



GYNOCENTRISM AS A NARCISSISTIC PATHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Gynocentrism is defined as the practice of prioritizing the needs, wants and desires of women. Examples of gynocentrism are found in the culture of social institutions, and within heterosexual relationships where men are invited to show deference to the needs, wants and desires of women, a practice otherwise referred to as chivalry or benevolent sexism. This study compares gynocentric behaviors with clinical descriptions of narcissism to discover how closely, and in what ways, the two concepts align. The investigation concludes that narcissistic behavior is significantly correlated with behaviors of gynocentrically oriented women, and that gynocentrism is a gendered expression of narcissism operating within the limiting context of heterosexual relationships and exchanges.

Keywords: Gynocentrism, chivalry, benevolent sexism, narcissism, narcissistic personality inventory, gender

INTRODUCTION

Gynocentrism has been described as a practice of prioritizing the needs, wants and desires of women over those of men. It operates within a moral hierarchy that emphasizes the innate *virtues* and *vulnerabilities* of women and the innate *vices* of men, thus providing a rationale for placing women's concerns and perspectives 'on top', and men's at the bottom (Nathanson & Young, 2006; 2010).

The same moral hierarchy has been institutionalized in social conventions, laws and interpretations of them, in constitutional amendments and their interpretive guidelines, and bureaucracies at every level of government, making gynocentrism *de rigueur* behind the scenes in law courts and government bureaucracies that result in systemic discrimination against men (Nathanson & Young, 2006; Wright, 2018a; Wallace et al., 2019; Naurin, 2019).

While gynocentric practices operate within most social institutions, they are equally observable within intimate heterosexual relationships in which men are expected to show deference to the needs, wants and desires of women, a practice referred to as chivalry or benevolent sexism (Wright, 2018b; Hammond et al., 2014; Naurin, et al., 2019).

In this article I set out to show that gynocentrism represents a gendered expression of narcissism, one that operates in the limited context of heterosexual relationships and exchanges.

To make a case that gynocentrism *is* narcissism we need first to define what narcissism is, which will be done by recounting the original Greek myth of Narcissus, followed by an overview of how the concept was taken up by the field of psychology and elaborated into a diagnostic entity. Next, this essay will take the diagnostic entity of narcissism and compare its formal criteria with those typically applied to the notion of gynocentrism to discover how closely, and in what ways, the two concepts align. Lastly the case will be made that narcissism, expressed as *gynocentricity*, is a delimited phenomenon depending on a gendered environment for its existence, and it thus qualifies as a form of 'situational narcissism' (Sherrill, 2001).

THE NARCISSUS MYTH

One day the handsome youth Narcissus became thirsty after a day hunting in the mountains with his companions. After discovering a pool of water he leaned upon its edge to drink and saw his face reflected in the water. Narcissus did not realize it was merely his own reflection and fell deeply in love with it, as if it was somebody else. Here is the account of his ordeal as told by Ovid:

While he seeks to slake his thirst another thirst springs up, and while he drinks he is smitten by the sight of the beautiful form he sees. He loves an unsubstantial hope and thinks that has substance which is only shadow. He looks in speechless wonder at himself and hangs there motionless in the same expression, like a statue carved from Parian marble. Prone on the ground, he gazes at his eyes, twin stars, and his locks, worthy of Bacchus, worthy of Apollo; on his smooth cheeks, his ivory neck, the glorious beauty of his face, the blush mingled with snowy white: all things, in short, he admires for which he is himself admired. Unwittingly he desires himself; he praises, and is himself what he praises; and while he seeks, is sought; equally he kindles love and burns with love. How often did he offer vain kisses on the elusive pool. How often did he plunge his arms into the water seeking to clasp the neck he sees there, but did not clasp himself in them!

What he sees he knows not; but that which he sees he burns for, and the same delusion mocks and allures his eyes. O fondly foolish boy, why vainly seek to clasp a fleeting image? What you seek is nowhere; but turn yourself away, and the object of your love will be no more. That which you behold is but the shadow of a reflected form and has no substance of its own. With you it comes, with you it stays, and it will go with you — if you can go.

No thought of food or rest can draw him from the spot; but, stretched on the shaded grass, he gazes on that false image with eyes that cannot look their fill and through his own eyes perishes. Raising himself a little, and stretching his arms to the trees, he cries:

“Did anyone, O ye woods, ever love more cruelly than I? You know, for you have been the convenient haunts of many lovers. Do you in the ages past, for your life is one of centuries, remember anyone who has pined away like this.” I am charmed, and I see; but what I see and what charms me I cannot find — so great a delusion holds my love. And, to make me grieve the more, no mighty ocean separates us, no long road, no mountain ranges, no city walls with close-shut gates; by a thin barrier of water we are kept apart. He himself is eager to be embraced. For, often as I stretch my lips towards the lucent wave, so often with upturned face he strives to lift his lips to mine. You would think he could be touched — so small a thing it is that separates our loving hearts. Whoever you are, come forth hither! Why, O peerless youth, do you elude me? or whither do you go when I strive to reach you? Surely my form and age are not such that you should shun them, and me

too the nymphs have loved.

