

How Do The Characters in The TV Adaptation of A Game of Thrones Fit into The Roles of Hero
and Anti-Hero?

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Creative Research

M5X01599

Introduction

The American Psychological Association argues that the anti-hero character is appealing to audience because it allows them to view into “a window into the dark side of human nature” (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crustal. 2012). Meanwhile Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals counters that argument, by believing that the pure or true hero is more appealing for its to “reveal our missing qualities” (Goethals & Allison. 2013). In this dissertation proposal I will be investigating in audiences appeal in the hero archetype, when compared to the anti-hero archetype. I will compare characters from the tv series, Game of Thrones, because of their moral grey standing and the rare characters with pure morals. In each chapter I will break down each of my theorists views and how they are displayed in the show and concluding with a question for my dissertation.

Chapter One: The Anti-hero is Flawed, But Relatable

The dark triad is a set of personalities composed of narcissism (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crustal. 2012), psychopathy (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crustal. 2012) and Machiavellianism (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crustal. 2012). Though we may see these traits as being undesirable in our traditional heroes, the Review of General Psychology argue that both our media and reality “is awash with characters that embody the dark triad” and that some are part “of the most popular media franchise today” (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crustal. 2012).

In this chapter I will be looking at the second word or middle ground of my three key words, the anti-hero, and investigating the use of this character trait in a Game of Thrones. This is a unique trait for the medieval/ fantasy genre, given its history of being defined by the idea of good vs evil.

The dark triad or anti-hero can be linked to characters like; Michael Corleone, Alex DeLarge or even Han Solo (Maldy. 2018). With these characters all embodying some or all of these traits. Though these characters tend to all have some form of charismatic charm when compared to the clean cut hero, the anti-hero allows the audience to peer into the darker side of human nature. Without the sacrifice of positive morals that audience expect from villains.

Though in relation to the show, I will be linking this theory with the characters of Jamie Lannister, Theon Greyjoy and Sandor Clegane. As these incorporate all of these tropes in some form. I will be using them to delve deeper into the dark triad.

While his brother, The Mountain, is in no doubt a villain. Sandor Clegane, or the Hound as he's known in earlier seasons, is a true anti-hero. Though it is true that he kills others, like his brother, but

audiences appeal towards the Hound is that those he kills can be argued as deserving their fate. For example, this can be seen with his duel against Beric over the Brotherhood without Banners goal to sell Arya Stark (Game of Thrones. 2013). Clegane links closely to the psychopathy aspect of the dark triad. With him showing psychopathic traits like antisocial behaviour, lack of empathy, manipulateness, violence and criminality (Hare. 1993). While characters like Brienne of Tarth and Jamie Lannister represent chivalry and the reality of it respectively. The Hound represents the post-traumatic stress disorder that many face after years of witnessing combat (Perkins.2017). Though his loyalty to protecting the weak, as shown with his protection of the hostages Sansa Stark in season two (Game of Thrones. 2012), makes him more of a hero than a villain. Though the other two key characters, for this section, have psychopathic traits Clegane is defined by this trait and his character built around his apparent lack of humanity, but strict loyalty to honour.

Though we associate narcissism with a love of one self. Coming from the legend of Narcissus, when he became obsessed with his reflection and wasted away. The term also correlates with aggression, impulsivity, being sexual provocative and loneliness. Although it has some overlap with psychopathy and Machiavellianism, the Review of General Psychology states that “narcissism's unique contribution of to the dark triad may lie in people's sense of entitlement or superiority to others” (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crustal. 2012). This can be seen in the character of Theon Greyjoy, with links to the idea that “narcissists do not just feel good about themselves – they feel that they are inherently better and deserving of respect and administration of those around them.” (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crustal. 2012) this can be seen during the early episodes of the series. As seen in the pilot when Theon sees himself as superior to the Stark children, especially the supposed bastard Jon Snow, because he was chosen to be their father, Ned Starks, ward. Even knowing the fact that he is there as a hostage against his rebellious father. (Game of Thrones. 2011). His narcissism continues after his transformation into Reek, by Ramsay Bolton, where he boasts that he is Ramsay's favourite

to torture. The reason why Theon belongs as an anti-hero is from his redemption arc of reuniting and saving the surviving Stark children (Game of Thrones.2016).

Machiavellianism is the final aspect of the dark triad and is represented through the characters Jamie Lannister. Someone with Machiavellianism traits can be described as being “manipulative, self-serving, cynicism, manipulativeness and a view that the ends justify the means” (Gunnthorsdottir, McCabe, & Smith. 2002) aspects that are shown throughout the early seasons. Mainly in an effort to protect his family and secret of his incestuous relationship with his sister. Jamie’s role in the early seasons is too “challenge the traditional conception of the knight and address its contradictions” (N/A. 2019), what makes him an interesting character is because he’s not a bad Knight. But a knight who is disillusioned by what societies notions of how a knight should act. Though when he interacts with characters like Brienne we are able to see that Jamie does believe that he could have been a true knight. When Jamie loses his hand (Game of Thrones. 2013), he also loses his warrior identity and drops his Machiavellian traits and releases his selfish façade. This event reveals that Jamie does in fact hold some chivalric standards. Killing the King, that he was sworn to protect, so he could save the lives of the innocent (). However, you could argue that Jamie did this to save as a self-serving move and manipulative, as it in turned pardoned him over the crime of killing a king and increased his position in society.

