



A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE SOCIETY'S CRIMINAL PRODUCTS: A PSYCHOPATH AND A SOCIOPATH FROM THE FILMS *JOKER* AND *TAXI DRIVER*

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ABSTRACT:

*The research paper comparatively analyzes the personalities of the central characters, Arthur Fleck from the film *Joker* as a psychopath and Travis Bickle from *Taxi Driver* as a sociopath in relation to Society, Crime, and Deviance. It further explores the factors that causes anti-social behaviour and provokes their criminal intentions. In a broad sense, the research attempts to investigate the tensions between the working class and society: how deviant behaviour is fueled into the working class by the society, and to what magnitude it becomes dangerous in motivating the individuals to conduct a criminal offence. The study compares both Travis Bickle and Arthur Fleck based on their social conditions, lifestyle and analyzes their behavioural pattern to discover the distinct features that result to their mental instability (turning one into a sociopath and the other into a psychopath). It finally aims to inspect the societal circumstances and motivating factors to identify the vulnerability of the members of working class and their likeliness to engage in crime.*

KEYWORDS: *Crime, society, anti-social, psychopath, sociopath*

INTRODUCTION:

Crime is a popular and prominent aspect of a society. It is defined as an act that violates the law in a certain community. Crime occurs when a society's social control fails. There are various motivating factors and reasons behind crimes and they differ from one another. The intention to commit a crime also differs from one individual to other. The study explores the social, environmental and behavioural patterns of the protagonists of the films *Joker* and *Taxi Driver* to analyze and identify the underlying factors that result in criminal behaviour. The first section of the study examines the influence of sociological forces and the pressure exerted by the dominant class over the vulnerable individuals of the working class. It explores the active influence that the society has on the vulnerable individuals through



its strict and subjective norms and the tensions between the social classes that result to crime and deviant subcultures. Arthur Fleck in the film *Joker* is one of the vulnerable individuals of the working class who is subjected to child abuse, rejection and economic deprivation that shapes and motivates him in committing crime. The second section of the study examines the passive influence that the society has over the same individuals of the working class, but the character Travis Bickle in the film *Taxi Driver* is a victim of his own perception and beliefs that he builds about the world which is constructed by the society in which he lives. He is also subjected to rejection, corruption and injustice, but in an indirect way unlike Arthur who directly gets to face these problems. It further analyzes the major reasons behind Travis's criminal intentions. The comparative study identifies various key features that are involved in the crime committed by a psychopath and a sociopath.

CRIME, WORKING CLASS AND PSYCHOPATHY:

Crimes are frequently associated with the working class rather than the strong and affluent social class, with the impoverished being represented as causing the most harm to society as a whole. It is difficult for people of the working class to attain their goals, especially through legitimate means as it is easily obtained by the dominant social class. When there is a lack of opportunity to attain their goals through legitimate means, individuals try illegitimate ways to obtain it. Some go beyond this by completely rejecting the conventional pursuits by becoming the social outlaws. The elements that influence such acts are geography, lifestyle and economic circumstances. The key sociological forces that result in criminal behaviour are corruption, alienation and lack of opportunity. They have a great impact in turning these individuals into criminals. Individuals with the deviant behaviour are highly vulnerable in committing crime. In the film *Joker*, the protagonist Arthur Fleck, becomes a victim of these sociological forces that motivate him in committing murders. Arthur being a member of the working class, dreams of being a renowned comedian, but subsequently faces rejection and ridicule which seeds the deviant behaviour in him. The movie begins with a radio broadcast about the Gotham city being piled up with ten thousand tons of garbage each day which is a strike, making the nicest sections of the cities look like slums. This paints a clear picture on the strife between the social classes. In this city, Arthur is working as a party clown in a company where one day he gets beaten up by a group of boys in the street for no reason when he was promoting a music album with the sign board. In this brawl, the promotion board that Arthur was holding gets broken into pieces and his confession about the event is not even considered by his employer, where the damage is compensated from Arthur's salary. He feels that no one pays attention to him. He literally tells this to the social worker in a scene stating that, "I don't think you ever really hear