Some ground for hope you offer with your friendly looks, and when I have stretched out my arms to you, you stretch yours too. When I have smiled, you smile back; and I have often seen tears, when I weep, on your cheeks. My becks you answer with your nod; and, as I suspect from the movement of your sweet lips, you answer my words as well, but words which do not reach my ears. — Oh, I am he! I have felt it, I know now my own image, I burn with love of my own self; I both kindle the flames and suffer them. What shall I do. Shall I be wooed or woo. Why woo at all? What I desire, I have; the very abundance of my riches beggars me. Oh, that I might be parted from my own body! and, strange prayer for a lover, I would that what I love were absent from me! And now grief is sapping my strength; but a brief space of life remains to me and I am cut off in my life's prime. Death is nothing to me, for in death I shall leave my troubles; I would he that is loved might live longer; but as it is, we two shall die together in one breath.”

He spoke and, half distraught, turned again to the same image. His tears ruffled the water, and dimly the image came back from the troubled pool. As he saw it thus depart, he cried: “Oh, whither do you flee? Stay here, and desert not him who loves thee, cruel one! Still may it be mine to gaze on what I may not touch, and by that gaze feed my unhappy passion.” While he thus grieves, he plucks away his tunic at its upper fold and beats his bare breast with pallid hands. His breast when it is struck takes on a delicate glow; just as apples sometimes, though white in part, flush red in other part, or as grapes hanging in clusters take on a purple hue when not yet ripe. As soon as he sees this, when the water has become clear again, he can bear no more; but, as the yellow wax melts before a gentle heat, as hoar frost melts before the warm morning sun, so does he, wasted with love, pine away, and is slowly consumed by its hidden fire. (Ovid, 1916)

Unable to leave the allure of his own image, he came to realize that his love could not be reciprocated. Unable to eat, his body slowly wasted away from the fire of passion burning inside him, eventually disappearing entirely and transforming into a golden narcissus flower that still grows along the water's edge today.

NARCISSISM AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL DESIGNATION

Twentieth century psychiatrists recognized the Narcissus myth as a useful metaphor for behaviors they were documenting in some of their patients, and so chose to refer to those behaviors as *narcissism*. As the primary symbol for representing narcissism was a male character, it may have helped to birth an assumption that narcissism is a mostly male pathology, which is misleading as both men and women can suffer from narcissistic excess.

Early psychiatrists could equally have chosen a female character to symbolize the self-absorbed personality, such as the fairy-tale character Little Princess Cottongrass who, like Narcissus, became ‘fixated with her own heart’ while staring into a pool of water (Schwartz-Salant, 1982). ‘*Little Princess Cottongrass Personality Disorder*,’ however, doesn’t afford quite the same clinical gravitas.

The development of narcissism as a psychological concept has a long and complex history, covering ideas like *primary narcissism* (Freud, 1914) which is viewed as a healthy ingredient of childhood development, through to pathological manifestations that cause personal and interpersonal suffering, such as *narcissistic neurosis* (Freud, 1991) or *narcissistic personality disorder* (Campbell & Miller, 2011). For the purpose of this study we will turn to the DSM-5 manual of psychological disorders which summarises narcissistic personality disorder as, “*a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), a constant need for admiration, and a lack of empathy.*” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 670). The DSM’s nine diagnostic criteria for narcissistic personality disorder will be detailed later, and compared point-by-point with gynocentric behaviors as described by relevant writers and scholars on the topic.

To begin with, we will touch on the concept of *acquired situational narcissism* as a qualifier of how gynocentric narcissism arises, contrasting it in this respect from narcissism that arises from developmental vicissitudes which result in intractable personality disorder. While the diagnostic criteria for these narcissistic phenomena converge, their genesis is considerably different.

ACQUIRED SITUATIONAL NARCISSIM

Robert B Millman, Professor of Psychiatry at Cornell University, coined the phrase “acquired situational narcissism” (Plante, 2006). It refers to narcissistic behavior that is brought about or “triggered” by an experience of celebrity status, and manifests symptoms comparable to those listed for narcissistic personality disorder (Sherrill, 2001). Millman suggests that it is triggered by an experience of power that comes with any privileged occupational position or favoured social status. In this sense it is the environment that promotes the exaggeration of narcissistic traits in an individual which may have only existed

previously as a mild trait or as latent potential. Examples of acquired situational narcissism include *cultural narcissism* (Lasch, 2018; Twenge, 2006, 2009); *ingroup narcissism* (De Zavala, et.al., 2009); *medical narcissism* (Banja, 2005); *celebrity narcissism* (Sherrill, 2001); and *leadership narcissism* (McSweeney, 2018). In this category we will include extreme gynocentricity displayed by women & girls as it manifests in the gendered context or ‘situation’ of interacting with men & boys (Wright, 2018b).

GYNOCENTRISM

Before comparing gynocentric behaviours with the DSM-5 criteria for narcissistic personality disorder, we will need to isolate a consensual understanding of gynocentric behaviors from historical texts and modern theory. To that end we will start with three key historical texts, the first two from Lester F. Ward (1888, 1903) who was the first person to propose a general scientific theory of gynocentrism, and the second from Irish author George A. Birmingham;

Lester F. Ward:

“The female sex is primary in point both of origin and of importance in the history and economy of organic life. And as life is the highest product of nature, and human life the highest type of life, it follows that the grandest fact in nature is woman... Woman is the unchanging trunk of the great genealogical tree; while man, with all his vaunted superiority, is but a branch, a grafted scion, as it were, whose acquired qualities die with the individual, while those of woman are handed on to futurity. Woman is the race, and the race can be raised up only as she is raised up.” (Ward, 1888)

“The gynæocentric theory is the view that the female sex is primary and the male secondary in the organic scheme, that originally and normally all things center, as it were, about the female.” (Ward, 1903)

George A. Birmingham:

“American social life seems to me — the word is one to apologize for — gynocentric. It is arranged with a view to the convenience and delight of women. Men come in where and how they can.” (Birmingham, 1914)

In these pithy descriptions, gynocentrism defines women as both biological and social superiors in their relation to men who are positioned to support women’s ‘convenience and delight’ where and how they can.

