

## Exploring Madness and Creativity through a Case Study on the character of “The Joker” in “The Dark Knight”

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to explore the notion of madness and creativity through a single case study. The case selected for the purpose was the character of The Joker from the film, The Dark Knight (2008). The concept that madness and creativity are somehow linked has been around for many years. We have tried to explore this link through this research. Seeming, by all accounts, to be the most malicious, unhinged, and flat out maniacal killer, The Joker is the primary antagonist of Batman. Thematic analysis of the case revealed the following themes: agent of chaos; embodiment of control and manipulation, behind the façade of chaos; always works with a plan; enjoyed watching the world burn; ingenious and proficient planning skills; fluidity in plans; and sociopathic personality. On the basis of the present study we can say that madness is neither necessary, nor sufficient for creativity.

**Keywords:** *Creativity, Madness, Single Case Study, the Joker, Thematic Analysis*

**M**adness can be defined as a continuum of behaviors typified by either abnormal patterns or behavioral patterns. The abnormality may manifest as infringement of social norms. This infringement can include an individual turning into a threat to themselves or to others. However, all acts of such violation may not necessarily be characterized as insane. In the contemporary times, madness is usually used as an informal unscientific term for indicating mental unsoundness. Another informal usage of the term madness or insanity is to symbolize something which is considered to be peculiar, passionate or extreme; this usage could be in a positive sense as well. The term may also be used to discredit or condemn certain ideas, convictions, values, aspirations, outlooks, or advocates of particular positions in political or religious matters. In modern times, medical practice avoids using terms such as madness or insanity in favor of diagnoses of specific mental disorders.

The way in which every society views madness varies and their classification also differs from one another. For example, in ancient Athens madness was known as melancholia, and in

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modern Evangelical churches it is referred to as spirit madness. Even today in New York City one can spot people selling cures for madness in the botanics of the Dominicans.

According to the Greeks, madness is a result of the physical imbalance of the four humours (black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, blood). They believed that these bodily fluids controlled a person's health and temperament. Thus, an imbalance in them led to temperaments such as melancholic, choleric, phlegmatic and sanguine, and their attendant illnesses. The Chinese on the other hand were of the view that madness is a consequence of an imbalance of the primal forces of yin and yang. The Jewish perspective on madness is reflected in the Old Testament which emphasized moral failings and divine intervention as the root cause of madness. All these cultures categorized the mad in a varying manner. While some believed in marginalizing and excluding the mad from the mainstream society, the others viewed them as reflections of prophecy and illumination.

There was a differentiation made between the naturally born idiot and the lunatic, first by the Romans, and later by the medieval medicine and society. While it was believed that naturally born idiots were untreatable, the lunatics were thought of as being. However, the legal treatment given to them both, and the moral stigma attached to them was evidently analogous. With the evolution of the concept of hospital in the early Middle Ages, special institutes for the mad were established in Baghdad as early as A.D. 705. By the late Middle Ages, this tradition had further expanded to areas such as Spain and Western Europe. By the Renaissance, madness became a reason for pride, because of the perception that one's abnormal behavior was an indication of normality in a world gone mad.

The nineteenth century placed its emphasis on somatic definitions of madness. Griesinger (1868: iii) wrote: “The so-called mental illnesses are found in individuals suffering from brain- and nerve illness”. This view became widely accepted in Western psychiatry by the 1890s. The increased somaticization of madness in the twentieth century, came at a price. More and more symptoms began to be related to specific neurological deficits such as dementia. Thus, the idiot and the lunatic, often housed in the same state institution through the nineteenth century, were by the early twentieth century seen as manifesting quite different social and medical causes (Trent, 1994).

Erving Goffman, R.D. Laing and Thomas Szasz, proposed a re-examination of the social causes of madness. This encouraged alternative perceptions of madness in the 1960s. Goffman (1961) was of the view that the asylum was just an oppressive way of societal regulation. Another viewpoint was that madness was a creation of both, the patient and the society (Szasz, 1961). Madness was seen as a healthy consequence of sick social or familial structures by Laing (1965). The rising patient empowerment movement of that time, because of the contribution of these models, gave rise to the idea of disability beyond the medical model of rehabilitation. People became suspicious of the very idea of madness, as they

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thought that madness instead of being a reason for diagnosis was becoming a reason of stigmatizing.

