

*The Making of a Narcissist: An Analysis of Sophie's
Character in The School for Good and Evil Movie*

صناعة النرجسي: تحليل شخصية صوفي من خلال فيلم مدرسة

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Abstract:

Movies often serve as an artistic medium to reflect the depth of the human psychology. In these movies, characters are portrayed as enigmatic figures with complex personalities and inner conflicts to explore certain psychological patterns such as narcissism. By examining Paul Feig's *The School for Good and Evil* (2022), this article aims to identify the characteristics of narcissism and analyze their impact on the protagonist, Sophie. W. Keith Campbell and Carolyn Crist's narcissism theory is used as a theoretical framework to explain how narcissism influences the narcissist's behavior and character. The findings of this study show that Sophie embodies three psychological components of narcissism: antagonism, neuroticism, agentic extraversion.

Keywords: *The School for Good and Evil*; Narcissism; Sophie; Inner Conflicts; Complex Personality.

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ملخص:

غالباً ما تُعدّ الأفلام وسيلة فنية حيث أنّها تعكس عمق النفس البشرية. تُجسّد الشخصيات في هذه الأفلام على هيئة كيانات غامضة ذات شخصيات معقدة لديها صراعات داخلية، وذلك لاستكشاف أنماط نفسية مُعينة، مثل النرجسية. من خلال تحليل فيلم مدرسة الخير والشر للمخرج بول فيج والذي تم إصداره سنة (2022)، يهدف هذا المقال إلى تحديد خصائص النرجسية وتحليل تأثيرها على بطلة الفيلم صوفي، كما تُستخدم نظرية النرجسية لكل من كيث كامبل وكارولين كريست في هذا البحث كإطار نظري لشرح كيفية تأثير النرجسية على سلوك النرجسي وشخصيته. تُظهر نتائج هذه الدراسة أن صوفي تُجسّد ثلاث مكونات نفسية للنرجسية: العداوة، والعُصابية، والانبساط الفاعل.

كلمات مفتاحية: فيلم مدرسة الخير والشر، النرجسية، صوفي، الصراعات الداخلية، الشخصية المعقدة.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Movies often reflect and uncover the darker corners of the human psychology. They become platforms to depict narcissistic characters with layered psyches. The movie of *The School for Good and Evil* (2022) by Paul Feig is not merely a story, it serves as an essential case study to explore the concept of narcissism. This article seeks to discuss how narcissism affects someone's behavior and personality. Therefore, the protagonist, Sophie, is selected for this analysis as she displays narcissistic characteristics. This article also aims to raise some important questions. First, in what ways does *The School for Good and*

Evil depict Sophie as a narcissistic figure? Second, how are Sophie's behavior and personality influenced and defined by narcissistic traits? For that reason, W. Keith Campbell and Carolyn Crist's narcissism theory is used as a theoretical framework to deepen knowledge and to enhance understanding of narcissistic behavior by examining how narcissistic individuals think and act.

2. Theorizing Narcissism

2.1 Understanding Narcissism

The origin of the term narcissism is rooted in the ancient Greek legend. It takes its name from a Narcissus, a mythological figure, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Joshi, 2017, p. 90). This character's story was tragic. He kept watching his own reflection on the water because he loved his face. He forgot to eat and drink and this led to his death.

Over time, the idea of narcissism has changed, leading to several opinions and new thoughts. According to Buffardi and Campbell, the word narcissism describes someone who overvalues himself, always wanting attention and praise, and rarely cares about what others feel (2008, p. 1304). Moreover, Pincus and Lukowitsky clarify that the noun "narcissist" refers to a person who exhibits the symptoms of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (2010, p. 430). This disorder often leads to high levels of narcissism. It can cause serious troubles such as creating problems with friends, in daily social life, and work. Vankin demonstrates that Narcissistic Personality Disorder appears in the early stages of adult life (2001, p. 2).

