

The history of popular culture film studies essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The media surrounds us everywhere we go, constantly molding the perspective of our consumerist society. The population is being exposed to an artificial sense of reasoning that the majority of victims absorb through the entertainment of their television set. Canadians have eagerly adopted one of "America's favorite pastime" consuming on average 1500 hours of television a year. Considering this statistic, a large quantity of that time is devoted towards watching one's favorite action packed television series. A few of these series include Dexter, The Wire, The Shield and The Walking Dead. Each one of these popular shows has similar traits, they are violent and they are associated with law enforcement. Certain characters on these popular media shows are looked upon with great envy and acknowledged for their heroic acts of violence. Viewers are exposed daily to the ideology that law enforcement television series associate violence with heroism. The constant exposure has sculpted popular belief on how to interpret that particular role. Law enforcement has been depicted on television since the late 1940s. Police officers were first portrayed doing their righteous duties of serving the public and upholding the law. Things have now changed but the parameters of what defines a hero have remained the same. Only recently has heroism been depicted as being associated with extreme acts of violence. These actions are regularly associated with a set generic character types who tend to strive within this particular ideology; anti-heroes, rogue law enforcement agents, informants and characters who've adopted the "Robin Hood" persona. Traditional heroic characters can be traced back to mythological times. Their stories may differ but they all consist of three main developmental stages; the departure, the initiation and the return. Joseph Campbell an American mythologist, was responsible for identifying these

<https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-popular-culture-film-studies-essay/>

three stages as well as the different steps that are associated with each stage. When combined, these stages relate directly to the developmental path incorporated in the rise of heroic characters. It would be very unlikely for all of the steps to occur in the same episode, but several are easily identified to assist with the acknowledgement of the character's role as a hero. Dexter is currently one of the most popular police drama television series. It will be the show's second last season, currently holding more than 3 million viewers. The series focuses on the life of the main protagonist Dexter Morgan, a blood spatter analyst for the fictional Miami Metro Police Department, who leads a secret life as a serial killer. The character derived from an anti-hero series of novels written by Jeff Lindsay. The television series depicts Dexter Morgan as an ingenious blood spatter analyst who, in his spare time, is a serial killer who preys on other murderers. Ironically, Dexter follows a unique code that alleviates him from the moral consequences of his massacres. Dexter can only kill people after finding evidence that they are guilty of murder. Additionally, he must dispose of all evidence, including the body of his victims, so he never gets caught. In many of the episodes the main character is appraised for his killings, because they are viewed as righteous and justified acts. In order to avoid death row, Dexter must protect himself by keeping his identity serial killer separate from his professional identity and workspace. Due to his number of murders, he eventually exposes himself to his younger sister Debra Morgan played by actress Jennifer Carpenter. Debra Morgan is a high ranked police chief employed at the same Miami Police Department as Dexter. Due to their very close relationship, both siblings work together throughout the remainder of the series to prevent Dexter's arrest and acquire his victims. In almost every

<https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-popular-culture-film-studies-essay/>

episode the character clearly demonstrates his gruesome ritualistic approach to murdering his victims. First, Dexter incapacitates them with a powerful sedative and then lays them down on a secure base, generally resembling an operating table. He uses multiple layers of transparent saran wrap to secure his victims to the foundation where he then stabs them in the chest, puncturing their vital organs. Once Dexter's victims are deceased, he follows his premeditated code-- being very meticulous and removing any evidence that could jeopardize his identity. In cooperation with his sister and the misuse of Miami Metro lab equipment, Dexter locates a secure dumping place for his victims. Dexter's "heroic edge" overrides the calculated monstrosities of his criminal activities. Even though he only kills murderers, he does so to satisfy his craving and blood-lust. As Dexter's sister told FBI's special agent Frank Lundy when Dexter's bodies are discovered, "You don't kill that many people because it's a chore but because you enjoy it". There are references to Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey within all the episodes of the Dexter series. The code of ethics that Dexter abides by was taught to him by his father Harry Morgan, who is deceased in the series. Harry makes appearances throughout the series either as flashbacks or as Dexter's mentor commenting and giving advice on all the problems. Harry is a direct representation of Campbell's "supernatural aid", who appears "consciously or unconsciously" as a "guide and magical helper". Similar correlation are found within each and every episode. In the season finally of the second season, Dexter is left with no choice but to murder his criminal ex-girlfriend Lila, due to her obsessive behaviour with him and his family. This character is someone who has feeling for him and can relate to his murderous addiction. This makes it very difficult for Dexter to get rid of her. Tempted by

