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**How do directors show character growth within spy
films in relation to psychopathy and sociopathy?**

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Independent Inquiry

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“Drama is life with the dull bits cut out” Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980)

Abstract- hypothesis of this essay

In this dissertation, I will be exploring how directors can show psychopathy and sociopathy within spy films, and how I will apply that to my own work. In the introduction, I will be looking at the recent history of spy films, from post-Cold War-early James Bond to the recent blockbuster successes of the Kingsman franchise and Atomic Blonde. The first section will focus on the background of psychopathy and sociopathy and analyse how the traits and tendencies make up the person. There will also be examples of both psychopaths and sociopaths in cinema, to provide more evidence. It will also look at the recent history of female psychopaths and sociopaths, and how they have inspired film characters which have been seen as psychopaths and sociopaths. The second section will focus on more in-depth character analysis. They will be focussed on different iterations of James Bond, and characters shown in the Kingsman franchise. The final chapter will be focused on my graduate project and a character analysis into the main protagonist, Amy, and how I create her psychological background based on what I have learnt from James Bond and Kingsman. It will also look at the visual inspiration for my project, and how certain films and TV shows have helped simplify the path that I am needing to go down.

Introduction- gives context to spy films and the spy genre

Spies have always been some of the most intriguing characters in cinema. From the concealed sleekness of Eggsy and James Bond to the maverick action of Jason Bourne and Ethan Hunt, modern spies have been on screen since the 1960s panic surrounding the Cold War. Every spy seen on film or TV has displayed or inhabited traits which can be linked to either psychopathy or sociopathy. As a writer/director, I am intrigued to see if there is any kind of connection between psychopathy/sociopathy and modern spies, and if there are, how I can adapt those into my practice. There are between 300,000 and 400,000 psychopaths currently living in the UK, each with a

different origin story. In this dissertation, I am wanting to understand why these origin stories happen, and how social perception has changed, especially on film and TV. I will be using this research and character analysis to help build the world that my characters will be inhabiting in my graduate project.

There has been a divide in opinion over what psychopaths and sociopaths are perceived as- victim or villain. Popular belief is that they are perceived more as villains, especially when seen in films and TV shows. Popular examples include Heath Ledger's Joker, and Kevin Spacey's John Doe. While on the outside, they are seen as murderers, manipulators and criminal masterminds, psychologically, they might be seen as more innocent people who are just trying to be understood. Perhaps, that is the reason as to why they do what they do.

Chapter 1: Analysis into psychopathy and sociopathy

In the James Bond books, and some earlier films, there can be arguments made which suggest Bond has psychopathic and sociopathic tendencies and traits. For example, in *Dr No* (Young, 1962), he sends a car full of people off cliff and later proceeds to casually chat with a cigarette in mouth all while torturing henchman Professor Dent. This is evidence that he doesn't care about people dying, nor does he care about killing anyone. Furthermore, another cinematic spy Jason Bourne can also be seen to be a sociopath and psychopath, although, it is revealed in the films that his status as a sleeper agent for the CIA is partially responsible for his psychopathic and sociopathic tendencies. Psychopathy can be defined as being a mental illness or disorder. It is traditionally a personality disorder characterized by persistent antisocial behaviour, impaired empathy and remorse, and bold, disinhibited and egotistical traits. A psychopath can be defined as being a person with a psychopathic personality, which manifests as amoral and antisocial behaviour, lack of ability to love or establish meaningful personal relationships, extreme egocentricity and failure to learn from experience (Dictionary, 2019). Common traits include a lack of empathy, guilt, conscience or remorse; shallow experiences of feelings or emotions; impulsivity and a weak ability to defer gratification and control behaviour; superficial charm and talkative nature; irresponsibility and a failure to accept responsibility for their actions, and a grandiose sense of their own worth (Science of People, 2019). Socially,