The idea that human’s mental diversity is a continuum came as a response to the older model of psychiatric disability. The term neurodiversity is used to denote a defining quality of human beings. It was coined by Harvey Blume in 1998. He stated that “Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment?” Nowadays rather than viewing autism as a deficit, it is increasingly being seen as an alternative mental state, and even a favored one. Autism in contemporary times has become a sign that an individual who is self sufficient is capable of challenging and surmounting the notions of social. It rejects the notion of an autistic as someone who is severely impaired and needs special attention and facilities. It just states the autistic as a being who is differently enabled (Murray, 2012).

Foucault follows the advancement of the idea of madness through three periods: the Renaissance, the "Classical Age" (the later seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries) and the modern experience. He states that during the Renaissance, the mad were depicted in art as people possessing a kind of wisdom (having knowledge about the limits of our world). In literature, they were portrayed as people who uncovered the difference between what men really are and what they pretend to be.

Foucault asserts that in the mid-seventeenth century, in the profundities of times of the period rationality, the logical reaction to the mad, who until then had been relegated to edges of the society, was to detach them from the mainstream society entirely by restricting them, along with prostitutes, vagabonds, blasphemers and the like, in recently made establishments all over Europe. He referred to this process as the "the Great Confinement."

The societal forces that drove this confinement process according to Foucault include the requirement for extrajudicial machinery for getting rid of the unwanted, and the desire to regulate unemployment and wages. He contends that the theoretical difference between the mad and the rational was in a way a result of this physical separation. This confinement made the mad conveniently accessible to medical practitioners, who began to view madness as a natural and worthy object of study, and then as an illness to be treated.

The modern experience for Foucault started at the end of the eighteenth century with the establishment of places dedicated exclusively to the confinement of the mad under the supervision of medical practitioners. These new establishments were the result of the amalgamation of two aims: the new goal of healing the mad who could not afford the required care at home, away from their family, and the old purpose of confining the unwanted in order to safeguard the society. These distinct aims were soon forgotten and the establishment became the only place where therapeutic treatment could be administered. Foucault views these ostensibly more enlightened and compassionate treatment of the mad in

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these modern medical institutions as equally atrocious and controlling, as their treatment had been in rational institutions earlier.

Creativity is a process whereby something novel is invented which is also of some value at the same time. This creation could be anything ranging from new ideas, jokes, literary work, painting, musical compositions, solutions to complicated problems, to a scientific discovery and a lot more. It has been argued that both creativity and creative problem are indispensable for the advancement of humanity, as well as for its existence (Taylor, 1964; Taylor & Barron, 1963). Logic, neuroscience and brain research, have all offered strong evidence that in order for creativity to occur, it is imperative that an interaction between the emotional processes and cognition takes place.

The classic psychoanalytic view of an ever going conflict between fantasy and reality have caused many to believe that creativity involves the darker side of human nature. According to Rank (1932/1960) and other psychoanalysts, this conflict is an ideal state of human nature. They theorized that the basis of our species progress has been our collective creative imagination. Our conscious mind is intrinsically creative by nature, and it guides the unconscious mind to act in ways that ultimately structures and decides the nature of our final products.

Rogers (1954) defined creativity as “the emergence in action of a novel, relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life.” Creativity involves: openness to new experiences and ideas that contradict our beliefs; an internal locus of evaluation; and the confidence and nerve to pursue the ideas which one believes in and the goals that one considers to be important, even when external factors might be discouraging. When acting creatively, individuals attend to their “inner voices”, their personal beliefs about what is right or worthwhile, rather than being influenced by contrary views (Treffinger, Young, Selby & Shepardson, 2002).

The thought that creative people are additionally a little mad has been around since the very early days of humanity. In ancient Greece, Plato noticed the erraticisms of writers and dramatists, and Aristotle observed that some extremely imaginative people were also depressed. This connection has persisted in the contemporary times; from Robert Schumann hearing voices guide his music to Sylvia Plath sticking her head in an oven to Van Gogh cutting off his ear.

Shelley Carson, a Harvard psychologist and author of the book *Your Creative Brain*, says that “creativity and mental illness share a process called cognitive disinhibition. Cognitive disinhibition describes a failure to keep useless data, images, or ideas out of conscious awareness. This failure may make schizotypal personalities more prone to delusional thoughts or mental confusion; on the flipside, it could make creative minds more fertile.”

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Cognitive disinhibition is a piece of Carson's larger model of “shared vulnerability” between creativity and psychopathology. The idea here is that whether a person becomes creative, mentally unsound, or a combination of both is influenced by the occurrence and intensity of various cognitive factors.

