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## The Theory of Patience as Reflected on Ralph Ellison's The King of Bingo Game

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### **Abstract**

This research focuses on how the theory of patience is reflected in the behavior of the protagonist in the story *The King of Bingo Game* by Ralph Ellison. Humans always have desires, be it good or bad desires. The steps that people take in dealing with lust are also a lesson. The step taken in dealing with a desire before it goes into an effectless restraint is a pearl of wisdom in patience. Then how may the theory of Patience have reflected on the protagonist of the story *The King of Bingo Game* by Ralph Ellison? In the story, Ralph wants to discover the powerlessness of the protagonist as a black person in society. What he desires by looking at the white people playing the game, as long as he is willing to win the jackpot so he can help his sick wife. This article uses qualitative methods to explain the theory of patience and how it's reflected in the story *The King of Bingo Game* by Ralph Ellison. In conclusion, this study examines patience of the protagonist exemplifies patience, including hope, endurance, persistence, and engagement.

**Keywords:** *Desire, Patience, Ralph Ellison, The King of Bingo Game*

## INTRODUCTION

King of the Bingo Game was first published in the literary journal *Tomorrow* in November 1944 (Ellison, 1996). The theme of alienation has been treated by many authors, but in *King of the Bingo Game*, Ralph Ellison examines the specific alienation felt by blacks in the United States. This story has three characters: the bingo caller, King Bingo, and Laura, the wife of King Bingo. This story teaches patience and how to survive in life. The protagonist of the story is a poor black man who wants to take care of his sick wife named Laura for treatment to keep her stay alive (Ellison, 1996). He tried his luck at a gambling game and won a large sum of money. If he wins that spin, he will have a large sum of money to pay for his wife's medical treatment. He loves Laura very much; he is also patient in taking care of her, and he tries his best so that Laura can survive.

He has been named The King of Bingo Game because he always wins if he gets the spin. The protagonists in this story show how patience is shown to the character in going through his life's conflicts and what will be obtained by the character when he chooses to be patient (Ellison, 1996; Vigani, 2017). Then, the question is; how may the theory of Patience have reflected on the protagonist of the story *The King of Bingo Game* by Ralph Ellison? By indicating patience, this article would like to humanize this literature into something that is suitable to human's experience. This is also written to prove how any literature is actually a reflection of everyday life but in an extreme model kind of writing.

## METHODS

By using qualitative methods, online and offline articles are used to explain how the theory of patience is reflected in the protagonist of the story entitled *The King of Bingo Games*. The data analysis includes comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down reference lists. The data collection includes obtaining sources, reading sources carefully from both Ellison's story and the theory of patience based on any platform. Each of them is read and then broken down into every particular element. The discourses of the story mainly reflect the patience of the protagonist through his inner conflict and some behavior. Here, Ellison's short story is the object, while the theory of patience is a tool to analyze. More elaborations related to the opposite analysis are also provided in addition furthermore.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### **The Protagonist and His Prolonging Situations**

The story of *The King of Bingo Game* focuses on providing for his wife for the rest of her life, and The King is always patient and consistent in his efforts to find work. In the first part, he is getting bullied in society (Ellison, 1996). The protagonist in *The King of Bingo Game* experiences a range of emotions, including confusion, desperation, hopelessness, and fear, as he faces a difficult decision in a desperate attempt to change his dire situation. His feelings are further complicated by his sense of isolation and alienation due to his

geographical displacement and racial identity. This can be seen through the quotes in the story, as follows:

*“His stomach gave a low, gnawing growl. “If this was down South,” he thought, “all I’d have to do is lean over and say, ‘Lady, gimme a few of those peanuts, please ma’am,’ and she’d pass me the bag and never think nothing of it.” Or he could ask the fellows for a drink in the same way. Folks down South stuck together that way; they didn’t even have to know you. But up here it was different.”* (Ellison, 1996)

The quotation above illustrates his struggle with the difference in culture. The protagonist is waiting and under pressure. The phrase “His stomach gave a low, gnawing growl” denotes his hunger and possibly his anxiousness, implying a state of tension and discomfort. The protagonist's thoughts on the differences between the South and his current place also reflect his stress. He wants to ask for something to eat or drink, but the different social norms and standards where he is now stop him. This internal conflict, combined with his desire for the camaraderie he found in the South, adds to his sense of pressure. Despite his awareness that the cultural standards in the South differ, he is hungry and craves peanuts. He must be patient in this situation, restraining his immediate needs and adapting to his new surroundings. In the most basic sense, patience is the propensity of a person to wait calmly in the face of frustration, adversity, or suffering (Schnitker, 2012). This demonstrates his attempt to master his situation, which is an essential part of patience theory.

