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PATRIARCHAL CULTURE AND ITS EFFECT TO THE CHARACTER IN *THE YELLOW WALLPAPER*

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Abstract: This study describes the impact of patriarchal culture on the main character in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The concept of patriarchy reflects a social system in which dominance and privilege are primarily held by men, thus bringing significant implications to women's lives. Through narrative analysis, this research reveals the dominance of the main character, John, as the main control in the narrator's life and the excessive focus on domestic life that inhibits women's freedom. This research uses descriptive qualitative methodology with Spradley's data analysis technique, grounded in Walby's patriarchy theory, to identify patriarchal elements in the story and analyze their impact. The results show that patriarchal culture creates limitations on women's freedom and autonomy, detailing the suppression of individual freedom, reliance on male authority, distrust of women's experiences, and restrictions of gender stereotypes. Overall, this short story provides a clear picture of the negative impact patriarchal structures have had on women's lives over the years.

Keywords: patriarchy, patriarchal impact, short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*

Introduction

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's seminal short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," published in 1892, stands as a poignant critique of the oppressive patriarchal culture that subjugated women during the Victorian era in America. Through the haunting narrative of an unnamed female protagonist, Gilman exposes the devastating psychological toll inflicted by the strict gender roles and lack of autonomy imposed upon women at that time. Feminist ideology holds that patriarchy, a social structure and legitimizing ideology that gives men greater power and privilege than women, is the primary cause of violence against women in modern society, including rape, abuse, and murder (Smith 1990). This classical feminist work remains profoundly relevant today, as its exploration of patriarchal structures illuminates the enduring struggles for gender equality that persist in contemporary American society.

The Victorian period was characterized by a rigid patriarchal system that confined women to the domestic sphere, denying them access to education, employment, and financial independence. Women were expected to dutifully fulfill the roles of homemakers, mothers, and caregivers. At the same time, their husbands or fathers exercised complete authority over their lives. This severe curtailment of women's rights and freedoms created a pervasive gender inequality that stifled their potential and relegated them to a subordinate status within the social hierarchy. Patriarchal culture manifests in the gendered division of roles prescribed by society. Men are often seen as the dominant and authoritative party, whereas women are expected to adhere to traditional norms that place them in domestic and subordinate roles (Roychoudhary et al. 2016).

The daily lives of Victorian women were significantly constrained by the patriarchal societal norms of the time. Access to education was severely limited, with most women receiving only basic primary education, if any. Opportunities for employment outside the home were scarce and, when available, were often limited to low-paying jobs or domestic service. Women were expected to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers, with little room for personal pursuits or ambitions beyond the domestic sphere. Social etiquette and dress codes imposed strict rules on women's behavior and appearance, further restricting their freedom of expression and movement. These limitations not only curtailed women's economic independence but also their intellectual and personal development, confining them to a narrow set of prescribed roles and expectations.

Despite significant strides toward gender parity, the legacy of patriarchy continues to cast a long shadow over women's experiences in modern-day America. The persistent gender wage gap, underrepresentation of women in positions of power and leadership, and the ongoing battle for reproductive rights are stark reminders of the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that still shape societal attitudes and policies. The recent case of Brittney Poolaw, a Native American woman who was unjustly incarcerated for suffering a miscarriage, exemplifies the ongoing marginalization and discrimination that women, particularly those from marginalized communities, continue to face.

