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## **EXPLORING THE PORTRAYAL OF NARCISSISM IN HOLYWOOD**

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and  
Culture**

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## **Dedication**

Praise be to Allah, whom without I would not have been able to put my existential crisis on hold in time to get this dissertation done and over with.

To my past self who could not see the point of doing this. To my present self who did not quit despite the many urges to do so. And to my future self who, most likely, knows that my past self has been correct all along.

To my dearest friend A.B whom without I would have been lost years before I even got to this point. The only person who offered to help me unconditionally time and time again. We may no longer talk, but you will never be forgotten.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

NPD = Narcissistic Personality Disorder

ASPD = Anti-Social Personality Disorder

BPD = Borderline Personality Disorder

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative research explored the portrayal of narcissism in Western film. Through a comprehensive analysis of *White Oleander*, *the Devil Wears Prada*, *Rebecca*, *the Invisible Man*, *Mean Girls*, *Rachel Getting Married*, and *the Narcissists*, this study aimed at determining the accuracy of the portrayal of narcissistic characters as well as whether the portrayal helps break down the stigma against narcissism or further reinforces it. The study incorporated a content analysis design to collect and analyze data in order to gain diverse perspectives and complimentary insights. There were not many studies that dealt with the portrayal of stigmatized illnesses in movies. This study was an attempt to answer questions regarding the portrayal of narcissists in the selected movies. It also sought to determine whether the main focus of the movies was showing the humane side of the narcissistic characters or portraying them as a source of negative impacts on those around them. Findings of this study showed an inclination towards the villainization of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder as almost all of those characters had either hurt or murdered other people.

*Keywords:* Narcissism, NPD, Psychological Abnormality, Stigma, Social Media, Villainization, Mental Illness.

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## General Introduction

With the continuous advancement of social media, communication between people is now easier than it has ever been. Seeing as large amounts of people keep sharing their personal experiences on platforms such as Reddit, Tiktok, and Instagram and others relate to them, it only makes sense that the interest in mental health is now reaching its peak, especially in the Western world. As people are made aware of the different symptoms to the varying mental and psychological ailments, they started to notice the ways they have been and still are represented in Western cinema. After those movies came under the scrutiny of keyboard warriors, and the disparity between the fictionalized versions of mental illness and lived realities started to show, many heated discussions about the false portrayals and misrepresentations began to appear all over the internet.

Cinema is one powerful medium. It can be exaggerated, and it can be real. It has the ability to capture reality as it is capable of creating new realities. One thing that is for sure, cinema is the best tool to manipulate the masses, change the public perception of the past and present, and shape a future that matches the industry's agenda. Film is more easily accessible to the public than written documents. Not to mention that it is more entertaining and requires less effort as watching visual media is more passive than reading.

As Ursula K. Le Guin puts it, *"It won't move your mind unless you give it your mind."* This quote highlights how easy it is to get influenced by visual media. Without the necessary media literacy skills, most people would not even be aware that they are being influenced with the ideas they are being exposed to. They just absorb them as they are without filtering through them to decide what is real and what is not. That itself requires adequate researching skills, and most people resort to visual media to avoid reading in the first place. This is also what gives cinema its power. It is a tool

that is easily capable of creating harmful stereotypes, whether it was intentional or not. Plenty of mental and psychological disorders end up being stigmatized because of those harmful stereotypes. One such disorder is Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), commonly known as narcissism, which is subject to considerable stigma even within the community of psychologically-disordered people. The term ‘narcissist’ will be used to refer to people with NPD throughout the study. It must also be noted that narcissists are not inherently abusive.

It is worth mentioning that, while there are some studies about mental health issues in film and its impact on public perception, narcissism is still particularly stigmatized. This study that includes various movies will offer more insights and diverse perspectives on the portrayal of narcissism in Western film in order to check whether they contribute in its stigmatization.

This study uses a qualitative methodology as it needs to answer questions about experience, meaning and perspective, using data that are not amenable to counting or measuring (Hammarberg et al. 499). It employs a content analysis approach in order to offer a broader overview of the data and an understanding of the general narratives about the topic (Hurst 210). The aim of this study is to explore the portrayal of narcissism in the selected movies through those characters in order to see whether they are made to reinforce the stigma of the disorder or to create an understanding around it.

This study has three main objectives. The first objective is to analyze the traits and behaviors exhibited by the narcissistic characters and compare them with the criteria of NPD and see which traits are more recurring than the others. Then the discourse used by the narcissistic characters and the other character characters in relation to them are also to be analyzed. Both analyses are to be linked together in order to increase the validity of the analysis. This aims to show and illustrate how the narcissistic characters are portrayed.

The second objective is to determine the main focus of the movies in relation to the narcissistic characters. By determining whether the movies focus more on the struggles of the narcissists as people who are affected with their illness or on the negative impact of those characters on the people around them. Then we study the recurrence frequency of both situations in order to decide whether the portrayal of narcissism in Western film still tries to reinforce the stigma or to break it down.

The last objective is to deduce the character archetype that is often assigned to the narcissistic characters, which shows the role they play in the broad picture of the story and how they influence the flow of events. More often than not, mental illnesses are used to categorize the different characters into villains, heroes, victims, etc. Exploring the categories that the narcissistic characters in this study fall under can show whether the disorder is being intentionally dehumanized or not.

For the purpose of reaching the aforementioned objectives, this study will address the following research questions:

- How are the narcissistic characters portrayed in the selected movies?
- What is the main focus of the movies? Is it the narcissistic characters themselves or their impact on others?
- Which character archetype is often assigned to the narcissistic characters?

To answer these questions, this dissertation will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter, which serves as the theoretical framework, will offer insights on NPD, its definition, causes, consequences, treatment, etc., and mental issues in cinema. Relying on the theoretical framework, the second chapter focuses on the analyses of the selected movies. There will be separate analyses of seven movies that are said to portray a narcissistic character. Those seven movies were selected from a list of “15 Movies about Narcissists” that

was found in a psychological blog called *Choosing Therapy* (Link: [15 Movies About Narcissists \(choosingtherapy.com\)](https://choosingtherapy.com/15-movies-about-narcissists/)) due to their being the most recent ones. The blog even indicated the characters that are considered narcissistic, which made it easy to know which characters to focus on while conducting this study. After conducting a combination of discourse analysis and content analysis on the selected movies, there will be a short interpretation of the analyses. It must be noted that ‘mental’ and ‘psychological’ will be used interchangeably to refer to the same thing throughout this study.

## **Chapter One: Narcissism and Hollywood Films**

### **Introduction**

This chapter tackles the important aspects of the theoretical background. It reviews some relevant literature in relation to the current study. It is divided into two main sections that explore several notions respectively related to the psychological abnormality of narcissism and the portrayal of psychological issues in Western Film. The first section is an introduction to psychological abnormality and narcissism, shedding light on their nature, causes, consequences, and treatment. Meanwhile, the second section deals with movies and their portrayal of psychological issues.

### **1.1. Psychological Abnormality and Narcissism**

#### **1.1.1. Psychological Abnormality**

Regardless of the changing norms of this era and the vague definitions of what is ‘normal’, some behaviors can still be considered to be psychologically abnormal to just about anyone. “Psychologically abnormal behavior” has been described as many things over the course of history including madness, insanity, craziness, lunacy, mental disorders, mental illnesses, psychopathology, maladjustment, behavioral disturbances, emotional disturbances, personal problems, etc. (Seefeldt 3). While there is no absolute definition of an ideal psychological health, it is still generally expected of people to be and act normal according to what their culture dictate. Any obvious deviation from that ‘norm’ is considered socially unacceptable.

Psychologically abnormal behaviors are usually, but not always, a sign of an existing psychological or mental disorder. Mental disorders can have many definitions; however, it is

most commonly described according to The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5-TR) as:

A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important activities. An expectable or culturally approved response to a common stressor or loss, such as the death of a loved one, is not a mental disorder. Socially deviant behavior (e.g., political, religious, or sexual) and conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are not mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict results from a dysfunction in the individual, as described above. (14)

As such, not all deviant behavior can be accredited to the existence of a mental disorder. However, the effects of a mental disorder on the individual carrying it cannot and should not be neglected.

Neglecting a mental disorder leads to its aggravation, which will inevitably cause great disturbances to the lives of the individual as well as the people around them. It may be true that getting a diagnosis brings along its own disadvantages. As a diagnosed individual and their family often, if not always, bear the negative impact of stigma and discrimination from others (Tabish 34). However, mental disorders do not disappear merely for a lack diagnosis, as their signs still prevail. Signs of the mental disorders can still appear on the individual, which usually makes them a target of discrimination or bullying regardless, as their actions are usually frowned upon by the society around them. Getting a proper diagnosis

helps them understand where those signs come from and work on how to properly cope in society and to find the treatment most suitable for their condition.

### **1.1.2. Unveiling Mental Health Trends: Self-Diagnosis Surge and Expert Insights on Social Media Awareness**

#### **1.1.2.1. The Rise of Self-Diagnosis by the General Public**

The internet makes it rather easy to have access to all kinds of information for all kinds of people. However, what is usually available for the public, free of charge, is nothing but surface level, general knowledge. Not to mention that the majority of the public nowadays get all their information from social media, without searching for any scientific proof. They generally do not bother to read long articles to factcheck, especially with the domination of visual media. Most social media influencers, or the people that the general public is getting their information from, are seldom experts in the fields they are talking about.

Psychological and mental health issues, especially, seem to be more about being ‘hippie’ and up-to-date and less about spreading awareness. This makes it easier for people, who are driven by their greed for fame and are just following the trends, to take those bits of general information that the common people know and turn them into relatable content that is as far away from the scientific truth as it gets. Many people end up using such inaccurate information to self-diagnose with illnesses they may or may not have. Mago says that it is good to use the internet to learn more about one’s symptoms before asking a licensed doctor, but it should not be used to self-diagnose (par. 4).

Self-diagnosis was initially a phenomenon commonly seen among medical students and popularly known as the medical students’ disorder or interns’ syndrome, wherein the students tend to diagnose themselves based on any symptoms they have in accordance to what they have dealt with in their classes (Aaiz and Stephen 2). However, in today's



technologically advanced world, self-diagnosis has become increasingly prevalent among both medical students and the general public. As the advent of social media platforms has made it easy to gain access to medical information, allowing individuals to research and diagnose their own medical conditions. This phenomenon, though often frowned upon by medical professionals, has gained significant traction in recent years. It has now become a rather common occurrence, especially when it comes to mental illness as individuals forget that information online is often incomplete, which can be misleading and sometimes even dangerous (Sisler), especially when it comes to seeking personal treatment based on inaccurate self-diagnoses.

#### **1.1.2.2. Expert Insights on Social Media Awareness**

As mental illness is a complex topic that is oftentimes up to debate, psychology experts and enthusiasts alike have different views on how mental illness is being approached by the public. In a mostly capitalistic world, it is nothing new that some experts would question their industry and its agenda. The industry of mental health is no exception, especially with the quick widespread of mental health awareness through social media, leading a significant number of people to seek treatment.

Experts are unable to reach a universal consensus on how to approach the matter. On one hand, some researchers claim the importance of the personal researching of mental illness and getting a proper medical diagnosis for people to learn how to navigate their lives around it. Tabish claims that “scientific evidence from the field of behavioral medicine has demonstrated a fundamental connection between mental and physical health” (34), meaning that neglecting mental illness directly affects the individuals’ physical health.

On the other hand, Aggarwal wonders whether “mental illness really exists” (4). Experts are questioning whether mental health has become but another product to sell for

profit. With unqualified people having quick access to information, accompanied by the human tendency to exaggerate, a lot of misinformation is circulating the internet that people treat as facts. Some specialists express their dissatisfaction with the direction that things are taking in the diagnostic field. Some say that the term ‘mental disorder’ have been overused and misused by those unqualified people on social media to the point that it started to include things that are irrelevant to the original meaning. Aggarwal (36) defines mental disorders as an internal dysfunction accompanied by harm towards self or others; otherwise, it is normal human behavior.

George Graham mentions that a labeled individual acts differently to an unlabeled one, subconsciously trying to fit in better with the criteria and symptoms of their diagnosis (qtd in Aggarwal 6). This goes on to expound that focusing heavily on mental health can bring about negative outcomes instead of the improvement that is hoped for. Ultimately, a balance is needed when it comes to dealing with mental health and exploring mental illnesses in order not to pathologize normal human behavior or making the symptoms worse in order to fit in with the diagnostic criteria shared on social media.