me” (Arthur: *Joker*, 2019). He thinks that he is not taken serious by anyone. Arthur suffers from a medical condition where he cannot control his laughter when he gets emotional. In a scene, Arthur travels back home where he attempt to make a kid laugh using gestures, but the boy’s mother will resist Arthur from doing so, dropping harsh words. This will make him emotional evoking his laughter. This disturbs her and she will later know that he has such disorder when Arthur gives her the card stating his medical condition. Despite having such physical and mental difficulties he will try his best to attain his goal of being a stand-up comedian and will be good to all. He lives in a mansion with his mother. She is the only person who reflects his kindness. Arthur at first tries to conform to the societal norms, but continuously faces problems for being good to everyone. In a scene his co-worker Randall will offer him a gun for his safety, but Arthur will deny it in the beginning by saying that, “I am not supposed to have a gun” (Arthur: *Joker*, 2019). This shows his civil mindset. One day in a hospital, he is assigned to put up an act among the child cancer patients. The gun accidentally slips out and he gets fired from his job. He convinces his employer stating that it is his prop, but he learns that Randall has lied to his employer that Arthur had tried to lend a gun from him. This is where Arthur’s shift takes place. He is left with no means to make money. When he travels back home in a train, he shoots three young men out of rage who will first tease a woman and then batter Arthur for laughing continuously without knowing his mental condition. This becomes the city wide news where the suspect is considered a clown. This is the first stage where he commits a second-degree murder. Thomas Wayne being a member of high social class will mention this incident and state that he is running for mayor to clean Gotham city. He will state the working class as clowns. This will slowly stimulate an insurgency among the public. Being battered and alienated by the society and thrown out of job, he tries to pursue his dream. One day he participates in a stand-up comedy show and struggles with his mental condition. This will be ridiculed in a famous TV show by a person named Murray whom Arthur had admired for life. This agonizes him and turns him furious against Murray. One day he finds a letter written by his mother to Thomas Wayne, where he learns that he is the son of Thomas Wayne. This completely breaks him into pieces. When he attempts to meet Thomas, he will find that his mother is the reason for his mental condition. He will find this when he goes through her hospital records. He had been adopted and tortured by her boyfriend in his childhood. This mental injury and trauma has made his life more tragic. In this situation he is entirely left with nothing, where his last hope turned to be futile. His only source of kindness, his mother, has now known to be the only reason for his pathetic condition. So he kills her by smothering her with a pillow. This is the second stage where he commits a first-degree murder by intentionally killing his mother. He then kills Randall for betraying him. He finally takes part in the Murray show as a guest, dressing up as a clown. This is the stage where Arthur



vents out his thoughts openly as a monologue stating that the society is constructed according to the rules set by the dominant class and will clearly state that comedy is subjective. This is because Murray makes fun of Arthur's medical condition, but in reality it is not so funny. Arthur continues to say that people like him will not be given importance even if they are dead and shoots Murray. His voice can be seen as the voice of every working class individual who is subjected to lack of opportunity, alienation and corruption. There will be scenes where the social worker will say to Arthur that the government has ordered to close these counselling services stating that the city is in poverty. But there are TV shows like Murrays comedy show, Royal theatres running even when there is poverty. This shows how corrupted the society is, where it resists the needs of the working class and soils the needs of the dominant class. Arthur becomes the symbol of a new deviant subculture because of these sociological forces. This clearly emphasizes that the society is the main reason for Arthur turning into a criminal. Psychopaths are more harmful and lack conscience, empathy and guilt. Arthur is considered as a psychopath because his personality is shaped by psychological and social factors. Arthur's mental condition is not the only reason for him being the criminal. The primary motivating factors of Arthur's criminal behaviour are alienation, lack of opportunity and corruption. His mental condition is the secondary factor. Therefore, Arthur is not the reason for the upheaval of the deviant subculture rather it is the result of the society's pressure exerted on him and the vulnerable individuals. Hence, making criminals the products of the society.

“Certain strains or stressors like discrimination, child abuse, and economic deprivation increase the likelihood of crime” (Agnew, 1992).

The general strain theory by Robert Agnew states how sociological factors play an active role in increasing the likelihood of crime and criminal behaviour.