What is essential to keep in mind when considering the "shared vulnerability" model is that two people can share behavioral and biological vulnerabilities and yet not be alike. This is the reason why not all creative people are mentally unsound, and why not every mentally unsound person is creative. "It's not a one-on-one correspondence," says Carson. Actually, according to her most creative people don't display severe mental problems at all; it's just that the eminent illustrations stick to our minds.

A legendary artist like Vincent Van Gogh famous for both his paintings as well as for cutting off his ear, has been a greater source of fascination for the public over the years, rather than a gentle mannered artist like Claude Monet. Likewise, more people are captivated by the poet Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide by placing her head in an oven, when compared to her colleagues who were equally talented and prolific, but more stable.

The amount of studies done on tracking mental instability amongst creative artists is far greater than that done in ordinary fields of work. For example, few people would be interested and would make an effort to examine the effect a baker's mood swing has on the quality of the loaves of bread he produces thereafter, but a study done on the association between the composer Robert Schumann's manic episodes and his music received significant attention (Dr. Sybil Barten, professor emeritus of psychology at Purchase College).

At the same time mood disorders, predominantly bipolar disorder and chronic depression have been found to occur among creative people at a disproportionately high rate. Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison, a professor of psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, concluded in her study "Touched With Fire: Manic Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament" that among distinguished artists the rate of such depressive illnesses is 10 to 30 times as prevalent as the population at large.

There is no doubt that there are plenty of gifted artists, musicians, writers, dramatists and performers who are not wavering on the edge of insanity while pursuing their craft. But, those who do not have a sound knowledge of the subject argue that in order to be creative, it is a must that a person has elements of madness in him. Ample theories up till now have talked about why research uncovers such associations.

One theory is that affective disorders have a genetic basis and that the presence of the same gene might also produce artists. Geneticists are of the view that a bipolar episode triggers extreme swings of emotion by stimulating brain activity. As a result of these extreme swings, the brain may become more accustomed to synthesizing incompatible thoughts. This process

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whereby dissimilar or contrasting emotions are restructured in a new form, might be the essence of creativity.

The theory also states that the “high” of the creative process is stimulated by the manic phase. "The idea that mania has an intrinsic relationship to creativity is based in part on retrospection of what it feels like to be in a state of manic excitement, a state that feels like manic power, euphoria, endless energy and optimism," said Dr. Barten. "On the face of it, these feelings might well be those that characterize the process of creation."

Another theory according to Dr. Barten is that because both madness and creativity have their origins in the unconscious, artists appear to be mentally perturbed. She added that anxiety provoking thoughts and covert desires such as sexual fantasies, which are normally repressed by people, are expressed by the artists without any regulation in an unfiltered form, thus, in a “mad” form.

### ***Researcher's Position***

Classifications of madness by many societies around the world are viewed as something that intrudes human activity. This intrusion can be good or bad, and the classifications can have a number of connotations and can be interpreted in various ways. What madness really comprises of is constantly fluctuating in any given society at any given time in the history. The symptoms and their connotations are ever changing. Madness might be considered as the antithesis of what is called normal. Similarly, it can be referred to as a state that surpasses the normal, or may be associated with other categories of infirmity and pain (Gilman, 1982; Porter, 2003). The idea of intrinsic divergence is central to all explanations of madness.

Creativity is not only the outcome of the collaboration between cognition and personality, but is also the result of the interaction with the circumstances. The presence of irrelevant or negative feedback hinders an individual from following their instincts and idea of what is best. This unwanted or inappropriate external evaluation is reduced and an empathetic understanding is communicated in a psychologically secure environment. This encourages one to put their all into the work, thus allowing the true self to surface in the creativity sphere. It also permits and promotes the freedom of symbolic expression (Rogers, 1954), experimentation, playfulness, and exploration. In order for all this to happen, the environment must be receptive to the creative process, resources must be present, new thinking should be presented rewards, and queries and challenges must be promoted.

Madness is a subjective word, it could mean any number of things, but if taken to mean psychological disturbance in general then madness and creativity are likely not "closely" linked. The far more probable outcome is that highly-creative people that additionally suffered from psychological issues made for more fascinating stories than creative persons that were psychologically normal. This creates an issue of confirmation bias.