### **1.1.3. Classifications of Personality Disorders**

Mental disorders manifest in different shapes and affect many areas of the human functions. The DSM-5-TR categorizes mental disorders into various diagnostic categories based on clusters of symptoms and clinical criteria. There are 19 major categories of mental disorders, one of which is Personality Disorders.

According to the DSM-5-TR, personality disorders are grouped into three clusters based on similarities in their descriptions as follows:

Cluster A includes paranoid, schizoid, and schizotypal personality disorders. Individuals with these disorders often appear odd or eccentric. Cluster B includes antisocial, borderline, histrionic, and narcissistic personality disorders. Individuals with these disorders often appear dramatic, emotional, or erratic. Cluster C includes avoidant, dependent, and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders. Individuals with these disorders often appear anxious or fearful. It should be noted that this clustering system, although useful in some research and educational situations, has serious limitations and has not been consistently validated. For instance, two or more disorders from different clusters, or traits from several of them, can often co-occur and vary in intensity and pervasiveness. (734)

Some personality disorders can occasionally be mistaken for another disorder belonging to the same cluster. As an example of that, borderline personality disorder can be mistaken for narcissistic personality disorder by the general public who are not well-informed of the detailing features of each disorder.

#### **1.1.4. Overview of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)**

##### **1.1.4.1. Definition of Narcissism**

The term ‘narcissism’ originates from Greek mythology, a well-known story of a handsome young man, named Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection in the water. According to Avelino, the concept was then adopted into the clinical scene at the end of the 19th century (22). Most researchers of the origin of the concept, including Freud himself, reached a consensus as they attributed it to the clinicians Havelock Ellis and Paul Näcke. According to these researchers, Ellis was the first to use the expression ‘narcissus-like’ in his text *Auto-erotism: a Study of the Spontaneous Manifestation of the Sexual Impulse*, from 1898, which has evolved over the decades into ‘narcissism’.

It is important to understand that narcissism can be both a clinical condition and a normal personality trait (Brunell et al 1664). As various psychological conditions become popular and trendy on social media every now and then, people tend to mistake normal healthy traits with the pathologies of said conditions. Exhibiting narcissistic tendencies and having pathological narcissistic personality disorder are often used interchangeably by the general public for lack of better knowledge, leading to even more limited understanding of the actual pathology of NPD and minimizing the struggles of the individuals affected by it (Kvarnstrom).

Narcissistic personality disorder is a Cluster B disorder, which means it can significantly impair individuals' functioning in various areas of life, including relationships, work, and social interactions. Narcissistic personality disorder is essentially featured by a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy that begins by early adulthood and is present in a variety of contexts (American Psychiatric Association 761).

Exhibiting narcissistic tendencies is more common and less damaging than the pathological narcissistic personality disorder. It often means being self-centered or selfish or having a big ego, which only affects certain areas of the individual's life; however, being self-absorbed does not necessarily mean they have a disordered mind as they can still feel empathy for others (Bennett). Meanwhile, individuals with narcissistic personality disorder do not experience empathy for others at all, leading to damaging both the self and the others.

#### **1.1.4.2. DSM-5-TR Diagnostic Criteria**

According to DSM-5-TR, narcissistic personality disorder can be indicated by five (or more) of the nine diagnostic criteria (760):

- 1) They have a grandiose sense of self-importance as they tend to exaggerate their achievements and talents and expect to be deemed superior regardless of whether or not they achieved anything worthy of such admiration.
- 2) They have constant fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.
- 3) They believe they are special and unique and can only be understood and associated with other special or high-status individuals or institutions.
- 4) They crave excessive admiration and validation from others.
- 5) They have an unreasonable sense of entitlement as they expect especially favorable treatment from others and automatic compliance with their expectations.
- 6) They have no issue exploiting other people for their own gains.
- 7) They lack empathy and are unwilling to see things from the perspective of others.
- 8) They are often envious of others or believe that others are envious of them.
- 9) They exhibit arrogant and haughty behaviors and attitudes.

#### **1.1.4.3. Differentiating Narcissism from Healthy Self-Esteem**

Both healthy self-esteem and narcissism are quite often associated with ambition and extraversion, which is why the relationship between the two has historically been a topic of debate (Crowe et al 17). However, the distinction between narcissism and healthy self-esteem lies in their underlying motivations, behaviors, and impacts on individuals and their interpersonal relationships.

As previously mentioned, narcissism involves an inflated and often exaggerated sense of self-importance, accompanied by a constant need for admiration and validation from others. Narcissists may exhibit grandiose behaviors, such as boasting, entitlement, and a tendency to exploit others for their own gain. They often lack empathy and have difficulty forming genuine connections, viewing others primarily as instruments to fulfill their own needs and desires, which is why they tend to put others down in order to lift themselves up (Crowe et al 17).

In contrast, healthy self-esteem is characterized by a balanced and realistic view of oneself, where individuals have a positive sense of self-worth, confidence, and self-respect, and is seldom associated with antagonistic behaviors (Crowe et al 17). They acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses without needing constant validation from others and can form secure and meaningful relationships based on mutual respect and empathy.

While individuals with healthy self-esteem can experience failure and criticism without feeling threatened or defensive, narcissists are highly sensitive to criticism, especially covert narcissists (Atlas and Them 73), and may react with anger, contempt, or aggression when their self-image is challenged. Ultimately, healthy self-esteem fosters resilience, authenticity, and positive relationships, while narcissism tends to lead to interpersonal conflict, manipulation, and emotional distress for both the narcissist and those around them.

#### **1.1.5. Genetic and Environmental Factors of Narcissism**

According to *Narcissism – the Handbook of PDs*, the contradicting evidence from theoretical and empirical perspectives makes the etiology of narcissism remain unclear (Crowe et al 14). Further research indicates that narcissism can result from an interplay of genetic, neurobiological, social, psychological, and environmental influences over the individual's life course (Cicchetti and Sheree 20). Similar to all personality traits, narcissism

is partially genetic. Twin studies have found that narcissistic traits have a moderate to high heritability, suggesting a substantial genetic component (Power and Pluess 1).

However, most research conducted on the origin of narcissism focuses on the impact of environmental influences from early childhood, also known as “parental socialization” (Thomaes and Brummelman 144). Dysfunctional parent-child relations can result in a multitude of psychological and physiological issues, some which may persist into adulthood. Narcissism is no exception, as these relations are considered by many theorists and clinicians to be central to its emergence (Thomas et al 1239).

There are two viewpoints on the parental socialization of narcissism. On one hand, Kernberg and Kohut believe that cold and dismissive parenting wherein the child lacks parental validation leads the child to compensate by exaggerating their importance in order to hide their fragile sense of self, which results in developing a narcissistic personality disorder (qtd in Crowe et al 14). Morf and Rhodewalt also suggest that the narcissist’s constant need for validation stems from unfulfilled emotional needs during their childhood (179). On the other hand, social theorists suggest that children learn how to view themselves by observing how they are viewed and treated by their parents; therefore, social learning theory explains how parents cultivated narcissism in their children by viewing them as special and more entitled than everyone else and treating them as such (Thomaes and Brummelman 144). This phenomenon is known as parental overvaluation. It leads the children to develop an inflated sense of self and viewing themselves as rightfully better than others. Ultimately, such enduring effects underscore the profound impact that early relational experiences can have on the lifelong development and functioning of individuals.

## **1.1.6. The Subtypes of Narcissism**

### **1.1.6.1. Grandiose Narcissism**

It is also known as overt narcissism and follows the common grandiose traits outlined in the DSM-5. This subtype is characterized by an inflated sense of self-importance, a constant need for admiration, and a lack of empathy towards others. Individuals with grandiose narcissism often display arrogance, entitlement, and a tendency to exploit others for their own gain. They may also seek out positions of power or authority to reinforce their sense of superiority (Crowe et al 16-17). Retrospective findings indicate that grandiose narcissism may not have clear environmental etiological factors identified. However, inconsistent effects have been found for lower levels of parental monitoring, and higher levels of parental warmth and overvaluation (Crowe et al 15).

### **1.1.6.2. Vulnerable Narcissism**

It is also known as covert narcissism. Vulnerable Narcissism varies greatly from grandiose narcissism in that it is featured with depressive moods, insecurity, shame, hypersensitivity, and withdrawal from others (Day et al 2). It is also more associated with the pursuit of external validation than grandiose narcissism. When compared to grandiose narcissism, vulnerably narcissistic individuals report experiencing higher levels of verbal, emotional, and physical abuse, more intrusive parenting, and lower levels of parental warmth. Vulnerable narcissism also seems to be associated with pathological adult attachment styles, such as anxious and avoidant, while grandiose narcissism shows no such association (Crowe et al 15).

### **1.1.6.3. Communal Narcissism**

Communal narcissism is a form of grandiose narcissism as both of them tend to be extraverted. However, it focuses more on public appearances than individual achievements. According to Drescher, this subtype involves an exaggerated focus on appearing altruistic,



caring, and helpful to others. Individuals with communal narcissism seek validation and admiration through acts of selflessness and generosity. However, their altruism is often driven by a desire for recognition rather than genuine concern for others' well-being.

#### **1.1.6.4. Malignant Narcissism**

Malignant narcissism is a more severe and less common subtype of narcissism. According to Raypole, malignant narcissism combines traits of both grandiose and antisocial personality disorders, characterized by a toxic blend of grandiosity, manipulation, aggression, and lack of empathy. Individuals with malignant narcissism tend to be abusive. They may exhibit a callous disregard for others' feelings, engage in exploitative behavior, and show violent or sadistic tendencies.

#### **1.1.7. The Psychological State of Narcissists**

Interacting with narcissists can have profound mental health consequences for those involved. According to Sarkis, dealing with constant criticism, manipulation, and lack of empathy from the narcissist can lead to emotional distress such as anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy. Additionally, narcissists often employ gaslighting tactics to undermine the perceptions and reality of those around them, leading to confusion, self-doubt, and difficulty trusting one's own judgment and experiences. Their disregard for boundaries and needs can result in feelings of invasion, powerlessness, and frustration, contributing to stress and burnout. This chronic stress may also lead to social isolation as individuals may withdraw from relationships to protect themselves from further harm, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and alienation. In severe cases, the aftermath of prolonged abuse or manipulation from a narcissist may resemble symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including flashbacks, hypervigilance, and avoidance behaviors. Moreover, individuals may struggle to

trust others and develop a heightened sense of skepticism towards new relationships, hindering the formation of healthy, fulfilling connections in the future.

It should not be forgotten that narcissists are also suffering from their clinical condition. Individuals with narcissistic personality disorder have strong inclinations towards perfectionism. Situations of extreme stress wherein they experience overwhelming emotions and are exposed to their own imperfection and failure can take a toll on their mental health and evoke suicidal ideations. However, unlike many others with similar ideations, individuals with narcissistic personality disorder are less impulsive in their suicide attempts making the attempts more lethal with less likelihood of failure (American Psychiatric Association 763). People tend to forget that narcissists are not exempt from the damages caused by NPD.

#### **1.1.8. Impact of Narcissism on Interpersonal relationships**

Narcissism shapes the paradoxical way narcissists approach interpersonal relationships. On one hand, narcissists are far less concerned with intimacy than normal people (Campbell et al 341). On the other hand, they still enjoy being with others thanks to their extraverted and socially bold character that knows neither shyness nor social anxiety (Emmons 298). As craving attention, admiration, and validation from others is one of the criteria to get a narcissistic personality disorder diagnosis according to the DSM-5-TR, narcissists tend to involve other people in their matters, whether directly or indirectly.

In certain situations, narcissists can be charming, engaging, and enjoyable to be around (Campbell et al 341, Morf and Rhodewalt 192). It is all thanks to their outgoing and uniqueness-seeking character, which gives them autonomy, independence, high self-esteem, and feelings of superiority towards the others (Emmons 296), which makes them intriguing to interact with. It is one of the self-regulatory strategies used to ensure their status and dominance is maintained and to get the validation they need from others. However, they can

be exploitive, arrogant, and lack empathy for others (Brunell et al 1664). Adding to that their egotistic and arrogant mannerisms, and willingness to exploit the others for their own gains, hindering genuine connection, it does not take long for them to alienate their interpersonal relations and incur negative social sanctions (Morf and Rhodewalt 188, Campbell 1255).