First wave feminist Charlotte Perkins-Gilman (1860 – 1935) claimed that the theory of gynocentrism was the most important contribution to ‘the woman question’ ever made (Gilman, 1911a; Davis, 2010). Commenting on Ward’s gynæocentric theory to doubters, she wrote “You’ll have to swallow it. The female is the race type; the male is her assistant. It is established beyond peradventure.” (Gilman, 1911b, p.53). Perkins-Gilman’s adherence to gynocentrism theory predated her introduction to Ward’s theories, given in such poems as ‘The Brood Mare’ (Gillman, 1898) and others which she had written years before she met Ward. While continuing to laud Ward’s gynocentrism theory as a brilliant contribution, she expanded on it by suggesting that women were more evolutionarily advanced than men, and that women were continuing to advance at a faster rate than men (Davis, 2010, p. 191).

More recently, American feminist Iris M. Young (1985) elaborated her gynocentric belief in a “superiority” of female values over male values, with the superiority thesis continuing to rest on a biological rationale as it did for Lester F. Ward and Perkins-Gilman above. Young states;

“Gynocentric feminism... argues for the superiority of the values embodied in traditionally female experience and rejects the values it finds in traditionally male dominated institutions... Gynocentric feminism finds in women’s bodies and traditionally feminine activity the source of positive values. Women’s reproductive processes keep us linked with nature and the promotion of life to a greater degree than men’s. Female eroticism is more fluid, diffuse, and loving than violence-prone male sexuality. Our feminine socialization and traditional roles as mothers give us the capacity to nurture and a sense of social cooperation that may be the only salvation of the planet... within traditional femininity lie the values that we should promote for a better society.” (Young, 1985).

Note the biological essentialism appearing from Lester Ward through to Young who further states that “Gynocentrism’s most important contribution is its affirmation of difference” (Young, 1985, p.184). Young clarifies that the superiority of “women’s bodies” and the associated values of women’s bodies are central tenets of both gynocentrism and third wave feminism, pointing to a biological essentialism that critics of feminism appear to have overlooked in their rush to denounce the social constructivism of some second-wave feminists (Wright, 2018c).

Since the 1970s most explorations of gynocentrism have been carried out by feminists from the perspective of what gynocentricity means to, or feels like, for women who embrace such behavior. They ask, for example, how does the practice of gynocentrism serve to strengthen women's ego-identity and improve their sense of dignity and wellbeing. Notably no equivalent discussion with men and boys has taken place to discover *their* experience of gynocentrism, thus the female-centric examination of the topic is an imbalanced one deserving of expansion by the inclusion of male, and also humanist perspectives in order to give a more complete overview of the topic.

Since the turn of the millennium new investigations into the nature and dynamics of gynocentrism – from male-inclusive, and humanist points of view – have appeared and provided a more detailed understanding of gynocentrism. The following examples present a synopsis of eight of these contributors: Alison Tieman, Paul Elam, Paul Nathanson & Katherine Young, Adam Kostakis, Peter wright, Dennis Gouws, and Peter Ryan.

Alison Tieman

“In my opinion – and this is just from observing the social systems as they play out – I would say that gynocentrism prioritizes women’s protection and provision.” (Elam & Tieman, 2018)

Paul Elam

“As gynocentrism manifests itself in the realm of sexual politics I do call it the tendency in human beings to prioritize the needs and wants of women over the needs and wants of men... The reason I like to frame it in terms of needs and wants is because in this gynocentric milieu, the gynocentric landscape in which we live, it’s not just protection and provision that women demand of the culture around them, it is everything. Its protection, its provision, its privilege, its power, its ‘believe the woman,’ its, you know, if I say something I don’t want to be questioned; this goes way beyond protection and provision. (Elam & Tieman, 2018)

“How did chivalry go from being a military code to being a codified standard for men to meet in their protective treatment of women? The answer to that is a matter of historical record; it was through manipulation of the gynocentric instinct. In the twelfth century Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie de Champagne engaged in an intensive campaign to popularize the idea of courtly or romantic love... Eleanor, a woman of serious means and influence, sort of like a supersized Betty Friedan of the high Middle Ages, saw an opportunity in this to promote a connection between men and women inspired by



passion and infatuation and driven by a model of service – particularly of service to women. She and her daughter commissioned troubadours who borrowed from the ethics of military chivalry to write books and songs that carried this message to all the European courts. Even though the message was meant primarily for the aristocracy it eventually filtered down into the general population and quickly grew in popularity... The advent of romantic chivalrous love took the naturally occurring tendency in men to take care of women and made the first great leap toward a gynocentric society that would tolerate and indeed encourage all manner of insanity in the name of putting women first.” (Elam, 2016)

Paul Nathanson & Katherine Young

“In ‘egalitarian’ societies imagined by this branch of feminism, men were free to exist as “equals” of women as long as they acknowledged the supremacy of women. This worldview – as distinct from the one that produces objective scholarship on women – is explicitly gynocentric and therefore ignores the needs and problems of men.