## THE PRESENT STUDY

The subject of my study on madness and creativity is the character of The Joker from the film, *The Dark Knight* (2008). Seeming, by all accounts, to be the most malicious, unhinged, and flat out maniacal killer, The Joker is the primary antagonist of Batman. In every sense he is the polar opposite of Batman, be it his appearance or his principles. The Joker's physical appearance is a perfect converse of Batman. While Batman in order to terrorize criminals employs dark colors such as gray and black, The Joker relies on bright colors, such as purple, green, and orange.

The Joker's schemes are capricious and inestimable. He does not crave money and is hence not tempted by it. He does things according to his own twisted sense of logic. The only thing he desired to achieve was the ability to instill chaos into the city of Gotham. He wanted to implant anarchy by whatever method required, in order to prove that organization is pointless and futile. His exceptional intelligence was his greatest weapon against Batman, the police, and the District Attorney's office.

The combination of the Joker's fluid plans and his extensive understanding of people is slightly alarming. He knows precisely how to push at an individual to get the response he covets. From a desperate cop to a mob leader to Batman himself, the Joker understands immediately how they all work, what motivates them, and why they do what they do. He then takes that knowledge and uses it for his own plans. The Joker is not simply some crazy criminal that the Batman needs to bring down. He is a social virtuoso and an expert manipulator who almost pushes Gotham to the brink of its collapse. The Joker denounces the idea of plans, which is marked with his famous saying, *"Do I look like a guy with a plan?"* And yet he works to a plan. What is different is that his plans are fluid. He can change them in an instant because he understands people well enough that he can manipulate them into his new plan. Even while one "plan" fails, the Joker already has another one in the process.

Throughout the movie, the Joker was all about chaos. He was not in it for the money or power; he just wanted to cause chaos. This is something that he practically preaches to everyone he meets. The Joker loves chaos, so much that he claims to be the embodiment of chaos. However, the truth is that the Joker is an embodiment of control and manipulation. The Joker does not live for chaos. Rather, he lives for control under the guise of chaos. From the very beginning, the Joker had everything and everyone under his control. He knows just how to manipulate someone to get them to do what he wants them to do while they are thinking that they are doing it for their own reasons. He is a man beyond the traditional values and customs of the society. He does not believe in complying with the society's demands and is a man with his own set of unique ideologies and principles that are based on his subjective truth and are not a result of the society's conditioning. Joker treats people like they are part of a game. If he succeeds in transforming their values and beliefs, then he triumphs. He illustrates how fast the so called moral people give up their principles when

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placed in the right situation. For The Joker, life is not about money, recognition or vengeance; it is about manipulating humans and controlling their will power. That is his game.

### METHOD

#### Qualitative Research

It is surprisingly difficult to define what qualitative psychology is. For one thing, it has many different constituent parts. It is impossible to suggest one characteristic which invariably, unassailably and essentially distinguishes qualitative from quantitative methods. Consequently, it is preferable to identify the range of features which typify qualitative research methods though by no means are all of them characteristic of all types of qualitative research methods. The following are the five features which Denzin and Lincoln (2000) list as major defining characteristics of qualitative research:

- *Concern with the richness of description* - Qualitative researchers value data which is rich in its descriptive attributes. So they tend to favour data collection methods which obtain detailed, descriptive data such as that produced by using in-depth interviewing methods, focus groups and the taking of detailed field notes.
- *Capturing the individual's perspective* - Qualitative methods emphasise the perspective of the individual and their individuality. The use of rich data gathering methods such as the in-depth interview and focus groups encourage this emphasis on the individual's perspective.
- *The rejection of positivism and the use of post-modern perspectives* - Qualitative researchers tend to reject *positivist* approaches (i.e. those based on a conventional view of what science is – or *scientism*) though qualitative and quantitative researchers both rely on gathering empirical evidence which is an important aspect of positivism. The post-positivist view argues that, irrespective of whether or not there is truly a real world, a researcher's knowledge of that reality can only be approximate and that there are multiple versions of reality. In qualitative research, relatively few researchers believe that the purpose of research is the creation of general stable knowledge.
- *Adherence to the postmodern sensibility* - The postmodern sensibility, for example, reveals itself in the way that qualitative researchers are much more likely to use methods which get them close to the real-life experiences of people - in-depth interviews, for example.
- *Examination of the constraints of everyday life* - Some argue that quantitative researchers overlook characteristics of the everyday social world which may have an important bearing on the experiences of their research participants. Qualitative researchers tend to have their feet more firmly planted in this social world, it is argued. So, for instance, in qualitative research reports much greater detail is found about the lives of individual research participants than would be characteristic of quantitative research reports.