her attractiveness and their common interests, Dexter would have to ignore her attributes in order to avoid being led astray from his quest of killing her. This step is a reflection of the "Initiation" stage of Campbell's Hero's Journey known as the "women as the temptress". The American police drama *The Wire* was set and produced in the streets of Baltimore, Maryland. It was first premiered in June 2002 and ended March 2009, comprising of sixty episodes. The series was a very crude depiction of the illegal activities that took place in and around the city. The show depicted a different facet of organized crime starting with the drug trade and the seaport system to the city government/ bureaucracy school system and the print news media. The shows portrayed a wide variety of characters made up of law enforcement, drug dealers, drug addicts and informants. The underlying meaning of the series was to demonstrate how institutions have an effect on individuals and how we all play our part within society. The series depicts a multitude of graphically violent scenes. Many of these scenes are instigated by the Baltimore Police Departments' (BPD) leading informant, Omar Little, portrayed by Micheal K. Williams. Characterized as the vigilante of the ghettos of Baltimore, he is a stick up man who is notoriously famous for robbing drug dealers and menacing those involved in organized crime. Due to his violent nature, Omar is a well-known by the habitants of his neighbourhood. The series depicts several scenes where he is heavily respected because of his positive influence on the community. Not only does he play the role of an Informant, Omar is also considered the "Robin Hood" of *The Wire*. Omar's violence and anger towards the drug trade and those involved in organized crime goes unnoticed because he is viewed as the Robin Hood of *The Wire*. Throughout the series he and his associates make

<https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-popular-culture-film-studies-essay/>

their living robbing drug dealers, disposing of their products and redistributing their wealth amongst the community. As he clearly describes during his testimonial when he was asked what he did for a living he responded " I rip and run, I rob drug dealers." During the second season, Omar is required to fulfil a promise he had made with the BPD. This situation required him to testify in open court. His testimonial made guaranteed that the antagonistic character by the name of " Bird" would be sent to jail for life on account of murder and drug dealing. During the courts appeal the judge was made aware of Omar's history of violence but chose ignore his actions due to his testimonial. The judge went as far as to promising him a " get out of jail for free card" as a sign of her appreciation for his testimonial. At that moment, the lawful representative revered Omar for his valiant actions and as appose to classifying him as a criminal. Before achieving his goal of incarcerating then enemy, he was forced to confront them head and expose himself in open court. Once " Bird" had been tried and convicted, Omar achieved what Campbell would refer to as " The Ultimate Boom". This stage is achieved when the goals of the quest have been accomplished. All the trial and tribulation that he experienced prior to this event were done to " prepare and purify" him in order for this event to take place. In Omar's case, he would be relieved of no longer having to carry the responsibility of avenging the death of his lover. He would also witness the suffering of those who have inflected tremendous amount of pain and anguish upon his community. A very large proportion of police dramas introduce a character who does not fully respect his superiors and other authoritative figures. A lone warrior willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done. The American police drama known as the The Shield focuses on an entirely corrupt police

<https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-popular-culture-film-studies-essay/>

Strike Team. The series ran a total of seven successful seasons from 2002 to 2008. The show is loosely based on the real events of the Rampart Division police scandal. The series concentrates on an experimental division of the Los Angeles Police Department. This division consists of a highly trained four man anti-gang unit, who perform unlawful and murderous activities to maintain justice within the streets of L. A. The series' main protagonist is a character by the name of Vic Mackey portrayed by Micheal Chiklis. Similar to Dexter, Vic's brutality generally remained directed towards criminals whom he feels are deserving of such punishment. His victims consist of rapists, drug dealers, pedophiles and mass murderers. He justifies his law breaking malicious attacks because they helped solve crimes of even greater importance. The series pilot introduces the rogue agent as an aggressive, street savvy police officer. After making drug seizures, Vic is asked to speak with his police chief regarding a detainee. This detainee has accused Vic of using excessive force during a prior arrest. He responded " I don't recall any pliers... I do remember the eight dime bags of pure H we nabbed you with", expressing his denial in an arrogant sadistic fashion. He would then be excused after convincing his superior that these types of men would do " anything to stay out of jail." Due to his successful vigilante like approach, Vic left unquestioned by his superior and free to continue his corrupted police work. He would then be confronted by a news reporter commemorating him for valiant police work in apprehending a local heroin dealer. This step is part of the " Initiation" stage referred to as " The Road of Trials", representing the tasks a hero must go through in order to commence his transformation. The protagonist of the action packed television drama series, The Walking Dead goes through a number of transformational procedures. The AMC program <https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-popular-culture-film-studies-essay/>