Gynocentrism is a form of essentialism – as distinct from scholarship or political activity on behalf of women – to the extent that it focuses on the innate virtues of women. But this worldview is explicitly misandric too, because it not only ignores the needs and problems of men but also attacks men. Misandry is a form of dualism that focuses on the innate vices of men. In this moral or even ontological hierarchy, women are at the top and men are at the bottom.” (Nathanson & Young, 2010, p.58)

Adam Kostakis

“The traditional idea under discussion is male sacrifice for the benefit of women, which we term Gynocentrism. This is the historical norm, and it was the way of the world long before anything called ‘feminism’ made itself known. There is an enormous amount of continuity between the chivalric class code which arose in the Middle Ages and modern feminism, for instance. That the two are distinguishable is clear enough, but the latter is simply a progressive extension of the former over several centuries, having retained its essence over a long period of transition. One could say that they are the same entity, which now exists in a more mature form – certainly, we are not dealing with two separate creatures. (Kostakis, 2011a).

“And what is the logical outcome – say, if tomorrow, feminists got everything they are advocating for today? We would be plunged immediately into a two-tier system of rights and obligations, where men and women form distinct castes of citizen, the former weighed down by the obligations that enable the latter to luxuriate in their total autonomy. Life for women would be a literal lawlessness, while men’s every move would be dictated from above, geared to the purpose of providing for all female needs and wants. It would not be inappropriate to call such a system sexual feudalism, and every time I read a feminist article, this is the impression that I get: that they aim to construct a new aristocracy,

comprised only of women, while men stand at the gate, till in the fields, fight in their armies, and grovel at their feet for starvation wages. All feminist innovation and legislation creates new rights for women and new duties for men; thus it tends towards the creation of a male underclass. (Kostakis, 2011b).

“So, here is the definition I offer up: feminism is the most recent, and presently the most culturally dominant form of Gynocentrism. It is a victim ideology which explicitly advocates female supremacy, at every facet of life in which men and women meet; it does so in accordance with its universalizing tendency, and so it does so in each sphere of life, including but extending beyond the political, social, cultural, personal, emotional, sexual, spiritual, economic, governmental and legal. By female supremacy, I refer to the notion that women should possess superiority of status, power and protection relative to men. It is the dominant cultural paradigm in the Western world and beyond. It is morally indefensible, although its adherents ensure that their hegemony goes unchallenged through the domination of societal institutions and the use of state violence.” (Kostakis, 2011c).

Peter Wright

“Gynocentric chivalry is alluded to by alternative terms such as benevolent sexism, romantic love, gentlemanliness, courtesy, gallantry, heroism, or simply chivalry. The practice has roots in what some scholars have referred to as chivalric ‘love service,’ (Bennett, 2013) a ritualized form of devotion by men toward women popularized by troubadours in the Middle Ages. The earliest conceptualization of love service borrowed from the vocabulary of medieval feudalism, mimicking ties between a liegeman and his overlord; i.e., the male lover is referred to as *homo ligius* (the woman’s liegeman, or ‘my man’) who pledged honor, and *servitium* (service) to the lady via a posture of feudal homage. The lady was addressed as *midons* (literally ‘my lord’), and also by *dominus* (denoting the feudal Lady) (Alfonsi, 1986). These practices form the ideological taproot of modern romantic chivalry.

The conventions and indeed the lived practices of romantic chivalry celebrated first among the upper classes made their way by degrees eventually to the middle classes and finally to the lower classes – or rather they broke class structure altogether in the sense that all Western peoples became inheritors of the customs regardless of their social station. Today chivalry is a norm observed across the majority of global cultures, an explicitly gynocentric norm aimed to increase the comfort, safety and power of women, while affording men a sense of purpose and occasional heroism in addressing that same task.

C.S. Lewis referred to the growth of romantic chivalry as “the feudalisation of love,” (Lewis, 2013, p. 2) making the observation that it has left no corner of our ethics, our

imagination, or our daily life untouched. He observed that European society has moved essentially from a social feudalism, involving a contractual arrangement between a feudal lord and his vassal, to a sexual feudalism involving a comparable contract between men and women as symbolized in the act of a man going down on one knee to propose marriage. (Wright, 2018a)

“The dominant features of gender relations today come from old Europe in the forms of damseling, chivalry and courtly-love. Together they form the customs, in fact the essence, of modern gynocentric culture.” (Wright, 2016)

Dennis Gouws

“This conservative approach to chivalry, one whose paternalism has surely outlived its usefulness in the twenty-first century, offers men little and confines them to a life of gynocentric pleasing and male disposability in the service of gynocentric chivalry. What this approach has in common with gender feminism is the way it suggests gynocentrism is essential and congruent with society—its natural and normal protocol—rather than being one philosophy among many. The second approach placed the onus on changing chivalry on women and their expectations. Ashley suggested that “It is women who need to figure out what roles they would have men perpetuate, and encourage those over the less-preferred actions.” This approach completely objectifies men and empowers women to dictate what they want men to do to please women. It is gynocentric, strategic, and impersonal; it is a gender-feminist approach. As much of this chapter has suggested, it is harmful to men and women who seek gender equity.