psychopathy expresses extensive heartless and manipulative self-serving behaviours with no regard for others, and is often associated with repeated wrongdoings, crime and violence. Although people change in some cases a great deal, many personality traits and behavioural patterns remain stable throughout life (Hare, 1999). Researchers believe that psychopathy has roots in early childhood. Children who show an early lack of fear, indifference towards peers and appear callous in the face of emotion are at the greatest risk (Science of People, 2019). Psychopaths can suffer emotional pain for a variety of reasons. As with anyone else, psychopaths have a deep wish to be loved and cared for (Martens, 2014). This desire remains often unfulfilled, however, because it is obviously not easy for another person to get close to someone with such impervious personality characteristics. Psychopaths are at least sometimes aware of the effects of their behaviour on others and can be actually saddened by their inability to control it. The lives of most psychopaths are lacking a stable social network or warm, close bonds.

There are many characters in cinema with psychopathic tendencies including Kevin Spacey's John Doe from *Se7en* (Fincher, 1995), Christian Bale's Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho* (Harron, 2000), and Malcolm McDowell's Alex DeLarge from *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1971).



Kevin Spacey as John Doe in *Se7en* (Fincher, 1995)

About 1% of the total population can be defined as psychopaths, according to a detailed psychological profile checklist. The majority of psychopaths are not violent, and many do well in jobs where their personality traits are beneficial, and their social tendencies can be managed. It is estimated they make up about 20% of the inmates of most prisons. They are obviously not very nice people. Psychopathy seems to be a lifelong trait, or combination of traits, which are heavily influenced by genes and hardly at all by social upbringing. While psychopaths can follow social rules when it suits their needs, sociopaths are more likely to fly off the handle and react violently whenever they're confronted by the mistakes of their actions. Sociopaths have a conscience,

although a weak one, and will often back up something they know to be wrong. By contrast, psychopaths will believe that their actions are justified and feel no remorse for any harm done. This differentiation may suggest that nature plays more of a role in the creation of a psychopath than a sociopath (Purse, 2019). This is supported in part by a 2014 review of studies by the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry in which as many as a third of people diagnosed with sociopathy essentially 'give up' their antisocial behaviour in later life and develop well-adjusted relationship. While the terms are often used interchangeably, sociopathy and psychopathy have clear lines of distinction that can be broadly described (Purse, 2019).

The 16 characteristics of psychopaths:

Intelligent

Rational

Calm

Unreliable

Insincere

Without shame or remorse

Having poor judgment

Without capacity for love

Unemotional

Poor insight

Indifferent to the trust or kindness of others

Overreactive to alcohol

Suicidal

Impersonal sex life

Lacking long-term goals

Inadequately motivated antisocial behaviour

Dr Donald Black, professor of psychiatry at the University of Iowa states that psychopaths and sociopaths are different types of people- adding that most sociopaths are prone to impulsive behaviour and are often seen as disturbed or unhinged, while psychopaths are cold and calculating, and sometimes even nice and charming (McCall, 2019). An example of someone who changes from a sociopath to a

psychopath is Michael C Hall's character from the eponymous series *Dexter* (Manos Jr, 2006).

Sociopathy can be defined as being someone with a psychopathic personality whose behaviour is antisocial, often criminal, and who lacks a sense of moral responsibility or social conscience (Dictionary, 2019). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), antisocial personality disorder is characterised by a lack of regard for the moral or legal standards in the local culture. There is a marked



Rosamund Pike as Amy Dunne from Gone Girl (Fincher, 2014)

inability to get along with others or abide by societal rules. Individuals with this disorder are sometimes called psychopaths or sociopaths (Mcafee.cc, 2003). Psychopaths and sociopaths appear to be incompetent of any true emotions, from guilt to love to shame. They are quick to rage, but just as quick to let it go, without holding any grudges to anyone or anything. No matter what emotion they say they have, it has no bearing on their future attitudes or actions. A sociopath typically has a conscience, but it is weak. They may know that taking someone's money is wrong, and they might feel some guilt or remorse, but that won't stop their behaviour. Both lack empathy;

the ability to stand in someone else's shoes and understand how they feel (Robinson, 2019). Examples of sociopaths in film and TV include Benedict Cumberbatch's Sherlock Holmes from *Sherlock* (Moffat, 2010), Heath Ledger's Joker from *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) and Rosamund Pike's Amy Dunne from *Gone Girl* (Fincher, 2014).

