

Mental Health Diagnosis

Clint A. Wilson

Huntington University

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When I began to analyze the characters in *The Glass Castle*, I thought this would be easy. I started putting a diagnosis on each character, or perhaps I was labeling them. Then I slowed down and forced myself to pick one, initially it was going to be Rex an obvious choice with his substance abuse disorder and more. Rose Mary was the one that stuck out to me. I see multiple mental health issues with Rose Mary, and I believe the primary one is a narcissistic personality disorder, I think Rose Mary shows signs of bipolar disorder as well. I am sure there are several other disorders we could label or diagnose Rose Mary with, but I want to focus on the narcissism.

According to the DSM, a narcissist is someone that has a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy. As we begin to break down the criteria for narcissistic personality disorder, we can start to see how this applies to Rose Mary (American Psychiatric Association & American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

Rose Mary often puts herself over everyone else; she is the most important person in her eyes. From the very beginning when she didn't have time to cook hotdogs for Jeannette when she was only three years of age. There are several examples of self-important behavior throughout the book; another example is when Jeannette found the wedding ring and Rose Mary felt her self-esteem was more important than feeding the kids. As a parent, I would sacrifice everything I have for my kids, yet Rose Mary would not sacrifice a materialistic item such as a ring that didn't even have any sentimental value attached to it. The reasoning that she kept this ring was to help her self-esteem, as that was more vital than food in her mind. Low self-esteem is

often found in people with narcissism, but it is heavily cloaked in extreme confidence (“Narcissistic personality disorder - Symptoms and causes - Mayo Clinic,” n.d.)

Rose Mary shows no signs of empathy another criteria of narcissistic personality disorder. When Mary Charlene died of crib death, she felt what appears no sorrow, and was confused as to why Rex was so upset. Stating “He gave me some perfect children, but He also gave me one that wasn’t so perfect, so He said ‘Oops, I better take this one back’” (Walls, 2005, p. 28). This may elude to Rose Mary just having strong faith in God, but if that were the case, she would still be able to empathize with Rex.

Rose Mary often would blame other people for her lack of success as an artist even if though she was living the life she had to choose. Here level of selfishness can be seen even more as seen when the kids ate popcorn for a week, and Rose Mary was sneaking chocolate bars and refused to share with the children, blaming her sugar addiction. It is evident that Rose Mary accepts little to no responsibility for her actions. Rose Mary who had formal education as a teacher found spending the family money on art supplies more beneficial to herself than contributing to the welfare of the family.

Rose Mary's narcissism has several effects on those around her. Though not directly the cause of Jeannette being burnt we can see that Rose Mary’s selfishness and self-centered attitude led to Jeannette cooking her food. There is a multitude of emotional damage that the children could be affected by. I feel the biggest one is that often the Walls girls feel as though they are not being heard or acknowledged by their mother. This could be why they began to get in so much trouble after moving to Phoenix. However, except for Maureen, the kids do end up with little lasting negative mental health issues. Maureen, on the other hand, ends up with several mental health issues and spends some time in a psychiatric hospital before she relocated to California.

When analyzing the overall family dynamic, it is a wonder that everyone but Maureen came out with any apparent lasting damage.

“One morning toward the end of the school year, Mom had a complete meltdown. She was supposed to write of evaluations of her students' progress, but she spent every free minute painting, and now the deadline was on her, and the evaluations were unwritten. Mom lay wrapped up in blankets on the sofa bed, sobbing about how much she hated her life” (Walls, 2005, p.207). When Rose Mary was in control of things in her life such as painting, then her world would be in a balanced state, however, as soon as she loses that control and is not in the center of everything we see her shutting down and refusing to act like a responsible adult. A narcissist has to be in control of every aspect of their lives, or they will break down such as Rose Mary often did.

References

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