#### Single Case Study Method

Case studies can consist of a detailed exploration of a single case or they can involve the comparison of a series of cases. Yin (1994) identifies three reasons for choosing a single-case design. First, the case may constitute a critical test for a well-formulated theory. Second, it



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may represent a unique or extreme case that is of intrinsic interest to the researcher. Third, the case in question may be revelatory in the sense that it was previously inaccessible. Single-case studies are, therefore, either of intrinsic interest to the researcher or they provide an opportunity to test the applicability of existing theories to real-world data.

The single case selected for the purpose of the present study was the fictional character of “The Joker”, from the movie “Dark Knight.” The Joker is the main antagonist of the film *The Dark Knight*, the second film in *The Dark Knight* trilogy. He is director Christopher Nolan and screenwriter David S. Goyer's interpretation of the comic book character created by Jerry Robinson, Bill Finger and Bob Kane in 1940 as the archenemy of the superhero Batman.

### *Thematic Analysis*

Thematic analysis is the analysis of what is said rather than how it is said. It can be recommended as an introduction to qualitative research because of its relative lack of complexity. Quite simply, one's data are examined in order to identify relatively broad themes which summarize the content of the data, hopefully, fairly completely.

Thematic analysis, even in its recent more structured forms, is a useful technique which is fairly accessible to novice researchers. As a form of qualitative data analysis it is less demanding than the other methods of qualitative analysis discussed in the next few chapters. The main reason for this is that the process of data analysis is not intimately linked to particular areas of theory as it is with other methods. In some respects, thematic analysis is most similar to grounded theory, though it does not involve the same level of sophistication in data collection and theory building. However, properly done, thematic analysis has quite a lot in common with these other analytic methods.

Thematic analysis is a useful analytic approach in circumstances in which:

- The data collection is complete;
- There are no strong theoretical perspectives to drive the analysis – though Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that there are two forms of thematic analysis whereby some are driven by pre-existing theoretical concerns and others are driven by the data;
- The data consist of detailed textual material such as interviews, focus groups, newspaper articles and the like;
- The data are rich in the sense of being full of detail and information such as will occur in in-depth interviews and materials taken from the media, etc.

## **DISCUSSION**

First, we begin with a brief description of all the characters of the movie that play a prominent role in the thematic analysis discussed below. Beginning with the protagonist of the movie – Batman is the alias and second identity of the billionaire Bruce Wayne who uses his wealth and power to protect the city of Gotham, thus becoming the Dark Knight. The Joker is the antagonist of the movie and the archenemy of the superhero Batman. Harvey Dent was the newly elected district attorney of Gotham City. He was supported by his

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girlfriend, Rachel Dawes who was the assistant district attorney. She was also the childhood friend and love interest of Bruce Wayne. Harvey Dent along with Rachel’s assistance had successfully locked up many of the city’s corrupt officials and mobsters. Hence, he came to be known as Gotham city’s “White Knight.”

Alfred Pennyworth was the butler in service of the Wayne family. Post the demise of Bruce Wayne’s parents, he became his guardian, confidant, and above all his best friend. James Gordon was the Lieutenant who is later promoted to the post of Commissioner. He had comforted an 8 year old Bruce Wayne at the night of his parents’ murder, and the two had worked in alliance ever since Bruce became Batman. According to Batman, Gordon was one of the few honest police officers of the city. Lucis Fox was the research head of Wayne Enterprise and later becomes Batman’s armorer. Janet Surrillo was the judge responsible for hearing the trials of all the criminals captured by Dent and Gordon.

The first theme that comes up is that the Joker was an **agent of chaos**. Throughout the movie, the Joker was all about chaos. What made the movie so captivating was that while Batman was continuously trying to figure out the Joker's motive, the Joker did not seem to have any motive at all. He wasn't tempted by money or power; all he wanted to do, was cause chaos. It was this motto of his life that he went around preaching everyone he met. He used this to bring down Harvey Dent’s downfall. The Joker loves chaos to the extent that he describes himself as an embodiment of it. This title seems to suit him so well that it makes the audience look at him and think of him as a crazy person. But, in reality, the Joker is not crazy, at least not in the way we assume him to be, that he is a psychotic killer who is in it for the thrill of chaos. There is another layer to the Joker, hidden behind his theory of chaos and his insanity.