By analyzing *The Yellow Wallpaper* through the lens of its historical context and enduring relevance, this study aims to shed light on the pervasive and enduring impact of patriarchal structures on women's lives, both in the past and the present. Understanding the root causes and manifestations of gender oppression, as depicted in Gilman's work, is crucial for dismantling the remnants of patriarchy that persist in contemporary American society and paving the way for true gender equality. Instances of patriarchal culture are observable in households, with examples being the imbalanced division of labor, restrictions on female employment, expectations of submission to the husband, and dress codes. The fantasy of the perfect woman that men create reflects patriarchal fears and desires regarding women's sexuality, strength, and obedience, as they are considered ideal sexual targets who do not complain and do not resist (Kasai 2018)

Previous scholarly works have explored various aspects of feminism and patriarchal representation in literature, including Sadiq's (2023) examination of feminism in Pakistani short stories, Özyön's (2020) analysis of feminist rebellion in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Gilman's novel "Herland," Budiman's (2019) study of a character's struggle against patriarchy in a John Steinbeck short story, and Saadah et al.'s (2022) investigation of psychological control within family relationships in "The Yellow Wallpaper." Tavassoli and Ghasemi (2019) explored rebellion against patriarchy in Carter's short stories, while Haryani (2020) analyzed the semiotics of patriarchy in a Sundanese short story titled "Si Bocokok." Additionally, Pasaribu and Firmansyah (2023) focused on the psychological representation of women influenced by patriarchal culture in the short story "Perempuan Itu Pernah Cantik" by Mashdar Zaidal. However, none of these studies have specifically analyzed the impact of patriarchal culture on the characters and themes in "The Yellow Wallpaper" within the broader context of its historical significance and its resonance with contemporary gender issues in America.

This study aims to fill this gap by conducting an in-depth analysis of *The Yellow Wallpaper* focusing on how Gilman's portrayal of the protagonist's psychological and emotional state serves as a powerful indictment of the oppressive patriarchal culture of the Victorian era. By examining the detrimental effects of the patriarchal pressure experienced by the main character, trapped in traditional female roles, this research seeks to shed light on the root causes and manifestations of gender inequality that continue to shape women's experiences in modern-day America. The intersection of patriarchy and mental health has a significant impact on women and non-binary individuals (Watson 2021). Patriarchy perpetuates gender roles that are detrimental to

mental health, and addressing these norms is crucial to promoting mental health and well-being.

In this study, researchers used Walby's theory of patriarchy (1990). There are two primary forms of patriarchy, namely individual patriarchy originating from the household that places the role of men as the leading central authority, and systemic patriarchy that exists in various aspects of life such as the workplace and public institutions that place the role of men as the central figure in social organizations. Patriarchy leads to subordination and marginalization of women, as well as gender inequality. Subordination and marginalization in the context of patriarchy refer to the processes that occur against women as a result of gender differences.

Through this comprehensive analysis, the researcher hopes to contribute to a deeper understanding of the enduring influence of patriarchal structures on women's lives, both in the past and the present. By illuminating the connections between the historical context depicted in *The Yellow Wallpaper* and contemporary gender issues, this study aims to provide valuable insights that can inform ongoing efforts to dismantle patriarchal systems and create a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

Literature Review

Patriarchy is a social system in which men occupy a leading position in social society, with a higher position than women in aspects of social, cultural, and economic life (Pinem 2009). Anthropologically, the term describes families or clans governed by eldest males or fathers. In feminist theory, patriarchy signifies a broad social structure where men hold power over women and children. Moreover, patriarchal structures encompass many forms in which men hold social privileges that may lead to oppression or exploitation, including male dominance in terms of moral authority and property control.

In the historical context, patriarchy has been a system designed by men primarily for their benefit. It has persisted in various societies for centuries. This system is a primary factor causing gender inequality and violence towards women and girls. In the United States, the influence of patriarchal culture remains relatively strong, particularly within the confines of the family unit, where the father's position as the household head entails unilateral decision-making authority, precluding the possibility of discourse or negotiation.

There are two primary forms of patriarchy, namely individual patriarchy, which originates in the household, and systemic patriarchy, which exists in various aspects of life, such as the workplace and public institutions (Walby 1990). Individual patriarchy arises from a social system that places the role of men as the leading central authority in the family environment. In the context of the household, individual patriarchy is reflected in the view that women are only considered to have reproductive functions and are considered only suitable to stay at home to give birth, take care of children, and do household chores.