As Sigmund Freud describes it, narcissism is a strong self-

love that makes people put their own needs first (qtd. in Krisan, 2011, p. 16). Narcissists often like to show off, feel certain about themselves, pursue their aims with determination, and give the impression they are doing great in their work and relationships (Masterson, 1988, p. 90). They emphasize their looks and skills to be admired by others. In his book, *Narcissism: Denial of the True Self*, Lowen defines a narcissist as someone who concentrates only on his own positive and good qualities, and ignores the admirable qualities of others (1985, p. 6).

2.2 Campbell and Carolyn Crist's Narcissism Theory

Through the lens of Keith W. Campbell and Carolyn Crist's (2020) narcissism theory which is explained and discussed in their book *The New Science of Narcissism*, this article examines the characteristics of narcissism and analyzes their impact on the protagonist, Sophie, from *The School for Good and Evil* movie.

According to Campbell and Crist, narcissism includes traits such as antagonism, self-importance, and a belief in personal entitlement. Therefore, narcissism has a relationship with ego and feelings of entitlement (2020, p. 21). Campbell and Crist explain that narcissism is characterized by three key elements which can be considered as core aspects of it. These three main components are: agentic extraversion, antagonism, and neuroticism.

- Agentic extraversion

Among the three core aspects of narcissism, agentic extraversion is considered the most attractive element. Campbell and Crist reveal that agentic extraversion reflects a sense of self-confidence, social fearlessness, the skill to achieve aims, step

into leadership, and achieve good results (2020, p. 173). In other words, individuals with this trait are frequently perceived as charismatic achievers because they know their targets well. This is confirmed by Campbell and Crist who explain that these people concentrate “heavily on tasks and projects” and they are responsive to rewards, especially the psychological ones. They are attracted by chances, success, fame, and “get recognition” (2020, p. 173). Miller and Campbell demonstrate that giving up is rare for them because they take their goals seriously (2012, p. 149).

- Antagonism

Among the three core aspects of narcissism, antagonism is considered the most destructive than the previous element which is agentic extraversion. Campbell and Crist state that antagonism can have its benefits. It may help in challenging rules and demanding higher salaries. However, it also has harmful aspects. It is “linked to emotional and physical abuse, cheating, numerous antisocial behaviors, rape, sexual assault, and partner abuse” (2020, p. 174).

According to Kwiatkowska and Samanik, antagonism acts as a barrier to collaboration and maintaining good relationships (2019, 142). Campbell and Crist argue that a high level of antagonism can appear in different forms such as feeling superior, arrogance, dominance, and in behaviors like showing off, entitlement, or bragging (2020, p. 109). Moreover, narcissists become aggressive if someone criticizes them or denies their desires (p. 212-213).

- Neuroticism

Neuroticism is another main aspect of narcissism. According to Campbell and Crist, spending time with someone who is neurotic can be challenging because they rely too much on others, think pessimistically about the present and the future, and do not relax easily. This can create a chain of harmful reactions. Furthermore, those who have neurotic traits may show internalizing feelings, such as depression and sadness, and externalizing feelings, such as anger and hostility. (2020, p. 176). According to Miller and Maples, neuroticism shows how strongly people react to feelings like anger, depression, and anxiety. (2012, p. 73). According to Campbell and Crist, neurotic persons are “threat” detectors. They are more likely to detect danger in their surroundings. Therefore, in comparison to emotionally stable persons, neurotic individuals consider the world full of dangers and threats. (2012, p. 56).

3. Sophie as a Narcissist Character

The School for Good and Evil (2022) movie, by Paul Feig as a director, is based on Soman Chainani’s novel (2013) which carries the same name. It is about two close friends, Agatha and Sophie, who differ greatly in character. Both friends live in a small village. One day, they are kidnapped by a huge bird that carried them to a school of magic. Within this school, there are two sides that opposed one another. While the School for Good focuses on teaching students to become heroes, the School for Evil educates students to become destroyers. Despite her blonde hair and beautiful look, Sophie finds herself in the School for Evil. However, Agatha, who lacks beauty, becomes a student at the School for Good.