Rosamund Pike's portrayal of Amy Dunne in *Gone Girl* (Fincher, 2014) is one of many examples of female psychopaths. There are similar, but different traits to traditional male psychopaths.

- They mirror and love-bomb in order to get information
- They are very charming and show gestures and exaggerated speech.

- They sabotage others secretly
- They demonstrate little to no remorse in harming others to get what they want.
- They are sadistic and enjoy inflicting pain
- They thrive off of sexual attention (Arabi, 2019)

Female psychopaths play the society and individual that they are involved with like a toy. The ability and willingness to employ brutal methods of obtaining power is a distinct feature that distinguishes sociopaths and psychopaths from other people (Purse, 2019). A psychopath is seen to suffer from a lack of empathy because of psychological, genetic and environmental factors. Psychopaths usually have no guilt or remorse and tend to be self-centred (Castillo, 2012). The choice of being a psychopath or sociopath comes down to personal decisions. Certain things change the way people perceive you, and the way that you perceive people.

Psychopaths are generally viewed as aggressive, insensitive, charismatic, irresponsible, intelligent, dangerous, hedonistic, narcissistic and antisocial. These are persons who can masterfully explain another person's problems and what must be done to overcome them, but who appear to have little or no insight into their own lives or how to correct their own problems. Those psychopaths who can articulate solutions for their own personal problems usually fail to follow them through. Psychopaths are perceived as exceptional manipulators capable of feigning emotions in order to carry out their personal agendas. Without remorse for the plight of their victims, they are adept at rationalization, projection, and other psychological defence mechanisms. The veneer of stability, friendliness, and normality belies a deeply disturbed personality. Outwardly there appears to be nothing abnormal about their personalities, even their behaviour. They are careful to maintain social distance and share intimacy only with those whom they can psychologically control. They are noted for their inability to maintain long-term commitments to people or programs (Hickey, 2005)

Chapter 2: The Dark Triad: Can modern iterations of fictional characters be seen as psychopaths and sociopaths?

The dark triad refers to the personality traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy. Narcissism can be defined as being selfishness, involving a sense of entitlement, a lack of empathy, and a need for admiration, as characterising a

personality type. (Dictionary, 2019) Machiavellianism in psychology refers to a personality trait which sees a person so focussed on their own interests they will manipulate, deceive, and exploit others to achieve their goals (Jacobson, 2019). Schadenfreude can be defined as being pleasure derived by someone from another person's misfortune (Dictionary, 2019).

Although each actor who plays James Bond has a different take on his character, a number of features, consistent with the Dark Triad, link the depictions. Bond has a killer instinct; he has a psychological disposition which allows him to kill others with a gun or by melee. Psychopathy likely underlies this ability. That is, having cold, uncaring attitudes towards others and limited empathy likely facilitates interpersonal aggression. James Bond has a relationship style that revolves around short-term trysts and mate-poaching.

In 2006, Daniel Craig was announced as the latest iteration of charismatic British spy, James Bond. Craig has starred in 4 films as Bond, not including the 2020 release *No Time to Die* (Fukunaga, 2020).

The synopsis of *Casino Royale* (Campbell, 2006) is as follows: After earning 00 status and a license to kill, James Bond sets out on his first mission as 007. He must defeat a private banker who funds terrorists in a high stakes game of poker at Casino Royale, Montenegro (IMDB, 2019). The synopsis of *Quantum of Solace* (Forster, 2008) is as follows: James Bond descends into mystery as he tries to stop a mysterious organisation from eliminating a country's most valuable resource (IMDB, 2019). The synopsis for *Skyfall* (Mendes, 2012) is as follows: Bond's loyalty to M is tested when her past comes back to haunt her. When MI6 comes under attack, 007 must track down and destroy the threat, no matter how personal the cost (IMDB, 2019). The synopsis for *Spectre* (Mendes, 2015) is as follows: A cryptic message from James Bond's past sends him on a trail to uncover the existence of a sinister organisation named Spectre. With a new threat dawning, Bond learns the terrible truth about the author of all his pain in his most recent missions (IMDB, 2019).