Thus, the second theme that comes up is that the Joker is an **embodiment of control and manipulation, behind the façade of chaos**. The purpose of the Joker’s life is not to cause chaos, but to be in control of everything. It can be seen since the inception of the movie that the Joker was in control of everything and everyone. He knows exactly how to make others do what he wants, by manipulating them in such a way that they think that they are doing it for their own reasons. From the minute we are introduced to the Joker’s character, it can be seen that he knows how to get under someone’s skin; how to make them do things he wants and which buttons to push in order to make a person snap. For example, in the opening scene of the movie “The Dark Knight,” a mob-owned bank in the city of Gotham is robbed by the Joker and his accomplices. This scene is followed by a planned sequence conceived by the mastermind Joker, wherein one by one, the accomplices kill each other, leaving the Joker alone with all the money who successfully escapes from the crime scene.

Another illustration of The Joker’s mastery in controlling and manipulating people can be seen whenever the Joker is telling someone the story behind his facial scars. The story varies from person to person. One might attribute this variation to the Joker’s insanity and his desire to cause chaos. But, in reality the reason behind the different versions of the story behind his

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scars is, that the Joker in order to get the desired responses from his victims tailors his story according to the situation and the victim, so that he can be in control of both. For example, the first time we hear the story of his past is when Gambol, a famous mobster is shooting pool at his headquarters. The mobster falls prey to the Joker’s plan when some thugs claiming to have killed the Joker come in with the body. The moment the mobster turns away from the body post inspection, the Joker jumps up and holds a knife to his face. The Joker tells a plausible story of how he received his facial scars as a result of having an abusive father and says his catchphrase “*Why so serious?*” before murdering Gambol. The second plausible explanation of the scars is put forth by the Joker at the fundraiser hosted by Bruce Wayne for Harvey Dent. There in search of Harvey Dent, he comes across his girlfriend Rachel whom he grabs and pulls a knife to her face telling her a different version of the story about how he got his scars. In this version, the Joker claims that his wife was scarred by loan sharks and that in order to make her smile he took a razor to himself. But, instead of appreciating his sacrifice, his wife left him over it. Eventually Batman arrives and confronts the Joker and fights off the thugs. In retaliation the Joker drops Rachel out of the window. However, she is saved by the Batman. The two end up slamming into a taxi very much alive.

The third theme that comes up is that **Joker always has a plan**. An interesting fact that the audience comes across repeatedly throughout the movie is that the Joker denounces the idea of having plans. This is reflected in his famous saying “*Do I look like a guy with a plan?*” Yet, the irony of the situation is that the Joker always has a plan. During the course of the movie, Batman is threatened by the Joker to reveal his true identity, or else innocent people will lose their lives every day. Judge Janet Surrilo finds a Joker card among the stack of conviction papers of the mob members that are rounded up for indictment by the police on receiving information about them from their Chinese accountant Lau. Meanwhile Lieutenant Gordon discovers traces of three DNA’s from the Joker’s card belong to Commissioner Loeb, District Attorney Harvey Dent, and Judge Surrillo. The Lieutenant treats this as a threat on the lives of those three people, and hence begins to make preparations for guarding them. Unfortunately, the Lieutenant fails in the case of the Judge and Commissioner Loeb.

The fourth theme that is highlighted during the movie is when Batman is sharing his worries about the Joker with Alfred at the bat-bunker. Alfred compared the Joker’s attitude to a jewel-thief that he had encountered during his stay in Burma. Alfred tells Batman how the jewel thief could not be caught or bullied as he stole for sport rather than profit. Thus, Alfred summarizes the situation as follows - “*Some men just want to watch the world burn.*” This is what the fourth theme reflects i.e. The Joker was someone who **enjoyed watching the world burn**. This scene is followed by the Batman standing alone on the top of a skyscraper, listening to police transmissions, when the transmission is interrupted by a crime being reported in the Joker’s voice. Lieutenant Gordon and Batman immediately reach the crime scene. There, Batman retrieves a shattered bullet from the wall of the crime scene, while Gordon discovers a newspaper clipping of the Mayor that the Joker has left as a clue for his next victim. After a lengthy and complicated process Batman is successfully able to trace the

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fingerprints of a man named Melvin White from the bullet. Melvin White turns out to be a man who lives over the parade route that the mayor was suppose to take the next day.