He understands that he is in a position not to challenge any structure. He must live as he is now. He must not resist. He must stay where he belongs at that time. The peanuts are not merely snacks, but his requests to other people. In order to get what he wishes, he must not worry about anyone unwilling to give him the things (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker, 2012). He must stay in his posture without any need to get more worried at all. This is also showing how his reaction is indeed something that must face any prolonged situation. He is the one that never does any protest, but he keeps going on to get what he wants (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker, 2012). It is indeed done by accentuating prolonging time for what he will do later.

In the second part, he wants his wife to be alive and happy with him. So, he is spending a lot of money on her. In the quotation below, he describes a situation where he is confused about how to defend himself and find solutions to survive for Laura.

*“Ask somebody for something, and they’d think you were crazy. Well, I ain’t crazy. “I’m just broke because I don’t have a birth certificate to get a job, and Laura is about to die because we can’t afford a doctor.”* (Ellison, 1996)

The quotation above presents a protagonist in a desperate situation, trying to find a way to survive and provide for his sick wife, Laura. He is unable to secure a job due to the lack of a birth certificate, and he is struggling to afford a

doctor for Laura. This situation can be analyzed through the theory of patience, which is frequently connected with the capacity to calmly endure difficult circumstances, delay gratification, and maintain composure in the face of frustration or adversity (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker, 2012).

Nevertheless, the protagonist's capacity for patience is pushed to its furthest boundaries. The individual's state of extreme despair compels him to engage in gambling activities, to acquire financial resources to cover the expenses associated with Laura's medical treatment. This behavior can be seen as a deviation from the theory of patience, which encourages to wait calmly in the face of adversity instead of resorting to desperate measures (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker, 2012).

Moreover, what he states is actually his never-ending love for his wife. It is clearly seen that he would like to sacrifice anything for his wife. His wife is his world and he could not live without her (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker & Emmons, 2007). In this sense, what he will do later could be mentioned as his struggle to maintain someone whom he loves to the fullest. He could not just say love words, but he must insist that the other person will live to prolong their love together. This is the situation that supports his patience alongside with his optimal struggle for his only wife.

In the third part, he meets an old man who told him to get up and not to despair. He gives him a whiskey drink which could be seen as a gesture of hospitality and camaraderie. It could also symbolize a moment of solace or comfort in a time of despair, reflecting the cultural significance of whiskey as a symbol of friendship and support. He is also advised on how to get into gambling, and he tries the person's suggestion. In the quotation below, when the situation makes him give up, he met an old man who made him feel good about the advice he gave him. According to him, it is also good advice, and he can earn money quickly. Finally, he tried it.

*"I musta been dreaming." "Well, here, have a drink. And don't be making no noise like that, damn!" His hands trembled as he tilted his head. It was not wine, but whiskey. Cold rye whiskey. He took a deep swoller, decided it was better not to take another, and handed the bottle back to its owner. (Ellison, 1996)*

*"Now he felt the cold whiskey breaking a warm path straight through the middle of him, growing hotter and sharper as it moved. He had not eaten all day, and it made him light-headed. The smell of the peanuts stabbed him like a knife, and he got up and found a seat in the middle aisle. But no sooner did he sit than he saw a row of intense faced young girls, and got up again, thinking, "You chicks musta been Lindy-hoppingl somewhere." He found a seat several rows ahead as the lights came on, and he saw the screen disappear behind a heavy red and gold curtain; then the curtain rising, and the man with the microphone and a uniformed attendant coming on the stage."` (Ellison, 1996)*

The quotation above shows that the old man he met offers him a brief escape from his hardships and introduces him to the concept of gambling as a possible remedy for his financial issues. Upon applying the theoretical concept of patience to the given quotation, it becomes evident that the protagonist is in a condition characterized by both anticipation and resilience in the face of adversity (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker & Emmons, 2007). The concept of patience encompasses the capacity to quietly withstand periods of delay, adversity, or distress without experiencing annoyance or emotional agitation.

Additionally, it encompasses the capacity to persevere in the face of opposition, challenges, or misfortune. The quotation depicts the main character's encounter with physical discomfort and hunger, evident by the trembling of his hands and the olfactory sensation of peanuts stabbing him "like a knife." Despite this, he accepts the whisky and suggestions proffered by the old man, thus demonstrating his willingness to persevere through his current situation and begin on new possibilities. This reveals the individual's capacity to demonstrate his patience and resilience in the face of adversity.