“Michael Kimmel (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010) popularized the concept of aggrieved entitlement which can succinctly be defined as “a gendered emotion, a fusion of that humiliating loss of manhood and the moral obligation and entitlement to get it back” (p. 454). Because Kimmel’s sympathies lie with gender feminism, he is uninterested in how this concept might apply to women’s behavior. Women might express aggrieved entitlement when they experience what they perceive to be a humiliating loss of the gynocentric privilege to which gynocentric chivalry, gender feminism, and hegemonic gynarchy have entitled them. Self-righteous, angry expressions of personal offense and even violent acts might result from their perceived moral obligation to regain their sense of gynocentric privilege. A cursory internet search of gender-feminist responses to men’s-issues speakers on campus and to the establishing men’s groups or other male-positive spaces on campus will provide examples of this aggrieved entitlement.” (Gouws, 2018)

Peter Ryan

I define gynocentrism as the following: The set of elements of society and relationships that are directed by the intent to prioritise female well-being over male well-being, based solely or partly on the sex of the intended beneficiary(ies) being female and for which there

are no equivalent efforts made to provide corresponding commensurate benefits to males.

I define well-being as the quality of the overall condition of the life of an individual or group, that is based on taking their mental and physical health and life satisfaction into consideration.

The diagnostic criteria that must be met for an element of society or relationships to be considered gynocentric are the following: 1. The element must be driven by the intent to prioritise female well-being over male well-being. 2. This intent must be solely or partly based on the sex of the intended beneficiary(ies) being female. 3. There must be no equivalent efforts made to provide commensurate benefits to males for instances where female well-being is prioritised over male well-being.” (Ryan, 2018)

Online reference definitions

“Gynocentrism: Is a radical feminist discourse that champions woman-centered beliefs, identities, and social organization.” (Encyclopedia R., 2005)

“Gynocentric: Centered on or concerned exclusively with women; taking a female (or specifically a feminist) point of view.” (Dictionary, O. E., 2008)

“Gynocentrism: The tendency to place the female or feminine viewpoint and experience at the center of a society or culture.” (Dictionary S. D., 2016)

“Gynocentrism: An ideological focus on females, and issues affecting them, possibly to the detriment of non-females.” (Dictionary, Y., 2018)

“Gynocentrism: Dominated by or emphasizing feminine interests or a feminine point of view.” (Dictionary, M. W., 2020)

CONDENSATION AND SUMMARY OF DESCRIPTIONS OF GYNOCENTRISM:

By definition males and females in gynocentric relationships are both ideologically and behaviourally ‘woman-centered’ as per the suffix *-centrism*. In this respect gynocentrism is differentiated from relationships that are *relationship-centered*, involving reciprocity between men and women, relationship partners, and other family members.

Gynocentric relationships assume strict gender roles: men are expected to pedestalize and extend chivalric (benevolently sexist) behavior toward women; and women are to assume the status of biological and moral superiority deserving of pedestalization and entitlement to special benefits. These roles have roots in the tradition of courtly and romantic love.

Gynocentrism is focused on maximizing the benefits of convenience, comfort, pleasure, needs, wants, protections, provision, power and self-esteem of women.

It takes place in heterosexual relationships, or by extension in relationships where stereotypical heterosexual roles can be mimicked. In this sense it is situational (heterosexual relationships) rather than universal and general.

It obliterates the variety of potential masculinities, and replaces them with the singular masculinity of chivalric servant. Masculine variety of every non-gynocentric kind is viewed as a failure and affront to the gynocentric mandate.

DSM CRITERIA FOR NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER

The DSM-5 states that narcissistic personality disorder is indicated by the presence of at least 5 of 9 criteria (See table-1 below). For the purpose of this study, the DSM criteria are compared below with behaviors typically inferred of the ‘gynocentric woman’ [GW].

TABLE 1. A Comparison of DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder Compared to Gynocentric Behaviors

DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder	Traits and behaviors of the gynocentrism-oriented woman
[DSM] 1. A grandiose sense of self-importance (eg, the individual exaggerates achievements and talents and expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements)	[GW] Views self as ‘superior’ to males (e.g. genetically, physically, morally, creatively, aesthetically, or in terms of emotional intelligence) based on the fact of being born female (Ward,1903; Young, 1985)
[DSM] 2. A preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love	[GW] Preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love, appearing especially in the gendered context of the romantic love tradition (Wright, 2014)
[DSM] 3. A belief that he or she is special and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people or institutions	[GW] Gynocentric feminists have long celebrated women’s special and unique “ways of knowing,” along with the mystical association women share through these paths (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1993)
[DSM] 4. A need for excessive admiration	[GW] Expects men to pedestalize herself and/or women generally. Pedestalization is defined by some authors as a central defining feature of gynocentrism. (Galbi, 2015; Jarosek, 2017)
[DSM] 5. A sense of entitlement (ie, unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations)	[GW] Feels entitled to receive gestures of benevolent sexism/chivalry, and deferential behavior from intimate and familial males (Hammond, et al., 2014; Wright, 2018b)



DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder	Traits and behaviors of the gynocentrism-oriented woman
[DSM] 6. Interpersonally exploitive behavior (ie, the individual takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends)	[GW] Pressures, manipulates or demands to receive benevolently sexist gestures from men in order to secure comforts, pleasures, needs, wants, protections, provision, power and self-esteem. Employs intimidating or punishing gestures for failures and non-compliance (Wright, 2018b; 2019)
[DSM] 7. A lack of empathy (unwillingness to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others)	[GW] Suppresses, ignores or actively censures empathic responses to men's issues. This approach is promoted by gynocentric feminists who treat dispensation of empathy as a zero-sum activity and scarce resource that must be reserved exclusively for women (Collins, 2016; Fiamengo, 2015)
[DSM] 8. Envy of others or a belief that others are envious of him or her	[GW] Envious of other women's beauty, or assumes others envious of her beauty; viewed as a competitive edge for securing male resources and admiration. (Friday, 1996) Also demonstrates envy and concomitant resentment of male potency and provision (Schoenewolf, 2017; Reich, 1953)
[DSM] 9. A demonstration of arrogant and haughty behaviors or attitudes	[GW] Displays an attitude and behavior of superiority over, and concomitant contempt for, men and boys. (Kostakis, 2011c; Nathanson & Young, 2001; Schoenewolf, 2017)

RELATED THEORIES OF NARCISSISM

The lexicon of narcissism-related terms provides further items that can be explored to determine the degree to which gynocentrism reflects narcissistic behaviors. Three topics are surveyed below to help to inform the current study.

'*Narcissistic supply*' is a concept introduced into psychoanalytic theory by Otto Fenichel (1938) to describe a type of admiration, interpersonal support or sustenance drawn by an individual from his or her environment that is essential to the formation of self-esteem. The individual employs two main strategies for eliciting narcissistic supplies from others; ingratiation and aggression. While Fenichel referred to the need for narcissistic supply as a human universal, he underlined its potential to develop into exaggerated and pathological forms (Fenichel, 1938). The phrase is typically employed in the pathological sense, describing an excessive need for attention or admiration and operating as a form of interpersonal exploitation in which the narcissist fails to take into account the wider feelings, opinions, or needs of other people.

Self-psychologist Heinz Kohut believed individuals with narcissistic personality disorder experience a mental disintegration when cut off from a regular source of narcissistic supply. Those providing supplies are sometimes treated as if they are a part of the narcissist in an eclipse of all personal boundaries (Kohut & Tolpin, 1996). The same motivations and behaviors are readily seen in the gynocentrically-oriented women's search for, and expectation of receiving, chivalric supplies from men (Hammond et al., 2014; Wright, 2018b).

'Narcissistic injury' refers is a psychological wounding of the self through lack of narcissistic supplies. It can arise from absence of a supplying audience, or alternatively by their refusal or failure to offer adequate ego support. Such a blow typically lowers the narcissist's self-esteem and produces feelings of humiliation, shame and rage (Reber, 1995).

In the marketplace of potential narcissistic supplies, women are frequently afforded priority over men, culturally speaking, such as we witness in phrases like "The wedding is *her* special day," "Ladies before gentlemen," "Aint nobody happy if mamma ain't happy," "Women and girls first," "Whatever she wants, she gets," "Men must pay the bill for dinner," etc. When denied the experience of gynocentric entitlements women may experience narcissistic injury, and may express a sense of aggrieved entitlement (Gouws, 2018; Wright, 2019).

'Narcissistic rage' refers to an aggressive reaction arising from the experience of a narcissistic injury that has threatened the narcissist's self-esteem or self-worth. The intensity of the reaction occurs on a continuum, which may range from instances of aloofness and expressions of mild irritation or annoyance, to serious outbursts including, at the extremes, violent attacks or homicide (Lambe, et al., 2018).

For Heinz Kohut, narcissistic rage is related to narcissists' need for total control of their environment, including "the need for revenge, for righting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means." (Ronningstam, 2005, pp. 86–87). It is an attempt by the narcissist to turn a passive experience of victimization into an active role via giving pain to others, while at the same time attempting to rebuild some sense of self-worth. It may also involve self-preservation, with rage serving to restore a sense of safety and power by destroying that which had threatened the narcissist. (Ronningstam, 2005). Edmund Bergler states that the rage

follows any blow to the narcissist's sense of omnipotence (Levin, 1995).

Viewed within the context of gynocentric relationships, narcissistic rage, or what we might loosely term *gynocentric rage*, is captured in the phrase “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,” which indicates that a woman who cannot make someone love her can become extremely angry and vindictive (Gouws, 2018; Wright, 2019).

DISCUSSION

Benevolent sexism (chivalry) plays a significant role in the operation and maintenance of gynocentric relationships, and warrants further analysis in the context of this study.

In their paper titled *The Allure of Sexism*, Matthew D Hammond *et.al.* studied whether women’s feeling of entitlement to special treatment, which they emphasize is “a central facet of narcissism based on feelings of superiority and deservingness” (2014, p.422), was linked with endorsement of benevolent sexism by women across time. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the study found that a psychological sense of entitlement by women *does* mediate endorsement of benevolent sexism. Moreover, the researchers theorized that characteristics of narcissistic entitlement, those which drive resource-attainment and self-enhancement strategies, are the same qualities that promote women’s adoption of benevolent sexism:

“First, benevolent sexism facilitates the capacity to gain material resources and complements feelings of deservingness by promoting a structure of intimate relationships in which men use their access to social power and status to provide for women (Chen et al., 2009). Second, benevolent sexism reinforces beliefs of superiority by expressing praise and reverence of women, emphasizing qualities of purity, morality, and culture which make women the “fairer sex.” Indeed, identifying with these kinds of gender-related beliefs (e.g., women are warm) fosters a more positive self-concept (Rudman, Greenwald, & McGhee, 2001).