As a holistic profiling, a narcissist can be described as follows:

A narcissist is extroverted and dominant; lacks empathy; demands attention; depends on others for acclaim and admiration and tends toward many short-term relationships as opposed to longer, more stable ones. These common behavioral patterns suggest that the narcissist experiences a high need for affiliation and power, and concomitantly, a low need for intimacy. (Carroll 355)

Although narcissistic self-regulatory strategies initially seem to work on enhancing the self as intended, it does not take long for the repercussions of their exploitative and manipulative tendencies, lack of empathy, and inability to foster a genuine connection with others to contribute to the downfall of that same self. And while they might be unaware of the consequences of their actions on others, Morf and Rhodewalt suggest that narcissists can still very much feel the impact of their inability to build long-lasting intimate relationships (189). Ultimately, having a partially successful public persona does not mean narcissists do not often experience feelings of self-doubt and worthlessness in private.

### **1.1.9. Treatment of Narcissism**

As difficult as it may be, narcissism is still treatable. According to Paoli and Tanzi, patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder are often unaware of their illness. They believe they are superior, which feeds their need for dominance, preventing them from trying to seek help. Even after they are made to acknowledge their illness, it is unlikely for narcissists to

seek help before experiencing many setbacks related to their behavior (2). However, when they do choose to work on themselves, the most common and effective method used is generally psychotherapy.

The psychotherapeutic treatment of individuals with Narcissistic Personality Disorder can be challenging. Existing treatments often show limited effectiveness, with frequent cases of no progress or negative outcomes, and high rates of premature discontinuation and persistent symptoms after therapy. However, some clinicians suggest certain guiding principles for more effective treatment. They try to include crucial factors for patients with NPD by advocating for a pragmatic, goal-oriented approach in order to match the emotional needs of their patients. Such factors include a strong therapeutic alliance, an autonomous motivation for therapy, and an identification of therapeutic goals that address the narcissism and are desirable for the patient. Even with all those factors included, treatment can still be challenging. However, therapists need patience to help their patients develop trust in the treatment by adopting a curious and non-judgmental stance and encouraging patients to be curious about their own obstacles (Paoli and Tanzi 2).

Ultimately, effective psychotherapy for individuals with NPD requires a nuanced approach that balances empathy, patience, and structured goal-setting. Building a strong therapeutic alliance, fostering autonomous motivation, and setting clear therapeutic goals are essential to facilitating positive outcomes. Despite the challenges, tailored therapeutic interventions can lead to meaningful improvements in the lives of patients with NPD.

## **1.2. Mental Health Issues in Film**

In this section, we tackle the great impact movies have on society and individuals in relation to this study. It mainly focuses on the way western movies shape people's opinions and attitudes, especially towards mental issues. The section also deals with how those movies portray a person with mental illness, which provides helpful insights that are traced in the present research.

### **1.2.1. The Cultural Impact of Film on the Audience**

The film industry has undeniably emerged an essential medium for narrative, entertainment, and artistic expression. Movies have become an integral part of human culture. Throughout history, Movies have had a profound and multifaceted influence on individuals and society. They have the power to both entertain and inspire audiences. They can influence public opinion, evoke emotions, reflecting and shaping the society's norms, values and ideologies. Thus, the effects of movies on society have been a subject of significant interest and concern for scholars, researchers, and policymakers alike (Hada 81).

#### **1.2.1.1. Film Raises Awareness**

By shedding light on complex societal aspects, movies encourage viewers to think critically about the impacts and implications of these issues. For instance, the ones that portray stories related drugs, alcohol, and substance abuse can emphasize their negative influence on individuals and society making people conscious of the disastrous consequences of these relates issues.

Furthermore, through the use of compelling narratives and relatable characters, movies help audiences connect with the issues, fostering empathy and understanding.

Speaking of war, movies can visualize their atrocity and thus, awaken a sense of empathy in people who have never experienced war first hand (Hada 84).

#### **1.2.1.2. Film Mirrors Culture**

Films can serve as a mirror to society, offering glimpses into its past, present, and future aspirations. Every movie has a specific setting and is developed in a particular culture (Hada 84). Thereby, they reflect cultural attitudes, trends, and concerns. For instance, Films like *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915 reflected the racist perspectives of the time. The film depicted African Americans as brutish, lazy, morally degenerate, and dangerous portraying inaccurate stereotypes that were prevalent during the early 20th century.

Nevertheless, the films portrayal of African Americans was so infuriating that it sparked widespread protests and criticism. By reflecting specific cultural aspects, “Movies can amplify existing societal trends, challenge conventional wisdom, and provoke critical thinking on pressing issues” (Hada 81).

#### **1.2.1.3. Film Shapes Culture**

Films are not only influenced by the culture. But also are influencing the culture they are produced in (Hada 85). Films possess the power to sway public opinion. They can shape cultural attitudes and customs by influencing how audiences perceive different groups, lifestyles, and issues. Movies can influence fashion trends by showcasing styles and designs that resonate with audiences. The film *The Great Gatsby* (2013) popularized the 1920s flapper style, while *The Matrix* (1999) introduced the iconic trench coat and sunglasses combination, which became trending after the movie. Movie settings and lifestyles also have an impact on architecture and interior design, shaping our concept of luxury, modernity, and aspiration. For

instance, the luxurious settings in *The Great Gatsby* inspired many interior design and architecture trends.

### **1.2.2. The Psychological Impact of Film on the Audience**

Movies are strongly capable of evoking emotions in viewers, allowing them to experience a wide range of feelings such as joy, sadness, fear, and anger (Hada 84). Positively, appealing fictional characters and storylines in movies can serve as motivation, inspiring the audience to seek their own ambitions. For instance, the movie *Whiplash* portrays the extreme ambition and determination of its main character, Andrew Neiman, to become a famous jazz drummer. The movie shows Andrew's unwavering pursuit of perfection fueled by his desire to prove himself and overcome his limitations which inspires people to also follow their dreams and achieve their ambitions.

Negatively, people who are exposed to visual violence and bloody scenes too frequently get desensitized towards others' suffering. They often become indifferent to those scenes in real settings. Studies also show that the exposure to violent movies causes an increase in violent thoughts, emotion, and behaviors especially among children and young audiences (Huesmann 1).

### **1.2.3. The Portrayal of Mental Health in Western films**

Movies have been instrumental in shaping public opinion and attitudes, often creating lasting impressions that influence how people perceive different groups, lifestyles, and issues. As a part of Media, they play an important role in shaping people's perceptions and influencing their attitudes towards mental health issues (Edney 48). According to Coverdale, "Mass media are widely recognized as one of the most powerful tools to increase

the visibility of people with mental illness, to shape public attitudes towards them and consequently to influence mental health policy” (Coverdale 57).

However, the portrayal of mental health in Western films has a long history of inaccuracies and negative stereotypes. Many films relied on harmful stereotypes. They often villainized characters with mental health conditions. The vast majority of cases present the mentally ill person as a dangerous criminal.

Some movies use mental illness as an excuse for a character's evil actions. For example, *The Visit* (2015) which is a film directed by M. Night Shyamalan portrays negative stereotypes about mental illness. The movie shows two children who visit their estranged grandparents at their farmhouse, only to discover that the elderly couple is not who they seem to be. The grandparents are actually escaped psychiatric patients with schizophrenia and dementia who have murdered their real grandparents and taken their place. The characters with schizophrenia and dementia were depicted as violent and bloodthirsty, reinforcing harmful stereotypes about mental illness which lead the movie to be criticized by critics for inaccurately depicting the symptoms of these conditions.

*Split* (2016) is another example of the inaccurate depiction of mental illness in Western movies. The film is a psychological thriller directed by M. Night Shyamalan and starring James McAvoy, Anya Taylor-Joy, and Betty Buckley. The movie follows a man with dissociative identity disorder (DID) which is a mental health condition characterized by the presence of multiple distinct identities or personalities within an individual (Begum). The movie makes the mental illness itself the source of the villain's evil actions as he kidnaps and imprisons three teenage girls in an isolated underground facility.

Signorielli found that 72.1% of adult characters depicted as mentally ill injured or killed others (qtd in Diefenbach 289). Characters with a mental illness were almost 10 times



more violent than other characters. Yet in reality, people suffering from a mental illness who do not have a concurrent substance abuse disorder are no more likely to commit a violent crime than anyone else (Steadman et al. 393).

#### **1.2.4. The Negative Portrayals of Mental Illness and Public Attitudes towards Them**

The negative portrayals of people suffering from mental illnesses in movies greatly influenced the public understanding of mental issues and their symptoms. Thereby, they affected the public attitudes towards mental issues and mental patients. This impact became a subject of concern and research efforts. Several studies found that the negative portrayals are linked to the public's negative attitudes and intolerance towards mental illnesses.

The media, particularly movies, have played a significant role in constructing characters with mental illness as violent and dangerous leading the general public to associate mental illness with violence (Sampietro 112). Most of the public's information and understanding comes from the media especially movies. The attractive narrative and impressive visual settings leave long lasting impressions on people's minds. With the lack of critical thinking, those perceived images and negative portrayals shape the thoughts of the vast majority and become their comprehension of the truth.

The movies' portrayal of people with mental illness as evil, aggressive, and dangerous, has resulted in the increase of their suffering from societal scorn and discrimination (Corrigan 201). Studies that examined the impact of the negative portrayals of mental illnesses on the public's attitudes have shown that "people who view negative content those are more likely to demonstrate maladaptive attitudes towards mental illness than those who do not" (Vermeulen 27). False and negative portrayals further reinforce the public's stigmatized perception of people with mental illness and sustain continued intolerance and

discrimination. “The media teach people to fear, devalue, and distrust people with mental illness. So people who need understanding are met with rejection and isolation” (Corrigan 201).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter includes basic psychological data about NPD. It also mentions the way cinema, not only can it mirror reality, it can also be easily used as a tool to manipulate the masses and influence the way they view universal matters such as mental health issues. This chapter aims to ensure a general understanding of the disorder and cinema is established before delving into the analysis of the movies included in the practical chapter.

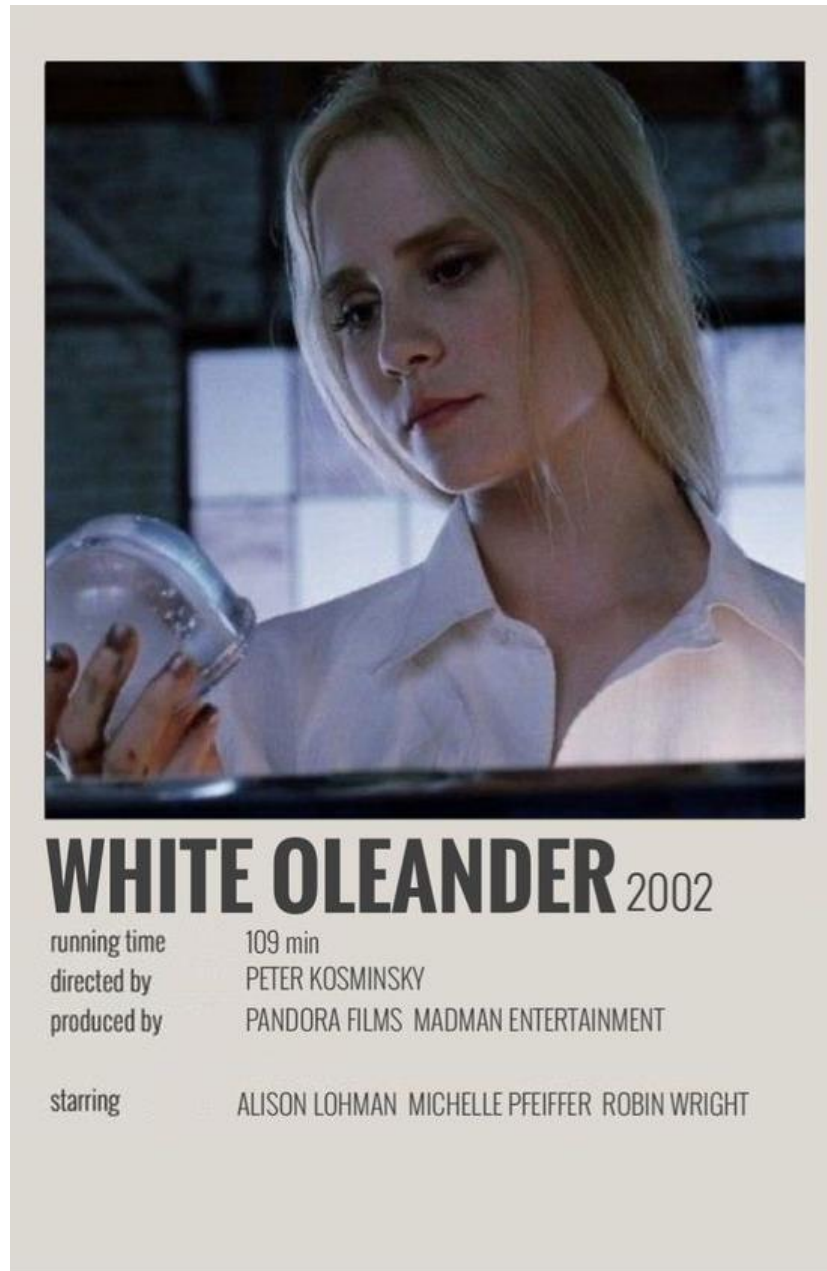
## **Chapter Two: The Portrayal of Narcissism in Western Film**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is the main focus of the study. In this chapter we analyze seven movies that were found in an article titled “15 Movies about Narcissists” in a psychological blog called *Choosing Therapy*. The seven movies that are chosen are the most recent ones as they are all released after the year 2000. This chapter will reveal how narcissistic characters are portrayed through a deep analysis of their behaviors, language, and interactions. By dissecting these cinematic depictions, we gain insights into the directors’ understanding of the complexities of narcissism and whether or not their portrayal of the characters reinforces the stigma against the disorder.