Nevertheless, the protagonist's choice to engage in gambling to quickly gain income can be interpreted as a deviation from the patience theory. The theory of patience commonly involves the capacity to postpone immediate rewards and withstand the allure of quick solutions or shortcuts (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker & Emmons, 2007). The protagonist's decision to engage in gambling reflects a desire for a fast resolution to his difficulties, presenting a contrast to the characteristic of patience.

It is quite reasonable that what he does will remain better to be put in the frame of patience. In a sense, he must have patience in seeing his sick wife. Then, he must also be patient and think about finding the money. Somehow, though gambling is not such a patience to find money, but the whole story may support that situation (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker & Emmons, 2007). He has been waiting for many days to come up with an understanding to get more money for his wife's medical assistance. On a hand, what he does is not ethical. On the other hand, no one will blame him if what he does is for the sake of other's life, especially his wife as someone whom he really loves.

In the fourth part, he feels so happy because he got five cards; the cards can take better care of Laura. He was so excited. In the quote below, he says that he feels that he is fortunate because it was his first experience in gambling. Besides being proud of himself, he is also happy because he can pay Laura's fees with this card.

*"He felt for his bingo cards, smiling. The guy at the door wouldn't like it if he knew about his having five cards. Well, not everyone played the bingo game; and even with five cards he didn't have much of a chance. For Laura, though, he had to have faith. He studied the cards, each with its different numerals, punching the free center hole in each and spreading them neatly across his lap; and when the lights faded he sat slouched in his seat so that he could look from his cards to the bingo wheel with hut a click shifting of his eyes."*  
(Ellison, 1996)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that the protagonist is demonstrating patience in several ways. First, he is playing a game that requires waiting for the correct numbers to be called, which is inherently a test of patience (Pasopati, et al., 2023). He is also breaching the rules by having five cards, demonstrating his willingness to patiently manage the complexities of several cards to increase his chances of winning (Ellison, 1996). The protagonist's faith and hope for Laura's recovery also show how patient he is. He is still hopeful and determined to do everything he can to help her, even though the odds are against him. This supports the idea that being patient usually means dealing with challenging situations positively or hopefully.

Furthermore, the protagonist's actions demonstrate the concept of patience as a form of endurance. He is in a difficult situation, but he is working hard to achieve his objective of winning the bingo game to help his wife (Ellison, 1996). This is consistent with the notion that patience involves perseverance in the face of adversity. Patience gives people the ability to withstand obstacles and troubles that they face in their lives, such as failure at work, disappointment, serious disability, or material disasters with forbearance and acceptance and to respond to life's pressures and tensions with courage, strength, and optimism because it is an integral part of life (Pujimahanani, et al., 2023). The protagonist in this quote shows patience by keeping a positive outlook, not giving up when things get hard, and taking an active role in the bingo game (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker & Emmons, 2007). His deeds show different parts of the theory of patience, such as hope, endurance, persistence, and engagement.

Though gambling is quite illogical and even illegal, what he does in gambling is actually reasonable and persistent as well. The rational point of it is seen in how he thinks so much about his card in such strategies rather than merely entertaining for him (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker & Emmons, 2007). He thinks that this is the way to give his wife the best treatment that she could get. This is also a means for him to prove his love for his wife. Its persistence is shown in how he plays the card by imagining Laura, his wife. No one does gamble by remembering his wife, but the protagonist is an exception to this. In many events, those who play gambling are also accompanied by other women. However, the protagonist is different. He has good intentions in gambling (Ellison, 1996). He would like to sacrifice for Laura.

In the fifth part, he was having so much fun that he forgot that what he was doing was the wrong job, and at that moment, he was caught by the police. He was caught and had to give up the things he got while doing the job. In the quote below, he got caught at the peak of winning the jackpot, which made him surrender without rebelling, but he also realized what he was doing was wrong.

*“But they couldn't do that. If they did the wheel flashing from the projection room would be cut off. But they had him before he could tell them so, trying to pry open his fist, and he was wrestling and trying to bring his knees into the fight and holding on to the button, for it was his life “ (Ellison, 1996)*

*“But as he warmed in the justice of the man’s tight smile he did not see the man’s slow wink, nor see the bow-legged man behind him step clear of the swiftly descending curtain and set himself for a blow. He only felt the dull pain exploding in his skull, and he knew even as it slipped out of him that his luck had run out on the stage.” (Ellison, 1996)*

The quotation above implies that the protagonist’s struggle can be interpreted as a test of his patience as he attempts to keep his grip on the button despite the difficulty he experiences. The quotation emphasizes the value of patience in the face of adversity. The protagonist was preoccupied with the immediate situation. “...the man’s tight smile” meant that he was ignorant to the oncoming threat “...the bow-legged man behind him”.

