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Hysteria vs. Doctors

Psychoanalysis and topics such as the unconscious and conscious mind owes much of its birth to the mental disorder known as hysteria. It could be said that hysteria was the most important topic taught by Sigmund Freud. When we talk about hysteria we are making reference to the revolutionary beginning of a new theory and discovery to the treatment of mental illnesses. In the text "Five Lectures on Psycho-analysis" by Sigmund Freud the author takes into consideration the history of hysteria, and proposes a possible connection to the diverse and varied symptoms that hysteric patients typically present, such as: paralysis, tics, permanent vomiting, anorexia, vision disturbances, recurrent visual hallucinations, and many more. These symptoms that once had no correlation, were connected by Freud.

Dr Breuer, mentioned along Freud's Lecture I is an example of professionalism, as he cared about his hysteric patients and showed genuine interest in their physical and emotional development. "Dr. Breuer's attitude towards his patient deserved no such reproach. He gave her both sympathy and interest, even though, to begin with, he did not know how to help her"(Freud2202). Breur wanted them to escape from their mental state, so he worked hard in his research to look for a treatment that would be able to change patients' lives and give them a hope of cure.

Even though Dr. Breuer was able to change and improve many of his patients' lives, not all doctors were that professional, since almost all doctors at the time were too preoccupied in their rush of finding answers to this questionable disease. Oftentimes, doctors forgot that they were experimenting on women's bodies, that they neglected the way they made their patients feel, by treating them as objects, instead of people. These patients were forced to endure high levels of anxiety, given that they had no clue if the procedures being performed on their bodies, even bore a cure to their illness.

Moreover, the unprofessionalism that doctor's displayed can be shown in the short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The main character of the story shares her experiences as a hysteric patient who was medically neglected in her own home, as her husband was a doctor in practice. "John does not know how much I really suffer" (Gilman 649). This quote is an example of the feelings that the protagonist had for her husband, and the way she is clearly described as a hysterical woman, who is suffering in silence as she vividly describes her symptoms, such as slowly becoming increasingly dissociated from her day-to-day life. Her husband, who was a doctor, failed to notice her symptoms and dissociation, a prime example of the careless and oblivious tendencies that doctors portrayed at the time. For example, the text states "there comes John, and I must put this away,—he hates to have me write a word" (Gilman 649). The fact that she had to hide her true feelings and emotions from her husband makes this marriage a toxic relationship. It demonstrates how even her own spouse, John, showed no interest in his wife's condition, but instead did all the contrary, by dismissing his wife's feelings, and in turn, created a gap in their marriage and pushed her away.

It is evident that Freud and Gilman shared the same opinion regarding the inadequacy of the doctors who practiced medicine at the time. “It is so hard to talk with John about my case”(Gilman 652). Freud and Gilman both believed that doctors did not provide sufficient care for their patients, and effectively, medically neglected them. (Why I Wrote the Yellow)

I believe it is necessary to talk about the topic and agree with Gilman when she says “It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked”(Gilman, 1913). Illustrating situations as presented in the “The Yellow Wallpaper” or Freud’s Lecture 1, persuade us as an audience of the importance for doctors to do their part and perform everything in their reach to provide responsible treatment for patients. Doctors should pay constant attention to their patients' various symptoms, reactions, and closely analyze their patient’s attitude and state of mind, in order to be able to understand if their patient's situation is improving or worsening. Hysteria is a complex topic that we continue to make discoveries about to this day. Although there are many theories in circulation that attempt to provide tips on how to improve the disease’s symptoms and contribute to the overall betterment of patient’s lives, if the doctor does not worry about their patient’s situation, then it is to no avail. As shown in Freud’s Lecture 1, “Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper” and “The Yellow Wallpaper,” no theory nor third-party health advice can replace the proper attention, care, and treatment that a responsible doctor can provide.