### **2.1. Results and Findings**

### 2.1.1. White Oleander (2002)



**Figure 1**

Released in the early 2000's, *White Oleander* is a movie adaptation of a book with the same title about Astrid Magnussen, a teenage girl who had to go through different unstable foster homes after the arrest of her mother, Ingrid, for murder. Astrid is depicted to be very close to her mother before the crime took place. As Ingrid is a single parent, she has the biggest influence on Astrid's life and behavior. The fluctuating relationship between the

two is a major theme in the movie after Ingrid is imprisoned as Astrid meets various people in her new journey, which gives her new perspectives on her mother. Despite being intelligent and having a charming character, it does not take an expert to tell that Ingrid's personality is rather abnormal. Although the majority of the characters, such as Astrid's foster mothers, seem to have different personality issues, Ingrid's character fits the most with the criteria of narcissistic personality disorder according to the DSM-5-TR.

To explore the portrayal of narcissism in *White Oleander*, one must start with the movie's title. "White Oleander" is a white flower known for its beauty and toxicity. The title can be taken literally, as it is the weapon that Ingrid used for her crime, and figuratively, as it is a metaphor for Ingrid's stunning beauty and the tragedy that is experienced by all the characters under her influence, whether it was direct or indirect.

The character of Ingrid Magnussen, played by Michelle Pfeiffer, is portrayed as a detached person who is skeptical when it comes to attachments, to objects and to people alike. Her daughter Astrid, played by Alison Lohman, says that "*she would make [things] just to burn [them].*" As Ingrid is an artist, her creations, which should normally be dearly treasured, are easily disposed of and ruined by her. It is not much different when it comes to people. "*Never let a man spend the night,*" she tells her daughter, "*never apologize, never explain*". This is a portrayal of how she, as a narcissist, cannot form genuine connection as these matters are necessary to sustain relationships. Apologizing, explaining, and letting someone into their personal space are all signs of vulnerability. Ingrid also says "*love humiliates you. Hatred cradles you. It's soothing.*" Narcissists avoid showing vulnerability because to them it is a sign of weakness, so they keep it deeply hidden as they believe it ruins the 'perfect' image they are constantly building. Therefore, when Ingrid finally gives in to Barry Kolker's persistent attempts at approaching her, ignoring her own rules and presumably expecting an ideal love life, just for him to go looking for other people, she murders him in cold blood.

To Ingrid, Barry Kolker's persistent approaches seem to serve as a source of validation; hence why when he stops supplying her with that validation, and she no longer has any need for him, she gets rid of him. This portrays narcissists as people who have no qualms going to extreme lengths when they do not get what they want. Even when Astrid eventually asks her why she killed Barry, Ingrid answers that it was "*self-defense*" and that "*he was killing [her]*," which is apparently how taking away that validation from her and trying to abandon her made her feel. She is portrayed to fully believe that she is the victim in that situation.

Ingrid is also portrayed as a self-centered artist and an irresponsible, controlling mother who prioritizes her own needs and desires over those of her daughter and everyone around her. This can be first seen when she chooses going to an event with people of equal status to her over showing up for her daughter's Parents' Night in school, which she completely forgets about. She then tries to justify it by saying that there is nothing they could tell her about Astrid that she does not already know, forcing Astrid to explain it to the teacher later on by saying that "*she is an artist*" and that "*she doesn't care about things like Parents' Night*," as though that naturally explains why Ingrid's plans are more important than her only daughter.

Furthermore, Ingrid never considers Astrid's feelings when she takes her with her, both when she goes to Mexico to buy DMSO, which she uses to make Barry absorb the poison faster through the skin, and when she goes to his house to murder him. In both situations, Astrid is clearly reluctant to be there; however her wishes are ignored by Ingrid. Astrid reveals in the movie that she knew what her mother was doing, which makes her feel like an accomplice despite being a powerless teenager. This shows how Ingrid is made to be either a very thoughtless mother or a mother who did not care how her actions affected her daughter's emotional and mental wellbeing.

Even when the cops show up to Ingrid's house to arrest her for the crime, "*they can't keep me. Don't worry. I'll be back in an hour*" is what she says to Astrid. Her baseless confidence is made to portray her arrogant and haughty attitude as well as her unreasonable expectations of getting away with things, which is a common trait of narcissism.

After getting into prison, Ingrid is not portrayed to reflect on her actions as she shows no sign of remorse. She is instead made to view everyone as an enemy plotting against her and Astrid, taking the narcissistic feelings of specialness to the extreme to the point of becoming paranoid. That makes her feel entitled to control Astrid's life and interfere with her relationships with those around her. In the first letter Astrid receives from Ingrid after six months of her going into prison, Ingrid says "*we're both in prison, you and I, punished for our strength and independence. Don't forget who you are. The best part of me is well-hidden, and you must do the same. Remember it all, every insult, every tear.*" In this scene, Ingrid is portrayed as a negative influence on Astrid. She was put in prison, so she wanted to mentally imprison her daughter with her.

Ingrid shows no remorse for her crime and did not consider how her words can affect her daughter, a mere teenager who is yet to shape her identity. Ingrid seems to consider Astrid as a mere extension of herself. If prison time means time stops flowing normally for her, how can it be any different for Astrid? Her lack of outside perspective as a narcissist makes her believe that if she is in prison, Astrid cannot possibly be free either. She is made to project her own feelings onto Astrid, trying to prevent the teenager from becoming any different from her. Now that Astrid is out of her sight, and she has no direct control over her actions, she tells her not to forget who she is, meaning by that the version she shaped her to be.

Throughout the movie, Ingrid's character is shown to hate seeing Astrid change from that version. A prime example of that occurs when Astrid visits her in prison for the first time,

wearing a pink dress that her first foster mother, Starr Thomas, gave to her as a present. Ingrid, who only wears varying shades of blue throughout the movie, mocks the color, calling it a “*sadly hopeful pink dress.*” She even gets furious when she is told that Astrid has become religious under the influence of her Christian foster mother, unlike her nonreligious self.

The Idea that Ingrid raised Astrid to be an extension of herself is further reinforced right after that scene. “*I raised you to think for yourself,*” Ingrid says. “*No, you didn’t. You raised me to think like you,*” Astrid responds. On one hand, the latter quote rather directly highlights the influence that Ingrid’s controlling behaviors has had on Astrid her entire life. The former quote, on the other hand, insinuates that Ingrid is not aware of that influence. However, even after being told about it, Ingrid does not reflect on her past behaviors. Instead, she again tells Astrid, “*I’m the only person you know who can keep you honest... You’re my daughter and you’re perfect,*” which shows that she has no regrets over the way she has raised her daughter as an extension of herself and also reflects her sense of self-importance.

The scene also explains why Astrid says in the beginning of the movie that she felt the most safe when she belonged to her mother. She was raised to let her mother do the thinking for her and tell her what to do and what to believe, which is why she felt lost and confused when her mother was imprisoned and she was left all alone, with nobody to rely on. Ingrid is not only portrayed to be very controlling and grudgeful, but she is also limiting to her daughter by instilling distrust, fear, and hate towards others into her from a young age.

When Astrid tells Ingrid that killing people who do not want you is evil and that they pray for her redemption every Sunday, Ingrid gets furious, swears, and tells her that she does not want to be redeemed and that she regrets nothing. She goes on to explain to Astrid how “*evil is tricky*” and that it constantly “*changes its form,*” making it hard to identify what is truly evil. She then immediately changes the subject to her refusing to ‘lose’ Astrid to the



religious people around her and calling them “*the enemy*,” as they are the ‘evil’ ones trying to steal Astrid from her. In this scene Astrid is portrayed to have a complete lack of self-awareness, which is why instead of owning up to her actions and accepting that that is what is pulling her daughter away from her, she blames it on the people around Astrid who has given her a thing to believe in, one that did not match Ingrid’s own beliefs. This reflects Ingrid’s controlling nature. Ingrid also seems to be envious of them for getting closer to her daughter and seems to believe that they are trying to steal her daughter because they envy her, which is another trait of narcissism.

Ingrid’s controlling behaviors is further exemplified when Astrid shows a romantic interest in Paul Trout. Even though she is an artist herself, Ingrid is portrayed not to consider all forms of art as actual art. When Astrid shows her the drawings of Paul Trout, Ingrid tells her that “*they’re not bad, for what they are.*” The words and the tone used indicate that she considers non-realistic forms of art as a lesser form of art, as though her being an artist makes her entitled to judge what real art is and what it is not. She is then shown to deter Astrid from getting attached to Paul, projecting her own experiences onto her daughter and negatively influencing her ability to connect with others by telling her that humans are meant to be lonely. Here, the character of Ingrid tries to instill that fear of vulnerability she has into her daughter to the point where even her daughter senses it and asks her if she even wants her to be happy. The way Ingrid denies that shows that she is not reflecting on her behavior, reinforcing the idea that narcissists either have no self-awareness, no remorse, or both. Her manipulation seems to work on Astrid because she has no reason not to trust her mother, so she ends up abandoning Paul after leaving the facility.

Furthermore, Ingrid’s exploitative nature is portrayed to get worse with Astrid’s other foster mothers, particularly Claire. Ingrid knows that Astrid does not want her interacting with Claire, yet she writes her letters regardless and tells her not to inform Astrid.

Claire is an anxious and sensitive woman, which makes it easy for Ingrid to manipulate her by playing at her insecurities. Ingrid is portrayed to be very jealous of how close Astrid has gotten to Claire while growing distant from her. Ingrid is portrayed to have no qualms exploiting Claire's weakness because she is jealous of how much Astrid seems to treasure and love her.

When Astrid asks her to leave her alone, she says *"oh, but it's such fun. Easy, but fun. And in my present situation, I have to get my fun when I can."* Not only that, but she views Claire's vulnerability with utter contempt telling Astrid that she can learn nothing from a woman like that. Ultimately, Ingrid's influence leads to Claire's suicide. After all that, Ingrid still shows no remorse and says that it was inevitable even without her interference. Astrid then tells her that she is never going to come see her again. However, Ingrid tries to cling onto her by telling her, *"I'm only trying to protect you from those people."* Her words and actions are portrayed to be inconsistent as her attempt to "protect" her daughter ends up making her witness a suicide, which is a very traumatizing event.

Even when Astrid tells Ingrid she does not want to see her anymore, Ingrid still does not respect her desires. She manipulates two girls and then her own lawyer in order to get her to come visit her again. However, it turns out that is not done out of affection, but solely for the purpose of making Astrid lie for her in court, showing her exploitative nature even towards her daughter. Astrid ends up visiting her anyway in order to ask her to let go of her.