Moreover, for women higher in psychological entitlement, benevolent sexism legitimizes a self-centric approach to relationships by emphasizing women’s special status within the intimate domain and men’s responsibilities of providing and caring for women. Such care involves everyday chivalrous behaviors, such as paying on a first date and opening doors for women (Sarlet et al., 2012; Viki et al., 2003), to more overarching prescriptions for men’s behavior toward women, such as being “willing to sacrifice their own well-being” to provide for women and to ensure women’s happiness by placing her “on a pedestal” (Ambivalent Sexism Inventory; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Thus, women higher in

psychological entitlement should be particularly enticed by benevolent sexism because it justifies provision and praise from men as expected behavior and does not require women to reciprocate the reverence or material gains, which men provide.’ (Hammond, et al., 2014, pp. 3-4).

Recognition of narcissism as prevalent among feminist women has a long history. In her paper *Who Put The “Me” in Feminism*, Imogen Tyler (2005) admits to the widespread recognition of narcissism in the feminist movement by wider society. Tyler attempts to put a positive spin on the behavior, reframing the predilection among feminists as a result of downtrodden women’s attempt to develop an independent, healthy narcissistic identity not tied to oppressive patriarchal demands. Tyler further advocates what she views as the hidden benefits of female narcissism:

“Feminism exposes and challenges the sexual politics of narcissism both by making prevailing forms of narcissism visible (the homo-social bond) and by encouraging new self-conscious forms of narcissism amongst women to emerge.”

“In this article I have examined what is at stake in the attribution of narcissism to femininity and feminism, and the routes through which arguments about ‘feminist narcissism’ became central to the popular abjection of feminism... Despite the ways in which narcissism has been consistently employed as a rhetorical means of denigrating women and delegitimizing feminist politics, I have also demonstrated the central role of narcissistic theories of identity in enabling feminist theorists to prise open the mechanisms of feminine identity and critique the sexual politics of identity practices.” (Tyler, 2005)

The narcissistic individual’s sense of entitlement, combined with an unwillingness to identify with the feelings and needs of relationship partners, renders their relationships decidedly narcissist-centered. The relationship partner is objectified as a “thing,” a resource provider who is pressured to follow the narcissist’s lead, or alternatively to suffer punishment, rejection or dissolution of the relationship.

Likewise, highly gynocentric relationships center around needs and wants of women, with the male partner expected to assist in serving those aims in place of his own. Writer C.S. Lewis captured this dynamic in his description of courtly love, where he elaborated male lover’s posture in relation to his lady; *“The lover is always abject. Obedience to his lady’s lightest wish, however whimsical, and silent acquiescence in her rebukes, however unjust, are the*

only virtues he dares to claim." (Lewis, 2013, p. 2). These findings are suggested in the term gynocentrism itself whose suffix *-centrism-* emphasizes dominance of the female position over inclusivity, compromise, and power-sharing relationships. Said alternatively, couple-centeredness and gyno-centeredness (woman centeredness) are antithetical concepts.

A note on terminology needs to be made at this juncture. The phrase "Gynocentric relationships," as used throughout this study, is differentiated by the author from all isolated gynocentric acts, such as an annual celebration of Mother's Day. Or for a more dramatic illustration of an isolated gynocentric act, we might picture a man taking on a knife-wielding maniac who is threatening to hurt his pregnant wife, while the wife, understandably, retreats and does not help the husband during the fight: the actions of both husband (protecting his wife) and wife (protecting herself) are rightly defined as gynocentric acts. However, if we consider the *overall* relationship between the same husband and wife, we might ask a different question – *is the entire relationship a gyno-centric one?*

If a husband and wife take turns indulging each other across the duration of their relationship in a spirit of ongoing, commensurate reciprocity, then the relationship can be referred to as "couple centered." Conversely, a *gyno-centric* relationship centres predominately or exclusively around the female partner and her wishes. This leads to the conclusion that when there is genuine reciprocity operating within a relationship, a balanced couple-centric dynamic in which the needs, wants and desires of both partners are afforded equal value, it can not be considered a gynocentric relationship (Wright, 2018d).

Much like the power dynamic between a narcissistic and non-narcissistic partner, gynocentric relationships are based on unbalanced roles that are in some ways comparable to master-slave, or BDSM-style relationships (Duits, 2015).

WHAT HAS BEEN MEN'S ROLE IN PROMOTING GYNOCENTRIC NARCISSISM?

Firstly we can say that men have played a principle role in aiding and abetting the growth of gynocentrism among women, motivated in large part by a desire to form relationships with them. Secondly, as Paul Elam recently pointed out in an article *Daddy's Little Nightmare*, men encourage narcissism in their daughters:

It's quite ironic, listening to a man complain about how his wife has crazy unreal expectations. He bemoans the fact that she cannot be satisfied, no matter what he does. He claims that he pulls his hair out trying to figure out how to satisfy her endless demands only to be met with more disapproval and, of course, more demands. He wonders aloud how she ever learned to be such a bottomless pit, and such a bitch about it.

Then you go watch him interact with his four-year old daughter, whom he will endlessly coddle and for whom he will go to any measure to make sure she never lacks anything, no matter how trivial.