stars a deputy sheriff by the name of Rick Grimes, who awakens from a coma surprised to find a world overrun by flesh-eating "walkers". Unable to live with the thought of abandoning his family, Rick is successful in finding his wife and son. The series becomes associated with law enforcement after Rick reunites with his family and begins to establish their own colony picking up stragglers along the way. Because of Rick's law enforcement background, he becomes the designated peace keeper and is responsible for maintaining the clan's health and security. As a character with a history as a police officer, Rick possesses the leadership skills to ensure the safety of his group. Based on the stages that Joseph Campbell outlined, Rick's character quickly experiences the "Initiation" stage. As the characters are presented with many life or death crises, acts of violence are ultimately acts of heroism. Rick is experiencing a challenging "The Road of Trial" by being presented with tasks and ordeals that he must overcome for the sake of his clan. Even though the series *The Walking Dead* is not considered a Traditional police drama. It portrays the life of a law enforcement agent in a post-apocalyptic world, utilizing his police tactics to maintain the health and safety of his community. There are extreme acts of violence in the majority of the episodes. At many points, Rick is involved in life or death situations, which are depictions of "The Road of Trial". The drive of Rick's character is to save and maintain the safety others. The violence Rick engages in, is his attempt to complete the tasks and tests presented by "The Road of Trial". There is a situation in the third season when Rick is presented with a very difficult situation. Another character in his group, Hershel, becomes infected with the virus by a bite to his leg. Rick is required to act very quickly and without discussing the options with others involved, Rick brutally removes Hershel's

<https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-popular-culture-film-studies-essay/>

leg in a successful attempt to stop the spread of the virus. The moralistic view of the TV drama is not the same comprehension as we have today. The four police television series I evaluated demonstrate how particular character types are able to commit vigorous crimes and be seen as a heroic figure. If these scenarios were to be brought into a real life context, the character portrayed in these series would either be incarcerated or classified as wanted felons. The TV scenarios that I reviewed are delivered as entertainment, in consequence shaping our perception. A recently published study by Arizona State University psychologists found that regular viewers of CSI and similar shows actually were more skeptical of scientific evidence than non-viewers." Those who now attend jury duty are surprised to hear terms like the findings are "similar to" or "consistent with" as opposed to advanced scientific terminologies. This analysis demonstrates the influential effects of how police television series manipulate their audiences' perception of modern day law enforcement. With the regular exposure to our favorite police drama television series, our perception of what qualifies as a hero undergoes similar manipulation. The association between violence and heroism is an influential factor when police shows choose to venerate a particular character. Whether it be Dexter, Vic, or Omar, using one's best judgement to define the validity of their perceived heroic status is recommended to all.

Sources:

"The Hero's Journey Outline." <http://www.thewritersjourney.com>. N. p., n. d.

Web. 5 Dec. 2012. ." One-quarter of your Life watching Television."

Interesting Facts About Canada :: Canada Facts. Canada Facts, n. d. Web. 5

<https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-popular-culture-film-studies-essay/>

Dec. 2012. . Santaularia, Isabel. " Dexter: Villain, Hero or Simply a Man? The Perpetuation of Traditional Masculinity in Dexter." Atlantis - Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies. N. p., n. d. Web. 5 Dec. 2012. .

" TV Versus Reality : Forensics : Investigation Discovery." Investigation Discovery : Investigation Discovery. Investigation Discovery, n. d. Web. 5 Dec. 2012. .

" Heros Journey : Summary of Steps." Maricopa Center for Learning and Instruction | Maricopa Center for Learning and Instruction. Maricopa Community College, n. d. Web. 7 Dec. 2012. .