On the other hand, systemic patriarchy is manifested in social, economic, and political aspects. Systematic patriarchy usually occurs in society, the workplace, law, violence, and the state, for example, in a social structure system that places men as the central figure in social organizations. This system is seen as the cause of oppression against women, with men as dominant, repressive, and exploitative towards women.

Patriarchy leads to the subordination and marginalization of women, as well as gender inequality (Walby 1990). Subordination and marginalization in the context of patriarchy refer to the processes that happen to women as a result of sex differences. Subordination is the judgment or belief that the role of one sex is at a lower level than that of the other sex. In patriarchal situations, women are often seen as inferior and placed in roles defined by men. This results in the subordination of women, where they experience limited access to and control over resources, leading to restricted decision-making and opportunities.

Meanwhile, marginalization is a dynamic process associated with barriers to economic achievement, personal advancement, and social integration. In the context of patriarchy, marginalization arises because of gender differences and can lead to poverty. Although the object of this research originates from England, the phenomenon of patriarchy and its impact on women's lives share similarities with the situation in the United States and Indonesia. Patriarchal culture has been deeply rooted in the societies of both countries, albeit with varying manifestations and degrees. Therefore, an analysis of the literary work "The Yellow Wallpaper" can provide relevant insights into the root causes of gender inequality and the psychological impact of gender-based oppression that persists to this day

Research Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research methodology to examine the elements of patriarchy and its ramifications in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The data are derived exclusively from the story's textual elements, and the data collection process involves reading and transcribing the story's contents. This study analyzes the data based on the theory of Walby (1990). There are two types of patriarchy, namely individual patriarchy and systemic patriarchy, that cause gender inequality. This study aims to describe and comprehend patriarchal attitudes and their influence on the story via data analysis. The study uncovers the presence of patriarchal attitudes in the story through textual data analysis. It paints a more nuanced picture of the patriarchal dynamics in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Hence, this investigation successfully reveals the impact of patriarchy in the short story.

This study uses Spradley's (1980) data analysis techniques, specifically domain analysis, taxonomy analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme analysis. The domain analysis used theory to examine the elements of patriarchy and its impact in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*. At the domain stage, the researcher conducted a data selection stage based on the main focus of the research. The method of reading objects and then transcribing them was implemented as a data collection strategy. At the taxonomy stage, the researchers group all the data that have been collected to analyze the problems and phenomena related to the research. At the componential stage, the researcher will group all the data that has been collected based on its category. Researchers will examine the cause-and-effect relationship of the most frequently occurring data at the cultural theme analysis stage. This analysis will identify the dominant cultural themes in the data.

Findings and Discussion

The patriarchal attitude in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* is reflected through various narrative elements. First, the scene is dominant, namely the main character's husband, John, who acts as the central controller in the narrator's life. John takes the initiative in making decisions that limit the narrator's freedom, as reflected in the quote, "I must not let her find me writing. She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which makes me sick!". This dialogue illustrates how difficult it is for the protagonist, an unnamed woman, to pursue her passion for writing because she is afraid that she will be considered sick by her husband and her nanny, who believe that writing is the cause of her illness. The meaning is that the protagonist feels constrained by social norms that view housework as the only suitable profession for a woman. She feels that her desire to write is not respected and is even considered the cause of her illness. This shows how difficult it was for women at that time to pursue their passions and dreams due to social pressure and strong gender stereotypes.

