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Accuracy of Antisocial Personality Disorder in Hannibal Lecter

Often, in films based on real, legitimate people or ideas, characters are often adjusted to exaggerate, emphasize, or better fit the characteristics of the film. *The Silence of the Lambs* is a film, produced by Gene Hackman and Orion Pictures, based on the novel by Thomas Harris, in which a young FBI trainee, Clarice Starling, is subject to the daunting task of confronting and interrogating the infamous serial killer, Hannibal “The Cannibal” Lecter, in an attempt to acquire information on how to find and stop another notorious serial killer, Buffalo Bill. Through some research and comparison, Hannibal Lecter’s mental disorder, antisocial personality disorder (APD), will be applied to the question ‘is it accurate?’ That is, the portrayal of Lecter’s mental disorder will be assessed to determine if he depicts an accurate representation of a possible victim of antisocial personality disorder, based on criteria and statistical analysis. The term average is based on some statistical research done, which found that typically, antisocial personality disorder is found in men, and that often, this mental disorder leads to high risk of criminal activity, although both of these criteria are not an absolute necessity to be considered one with APD. This may occur statistically, but the victim must also own the characteristic criteria in which antisocial personality disorder is diagnosed. To analyze the accuracy of Hannibal Lecter’s character to an APD victim, comparisons will be made between the movie and

research in the topics of interactions, symptoms and characteristics, crimes, treatment, and even gender.

First and foremost, both Lecter's interactions and his characteristics were accurate in the portrayal of someone who live through antisocial personality disorder. According to a study done by Robert Hare and Stephen Hart, which showed comparisons between the criteria of APD diagnosis between the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Behaviors IV and the ICD-10, criteria to diagnose patients with antisocial personality disorder include "evidence of stealing, lack of remorse, impulsive, manipulative, irritable, and shows inflated and arrogant self-appraisal" (Hare et al. 392). Evidence of this was shown in Lecter's character on multiple occasions. Lecter's tendency to steal and make impulsive decisions is shown when he steals a pen from an FBI director to unlock his shackles and proceed to kill one of the police officers. His manipulative and irritable sides are shown after he becomes upset with another man in jail, Multiple Miggs, for inappropriately throwing his semen at Ms. Starling as she is leaving. That night, Lecter proceeded to hiss things at Miggs. While it was not seen in the movie and was not proven, Jack Crawford, Clarice's boss, explains that Miggs cut his own tongue off and swallow it, which killed him. Whether or not this may be true, the possibility of the situation shows the intensity that Lecter's manipulation can reach, and even if it's not, the hissing of such things at Miggs shows an attempt at manipulation either way. His ability to do so probably came from his background as a psychiatrist, but the manipulative, impulsive nature of the act shows his traits as one with APD, and he simply justifies his actions to Clarice Starling by saying he did it because of what Miggs had done to her the day previous. According to another study by S. P. J. van Alphen, it was seen that the manipulative and impulsive traits were some of the most prevalent criteria seen in antisocial personality disorder patients. From the occurrences of these

interactions along with the simple characteristics that Lecter shows, it's already a quite accurate representation of one who suffers from APD. However, characteristics alone are not necessarily a complete determination of why he resembles an average APD victim so well, so other applicable ideas such as risk of criminal activity should be assessed.

Hannibal Lecter is depicted as a notorious serial killer known for the cannibalistic mutilated state he leaves his victims in. While obviously those who suffer from antisocial personality disorder don't necessarily commit murder or even crimes in general, there is a major risk of criminal behavior found in those that suffer of this mental disorder. A study operated by Moore included 118 participants with antisocial personality disorder concluded that over 90% of those participants had histories in which they were involved in criminal behavior (Moore et al., 76). While the majority of those cases did not include murder as their crime, it can still be seen that there is a massive risk of criminal engagement in those who have APD. In another study performed by Safa Maghsoodloo, Arash Ghodousi, and Taghi Karimzadeh, data concluded that over 70% of patients who had committed some sort of crime but had not yet been diagnosed with any mental disorder showed enough signs to be diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder, while only 10% of non-criminals in the study showed enough criteria to be diagnose with the disorder. From this, it can again be seen that those with antisocial personality disorder run a high risk of criminal participation. Lecter's portrayal as one who has committed murder, let alone any sort of crime, is one that can accurately depict him as a victim of APD, although it is not necessary to distinguish him as so. The idea simply exposes the viewer to the idea that his troubles with APD led him down a path of criminal behavior, an idea that is also comparable to the gender stigmas associated with antisocial personality disorder.