The final conversation between the mother and daughter is the only time that Ingrid shows vulnerability in the movie. It first happens when Astrid asks her whom her father was, Ingrid seems reluctant to answer and especially avoids answering the question of whether she loved him or not. Answering that question appears to have been a sensitive topic for her since it shows her vulnerability in her earlier years, which she greatly detests, seeing from how she

has reacted to Claire. She loved Astrid's father and had fantasies of an ideal love life with him; however, he left her for another woman, broke her heart, and made her feel foolish. Leading Claire to end her life seems like her way of killing that past version of herself.

Ingrid is portrayed to be most vulnerable when she is asked about Anna, an old neighbor that she abandoned Astrid to for an entire year when she was just a baby. Ingrid's facade finally cracks as she shows signs of guilt and remorse. However, she still deflects by trying to make excuses and justifying her behavior instead of taking accountability and apologizing. She tries to put the blame on baby Astrid for constantly crying and having needs that are typical of a baby, which she could not tolerate as a free-spirited, young, and single mother. When Astrid looks disappointed in her, Ingrid seems to get emotional and, for once, loses her calm demeanor. Ingrid tries to explain how she still came back for her and, "*for once, did the right thing,*" even though her own rule was to never explain.

Eventually, Ingrid is portrayed to try redeeming a small part of what she did wrong to Astrid. She finally chooses to let go of Astrid by not letting her lie for her in court. She ultimately relents to Astrid's pleas, making her sacrifice the rest of her life in order to stop Astrid from self-destructing. That is symbolized by the white clothes she wears on the day of the trial. In conclusion, narcissism in *White Oleander* is portrayed to be a defense mechanism used by Ingrid in order to avoid getting hurt again. She makes everything about her, which ends up hurting everyone else around her instead.

### 2.1.2. The Devil Wears Prada (2006)



**Figure 2**

*The Devil Wears Prada* is a movie about Miranda Priestly, the powerful and demanding editor-in-chief of a fashion magazine. Miranda has a significant influence on all the characters and their personal life, particularly her assistant Andrea Sachs, the protagonist of the movie. Her high standards, sharp critiques, and unwavering dedication to perfection push Andrea and the other characters working for her to their limits and transforming them in

the process into new versions that match her preferences. Narcissism in this movie is explored through the character of Miranda Priestly.

To start with, the movie's title *The Devil Wears Prada* is talking about the character of Miranda Priestly, the narcissistic boss belonging to the fashion industry. The devil is known to be manipulative, cruel, and evil. Miranda and her behaviors throughout the movie are being compared to the devil, which literally serves to demonize her narcissistic personality.

Miranda's character is portrayed to be a controlling boss with a grandiose sense of self-importance, who always wants things to go her way. She is an ambitious woman in a position of power, which is why all the workers in the magazine both fear and idolize her. Miranda has a strong personality that is almost tyrannical as all the employees around her abandon their own styles and tastes in order to match hers, merely to avoid the possibility of slightly inconveniencing her and getting fired from their jobs. Some employees even wear shoes they find uncomfortable in order to match her fashion sense.

Everyone around Miranda seems to be adopting some traits of her personality in order to survive by her side. Prime examples of that would be Emily, Miranda's first assistant, and Nigel, the Art Director at the magazine, when they make fun of Andrea's sense of fashion. Nigel mocks her style by calling her "*a sad little person*" because it does not match the latest trends, which are often influenced by their magazine after being picked by Miranda.

Miranda is also portrayed to have extreme lack of empathy, which is a trait of narcissism. She is "*famous for being unpredictable,*" as one of the characters describes her. Miranda changes her mind all the time with no prior notice. She decides things on the spot and expects everyone to comply with no complaints. Regardless of what actions she takes,

nobody holds her accountable. She does not even bother explaining herself as everyone either justifies her actions for her or does not question them to begin with.

This is exemplified when Miranda misnames Andrea and calls her Emily, for which Andrea corrects her in front of the people she has had a meeting with. Everyone looks at her as though she did something blasphemous, showcasing how nobody dares telling Miranda that she is wrong. It is further reflected when Emily tells Andrea, "*You may never ask Miranda anything.*" Miranda does not specify what she wants, yet she wants them to understand without explanation. For instance, she asks Andrea to get her skirts from a certain brand and to bring her the table she liked at a certain store without specifying anything about them.

Miranda's lack of outside perspective makes her disregard how her behaviors affect her employees' personal lives. She dismisses their crises and important events and expects them to prioritize her own needs above all else. This portrays her as an inconsiderate, self-centered boss. Examples of that are recurring throughout the movie. A prime example occurs when she calls Andrea in the middle of her awaited dinner with her father during the weekend in order to deal with a personal matter of hers. Miranda's flight has been cancelled due to the stormy weather, so she makes Andrea look for a different flight for her on such a short notice. Miranda is portrayed to prioritize her own plans over everyone else's due to her sense of entitlement and self-importance.

Miranda has unreasonable expectations of getting a flight in the middle of a storm just to go see her daughters' show. When she misses the show because no flights were available, she blames it all on Andrea. She starts telling her how she gave her a chance despite her being different from the type she would normally choose, stylish and skinny, just because she expected her to work harder and do better before telling her how disappointed she is,

disregarding all the efforts that Andrea put trying to find her a flight, including leaving her father behind.

*“If I do something right, it’s unacknowledged. She doesn’t even say thank you. But if I do something wrong, she is vicious.”* This quote by Andrea explains that Miranda does not give her employees credit for doing their job well because that is what is expected of them. To her everyone is easily replaceable, especially if they are not taking their job seriously, which often means completely giving up on their personal lives. She only gives a little smile of approval to Andrea when she starts dressing fashionably, giving up on her own sense of style and becoming another one of what Andrea herself called *“the clackers.”* The term first appears when she first describes Miranda to her, Andrea’s, partner. *“She is not happy unless everyone around her is panicking, nauseous, or suicidal. And the clackers just worship her.”* Miranda does not feel satisfied until everyone matches her often unreasonable expectations without any complaints.

Miranda is further portrayed to have unreasonable expectations of favorable treatment. She tells Andrea to get her the unpublished manuscript of the Harry Potter series, expecting that telling the publishers it is for Miranda Priestley makes it certain that she gets to receive a copy. Miranda threatens Andrea that if she does not get it done in a matter of hours, she is fired from her job, which shows her abuse of power. It is further portrayed when she forces Andrea to replace Emily at Paris Week, disregarding the importance of the event to Emily, merely because she is capable of doing it. She, again, threatens Andrea with her job, forcing her to abandon her morals and even forcing her to be the one informing Emily. Miranda appears to enjoy torturing the others. She is even called a sadist by another character at some point.

Miranda is only portrayed to show some vulnerability in one scene wherein she talks about her husband divorcing her. She is portrayed to be aware of how she is perceived by the others. She is self-aware of how overly obsessed she is when it comes to her career as well as how cold she is as a person. However, she does not seem to care about the opinions of others as much as she does about how that would affect her daughters. However, that vulnerability only lasts for a moment before she goes straight back into talking about work, not allowing her personal life to affect it.

Ultimately, Miranda's behaviors are portrayed to have influenced Andrea. Miranda tells her, "*I see a great deal of myself in you.*" That does not please Andrea as only then is she made aware of how much change has her character undergone. However, she does not accept it and tells Miranda that she does not want to live like her. Miranda's answer, "*Don't be ridiculous Andrea. Everybody wants this,*" shows that she believes everyone is envious of the life that she is leading, which is another trait of narcissism. That forces Andrea to quit in order to save what is left of her old life, abandoning Miranda. Miranda, however, does not hold a grudge against her as she helps her when she tries to get another job. By the end of the movie, there is a scene wherein Miranda gets into her car and orders her chauffeur to "go" in a domineering tone. In conclusion, *The Devil Wears Prada* explores narcissism through the character of Miranda, who eventually chooses to stick to her old lifestyle regardless of the consequences.



### 2.1.3. Rebecca (2020)



**Figure 3**

*Rebecca* is a movie adaptation of a classic novel with the same title by Daphne du Maurier. The movie delves into the influence of Rebecca, the dead wife of Maxim De Winter, on the characters of story, especially Mr. De Winter and his new wife Mrs. De Winter. While she is dead herself, Rebecca's influence is still exerted through the character of Ms. Danvers, the housekeeper of the mansion and her old friend. Throughout the movie, the nameless protagonist Mrs. De Winter is constantly compared to the dead wife Rebecca, which is

initially portrayed as a perfect person loved by everyone and especially adored by Maxim, to the point that the ghost of Rebecca starts haunting her in her dreams. Eventually, Rebecca is exposed to be nothing but a narcissistic character all along.

Despite not appearing even once in the movie, the character of Rebecca has a significant influence on the events of the movie. For the majority of the movie, Rebecca is portrayed as the flawless wife adored by her husband and everyone else. Even Maxim's sister, Beatrice, describes her as *“one of those bloody annoying people. Irresistible to everybody. The men, women, children, animals. Us mere mortals couldn't hope to compete.”* This quote, said with no malice as if merely stating an undeniable truth, can summarize how everybody felt about Rebecca before her death. However, it is eventually revealed that it was all an act by Rebecca. It was nothing but a persona created by Rebecca to deceive everyone who did not know her well enough in order to get what she wants.

Rebecca sought power, wealth, and validation from others, which is a trait of narcissism. She used whatever means possible in order to get just that. She did not hide her treacherous and promiscuous nature from the people who knew her truth. She cheated on her husband with various men for her own pleasure without even hiding it from him. She felt validated by being desired by many. Ms. Danvers tries to justify her actions by saying *“can't a woman amuse herself?”* This quote by the person closest to Rebecca before her death implies that Rebecca had no qualms exploiting others, including her husband, and hurting them for her own amusement, which is another trait of narcissism.

However, Rebecca was portrayed as a master manipulator when it came to the people who did not know her for whom she truly was. She employed the soft approach and charmed them into loving her using a fake persona that is outwardly flawless. That way, even if Maxim wanted to divorce her, he would not find any excuses for doing so. He could not mention her

cheating on him because he feared for his reputation. Thus, she continued to cheat on him, and he continued to keep silent about it.

Rebecca also had a powerful presence, which shows her grandiose sense of self-importance, another trait of narcissism. She had her initials embroidered all over the mansion, in handkerchiefs, bath towels, and stationery, which is a sign of self-obsession. It also serves as a reminder of her pervasive influence in the mansion even after her death. Not to mention that she was described by one of the characters as someone who “*wasn't afraid of anything.*” She did what she wanted with no fear and no regard to the consequences.

When she was alive, Rebecca exploited her husband's wealth, which she felt entitled to, and constantly held grand balls. She kept inviting people from the upper class, in order to associate with people of high status and charm them to create a place for herself among them, which is also a clear trait of narcissism.

Ultimately, Rebecca's character is never portrayed to have a redemption arc. She is eventually killed in a fit of rage by her husband, who wanted to free himself of her control. She was the one who encouraged him to do it by making him into falsely believe she was pregnant with someone else's child when in fact she was terminally ill with cancer. In the end, even though her life was coming to an end anyway, Rebecca wanted to be in control of her own death the way she was in control of her life before. However, instead of doing it herself, she chose to put an end to her life by manipulating her husband to become a murderer and aiming to ruin his life, remaining cruel until the very end.

#### 2.1.4. The Invisible Man (2020)



**Figure 4**

*The Invisible Man* is a movie about Cecilia Kass, portrayed by Elisabeth Moss, who runs away from her partner Adrian, portrayed by Oliver Jackson-Cohen, a genius in the world of optics and a “*narcissistic sociopath*” who abused her throughout their relationship. Adrian is then reported to have committed suicide and left her his fortune while, in truth, he created a

high technology suit that makes him invisible, allowing him to stalk and harass Cecilia while turning everyone on her and making them believe that she has lost her mind with paranoia.

Adrian is not only a narcissist, but a sociopath as well, more formally known as Anti-Social Personality Disorder (ASPD), another disorder under the Cluster B umbrella. Adrian is portrayed as an extremely controlling man, always needing things to go his way with no regards to other people's desires. Cecilia says in his description, "*He was in complete control of everything, you know, including me. He controlled how I looked and what I wore and what I ate. Then it was controlling when I left the house and what I said. And, eventually, what I thought.*" This description coming from someone who has only lived with Adrian for a while reflects how intense his controlling behavior is. After speaking about Adrian's controlling behavior, Cecilia goes on to mention how if he does not like what he "*assumes*" she is thinking, he ends up hitting her, "*amongst other things.*" This portrays Adrian as an abusive partner with no respect for Cecilia.