Secondly, there is an excessive focus on domestic life, where the narrator, despite her anxieties and difficulties, remains fixated on home duties and her role as mother and wife. The protagonist feels trapped in traditional roles and has no room to pursue a

career or pioneer personal freedom. Furthermore, concerning the narrator's heart problem, despite experiencing physical and mental suffering, she still submits to the roles prescribed by society. This reflects an attitude of indifference towards the welfare and freedom of individual women. When John says, "Career? You know, with your heart problem, we have to be careful. Don't be too ambitious. Just fulfill your duties at home". Through the dialog, the author Charlotte Perkins Gilman managed to convey criticism of patriarchal norms and gender roles that hindered women's freedom and personal development at that time. The dialog reflects the social conditions that viewed women as beings who should be limited to domestic roles and had no right to pursue aspirations or ambitions beyond that. The importance of the narrator's health takes precedence over her desires and mental well-being, showing insensitivity to the non-physical aspects of women's lives. John's dismissive attitude towards women's ambitions and the use of health as an excuse for control highlights the inequality women experience in achieving autonomy and self-fulfillment.

The narrator's designation as the nameless wife highlights that women's identities are exclusively defined by their relationship with men. Meanwhile, the narrator's husband's doctor considers himself an authority who knows what is best for the wife, even when the treatment imposed is detrimental to the narrator's mental health. It is important to note that the main character is ignored and deemed crazy when trying to express herself, reflecting gender injustice and the rejection of women's voices. An example in the yellow wallpaper story is when the narrator tries to express her fear of the house to her husband but is ignored and dismissed as insane. When the narrator says, "There is something strange about the house; I can feel it," and her husband replies, "What is it, little girl?". This conversation reflects how the narrator's voice and fears are ignored and dismissed, reflecting gender injustice and trivializing women's voices. The husband's doctor does not even see the need to rectify the situation, indicating his dismissive, paternalistic view. Thus, the story illustrates how patriarchal structures control and harm women's lives through domination, restriction of traditional roles, and denial of women's individual freedom.

Individual patriarchy originating from the household is evident in "The Yellow Wallpaper" through the character of John, the narrator's husband. He exercises complete authority and control over his wife's life. He restricts her freedom to pursue her passion for writing, considering it the cause of her illness. This reflects the view of individual patriarchy that positions the husband as the central authority within the family and confines the wife's role to domestic duties like housekeeping. It demonstrates how individual patriarchy can limit women's freedom and personal development within the domestic sphere. Systemic patriarchy existing beyond the household environment is also highlighted in the story. The narrator's husband's doctor views himself as the authority who knows better than the wife about her condition. He even imposes a treatment that is detrimental to her mental health, disregarding her experiences. This attitude reflects systemic patriarchy in institutions like medicine, where men are positioned as the leading figures, often marginalizing women's perspectives. It demonstrates how systemic patriarchy can lead to gender injustice and the oppression of women across various aspects of society.

In the narrative of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the detrimental effects of patriarchy on women are clearly illustrated, including the suppression of individual freedom, reliance on male authority, distrust of women's experiences, and restraint in gender stereotypes. For example, the protagonist's husband, John, curbs her desire to express herself through writing by stating that contemplating her condition will only make it worse, as expressed in the quote, "John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad." The dialogue illustrates how John, the husband of the main character, ignores the feelings and needs of his mentally ill wife. John thinks that thinking about her condition will only make it worse when, in

fact, she needs support and attention from her husband. The dialogue reflects the view of society at that time, which lacked understanding and respect for mental health.

The main character's dependence on her husband is evident in her husband's rejection of her desire to move to another room as an attempt to overcome her psychological discomfort. Her husband considered that it was the result of a delusion and did not give permission, as revealed in the quote, "He said I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies." The dialogue implies that ignoring or suppressing uncomfortable or anxious feelings and thoughts will only worsen the situation of someone who is experiencing a nervous breakdown or anxiety. The narrator's husband, a doctor, ignores his wife's complaints and concerns and instead blames her negative feelings and thoughts as "fancy." The dialogue shows how important it is to listen to and understand the feelings and thoughts of someone who is experiencing a mental disorder and that suppressing or ignoring these feelings will only make things worse.