If the character had been patient longer, he might have been more aware of his surroundings and avoided the police. This aligns with the idea that patience helps focus on the future or the outcome of things, not just the present situation (Good & True Media, 2023; Lavelock, 2015). The characters’ hardships serve as reminders that patience is more than just waiting; it is also about maintaining a positive attitude, staying focused, and being aware of one’s surroundings.

Somehow, the protagonist could not tame the wilderness of the gambling itself. He is too involved in the game and forgets that he must always be aware of his surroundings. He has the patience to sacrifice for Laura (Good&TrueMedia, 2023; Lavelock, 2015). However, his sacrifice is diminished by his intention that goes deeper in gambling. On this occasion, he was already drowning and could not get out. He is lost in the matter of gambling and leaving his patience behind.

### **Patience and Its Continuation on Psychological Goodness**

The theory of patience says that patience is a response to delay, reflecting emotions like calmness, sympathy, and empathy (Annasai, 2023; Bulbul & Izgar, 2017). Someone’s situation that reflects the theory of patience is her/his struggle to adapt to a new environment and need to suppress immediate desires. However, longing for the past and struggle to adapt suggest a tension between patience and impatience, reflecting the challenges of mastering one’s situation (Good&TrueMedia, 2023; Lavelock, 2015). In this sense, it is quite clear that patience is a virtue in which psychological understanding must always be grown. It is implied that patience is not taken for granted, but a process of such perseverance of facing any prolonging aspect in life.

The concept of patience can also be concluded for having various meanings such as self-control, accepting efforts to overcome problems, enduring suffering, feeling the bitterness of life without complaining, persistence, working hard, being persistent and tenacious to achieve the goal (Annasai, 2023; Bulbul & Izgar, 2017). The idea is that following the desire of self and at the same time directing it towards better deeds. By doing so, people could gain a better understanding about what is going on and amend it to find its best matter in the future (Good&TrueMedia, 2023; Lavelock, 2015).

Moreover, patience is a person's tendency to remain calm when frustrated, experiencing difficulties, or suffering. It is also related to positive social characteristics and includes virtues. More patient individuals will show a more empathetic attitude and they will always be grateful for what they experience (Pianalto, 2016; Sarmi, et al., 2023). It is also quite clear that calm condition is the true face of patience. No one has patience if she/he is angry and having hysteric emotions. This reflects that patience is something that comes from the inner self by reacting to other outer self-matters. It is not an action, but a reaction of a need to define something better later.

It is also implied that patience is a process that makes individuals not easily complain, able to survive, and always be stable when facing difficult situations. Patience also means that individuals can hold back and not complain about the difficulties they face (Pianalto, 2016; Sarmi, et al., 2023). Patience also means being able to withstand emotions, such as not getting angry easily and not generating negative energy for oneself or the environment. In many events, complaining is something usual and ordinary, but patience will never raise that action to appear. patience will walk together with the prolonging time (Smarandreetha, 2023; Stevens & Stephens, 2008). It will wait for the best time to resurface. it rather waits than pushes things to come through. it is done to support, not to be the main indication for all aspects whatsoever.

In addition to holding back emotions, patience also means being able to control desires, such as refraining from the temptations of the world's pleasures (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker & Emmons, 2007). So, it can be concluded that patience is the ability of a person who always accepts what he experiences, does not easily complain about all the trials or problems that exist, can hold himself without being easily emotional, and always tries to improve his life conditions more actively and sincerely (Smarandreetha, 2023; Stevens & Stephens, 2008). Therefore, patience is a way to show that it is actually psychological well-being in growing. It is not only planted, but should also be cultivated in order to find the best suitable plan for any goodness to stay inside someone's inner self.

Patience is also related to tolerance and forbearance. tolerance is indeed related to having any prolonged reaction toward any other action. It is done to show that someone has a big heart against anything both in good and even evil ways. She/he knows what to do in such an oppressed condition without getting angry at all (Ghorbani & Khormaie, 2019; Kupfer, 2007). Forbearance involves emotion that people can control well; if it is not well controlled, it will turn into anger. Patience that comes up to forbearance also underlines accepting circumstances that do not match any other expectation. What should not be accepted can be accepted with patience (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker & Emmons, 2007).