Adrian's abusive character is evident throughout the movie, both physical and mental. Mentally abusing Cecilia appears to be a game to him. He silently watches her wearing his invisibility suit, which slowly instills the feeling of being constantly watched in her. He then goes on to mess with her enough for her alone to notice. It starts when he slightly turns up the heat of the stove when Cecilia leaves for a moment, burning her food and nearly burning the kitchen with it. Other examples of how this appears to be a game to him are his randomly opening doors, pulling away her blanket in her sleep, making the lights flicker, etc., which are inconspicuous to the others, making them doubt and question her mental well-being when she keeps mentioning that Adrian is still alive and is there with them. Little by little, Adrian strategically tries to sabotage all her relationships in order to isolate her with the purpose of regaining control over her when she is most vulnerable.

When it comes to the physical abuse, there are plenty of examples in the movie showing that Adrian has no qualms using violence against others, regardless of their age or gender. A prime example of that occurs when he hits Sydney, merely a little girl, in order to implicate Cecilia and ruin their relationship. This escalates to the point of murder when Cecilia informs her sister of the invisibility suit she finds at Adrian's old place, again implicating Cecilia with the deed, after which she is then forced into a mental facility. After getting into the facility, Cecilia discovers that she is pregnant with Adrian's child, who knew that she did not want to get pregnant yet switched her birth control pills without her knowledge. Only after learning of the pregnancy does Adrian decide it is time to stop playing games with her, on the condition that she goes back to her old, controlled life with him.

The influence of his actions forces Cecilia to transform into a ruthless, calculating person. After learning that Adrian wants her and the baby back, Cecilia pretends to attempt ending her own life just to prevent him from getting what he wants in order to catch him while he is stopping her. She ends up stabbing him with a pen several times, which nearly ruins his suit and blows his cover. While trying to run away, Adrian ends up murdering a significant number of guards at that facility. When Cecilia does not quit and continues to chase after him with a gun, he tells her, *"If you fight me, I won't ever hurt you. I'll go to those you love and hurt them instead."* This whole scene is portrayal of the negative influences narcissists have on those who deal with them. It also highlights his use of a known manipulation strategy.

Adrian is portrayed as a master manipulator. Despite his evident abuse, the discourse used by him appears to be that of a rational, innocent man. After his faked suicide, Cecilia is given a death statement written by Adrian, in which he tells her that *"[he] at least thought [they] had built up enough trust that [she] would talk to [him]"* instead of running away. This example shows Adrian's attempt at shifting the blame onto her to make her question her

actions. *“Adrian was brilliant. But it wasn’t because of anything he invented; it was how he got in people’s heads. That was his true genius, knowing people’s weaknesses.”* This is how Adrian’s brother, Tom, describes him. This quote exposes Adrian for the manipulator that he is portrayed to be.

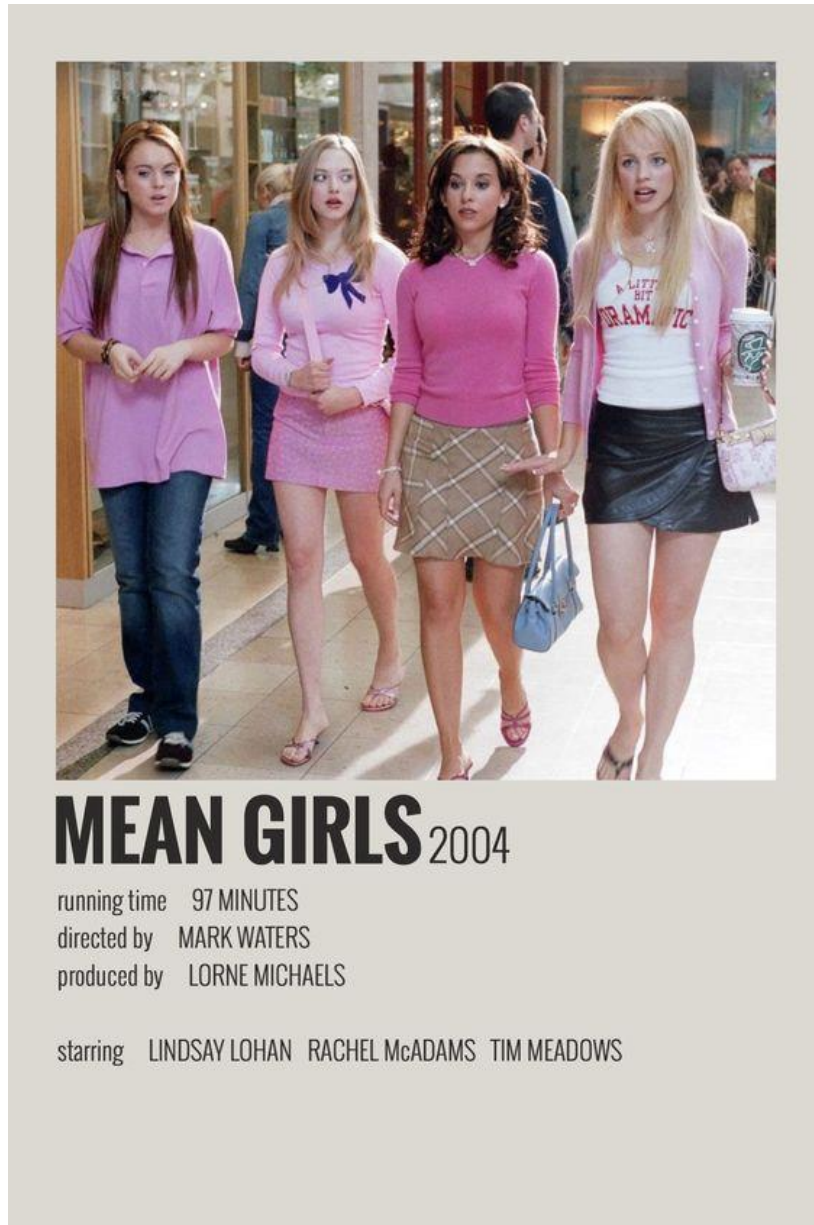
It appears that Adrian’s manipulative behavior is not limited to Cecilia, as Tom, who has been under his influence for his entire life, seems to have become a mere puppet of Adrian. Tom is under his control throughout the movie as he has been appointed as his financial lawyer. That makes him responsible for dealing with Cecilia in order to transfer Adrian’s fortune to her. When Cecilia confronts Tom about his brother being alive and telling him to leave her alone, he tells her, *“my brother controlled me long before he met you, Cecilia”* in order to convince her that his brother is their common enemy, implying that it is impossible for him to side with Adrian. However, it eventually turns out that he has been on Adrian’s side all along, which shows that he has already been under his control.

Ultimately, Tom is used as a scapegoat to clear Adrian’s name, which leads to his demise. Adrian is portrayed to show no signs of guilt or regret after his brother’s death. He instead shifts all the blame onto Tom and acts as a victim. This highlights Adrian’s inability to form genuine connections with others, including his own brother. He cares for no one other than himself. This reflects his grandiose sense of self-importance, which is a trait of narcissism. It also shows when he tells her that she is *“the only person in the world who gets to see [his] hand shake”* because he needs her, which makes him feel entitled to have her regardless of what she wants. Adrian’s obsession with Cecilia is also exposed for what it truly is, a need for validation. *“He needs you because you don’t need him. No one’s ever left him before.”* This quote by Tom exposes Adrian’s hatred towards rejection and need for validation, which is another trait of narcissism.

In conclusion, *The Invisible Man* heavily focuses on the exploitative trait of narcissism combined with sociopathy. It does not shed much light on the other aspects of the disorder. Adrian is portrayed as a plain villain. He makes Cecilia believe that she is finally free of his with his death, just to haunt her again and make her life a living nightmare. He has no genuine connections with anyone and intensely pursues what he wants using any means possible, including extreme ones such as murder, with no regards to the consequences. The Invisible Man also explores the negative influences of such character on the people around it as most of them end up dead and the living ones end up much more cruel than they initially were.



### 2.1.5. Mean Girls (2004)



**Figure 5**

*Mean Girls* is a classic movie that portrays the toxicity of social hierarchy and narcissism through the intricate dynamics of high school life. It tells the story of Cady Heron, portrayed by Lindsay Lohan, a previously homeschooled teenager who spent most her life in Africa before moving back to the US. The movie follows her as she navigates the treacherous waters of high school cliques and eventually becomes entangled in their manipulative power struggles. *Mean Girls* offers a profound exploration of narcissism through the character of

Regina George, portrayed by Rachel McAdams, a mean, arrogant girl whose narcissistic tendencies drive much of the film's conflict.

Regina is portrayed as the epitome of beauty, popularity, and entitlement, wielding her power over her peers with effortless charisma. "*Evil takes form in Regina George*" is how she is described by Janis, Cady's first friend. Regina's entitlement shows early on in the movie as she is portrayed to be the leader of a clique of pretty girls on top of the social hierarchy called the Plastics, which include her and her "*followers*" Karen Smith and Gretchen Wieners. Regina invites Cady to have lunch with her clique and says, "*We don't do this a lot. So this is, like, a really huge deal.*" This showcases how Regina only associates with whom she acknowledges, people generally belonging to the top of the social hierarchy. Regina's condescending nature also shows in her preconception of home-schooled kids, as a highschooler, when she tells Cady, "*home-schooled. That's really interesting. But you're, like, really pretty.*" This shows how she looks down on people without getting to know them based on where they come from.

Regina constantly exerts control over the others, which reflects her grandiose sense of self-importance. This is evident through all the rules she sets for her clique, especially regarding how to dress up. Examples of that are not wearing tank tops two days in a row, only wearing their hair in a ponytail once a week, and wearing pink on Wednesdays. Breaking those rules prohibits the members from sitting with the clique during lunch time. The clique members are also expected to ask for approval first before when it comes to shopping clothes or romantic interests. For instance, Cady is told by Gretchen that she is not allowed to like Aaron Samuels merely because he was Regina's previous partner. She is then told by Regina that she cannot join the Mathletes despite her fondness of mathematics because it is considered "*social suicide.*" These examples highlight Regina's arbitrary enforcement of social norms and her need to exert control over others to maintain her status. Her sense of

entitlement leads her to believe that she alone has the authority to dictate the behavior of her peers, demonstrating a classic narcissistic trait.

Regina is also portrayed as an exploitative character with no qualm about hurting others for her own benefit. A prime example of that occurs when she calls a girl's mother while pretending to be someone from Planned Parenthood, which implies that the daughter is pregnant, causing the mother to faint. This happens because the guy that Gretchen likes leaves her for this other girl. Regina is later on proven not to care about the girls of her clique, which means that she does it for the sole purpose of preserving her own image. Gretchen is part of the Plastics; thus, anything that harms her image affects Regina's own image by association. Another example is the "*Burn Book*," wherein she and the clique write mean things about all the girls in their grade for entertainment.