In addition, there is a prominent distrust of women's experiences, as illustrated through the attitude of the protagonist's husband who doubts his wife's complaints and understanding of her condition. The quote "John is a physician, and perhaps (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind) perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster" reflects the distrust of women's judgment of their condition. The dialogue shows that distrust of women's assessment of their condition is a persistent problem in mental health care. Women are often ignored or disbelieved when reporting symptoms of mental illness, and this can worsen their condition. The narrator experiences disbelief in her judgment and experience, which is a representation of the patriarchal views of the time that underestimated or even blamed women's judgment of their condition. This illustrates the injustice in the treatment of mental health conditions and the need to listen and understand someone more deeply. Therefore, it is essential to understand and listen to someone more deeply, especially in mental health treatment.

Another example of the impact of patriarchy in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is the narrator, who is seen as having no authority in her own life, who accepts her passive role in their relationship and can only say "agree" to her husband's decisions about her medical treatment. However, as time passes, she begins to feel trapped and has no control over her life. The narrator's feelings of inadequacy and lack of confidence are further reinforced by her sense that she is powerless and worthless. She feels like a "nobody" and doubts her ability to think clearly. Her husband's domineering attitude also makes her hesitant to express her feelings and thoughts clearly, as she fears being judged or seen as insane. The narrator's inability to express herself freely and her fear of the possible consequences of doing so are examples of how patriarchal structures can silence women's voices. Not only is the narrator trapped in her relationship with her husband, who determines her life roles and decisions, but she is also trapped in the dominating mindset of a society that oppresses women. This reflects how a patriarchal society can limit women's autonomy and erode their self-confidence.

Finally, the story reflects gender stereotypes that demean women, portraying them as weak and incapable of making their own decisions. The following quote, "Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good. But what is one to do?" highlights the protagonist's disagreement with the demeaning views of women and shows her inability to act according to her wishes. Overall, it is a depiction of the detrimental impact of patriarchal structures on women's lives, creating a dynamic that limits their freedom and autonomy. The movie presents an in-depth look at how patriarchal structures negatively impact women's lives. Through its characters, the movie illustrates how patriarchy can limit women's freedom and autonomy, even in everyday personal decisions. For example, the main character may be forced to abide by rules set by male figures in her life, such as her father or husband. This creates a dynamic that oppresses

and limits women's space, hindering their ability to develop and achieve their potential. In addition, the movie also illustrates how patriarchal structures can create social injustice for women. In many cases, power and control are in the hands of men. Hence, women are often the victims of inequality in terms of opportunities, rights, and treatment. All of this creates a clear picture of how detrimental the patriarchal structure is to women's lives as a whole.

Conclusion

To sum up, it can be concluded that the influence of patriarchal culture is clearly reflected in the narrative elements of the short story "The Yellow Wallpaper." The story vividly depicts the manifestations of individual and systemic patriarchy outlined by Walby's theory. Individual patriarchy originating from the domestic sphere is embodied by the character of John, the narrator's husband. He exerts complete authority and control over his wife's life, restricting her freedom to pursue writing due to perceived notions about gender roles. This reflects the view of individual patriarchy that places the husband as the central authority within the family unit and limits the wife's role to domestic duties.

Moreover, the story also highlights systemic patriarchy existing in institutions beyond the household. The narrator's husband's doctor positions himself as the authority figure who knows better than the wife about her condition. He imposes a treatment detrimental to her mental health, disregarding her experiences. This exemplifies systemic patriarchy in fields like medicine, where male perspectives dominate, and women's voices are often marginalized.

Both forms of patriarchy depicted in the story - individual and systemic - contribute to the suppression of women's autonomy, the distrust of their experiences, and the enforcement of restrictive gender stereotypes. This in-depth analysis reveals how the prevailing patriarchal dynamics of the time created significant limitations on women's freedom and personal development.

Through this comprehensive examination of individual and systemic patriarchal elements, the analysis provides invaluable insights into the psychological impact and oppressive forces experienced by the characters, reflecting the broader societal challenges women faced during that era. The study illuminates the detrimental effects of patriarchal structures on women's lives as portrayed in this literary work.

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