James Bond is a highly unique individual. He appears to be of a good mind and strong spirit. He is highly intelligent, exceedingly cunning and fiendishly independent.

Like most who lose parents in their youths, Bond has abandonment issues, which is why he never makes friends or has long-lasting relationships- his only being with Vesper Lynd in *Casino Royale*. He enjoys pushing himself to the limit, both mentally and physically. Bond's lone-wolf status tends to attract others to him, not the other way around. He is highly calculating, manipulative and possesses a high level of intelligence. James both thrives under structure yet finds subtle ways of rebelling against it. He is not self-destructive, but can be a problem to his superiors, like M, who mostly despise his unorthodox methods of completing a job and his personality. All these films feature examples of James as a psychopath and a sociopath. For example, in *Casino Royale* (Campbell, 2006), James Bond says to Vesper Lynd that she is not his type. She asks if it is because she is smart. He says no, it is because she is single. He easily charms his way into the beds of women, the favours of American spies, and even the various nemeses that he faces, as is the case with Lea Seydoux's Dr Madeleine Swann, in *Spectre* (Mendes, 2015). James Bond dresses impeccably well, typically wearing expensive watches and tailored suits and tuxedos. He drives around in Aston Martins filled to the brim with gadgets including hidden guns and bulletproof windows. Despite scuffs with villains, he always has perfect hair, and when his tie is messed up from fighting, he knocks the antagonist off a roof, and walks off as he fixes his tie, as seen in *Quantum of Solace* and *Skyfall*.

In 2013, Taron Egerton was cast as Gary 'Eggsy' Unwin in Matthew Vaughan's *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (Vaughan, 2014). The film shows Eggsy's growth from a streetwise London youth, to an esteemed gentleman spy working for Kingsman, a division of MI6. It also stars Colin Firth as Eggsy's mentor Harry Hart/Galahad.

The synopsis for *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (Vaughan, 2014) is as follows: Gary 'Eggsy' Unwin, whose late father secretly worked for a spy organisation, lives in a South London housing estate and seems headed for a life behind bars. However, dapper agent Harry Hart recognises potential in the youth and recruits him to be an agent in the secret service. Meanwhile, villainous Richmond Valentine launches a diabolical plan to solve the problem of climate change via a worldwide killing spree (Pinewood Studios, 2019).

The reason as to why I am looking at both these films is because they are prime examples of spy films, with all three characters- Bond, Hart and Eggsy, being portrayed as maverick and charismatic spies, willing to do anything to serve their country. For example, in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (Vaughan, 2014), Harry Hart (Colin Firth) goes to a right-wing church in Kentucky, and unwillingly becomes part of Valentine's (Samuel L Jackson) test of rage-inducing sim cards. As expected, everyone in the church starts going crazy and killing each other, so Hart is forced to violently react and try to control the situation. Through his glasses- one of Kingsman's gadgets, Eggsy and Merlin (Mark Strong) watch on as Hart goes from smart, charismatic agent, to psychopathic killer. Personally, I am a fan of this scene because it shows that even the most normal people can become psychopathic or sociopathic, without getting triggered. At the end of the sequence, Hart ends up being killed by Valentine as the latter announces his plans for world domination. While Hart isn't shown displaying psychopathic or sociopathic tendencies all of the time, this one scene shows the length that people resort to.