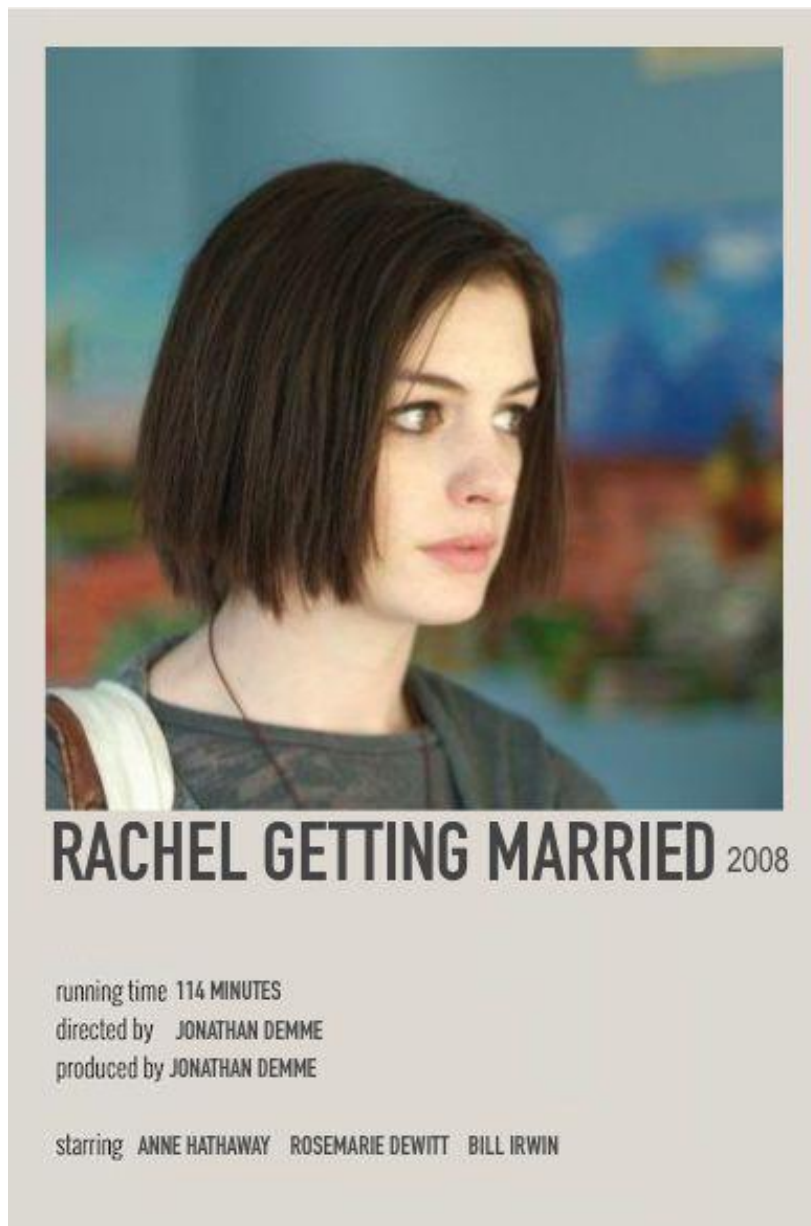
The need to maintain her image also reflects Regina's validation-seeking tendencies, which is another trait of narcissism. This is portrayed through her consistent maintenance of her appearance. She is rather concerned with how she looks, and expects the rest of the clique to be insecure about their bodies as well. This trait may stem from mirroring her mother who also exhibits the same trait, which shows when she calls herself "*a cool mom*" and "*not like a regular mom*" and uses slang strictly used by the younger generation in order to be accepted by her daughter's clique.

Regina's narcissistic tendency to put other people down in order to feel superior is further exemplified by her manipulation of her friends and romantic interests. She strategically pits her friends against each other, exploiting their insecurities to maintain her position at the top of the social hierarchy. For example, when Regina discovers that Cady has taken an interest in her previous partner, Aaron Samuels, and that he seems interested as well, she immediately sets out to sabotage their potential relationship by telling Aaron lies about

Cady being an obsessive stalker. Then she pretends to be nice and tells him not to make fun of her because she is her “*friend*.” Even though Regina is the one who left Aaron, she does not want him paying attention to another girl. Regina’s manipulative behavior demonstrates her disregard for the feelings of others and her willingness to use them as pawns in her quest for power and attention.

Ultimately, Regina’s behaviors lead Cady, who initially appears to be devoid of any narcissistic traits, having been raised in a different environment, into getting increasingly entangled in the social dynamics of high school life. In her journey to take revenge on Regina, she too succumbs to the allure of power and validation. Cady transforms from a naïve girl to a sneaky, calculating manipulator who plots treacherous schemes in order to ruin Regina’s image. Eventually, Cady discovers that she has also become one of the Plastics, with all their hypocrisy and superficiality. In conclusion, *Mean Girls* portrays the insidious nature of narcissism and its ability to corrupt even the most well-intentioned individuals as well as its detrimental effects on society as a whole.

### 2.1.6. Rachel Getting Married (2008)



**Figure 6**

*Rachel Getting Married* is a movie about a woman named Kym Buchman, portrayed by Anne Hathaway, who is released from rehab to attend her sister Rachel's wedding. The movie portrays her struggles with addiction, complex family dynamics, and traumatic past that are known to everyone in town. In the movie Kym exhibits various narcissistic tendencies that affect her relationship with her family members, particularly her sister, Rachel, portrayed

by Rosemarie DeWitt. It eventually leads the family members to confront their unresolved issues and learn to better understand each other.

Kym's character is portrayed to be arrogant and haughty, which a common trait in narcissism, from the outset of the movie. In the ride home after being released from rehab, when she is told that her sister is planning her wedding, she says "*my sister is bending the environment to her will, really?*" Kym is mocking her sister for taking charge of her own wedding, implying that she is usually quite obedient unlike her free-spirited self. Then when she is asked if there is anyone she wants to "*say goodbye to*" after staying in rehab for nine months, she says "*god, no!*" Her tone betrays her disdain, which shows that she looks down on those who were with her in rehab despite being one of them herself. She even calls them "*crazy people,*" which shows her sense of self-importance as she refuses to associate with people she does not think highly of. Even during the rehearsal dinner later on, Kym leaves her seat and calls the people she was sat with "*the loser end of the table.*"

Kym also exhibits a sense of entitlement throughout the movie. It is shown by her tendency to make everything about her. That is first seen when she gets furious at her sister for choosing someone else over her as maid of honor for the wedding. "*Is being maid of honor that important to you? Because I didn't think you gave a sh\*t, sorry*" is what her sister tells her, which shows how Rachel's feelings are hurt thinking that her sister is too self-absorbed to care about her. However, instead of reassuring her that she does indeed care, Kym makes it about herself again and asks her "*how can you say that to me.*" Rachel then asks the other girl, Emma, to "*please step down as maid of honor*" in order to end that conflict and not prolong it any further.

Kym consistently seeks to make herself the center of attention, often at the expense of others, particularly her sister. She frequently clashes with Rachel during the wedding

preparations disregarding that it is an important time for her sister wherein she needs to feel special. One example of that occurs when she learns that her mother will be late for the dinner rehearsal, and she says *“I can’t believe mom would be late for my release back into the wild,”* to which Emma answers *“and here I was thinking tonight was about Rachel.”* Another prime example is when Kym interrupts the heartfelt toasts given by the guests to the marrying couple to give her own toast, just to start talking about herself again. *“I’m Shiva the Destroyer and your harbinger of doom for this evening”* is how she introduces herself. The focus of her toast is mainly her recovery and healing journey as she talks about *“making amends”* being an important step before finally apologizing to Rachel about everything she has done to her. However, her choosing that specific timing, wherein Rachel is in the center of attention, to talk about her development seems like an attempt to attract some of that attention to herself. This constant need for attention and validation is a common trait of narcissism.

Kym's insistence on having her voice heard and always be right does not stop there. When Rachel says that she is pregnant in the middle of an argument, and the family disregards the prior conflict and focuses on congratulating her, Kym complains that *“it’s not fair”* how she mentions that in an unrelated conversation. This reflects her deep-seated belief in her own importance, which makes her too self-absorbed to feel happy for her sister. Another example is when she tells her family that they should go to a Nar-Anon, in order to learn how to properly deal with her and make her a priority in their lives. However, she says it in a condescending manner followed by saying they are *“people living in this little world of judgment and paranoia and mistrust.”*

Kym’s narcissism is further exemplified when she is at the salon dyeing her hair with her sister. Rachel coincidentally learns about Kym’s lies regarding her supposed anorexia and allegations of molestation by their uncle when a man who used to go to rehab with Kym tells her how her bravery inspired him. Kym’s fabrications are revealed, which deeply hurts and

angers Rachel, adding to the complexity of their relationship and the family's dynamics. This moment has a great significance in the movie as it serves as the necessary push for the family members to confront each other and reveal the feelings they kept locked for a long time.

As it turns out, Kym's narcissism is a consequence of her traumatic past. When Kym was merely a reckless 16 year old teenager, she caused an accident that led her little brother Ethan to drown to his death because she was "*high out of [her] mind*" as she said. She has carried the burden of her guilt and shame for years, which is where her validation-seeking tendencies stem from. Her seeking approval from others stems from an immense need to be forgiven. On top of that, she takes her father's continuous worrying whenever she is out of his sight as a sign of his mistrust of her. She wants her family to acknowledge that if it has been hard for them, it has been even harder for her, living while constantly receiving judgmental looks from everyone around her in addition to her guilt and grief. Even after years from the accident, she is still treated like an outcast by the others. That can be seen in the dinner rehearsal when she gives a toast to her sister and no one laughs at her jokes despite laughing at everyone else's. Being consistently rejected like that pushes her to try even harder to seek approval, further reinforcing her narcissistic tendencies.

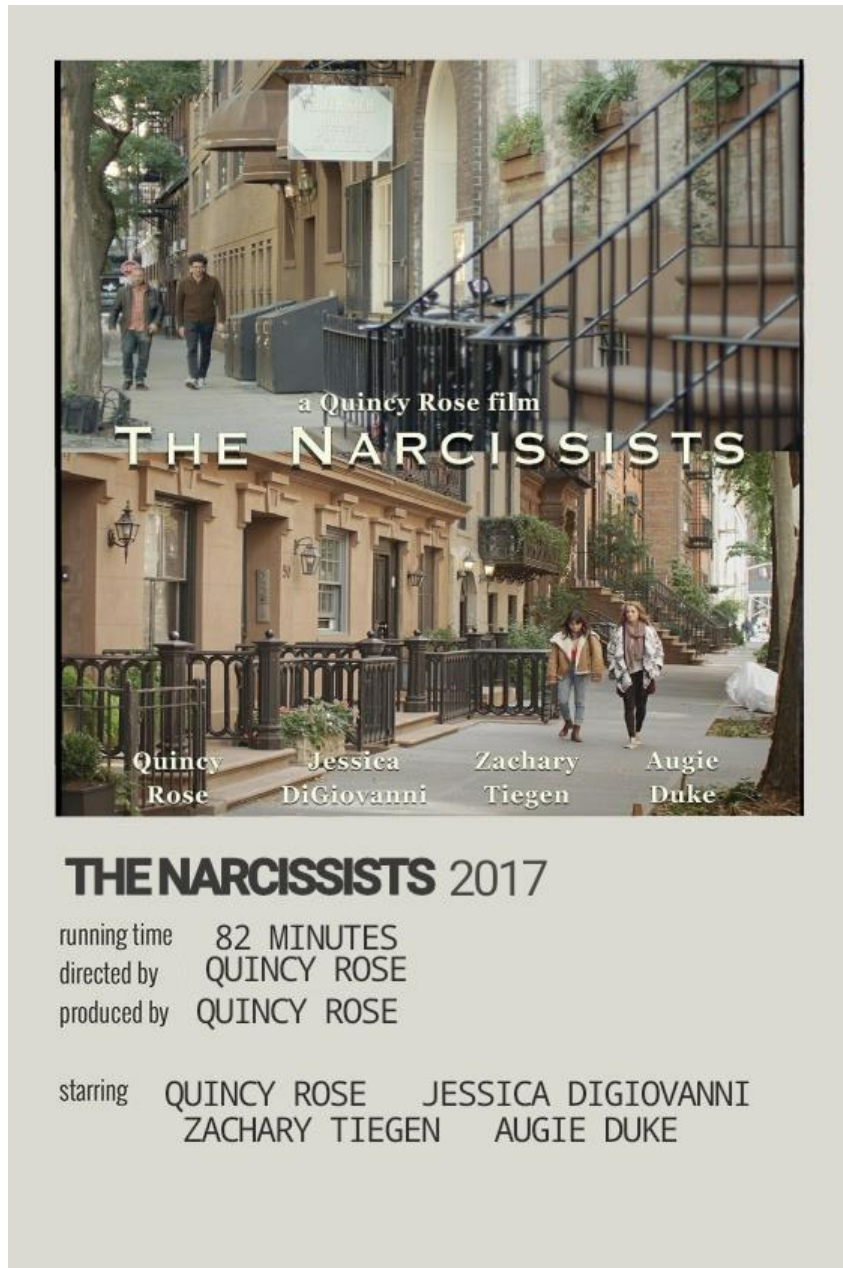
The movie does not only portray how a traumatic past can be the major cause of narcissism, but it also reflects on how that narcissism, in turn, affects everyone around the narcissist. After the accident, Kym's father starts to pay special attention to Kym, out of worry that she might harm herself through her unhealthy coping mechanisms. However, Rachel views it as Kym getting preferential treatment from their father. He always tries to defend her in their arguments and always asks about her whereabouts when she is not close by. This makes Rachel feel neglected as she does not receive as much attention regardless of how well she behaves, which is why she considers Kym as a competitor who stole their father's affection from her. This and Kym's narcissistic tendencies lead the sisters to fight



frequently. The accident also affects Kym's relationship with her mother as Kym ends up blaming her for leaving her alone with Ethan despite knowing that she was high.

