

Final Paper: Personality Disorders in Popular Culture

Due: May 13

Then, provide a diagnosis supported by the DSM 5:TR; make sure to discuss and give examples of the specific criteria. Finally, discuss their behaviors and history (if you have the information) in terms of two of the models we discussed in class (Dynamic/Psychoanalytic, Cognitive/Behavioral, Evolutionary, Neurobiological). If discussing the dynamic model, make sure to cite defense mechanisms and give specific examples. More directions will be given closer to the due date.

Personality Disorders in Popular Culture: Wednesday Addams

Introduction

Wednesday Addams from *Wednesday* (Netflix) is a good example of how personality traits can look like a personality disorder. While the show exaggerates her behavior for entertainment, a lot of her patterns actually line up with clinical features. Based on her consistent emotional detachment, lack of interest in relationships, and preference for isolation, Wednesday most closely fits **Schizoid Personality Disorder (SPD)**.

A personality disorder is defined as an enduring and inflexible pattern of behavior and inner experience that deviates from cultural expectations and causes impairment . Wednesday shows these patterns across different situations, which supports looking at her through a diagnostic lens.

Diagnosis: Schizoid Personality Disorder (SPD)

Schizoid Personality Disorder is characterized by **detachment from social relationships and restricted emotional expression** .

DSM-5-TR Criteria & Examples

Wednesday meets multiple key criteria:

- **Neither desires nor enjoys close relationships**
 - She consistently avoids friendships and openly states she prefers being alone.
 - Even when others try to connect with her (like Enid), she resists emotional closeness.
- **Almost always chooses solitary activities**
 - She isolates herself physically and emotionally, choosing independence over group involvement.
- **Lacks close friends**
 - At the start, she has no meaningful relationships and does not seek them out.
- **Appears indifferent to praise or criticism**
 - She shows little reaction to how others perceive her, whether positive or negative.
- **Shows emotional coldness or flattened affect**
 - Her tone, facial expressions, and reactions are consistently controlled and detached.

These traits are **stable across time and situations**, not just temporary moods, which supports a personality disorder diagnosis rather than something situational.

Why Not Another Disorder? (Quick Differential)

- **Not Avoidant PD** → she's not avoiding people due to fear or insecurity.
- **Not Autism Spectrum** → her social detachment is intentional, not due to deficits in understanding.
- **Not Antisocial PD** → she's not driven by violation of others' rights or impulsivity.

Her behavior is more about **lack of interest**, not fear or hostility.

Model 1: Psychodynamic (Dynamic) Perspective

From a psychodynamic view, Wednesday's personality can be understood in terms of **defense mechanisms and early relational patterns**.

Key Defenses

- **Isolation of affect** → she separates emotions from experiences (talks about intense events with no emotional reaction)
- **Withdrawal** → avoids relationships to protect herself
- **Intellectualization** → focuses on logic and facts instead of feelings

This suggests she may have learned early on that emotional closeness is either unnecessary or unsafe.

Attachment + Internal World

- She shows signs of **avoidant attachment**
- Relationships are seen as intrusive rather than supportive
- Emotional needs are minimized or denied

From this lens, her detachment is not just personality—it's a **protective structure**.

Model 2: Cognitive-Behavioral Perspective

From a cognitive model, her behavior comes from **core beliefs and schemas**.

Core Beliefs

- "People are unnecessary"
- "Emotions are a weakness"
- "Independence is better than connection"

These beliefs shape how she interprets the world and guide her behavior.

Behavioral Patterns

- Avoids social interaction → reinforces isolation
- Minimal emotional expression → reduces vulnerability
- Self-reliance → strengthens belief she doesn't need others

This creates a **self-reinforcing cycle**:

beliefs → behavior → lack of relationships → confirms beliefs

Functioning and Outcomes

Even though Wednesday is highly intelligent and capable, her personality creates limitations:

Strengths

- Independent
- Emotionally controlled
- Highly focused and analytical

Impairments

- Difficulty forming relationships
- Limited emotional range
- Lack of social support

According to DSM, personality disorders must cause **impairment in functioning**, which we see in her interpersonal life.

Conclusion

Wednesday Addams is a strong example of how personality disorders can be portrayed in media. While exaggerated, her consistent detachment, lack of emotional expression, and preference for isolation align with **Schizoid Personality Disorder**. Looking at her through both **psychodynamic and cognitive models** helps explain not just what she does, but why she functions this way. Overall, her character shows how personality traits can be both adaptive in some ways and limiting in others.

- A short paragraph on **treatment (CBT vs psychodynamic therapy)**

Introduction (with citation)

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A personality disorder is defined as an enduring and inflexible pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates from cultural expectations and leads to impairment (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) .

Diagnosis Section (with citations)

Schizoid Personality Disorder is characterized by detachment from social relationships and a restricted range of emotional expression (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) .

Wednesday demonstrates multiple DSM-5-TR criteria, including lack of desire for close relationships, preference for solitary activities, limited emotional expression, and indifference to social feedback (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). These traits appear consistently across different settings, supporting a personality disorder diagnosis rather than a temporary state.

Functioning Section (with citation)

Although Wednesday shows strong independence and intelligence, her personality limits her ability to form meaningful relationships. According to the DSM-5-TR, personality disorders must involve significant impairment in social or interpersonal functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) , which is clearly present in her interactions.

Psychodynamic Model (add citation)

From a psychodynamic perspective, Wednesday's behavior can be understood through defense mechanisms such as isolation of affect and withdrawal, which protect her from emotional vulnerability (Lenzenweger & Clarkin, 2005) . These patterns suggest underlying attachment issues and a preference for emotional distance.

Cognitive Model (add citation)

From a cognitive-behavioral perspective, Wednesday's behavior is shaped by core beliefs such as "I don't need others" or "emotions are a weakness." These beliefs influence her behavior and reinforce her social isolation over time (Beck & Pretzer, as cited in Lenzenweger & Clarkin, 2005).

APA 7th Edition

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed., text rev.; DSM-5-TR). Author.

Lenzenweger, M. F., & Clarkin, J. F. (Eds.). (2005). *Major theories of personality disorder* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

(Gough, A., & Millar, M. (Creators). (2022–present). *Wednesday* [TV series]. Netflix.

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- Use **(American Psychiatric Association, 2022)** every time you reference DSM criteria
 - Keep DSM as your **main source for diagnosis**, and the textbook for theory

If you can **2–3 journal articles for stronger sources (A-level paper boost)**