As mentioned above, the fictional character Sherlock Holmes can be seen as a sociopath, especially Benedict Cumberbatch's interpretation for the BBC. Another character in *Sherlock* (Moffat, 2019) is his estranged sister, Eurus, played by Sian Brooks. When she was a child, she murdered Sherlock's best friend Victor Trevor, by locking him in a well and letting him drown and refusing to give out his location. The situation affected Sherlock so much that he rewrote Trevor's memory and turned him into a dog named Redbeard, who Sherlock instead thought was put down. After she burns down the Holmes family



Eurus Holmes is described in Sherlock as being a "psychopath of the highest order" because of the way that she treats her siblings.

manor, she is then imprisoned at the maximum-security psychiatric facility known as Sherrinford. She is described by Sherlock as a "psychopath of the highest order". The evidence for this comes in the episode titled 'The Final Problem' (Caron, 2014), in which Sherlock, his brother Mycroft and John Watson find out about the hidden existence of Eurus. For instance, with her supreme intelligence, she takes control of

the prison, which is holding her, and manipulates Sherlock into killing either his best friend or his brother.

Women with higher levels of Machiavellianism expressed greater feelings of pleasure, in response to their female friend's misfortunes in a romantic relationship and their physical appearance, but not in relation to academical abilities.

Psychopaths are troubled by feelings about emotions. This defect causes them to be insensitive to loss or risk, which reduces or eliminates the risk suppression associated with fear of failure, thus, psychopaths dare to take risks (Wang, 2019). Although they cannot experience emotional empathy, this limitation does not prevent them from understanding the factors that drive people and makes them very capable of using other people to achieve their goals. Individuals with psychopathic tendencies hate social norms and are willing to oppose the status quo. They are good at concentrating and performing well in uncertain situations and are often drawn to the more adventurous activities. The performance of psychopaths can often be related to positive attributions. Psychopaths are considered smart, charming and interesting people, and there are more successful psychopaths in top management (Wang, 2019).

Chapter 3: How I can show Amy's character growth in Sealed Until Death.

With regards to my film, I am wanting Amy's arc to be more similar to that of Eurus's. By this, I mean what traits that were looked at in the previous chapters can and will influence Amy during the course of my film. I will primarily be focussing on the first two traits- lack of empathy, guilt, conscience and remorse; and shallow experiences of feelings and emotions. The way that Amy is being presented in the film is like that of a lone 'exhibit', akin to that of Hannibal Lecter



Hannibal Lecter's cell from Silence of the Lambs (Demme, 1991)

in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and Eurus Holmes in Sherlock. In terms of the sociopathic traits, they are similar in way to the psychopathic traits as she is perceived in my film as having no empathy or remorse for others or what she has done, which is the basic premise of my film.



This is an example of what I want the living room to look like in my film. As you can see, it is contemporary and modern, which reflects the type of woman that Amy once was. (Hokkori.me, 2019)

How Amy interacts with others is largely dependent on her influence and impact on others around her. Initially, I wanted Madison, the daughter, to see Amy almost like a war hero, being praised for what she has done, while being aware of the national implications. But for the new story that I am going for, Madison is estranged from her mother, almost like she doesn't know her anymore.

This is because of the social context of the film, and why Amy is now seen as a psychopath. From a directing standpoint, I will present Amy as a closed off person who isn't really revealing much about herself. The reason as to why is because all of her story and background will be revealed by Madison, the daughter, who is masquerading as Amy's psychiatrist, in order to understand why the prior events happened, and why she is in her current state. In terms of the film's context, Amy was exposed to psychopathic behaviour 5 years before the film takes place. I am establishing this timeline because as a filmmaker, it will be interesting to see how a functioning psychopath relates to and responds to the crimes that she has committed, and that psychological morality fight will be the main conflict of the film. To spoil my film, Amy accepts what she has done is wrong, and therefore accepts death. As shown on the left, the main setting for my film inside a living room. I have chosen this location primarily because, in terms of the context, this is where Amy lives, and therefore feels the safest. While it doesn't look like it initially, Amy's living room is acting secondarily as her jail cell. Like most psychopathic prisoners, it is best to put them far away from other, in their own environment, similar to how Lecter's cell (above) looks different to the other cells in Baltimore State Hospital. This is why, as mentioned above, Amy is not being kept in a psychiatric ward as she feels safer in an environment which she recognises.