In conclusion, *Rachel Getting Married* offers a poignant exploration of narcissism and its impact on the narcissist as well as on familial relationships. Through Kym's character, the film exposes the destructive nature of self-absorption and the importance of empathy and genuine connection in overcoming personal struggles as only after Kym and Rachel both open up about the feeling they kept hidden for so long do their relationship get better and the wedding go smoothly. As Kym navigates her journey toward redemption, she is forced to confront the consequences of her narcissistic behavior, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of herself and her place within her family.

### 2.1.7. The Narcissists (2017)



**Figure 7**

*The Narcissists* is a semi-biographical indie movie about a couple from Brooklyn, Cassi and Oliver, spending their day apart in New York City, each with their respective best friend, Cassi with Letty and Oliver with Max. Both Cassi and Oliver are contemplating their relationship that is going through difficulties after lasting five years together. However, the movie delves into various other subjects on self-identity, insecurities, and modern intimacy

and explores varying perspectives into those matters. As the movie title suggests, all four characters in the movie exhibit varying traits of narcissism.

The character of Oliver, portrayed by the director of the movie, Quincy Rose, is portrayed as a struggling playwright who is too absorbed in pursuing his own ambitions and aspirations to put as much energy into his relationship with Cassi, which shows his sense of self-importance. It also shows when he says that he wants to have a child in order to leave his things to, to which Max answers that it would be severely damaging to the child. This shows how even though Oliver thinks too much, he still did not regard the matter of raising a child as a big responsibility but rather as leaving his legacy behind. This also showcases a mild tendency to exploit others for one's own benefit.

Another trait that can be seen in the movie is Oliver's haughty attitude when talking to Max, especially when Max told him he quit reading books long ago. Oliver tells him *"it's like you're allergic to culture,"* implying he is a cultured one because he reads, which makes him superior. Not to mention, his abstention from getting intimate with Cassi with no consideration of her needs shows some lack of empathy on his part, which is what pushed Cassi to cheat on him, causing the difficulties in their relationship.

The character of Cassi, portrayed by Jessica DiGiovanni, exhibits some other traits of narcissism. In the first scene between her and Letty, she mentions her sister's envy of her saying that her sister only enjoys her own success when she, Cassi, is miserable. However, the mentioning of her sister is random and irrelevant to the subject they were talking about beforehand, showcasing that she can be projecting her own envy of her sister's success. Not only that, but she which also mentions how her mother is too keen on Oliver and how she envies Cassi for her relationship with him. *"It's as if she's in the relationship with him,"* Cassi says. These feelings of envy and of being envied are a trait of narcissism. She also

rejects Letty's invitation to eat somewhere nearby because she does not *"want to be surrounded by spoiled, snobby housewives,"* which shows her arrogant and haughty attitude. Her friend then mocks her for preferring to be *"around spoiled, snobby college kids and nameless models"* instead, which also shows that she only associates with people whom she thinks of as worthy.

Cassi cheats on Oliver when he does not provide her with the intimacy she desires instead of either communicating and trying to resolve their issues or ending things with him directly. Not to mention that she is a controlling partner as she does not allow Oliver to speak with other women, particularly the ones he has been in relationships with before or those he could find attractive. She also says that she does not *"like being single."* Relationships can be a source of validation and reassurance of being desired, which is sought by narcissists. That is also where the fear of abandonment stems from. Cassi herself admits that her actions stem from her *"fear and insecurity that he wants to leave [her]."*

The characters of Max, portrayed by Zack Tiegen, and Letty, portrayed by Augie Duke, are the best friends of Oliver and Cassi respectively. They are both impulsive characters doing as they please in life with no regards to the consequences. They are similar in that they both chase fleeting sexual encounters because they are incapable of forming genuine connections with a romantic partner. They are also blunt, not bothering to mince their words out of consideration to others.

Max finds it unpleasant and unnecessary to be mindful of other people, showcasing his struggles with empathy. That can be seen when he keeps insisting on Oliver to smoke despite knowing that he quit when smoking caused him panic attacks. Another trait for Max is his fantasies about his dream girl being an *"18 year old orphan who just lost her family and inherited a billion dollars."* As for Letty, she has no qualms hurting others for her own

momentary pleasure. She has a cyber-sexual encounter with someone knowing he already has a partner and admitting that she just does not care. She then says it is not cheating as it did not happen in real life and then justifies it by saying that if she does not know, it will not hurt her.

Ultimately, the characters of *the Narcissists* exhibit fluctuating traits, as they are not inherently bad people. Cassi cheats on Oliver; however, she then admits it to him and takes accountability. Oliver opens up about being molested in his childhood and how he almost molested another kid in order to “*take [his] power back*” before immediately regretting it and stopping. He eventually decides to confront Cassi to talk about their relationship. He also tries to push Max to change his impulsive lifestyle. Max cries when he says that sometimes he is a raging narcissist, not caring about people in his life, while at other times he does care. While his own lifestyle is self-indulgent, he still tells Oliver to take the matter of having a child more seriously. And Letty helps Cassi navigate her issues regardless of their differences.

Regardless of their own issues, the characters still hold each other accountable. They are also self-aware of their issues and their roots and are trying to change. All the characters end up unpacking their insecurities throughout the movie and the interviews after, revealing what pushed them into being the way that they are. In the interviews at the end, Oliver says that social media planted “narcissistic qualities” in everyone and that “*the selfie alone is like [an] extension of narcissism.*” Cassi says that “*we’re all narcissistic in some way... Narcissism is kind of what keeps us alive, in a way.*” This shows some misunderstanding of the disorder as they mistake self-love and inherent human selfishness for narcissism. This common misconception can trivialize the struggles of narcissists and invalidate their experiences. It diminishes the seriousness of the disorder and dismisses its complexity. Regardless, it is based on the notion that social media reinforces that selfishness and turns it into narcissistic tendencies.

Ultimately, the events of the movie were set in a single day, which makes it difficult to gauge if those traits are intense enough to be considered truly narcissistic; however, it still gives a glimpse into the struggles of narcissists. Overall, *the Narcissists* can put into perspective the struggles of people suffering from narcissistic personality disorder. It offers a personal exploration of narcissism in the context of modern romance in order to make it easier for the audience to relate to and understand the struggles and perspectives of narcissists.

## 2.2. Discussion of the Findings

After analyzing the selected movies, some patterns can be seen in the portrayal of narcissistic characters. The few key points that can be deduced are as follows:

- Almost half the titles of the movies are a negative reflection of the narcissistic characters (*White Oleander*, *the Devil Wears Prada*, and *Mean Girls*).
- Most of the selected movies include various traits of NPD but focus heavily on the exploitative part of it, especially *the Invisible Man*.
- Even though the malignant subtype of narcissism, which is the only one that can be considered truly malicious, is said to be rare, four out the seven movies can be said to portray that subtype (*White Oleander*, *Rebecca*, *the Invisible Man*, and *Mean Girls*)
- Most of the narcissistic characters appear to lack self-awareness caused by their lack of outside perspective. However, the ones who have some awareness do not seek change, deny their illness entirely, or mistake narcissism for self-love. There is only one character in the selected movies who seeks treatment, as an exception.
- The majority of the movies paint the narcissistic characters as manipulative and controlling.

- Even though narcissists are not inherently abusive or harmful, almost all the narcissistic characters in the selected movies abused (either mentally, physically, or both) or killed one or more characters.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter includes the findings after analyzing seven selected movies about narcissists. It then offers a simple discussion of the findings, which is done by breaking down the patterns portrayed in the majority of movies and putting them into key points. The findings offer answers to the research questions and show that narcissists are generally villainized in Hollywood, which further reinforces the stigma against Narcissistic Personality Disorder, making it seem as though the individuals suffering from it are inherently abusive and manipulative.

## **General Conclusion**

Despite the continuous efforts of social media to raise awareness about mental health issues, many of those issues are still stigmatized to this day. Some of them are even stigmatized by the same people who keep talking about raising awareness. That especially applies to Cluster B disorders, such as NPD, ASPD, and BPD. People often do not understand the origin of those disorders. After having a negative experience with an individual or more suffering from any of those disorders, people end up stigmatizing the disorder itself as they cannot separate the disorder from the behaviors of some of the individuals suffering from it. That usually often creates a negative bias against the disorder, which leads to further discrimination towards the disorder itself instead of the specific people who hurt them. This dissertation aims to explore the portrayal of narcissism in Hollywood and how it serves in further reinforcing that stigma.

The first part of the theoretical part tackles the meaning of psychological abnormality and the different types of disorders. It then deals with the way social media makes it easy for people to both diagnose and misdiagnose their own conditions. Afterwards, it discusses the perspectives of psychology experts when it comes to the social media awareness. Some of them think that it is essential for people to have more mental health awareness. Others, however, criticize the means used to spread that awareness. They believe that the quick spreading of medical information, which is often done by nonprofessional persons, can have its own negative outcomes. After that, the chapter delves into narcissism. It gives a profound definition of narcissism and expounds on the difference between suffering from the clinical NPD and merely exhibiting some mild narcissistic traits. It also mentions how narcissism differs from healthy self-esteem. It then goes on to tackle causes, subtypes, impact, and treatment of narcissism.



The second part, on the other hand, tackles the significant impact that movies have on individuals and society as a whole in relation to our study. It then focuses on the way western movies shape people's opinions and attitudes especially towards mental issues. This part also deals with how those movies portray a person with mental illness which provides helpful insights that are traced in the present research. As movies can be a very powerful tool used to manipulate the masses and create harmful stereotypes if the industry so wills, those portrayals do influence how the audience view mental health issues. More often than not, that influence is negative, which also affects the psychological state of mental health patients. After the quick increase in awareness of mental health issues in the latest years through social media, people started to have criticize those portrayals.

As for the analytical part of the practical chapter, we have seen the portrayal of narcissism through various characters. It is easily noticeable that almost all those characters are problematic and cause trouble to the people around them. Both the character of Ingrid in *White Oleander* and the character of Adrian in *the Invisible Man* are portrayed as cold-blooded murderers, with one being a controlling, manipulative mother and the other being a controlling, manipulative partner respectively. The character of Rebecca in *Rebecca* was a cheating wife and a manipulator before her death. The character of Regina in *Mean Girls* is also another manipulator and a mean bully. Then there is the character of Kym in *Rachel Getting Married* who is portrayed as a recovering addict and a manslaughterer. Only the characters from *the Narcissists* are portrayed as average people.

Furthermore, the main focus of five of the seven movies was on the impact of the narcissistic character and their behavior on the characters around them, which is more often than not a negative one, sometimes extremely so. Only two of the movies gave insights into the pains of the narcissists. *Rachel Getting Married* focused on the narcissistic character's

struggles and traumatic past. It also focused on her recovering journey, highlighting that relapsing is a major part of it, which makes her feel more humane. Then *the Narcissists* also gave insights into the past of the characters, which shaped their beliefs and behaviors.

Narcissism is used in the majority of the selected movies to characterize them into the role of the villain. They play the role of the challenging character that the main character is supposed to overcome and defeat in order to regain control over their lives. They are characters to be fought and resisted rather than understood, in five out of the seven movies (*White Oleander*, *the Devil Wears Prada*, *Rebecca*, *the Invisible Man*, *Mean girls*). Only in two movies do they play roles of victims of uncontrollable circumstances (*Rachel Getting Married*, *the Narcissists*).

Ultimately, when comparing the results, it can be easily seen that the majority of the selected movies indicate a villainization of the narcissistic characters hence reinforcing the stigmatization of the disorder itself. The majority of the narcissistic characters are made to play the villain in their movies. They contribute to the story by playing a challenging role for the others to overcome. Their cruel or otherwise villainous behavior is always directly linked to a narcissistic trait of their, which makes it easy for the audience to view them with contempt and blame the illness for their behavior. In conclusion, we find that the majority of the selected movies do indeed portray narcissistic characters poorly, which further stigmatizes the disorder. However, as this is but a small number of movies, it will be difficult to generalize this conclusion onto all Western film. Therefore, it is recommended that others continue this study with a larger number of movies.

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