Although the examples mentioned here are all men, the anti-hero isn’t an exclusively male trope. With Villanelle, Teresa Mendoza (Roberts. N/A) or the shows own Arya Stark (Kelly. 2017) being seen with elements of the dark triad. It is argued that the reason why there are a lack of female anti-heroes come from the fact that “these women take on characteristics traditionally reserved for male [anti-hero] characters” (Andrews. 2015) through removing the likeable trait, that many female heroes aim to achieve. Instead, we focus on “the ugliness and the darkness that male characters have been able to get away with the rise of the anti-hero” (Michael. 2013). Traits are traditionally the

focus on female villains. The female anti-heroes in Game of Thrones are far and few, but they keep the charisma, that audiences expect from the male counterpart.

Chapter Two: The Hero is Inspiring

In this chapter I will be investigating the four dominant perspectives that Kristian Frisk discusses in his essay of *What Makes a Hero? Theorising the Social Structuring Heroism*. Kristian Frisk argues that “there are four dominant perspectives that apply to the creation of a realistic and engaging hero archetype” (Frank. 2018); the hero story, theory of the great man, the hero institutions and sociology’s contribution (Frank. 2018). As a director I need to convey these four perspectives through my actors for their individual, so I can create a realistic character that audiences can engage with.

The three groups that I will be looking at are the hero story, theory of the great man and the hero institutions (Frank. 2018). The reason why I have left out the final section in Frisks’ essay, sociology’s contribution (Frank. 2018), is because this part of the essay focuses on the historical and literacy influences on our idea of a hero and would take up a large portion of the word count. Though the show is famous for its characters belonging in the grey zone/ being classed as an anti-hero. A Game of Thrones does feature a number of characters that hold high morals and can be called a stereotypical ‘hero’ with little to no negative qualities towards them. One of the largest negative qualities that link all my three characters together, Ned Stark, Jon Snow and Brienne of Tarth, is their blind loyalty to the notion of chivalry and their naiveté to the goals of those around them that will harm others.

Carlyle argues that “the progress of civilisation could be boiled down to the thoughts and dues of few distinguished personalities” (Carlyle. 2001[1841]) in the great man type of character, whom inspires others to be better. This can be seen through the death of Ned Stark. This inspires the north to declare independence from rest of the seven kingdoms. Believing that they don’t think as a collective, but in a singular self. “In the eyes of history, Jamie is probably the more historically

accurate knight” (n/a. 2019), but when compared to “the morally upright Brienne is like an ideal knight” (n/a. 2019) and her equals, Ned Stark and Jon Snow, could be compared to literary hero, Don Quixote, with them dedicating their lives to the very notion of chivalry, in a world where those values are dead or seen as dying. Though still aspects we assign to the great man role.

Acts of heroism, play a large role in how the character is interpenetrated by the audience and others as they appear within the world of the story. As Oliner states that heroic acts “are not exclusive provinces of larger than life figures. Rather they are usually the deeds of ordinary people” (Oliner. 2002). My interpretation to this statement is that, characters that seemed destined for greatness don’t achieve this. As shown when you compare Jon Snow and Stannis Barathian. Jon, whom at the start of the story is sent to the wall because of his lack of apparent greatness. Achieve to become the youngest lord commander, unite the North with the wildling and become the King in the North. When you compare this with Stannis, who spends the majority of the show staying in the Stormlands declaring himself as the “prince that was promised” (Reiher. 2019), but dies in his first major battle because of his arrogance. A comment on the acts of heroism, is how humbling the hero can appear.

All of these characters are inspired by the romantic notion of chivalry made famous by the Arthurian tales written by Chretien de Troyes in the twelfth century and the notion of chivalry that he redefined. The show uses these characters to create a commentary on the positives and negatives of this idealised version of chivalry in a context of a real world scenario. Making the characters appear naïve to the sinister intentions. To the point that their dedication to chivalry has led to two of the characters, Ned Stark (Game of Thrones. 2011) and Jon Snow (Game of Thrones. 2015), dying on the show meanwhile in the books, all three are dead (as of the release of the final book). Showing a negative viewpoint that you can’t have good people in the world. However from the audience’s standpoint of viewing the show, the books negative commentary has been subverted. With Jon Snow being resurrected (Game of Thrones. 2016) and Brienne being rewarded with the title of a true knight.

Because of the characters appear flawless and set above others, they receive very little internal conflict/ development. Instead they receive external ones, with their conflict coming from others and they overcome these obstacles to appeal to audiences. However, one could argue that these characters haven't been created to be liked. But rather, have been birthed so the world doesn't appear so dark and audiences can aspire to be them.

Chapter Three: Dissertation and Major Project

For my third and final chapter, I will be stating about how the previous two key words have influenced my final one, dissertation, and how they have inspired the key chapters in my dissertation and the question that I will be exploring.

Next year, I want to carry on the theme of what makes characters relatable in the first chapter, however in the second, I wish to look at the best way to develop a character and how audiences interact with a characters development. The key words that I will be looking at are; development and relatable. The reason why I was to carry on exploring these themes, is so I can better develop my characters and work better with my actors, so they can create a better connection with the actors.

I will use all this current knowledge I have gained from this proposal and the added information that I will gain from my final dissertation and use it in the creation of my major project. Where I want to explore character development over a series of short films. Almost making a tv or web series. I want to do this form of filmmaking as I believe that it is a unique thing to do at a university level and is one of the best ways to dedicate time to develop a character over a period of time and allow audiences to form a connection with them.

Word Count: 2,327

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