The choice of Thomas Harris to use a male for the character particular to Hannibal Lecter, and for Gene Hackman to keep this idea consistent, coincides with the stereotypical idea that APD is a more masculine mental disorder. The reason for this labeling may come from the criteria used to diagnose such a condition. With the enhanced amounts of aggression and higher criminality rates associated with antisocial personality disorder, the reasons for the pigeonholing of this illness as a more masculine one may be found. Guy Boysen and his staff conducted a study relating gender to the amounts of patients with APD and found that the number of men with APD outnumber the number of women with the disorder by a ratio of 3:1 (546). While the idea that a victim of antisocial personality disorder does not necessarily need this characteristic arises again, the use of a male as Lecter's character simply adheres to the stigma of APD being a more masculine found disorder. Again, the use of statistics was used in the film to better fit the role of Lecter to the typecast of antisocial personality disorder victims in the real world, as was done with the portrayal of Lecter as a criminal, even though it must be clear that APD patients are not necessarily male, nor a criminal.

Aside from these aspects which render Hannibal Lecter as an extremely accurate representation of a real-world APD patient, there can be some counterclaims made to reason the inaccuracies of said representation. First, sufferers of antisocial personality disorder generally lack the qualities of compliance and perspective taking when working with or associating with other people. In the film nevertheless, Hannibal Lecter seems to display both of these attributes, and does so almost completely naturally. In a study performed by Kaasim Fatih YAVUZ, it was shown that APD patients have a severe lack of perspective-taking levels in confrontations with others (1792-1800). Logically, this would mean that an accurate representation of antisocial personality disorder would show Lecter simply unable to see any opposition to his views.

However, in the movie, *The Silence of the Lambs*, the interrogations of Lecter by Clarice Starling show otherwise. For example, when Clarice first meets Lecter and they begin to talk about Ms. Starling's past, which includes some post-traumatic stress from some childhood events, Lecter seems to see Starling's perspective that she finds dark pasts redeemable through certain actions. While Lecter's view is clear that he finds his history to be incurable, he understands what Clarice is trying to do. Not only does he comprehend the idea, he recognizes it before Clarice even tells him and then proceeds willingly in the task of helping her. Here, the idea of compliance is introduced. Research done by Yann Le Corff and Jean Toupin explains that those who suffer from antisocial behavior lack the ability to comply in most, if not all, situations, and the study was applicable in at least 87% of the cases (32). This relates to the suggestion of inaccuracy in APD exposé because Lecter's willingness to assist Starling and the FBI in their quest to seize Buffalo Bill is almost transparent.

Another counterclaim that could be made to reason the inaccuracy of the Lecter's portrayal of a victim of antisocial personality disorder is the idea that Hannibal Lecter is able to easily process the emotions and facial expressions of Clarice Starling during their confrontations when real APD patients have major difficulty in doing so. According to a study done by Bingren Zhang, those with antisocial personality disorder have difficulty reading the facial expressions of others, doing so shallowly or lacking any real thought (1-6). This would mean that Lecter should carry out conversation showing almost no regard to emotions of others. In the film though, during their first interaction, Clarice seemed to show signs of fear and horror when she spoke to Lecter about her past, and Lecter could see it. This is known because he digs at that fear with questions, trying to see if and how he can manipulate Clarice during that first collaboration

between the two. This backs the idea that he does not show an accurate portrayal of one who suffers from antisocial personality disorder.

While these counterclaims show some good reasons of inaccuracy, there is information to rebuttal those claims effectively. To explain the reasoning for a lack of APD character showing in Lecter, the confrontations between he and Clarice may have acted as a sort of treatment as they went along, causing Lecter to show some signs of a natural, healthy individual. Research done by Marcus Evans explains the idea that treatment is difficult for many antisocial personality disorder patients because of their ability to manipulate those they interact with (143). However, as the interrogations go on, Clarice seems to have Lecter's games figured out, and she is able to avoid any sort of manipulation that Lecter tries to establish upon her. Because of Starling's ability to avoid manipulation, these interrogations act as treatment to Lecter, which may cause him to show signs of a healthy individual such as compliance and perspective-taking.

In addition, the idea that increases in age seem to cause APD symptoms to decrease could also explain why there are some aspects of Hannibal Lecter's character that cause him to adhere as a well individual. A study done by Katherine Holzer and Michael Vaughn explained that the reasoning behind a lack of prevalent APD symptoms in older patients is due to an antisocial "burnout" (291). Hannibal Lecter is depicted as an older individual, so this study relates that age to the reason for Lecter's ability to possibly recognize facial expression and once again comply. Once again, the counterclaims may provide some useable information, but these ideas give reason to disregard those counterclaims.

Because of Lecter's accuracy in portrayal as what could be determined as an average antisocial personality disorder patient, the 'treatment' that Clarice provides him could be an undermining idea in the film. Antisocial behavior aspects vary from victim to victim, so general

care-takers may not be so effective. Rather, care-takers should be those who can specialize to the specific needs of the patient to counteract their specific behaviors. Overall, this paper primarily provides necessary information to see that Hannibal “The Cannibal” Lecter is a solid depiction of an APD victim based on criteria and statistics. With this in mind, it must be considered that the film has some possible undermining ideas about antisocial personality disorder as far as stereotypes and possible treatments. It also goes without saying that often times producers of films and movies based on real world ideas and stories put workloads of effort in making the characters of their films match those real-world aspects.

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