CRIME, WORKING CLASS AND SOCIOPATHY:

In contrary to the film *Joker*, *Taxi Driver* revolves around the character Travis Bickle who is identified as a sociopath who is shaped by his own beliefs of the society. He is also a member of the working class, a twenty six year old army veteran with ASPD and insomnia working as a taxi driver at night to fight his illness. Travis does not have any rigid goal like Arthur; rather he considers his life to be meaningless and pretends to become like someone that everyone likes to become. He is an existential hero who is passively influenced by the society. The film portrays New York's night life more meticulously: bars, porn theaters, drug peddling, prostitution houses, gambling etc. Travis is more concerned about this, where he wants this situation to change. Being an anti-social person, he finds it



difficult to socialize with people. In a scene, he will try to build a conversation with a porn theater employee, where she will resist talking to Travis. His perspective about the world is shaped and pictured in a negative way. He even builds a racist idea thinking black people as dangerous and violent, where his cab gets attacked by a group of Afro-American boys one day. He even shoots a black person who tries to rob in a store. This is where he commits a second degree-murder. This shows how his perspective gets shaped by the society. The majority of what he has experienced paints the societal stereotype in his mind. He meets a woman named Betsy, and considers her as the woman who needs to be rescued from this society as it is filled with filth and dirt. He dates her, but unfortunately she leaves him as he takes her to a porn movie. This draws a negative picture of him in Betsy's mind. He could not stand this rejection and tries to reconcile, but the attempt gets futile. Finally, he judges her as he does the entire society, stating that she is also a part of it. Travis being more judgmental appears to be narcissistic and prone to hypocrisy, because he considers the city as a place filled with filth and dirt, but his home is similar to the city. In a scene, Betsy clearly states this by saying that, "he is a walking contradiction" (Betsy, Taxi Driver). One night, a twelve-year-old girl gets into his cab and asks him to take her away, but quickly a man pulls her out and throws money in the cab to forget this incident. This makes Travis think that there is a price for everything in the city which is entirely prone to corruption. One day, one of his customers opens up to him that he is planning to murder his wife with a 44 magnum pistol for cheating him. This is where Travis gets motivated. In order to seek people's attention, he decides to kill Palantine who is running for the president post. Betsy is working under him, so Travis thinks that he is a father figure to her. Killing Palantine will turn her attention towards him. So he buys guns and plans to shoot Palantine, but the attempt ends unsuccessful. This failure makes him think of Iris, the twelve-year-old girl who is forced into prostitution. He think Iris is the one who needs to be rescued and goes on to kill three men who are responsible for this situation. This is the place where he commits a first-degree murder. Finally, he turns to be a hero and his perspective about the world changes. He finally drops Betsy at home, where she looks him as a hero with the same eyes that viewed him negatively. Sociopaths are similar to psychopaths, but they find difficulty in making decisions, they are less calculative and less harmful. Travis is considered as a sociopath because his personality is completely shaped by his environmental and social forces. Therefore, Travis being a person shaped by his own beliefs about the world is passively influenced by the society where he is also subjected to rejection like Arthur. Travis is not pressurized by the society as Arthur, but he was not able to stand the ongoing corruption and injustice. So he turns his purpose into becoming a saviour being an outlaw.



CONCLUSION:

Both Arthur and Travis being members of the working class, have certain similarities and dissimilarities. This helps to clearly understand the motivating factors and reason behind the criminal behaviour. In Arthur's case, societal factors such as corruption, alienation and lack of opportunity are the main reasons for his criminal behaviour. Though Arthur is considered as a psychopath with childhood trauma, his criminal intent is mostly soiled by the sociological forces. His mental illness is a secondary factor. This makes Arthur a victim of the society which considers him a criminal. In Travis's case, it is quite opposite. He is shaped by his own beliefs about the world. He is passively taken by the sociological forces like corruption, rejection and injustice. His beliefs turn him against the society which finally praises him as a hero unlike Arthur who is considered a criminal who is actively influenced by the society. This emphasizes the fact that society plays a major role in influencing and motivating crime both actively and passively, which results in the growth of deviant subcultures. This study can be taken further in examining the deviant subcultures based on crime and society.

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