In terms of directing the film, I am emulating the work of Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), Sherlock episode The Final Problem (Talalay, 2017), directed by Rachel Talalay, and Arrow episode Kapiushon (Tancharoen, 2017), directed by Kevin Tancharoen.

In the Arrow episode, to the right, Oliver Queen is held captive and being exposed to torture by series antagonist, Adrian Chase. This is in order to break him, and work out why he is who he is. As Queen is already quite a broken man, given by the scars and wounds on his



body, he should be quite easy to break mentally for Chase, a master tactician and manipulator. But Queen's almost sociopathic resilience to emotion keeps him in check until Chase asks him why he likes to kill people. Queen's response is to scream 'Because I like to' back at Chase. This almost breaking point is what I am aiming for from Amy in my film- a moment where Amy gets rid of her psychopathic façade, becomes human again, and admits defeat.

As previously mentioned, in the Sherlock episode, to the right, Sherlock finds out that he has a younger sister named Eurus, who is a psychopathic criminal mastermind, who takes control of the prison which is holding her, and almost manipulates Sherlock into killing either his brother Mycroft, or his best friend John Watson. A particular scene



which I am taking reference from comes from the end of the story where Sherlock finally reaches Eurus mentally, just to bring her back down to earth. This is influential for my film because I am wanting to develop a relationship between Amy and Madison without completely revealing that they are related until the very end.

A combination of both Arrow and Sherlock, even though it was released before, is Silence of the Lambs (Demme, 1991). This is because it combines the psychological torture and manipulation of Arrow with the sibling-esque relationship established in Sherlock. The scene which I am looking at is when Clarice and Hannibal first establish

their quid-pro-quo relationship. By this, Hannibal reveals clues about Buffalo Bill when Clarice reveals more about her past. This evidence supports the fact that Hannibal is a sociopath as he is manipulating Clarice into doing what he wants her to do.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, there are many ways that psychopaths and sociopaths can be, and have been represented in modern cinema by spies, or people with troubled backgrounds. The most common, and conventional, way is by giving them a troubled backstory, similar to that of James Bond and Sherlock Holmes, which can almost motivate them into making the dark choices, which go on to make them what we see them as in cinema.

Personally, I do have to admit the approach I wanted to have is slightly different to the outcome. By this I mean that it is seen more as a thorough analysis of psychopaths and sociopaths first, and a film and character analysis second. While this could be perceived as a positive thing, I wanted something different, so I could help bridge the gap between films and TV shows I have talked about during this dissertation, with psychopathy and sociopathy. This would then shape my approach to my graduate film project, which is about how the modern world, and in particular family members see psychopaths they have effectively grown up with.

If I were to do an essay, or paper on this topic again, I would take a different approach. By this I mean, I would start working backwards, from my project, or anything that I would be working on. This way, it would be easier, and I wouldn't have to rely on doing more research than I would have had to- even though, I thought I was fine for researching in this essay.

I feel like my work does confirm what many people already knew about psychopaths and sociopaths, especially relating to their representation and perception in cinema. If anything, it is more of an insight for me into how I can adapt and interpret certain films and TV shows into what I feel is the best version of a psychopath for my graduate project, even if the topic might not have been completely interesting to me.

In terms of what's next, I am fully focussed on my graduate film project. As mentioned above in the previous chapter, my graduate project is about a mother who, as a psychopath, comes to accept her death, with help from her daughter/psychologist.

Recently I have become quite intrigued with psychopaths and sociopaths, with regard to how they are perceived and interpreted, especially as a filmmaker. Making my graduate project, I now want to emulate those that have been significant to me- e.g. Eurys Holmes, Hannibal Lecter, and create my own interpretation of these common disorders and tropes.

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