Sophie is portrayed, in this movie, as major character who embodies agentic extraversion. In her mind, Sophie is convinced that she is the chosen princess who will change the world. Her trust in this idea comes from a talk with her mother, “Always remember how special you are. You’re gonna change the world someday.” (Feig, 2022, duration 00:07:32). According to Campbell and Crist, persons who have agentic extraversion are attracted by success, fame, and “get recognition” (2022, p. 173). This sums up the idea that Sophie creates in her mind. She believes that she is the next princess who will become famous and attract the attention of others. Moreover, Sophie tells her friends that she is capable of communicating with squirrels. But, this claim is totally wrong because she does not have the power to speak with squirrels. She wants only to become famous and catch the attention of the head of the School for Evil, lady Lesso, and the other students in the School for Evil.

Sophie cannot accept the fact that she becomes a student at the School for Evil. She feels that her real place is in the School for Good because of her charm and kind nature. For that reason, she makes several efforts to move to the School for Good. This becomes clear through her conversation with the head of the School for Evil, lady Lesso. Sophie states that she does not belong to this school. As Campbell and Crist (2020) explain, individuals with a high level of agentic extraversion concentrate strongly on their “tasks” (p. 173). This can be applied to Sophie who tries several times to switch schools. She wants to achieve her goal whatever the costs.

Campbell and Crist argue that a high level of antagonism can appear in different forms such as feeling superior, lack of

empathy, arrogance, dominance, and entitlement (2020, p. 109). Through the analysis of Sophie's character, we find these traits. Sophie put her own needs above everything else and this proves her lack of empathy. This becomes clear during a dangerous test called the Trial by a Tale. To pass this test, Tedros and Sophie must confirm their real love by working and supporting one another. But, Sophie chooses not to sacrifice her own safety to rescue Tedros despite the fact that he is in a big danger.

Furthermore, Sophie shows her dominance repeatedly as if she has no competitor. She has a belief in her superiority and this is reflected in the thought that she is bigger than the other students in both schools. The outfits, in the School for Evil, must be in black or grey colors. But, Sophie adjusts her black outfit to ensure that she can be noticed by everyone. Above all, her walk is stylish and she moves, with high confidence, like a model on the stage. She states, "I am a thing of beauty, am I not?" (Feig, 2022, duration 01:44:18).

Sophie has a big sense of entitlement. Beside her big dream to be the chosen princess who will change the world, she wants a prince in order to be perfect. Therefore, she starts to think about how to catch the attention of Tedros, a prince from the School for Good, and makes him loves her. In addition to this, her arrogance is shown through her talk with her friend Agatha from the School for Good. Agatha informs Sophie that she finds her a prince to "kiss" like the fairytales that Sophie used to read. However, Sophie answers with big arrogance, "I already found my true love, Tedros" (Feig, 2022, duration 00:52:51).

Furthermore, those who have neurotic traits may show internalizing feelings, such as depression, anxiety, and sadness,

and externalizing feelings, such as anger and hostility. (2020, p. 176). Because of her neuroticism, Sophie feels vulnerable. She has negative thinking patterns which makes her insecure. She always asks questions about being placed in the School for Evil instead of the School for Good, Tedros, and being the chosen princess. All these inquiries lead to internalized emotions and anxiety.

Therefore, Sophie's internalized feelings are transformed into externalized feelings, such as anger and hostility. She makes an alliance with Rafal, a villain who is dissatisfied with the dominance of good. Rafal promises Sophie that she will be the most "beautiful" and "powerful" through "blood magic." (Feig, 2022, duration 01:41:55). Through accepting this "gift" (duration 01:41:55) as Rafal says, Sophie turns into another person. With this anger inside, she becomes more aggressive and turns both Schools upside down. Because of the huge anarchy she creates, all students from both schools start fighting each other.

4. CONCLUSION

The School for Good and Evil (2022) by Paul Feig serves as essential case study to explore the concept of narcissism. The protagonist, Sophie, is selected for this analysis as she displays narcissistic characteristics. For that reason, W. Keith Campbell and Carolyn Crist's narcissism theory is used as a theoretical framework. The findings of this study show that Sophie displays three aspects of narcissism: agentic extraversion, antagonism, and neuroticism.

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