Patience is the propensity of a person to wait calmly in the face of frustration, adversity, or suffering. Patience is enacted across a wide range of circumstances and timeframes (Ghorbani & Khormaie, 2019; Kupfer, 2007). It is enacted in mundane activities, such as waiting in traffic, and in more significant and long-term situations, such as parenting or dealing with a severe illness. Although it often involves a temporal or waiting component, patience is also

called for in situations with no direct focus on time (e.g., dealing with a difficult person) (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker & Emmons, 2007). In everyday life, patience often occurs when someone is not satisfied with what is expected.

### **Protagonist's Patience in The King Bingo Game**

In this analysis, the protagonist of that story has a necessary level of patience. He can also keep looking for work to survive and pay for his wife's medical expenses. Even though he gets lousy behavior from those around him, he does not give up. He continues caring for his wife despite being in a downturn (Subandi, 2011; Smith, et al., 2023). He continues to live patiently. Maybe he moves to the city to make a lot of money, and what he thought would be easy to get turned out to be complicated. Even though he wanted to give up so badly, he definitely remembered his wife. Because what makes him passionate is his wife, Laura.

He did a lot of positive things when he was depressed about the situation, which left him helpless. He has patience in life's difficult trials and will remain calm and not give up easily (Subandi, 2011; Smith, et al., 2023). He takes advantage of challenging moments as opportunities to learn, grow, and find the best solutions. With that determination, patience allows him to keep trying to achieve his goals, keep his emotions stable, and see hope amid darkness. Thus, patience is the key to success in facing all challenges in life with an optimistic attitude.

This story through its protagonist would like to show how patience is actually needed but must be cultivated from time to time. It is not an *ala carte* thing that could be easily consumed. It must always be grown in someone's self as forbearance against any hardship in life (Ghorbani & Khormaie, 2019; Kupfer, 2007). Only by remaining so then patience could be obtained. It is done to persuade more indications of prolonging time in order to gain more perseverance either. In addition, patience is not something that is merely a usual action. It is a skill in which people must master to gain a better insight of the world. People must go with any problem and indeed patience must always be intact to accentuate how strong someone is by facing anything that may come (Ratchford, et al., 2023; Schnitker & Emmons, 2007).

Another analysis also shows that patience is nothing but a way to cope up with any temptation. In the story, for many times, the protagonist is tempted to do anything out of any good virtue. He somehow also legitimizes gambling as a good way to get more money. However, any good intention must always pass good way too if someone desires a good result either (Bülbül & Arslan, 2017; Fitriani, 2023). The protagonist takes a shortcut by doing gambling for the goodness of his wife. Somehow, it does not really work since the gambling has swallowed him wholly, making him stay away out of patience to any guilt that he may forever regret.

In matters of characterization, the protagonist is quite interesting in his character. His major dramatic question is clear, that is to find money to get medication for his wife. However, his effort is never as smooth as it seems. He

must always face various obstacles, including taking shortcuts for the money. He ends up doing gambling in which he surrenders to the antagonistic point of the story. He forgets that he must be patient. He loses it as he loses his mind too (Bülbül & Arslan, 2017; Fitriani, 2023). He no longer has perseverance but merely joy. He is becoming the antagonist at the end.

In this story, there is also a message that the black skin population gets unfavorable actions from the surrounding community or can be called racist. Even though they are in a difficult situation and are faced with unfair discrimination, black people still show resilience and fortitude. They do not retaliate with hatred or anger but choose the path of peace and hard work to prove their worth (Bülbül & Arslan, 2017; Fitriani, 2023). This patient gesture reflects an extraordinary character in that they face inhuman challenges with an open and understanding heart. Through this story, the message about the importance of patience in the face of injustice and discrimination becomes even more relevant, inspiring people to stand firm and uphold justice without sacrificing human values and wisdom.

## CONCLUSION

Patience can be defined as an individual's capacity to consistently embrace and acknowledge their experiences without readily expressing dissatisfaction towards the various challenges or difficulties. The story of The King of Bingo Game is about a poor man who is desperately trying to gather financial resources for his ailing wife's medical treatment. Despite his best efforts, he finds securing employment and earning money challenging. He resorts to bingo, which may not be entirely ethical, but he sees it as a preferable alternative to theft. What the protagonist goes through shows how determined he is and how far he is willing to go to save his wife's life. His actions exemplify various aspects of the theory of patience, including hope, endurance, persistence, and engagement. The story also extends the theme of patience to the broader context of racial discrimination, illustrating how the black population responds to unfair treatment with resilience, fortitude, and a commitment to peace and hard work. It embraces patience as a virtue in confronting both personal hardships and societal injustices, advocating for justice without compromising human values and wisdom.

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