The parade that was a funeral service for Commissioner Loeb was being monitored heavily by security in case the Joker was to attack the Mayor. Batman reaches White’s apartment just as the Mayor begins his eulogy. He finds out that the honor guards from the ceremony have been tied up and their uniforms have been taken away. Just then a timer goes off, opening the shutters and distracting the security outside. It is then revealed that the honor guards stationed outside are actually the Joker and his men who open fire on the crowd. Once again it is seen that the Joker’s plans are a puzzle outside the box. The government officials are so concerned and worried about how the Joker will attack the Mayor that they fail to apprehend that the ceremony has been infiltrated by the Joker and his men. Thus, the joker succeeds in creating havoc and escaping from the scene amidst the crowd running around in wild panic. In this chaos Lieutenant Gordon is apparently killed.

With so many innocent lives being taken, the Batman is left with no other choice but to turn himself in, and so he asks the D.A. Harvey Dent to call a press conference. At the press conference, Dent tries to calm down the agitated and angry crowd. But, when he fails to do so, he turns himself in pretending to be Batman and agrees to be arrested. Dent during his meeting with Rachel at his holding cell discloses that he had preplanned the whole incident in order to set himself up as bait for the Joker. The procession of cop cars is forced to take a detour due to a burning truck when taking Dent to the central holding in an armored truck. This alternative exit ramp that the cops decide to take makes them an easy target for the Joker. This is followed by a long sequence wherein the two parties (Joker and his men, and Dent and the cops) are trying to get to each other, with Batman entering the scene just in time to save Harvey Dent. However, ultimately, Batman’s refusal to kill his enemies almost brings his downfall, but before the Joker can kill him, Batman is saved by Gordon and the SWAT team. Gordon then divulges that he had staged his death in order to protect his family. The Joker and his cronies are thus eventually captured by the police. The fact that the Joker chose to kill Batman in a situation that would be so heavily monitored by cops, proposes that the Joker had full intentions of getting caught.

The fifth theme that can be seen is the Joker’s **ingenious and proficient planning skills**. An illustration of the Joker’s ingenious planning and ability to manipulate is seen when Batman questions the Joker about Harvey Dent’s disappearance. We see Batman exhibit a level of belligerent violence that is never seen by his character before. The Joker challenges Batman that he can prove that every average man, when placed in the appropriate circumstances becomes just as savage and evil as he is. Here, the Joker tries to mess with Batman by getting inside his head, but when he fails to do, he decides to take an alternative approach. He drags in other people, namely Rachel, to prove his point. Inability to find Dent’s location, makes Batman impatient. As a result he continues to beat up the Joker till it is subsequently revealed that Rachel has been kidnapped as well, and that Batman only has the option of saving one out of the two – either Dent or Rachel. The Joker delivers his master stroke here as he inflicts

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one of his trademark moral dilemmas on Batman i.e. Batman is forced to take a life in order to save the other. Thus, breaking his rule of never killing anyone.

Even though Batman continues to beat up the Joker out of his frustration and inability to locate either Dent or Rachel, the Joker doesn't give in, as he is a masochist who is not afraid of pain or death. The Joker mocks Batman and explains “*You have nothing you can threaten me with.*” It is at this point that the sixth theme i.e. the **fluidity in Joker's plans** comes to forefront. The Joker brilliantly plans his escape from the police and tricks Batman by giving him the wrong addresses of Dent and Rachel. Being well versed with the human psyche, the Joker knew that Batman's priority would be to save Rachel, and so he gave him Dent's address stating it to be as Rachel's, thus leading to Rachel's death. On the other hand, Harvey Dent ends up burning the right half of his face while trying to escape from the warehouse where he had been imprisoned by the Joker. Though his life is saved by Batman, he ends up being nicknamed as “two-face.” It is uncertain whether the Joker had plans of bringing Dent's downfall all along or whether it was a last minute improvisation, but his plans seemed to be building up as the events unfolded. This was the Joker's unique selling point and the major reason behind his success. Whenever something did not work out the way as planned by him, he would merely amend his actions to suit the situation. He always has a backup plan being processed simultaneously. He is capable of modify them easily according to the need of the hour as he is well versed with the human psyche and knows how to make people do what he wants.