And it doesn't stop when she turns five. Or fifteen, or twenty-five. When it comes to turning human females into paragons of pissy entitlement, the western father has few rivals. (Elam, 2019)

Suffice to say that many men are complicit in maintaining the status quo, creating a culture of exaggerated benevolent sexism in order to gain romantic access to women. The subsequent relationship dynamic is one they may come to find destructive to their emotional and physical wellbeing and thus unsustainable in the long term. Some men adjust to the gynocentric dynamic by resigning their dreams and emotional needs and playing the role of what is disparagingly referred to as a 'simp' or overly servile partner, perhaps rationalizing that gynocentrism is encoded into our genome and is thus 'the way of nature.'

Gynocentrism is further upheld by men at the institutional level, relying for example on a chivalric compact between women and male politicians who wish to hold office (Farrell, 1996; Frasure-Yokley, 2018; Lodders & Weldon, 2019; Naurin, et al., 2019; Wright, 2017), or male court judges who are eager to demonstrate their chivalric credentials by providing lighter sentences for female offenders (Visher, 1983; Hood, 1992; Curry, et al., 2004; Embry, et al., 2012; Starr, 2015). Such displays by men in positions of power have the effect of normalizing gynocentrism, with the gender imbalance it entails, as an acceptable standard of behavior for heterosexual exchanges.

In cultures perceived as encouraging gynocentrism, an emerging male demographic is seeking female partners who eschew the gynocentric blueprint in favor of alternative relationship models; for example traditional gender roles based on division of responsibility and labor (Wright, 2020), or alternatively a 'multi-option' model for both male and female partners based on the libertarian principles of individual choice, self-determination, and negotiated labor-sharing arrangements (Wright, 2020).

Further, increasing numbers of ‘no gynocentrism’ men are choosing to avoid long-term relationships with women, adopting instead the lifestyle of confirmed bachelors while engaging in meaningful relationships and activities that can fill the breach (Smith, 2013, Yiannopoulos, 2014). In Western societies these men are sometimes referred to as ‘Zeta Males’ who reject the gynocentrism-dependent male categories of *alpha* and *beta* (Tayo, 2017), or alternatively they are called ‘Men Going Their Own Way,’ (Wright & Elam, 2013), and in Japanese society they are given the title of *sôshoku danshi* or ‘herbivore men’ to denote their refusal to seek traditional ‘carnivorous’ pursuits of career and women (Smith, 2013, Morioka, 2013, Yiannopoulos, 2014).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Most academic studies find that males as a group score higher on narcissism scales than do females (Grijalva, et al., 2015). However, these findings may be misleading because the instruments used, their factor structures, and the wording of questionnaires may be more effective at tapping male expressions of narcissism over female expressions within the alternative context of intimate relationships.

Men’s typical commitment to work and to learning new skills provides a sense of mastery and competence that is often backed by ‘commensurate achievements,’ thus men’s display of agentic confidence in the area of skill-acquisition may serve as a misleading marker for narcissistic inflation. Conversely, the male social role may encourage a façade of ego-strength in order for men to gain acceptance as reliable laborers, leaders, parents or husbands (Carroll, 1989; Wood & Eagly, 2012; Grijalva, et.al., 2015). In this respect male displays of confidence are aimed substantively toward service roles, and to the generating of resources that can be shared with others. On the downside, a persona of strength may belie an inner feeling of impotence that is considered taboo for public exposure – as men are expected to appear agentic and confident. The fragility of this position is summarized in Dr. Warren Farrell’s statement that ‘*Men’s greatest weakness is their facade of strength, and women’s greatest strength is their facade of weakness.*’ (Farrell, 1996, p. 27).

A finding of gender bias in descriptions and assessment criteria for narcissism have been raised in studies by Akhtar (1982), Philipson (1985), and again in a paper by Carroll (1989)

which concluded that the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) pays more attention to behaviors typifying male expressions of narcissism than female. Carroll states, “*women may exhibit both adaptive and maladaptive narcissism in subtler, more oblique ways than men... [and] may be more likely to express narcissism in an interpersonal style which involves greater enmeshment and dependency upon relationships.*” (Carroll, 1989, p.1005). Following Carroll, the main instrument under examination for generating gender bias is the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) which remains the most popular measure of narcissism, employed in over three-quarters of empirical studies (Cain et al., 2008).

The problem of bias in the NPI was recently confirmed by Gebauer et.al (2012), and Nehrlich et.al (2019) who suggest the need to employ a ‘two spheres’ approach characterized by ‘agentic narcissism’ and ‘communal narcissism,’ which tend to be correlated with typical expressions of masculine and feminine gender roles respectively. According to Gebauer et.al, “*acknowledging the existence of a communal facet of narcissism broadens the scope of narcissistic self-affirmation, self-promotion, and self-enhancement. In other words, the agency-communion model supports the existence of... situation-behavior patterns among narcissists that extend into the communal domain.*” (2012, p.871)

These studies lend support to the contention that women’s expression of narcissism can be more relational in nature, requiring alternative constructs and scales to assess. Furthermore, women’s narcissism may be highly targeted in its communal expression because women might not feel entitled, for example, to special treatment by all non-intimate males nor by other women, whereas they may feel highly entitled to special treatment by men and boys in platonic and intimate relationships, as detailed above. To effectively measure female narcissism, otherwise referred to in this essay as *gynocentrism*, new scales need to be developed to target the specific behaviors outlined and the contexts in which they typically occur.

This essay demonstrates that the DSM-5 criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder is significantly correlated with behaviors and expectations of gynocentric women, which leads to the conclusion that gynocentrism is a gendered expression of narcissism operating in the limiting context of heterosexual relations.

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