Meanwhile, Wayne's accountant Reese appears on a television news channel claiming to know the real Batman's identity. Just as Reese is about to disclose the truth, the Joker calls the show asking the accountant to not ruin his fun. The Joker promises the people of the Gotham city that if the accountant is not killed within an hour, he would blow up a hospital. This triggers panic amongst the police who rush to protect the accountant, and evacuate all the hospitals of the city. The Joker did not really wish to kill Reese; the sole purpose of his using this threat was to get the hospitals evacuated so that he can meet his next target. He meticulously plans his entry into Harvey Dent's room wearing a nurse's outfit, and tries to instigate him by saying that following legal laws or codes of ethical conduct are meaningless, as no matter how much we try to plan out everything in our lives, we all live and die arbitrarily. This makes complete sense to Dent given the situation; after all, Rachel's death was sudden and made no sense, and despite all his efforts to bring order to Gotham, he himself had eventually become a victim of chance. Thus, saying the right thing at the right time, the Joker takes full advantage of the situation by letting Dent loose and handing him a pistol. Harvey Dent, who is now known as Two-Face, begins to believe that everything in the world should be decided on the basis of chance. Bent on seeking vengeance, Dent decides to settle the fate of the Joker's life on the basis of the flip of a coin, to which the Joker agrees, as he feels it is fair. Although the result of the coin's toss is not shown in the movie, it obviously lands in the Joker's favor as the next scene shows the Gotham General Hospital blowing up in the back as the Joker leaves.

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The seventh theme is about the Joker’s **sociopathic personality** which is displayed by he acts that follow. After burning up the hospital, the Joker reappears on television, making the kidnapped GCN reporter Mike Engle to read out his plans forcefully. He announces that the Gotham City now belonged to the Joker, and anyone who did not wish to follow his wishes and command could leave the city, however they would have a hard time doing so. He also alludes to the fact that something big was going to happen that very night. Thus, Batman requests Fox to track the Joker’s location using his cell phone sonar technology and inform him. Meanwhile, the bridges meant for exiting the city have been wired with explosives as two large ferries are trying to escape from Gotham due to the Joker’s threats. While one is occupied by innocent citizens, the other is packed with criminals that Harvey Dent and Commissioner Gordon put away. As the two boats are sailing off, they lose all power and are intervened by the Joker’s voice on the loudspeaker. He apprises the passengers that the detonator present on each boat is for the explosive on the other boat, and as part of a social experiment, one ferry must destroy the other by midnight, or else both the ferries would be destroyed by the Joker. This not only triggers a lot of panic and chaos on both the boats, but also causes the passengers to do a lot of soul searching about morality.

Meanwhile Fox is able to track the Joker’s location and informs Batman. Batman on his way the building notifies Commissioner Gordon about it. The Joker decides to destroy both the boats as he is disappointed that none of the passengers would stoop down to his level. However, he is just stopped in time by Batman. As the two struggle over the detonator, Batman throws him over the edge of the building; however, the Joker is saved by Batman before he can hit the ground. While hanging from the building, the Joker admits that Batman really was incorruptible, however, he divulges his real plan to be bringing the downfall of Gotham’s White Knight i.e. Harvey Dent.

Batman heads off to find Harvey, while the SWAT team captures the Joker. By the time Commissioner Gordon reaches the location, he gets a call from his family informing him of their captivity by Harvey Dent. When Gordon arrives at the scene, Dent tells Gordon that he is going to make him suffer just as he did. He grabs hold of Gordon’s young son Jimmy, and flips a coin to decide his fate. However, Batman arrives at the scene in time and requests Dent to not go any further with his plan. In the process of tackling Dent, Batman and Dent fall off the building, leading to Dent’s death.

When Gordon goes down to check on Batman, Batman expresses his disappointment and laments over the fact that in the end, the Joker had won. By successfully corrupting Harvey Dent and turning him into a malevolent person just like himself, the Joker had brought about the downfall of the best of them. Batman decides to take the blame of Dent’s death on himself in order to uphold the symbol of hope and faith that Dent had given to the people of Gotham City and to prevent the Joker from winning in destroying the city’s peace.

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### *Concluding Comments*

Thus, the Joker can be called a representation of the Dionysian, and underlying savage nature of humanity. However, unlike a typical villain that merely represents the Dionysian, the Joker wants to prove to the people of the Gotham city that underneath all their pretence of being moral and civilized, they are all just like him. His actions throughout the movie reflect his attempts to provide evidence for his theory that people act morally and stay civilized only as far as the society’s rules and order are in their favor and benefit them. He believes that lawful morality only exists at a superficial level and that humans will always choose against it in case it poses a threat to their personal aspirations.

There is no doubt that The Joker possesses aspects of both madness and creativity, but there is no ascertaining whether his creativity stems from his madness or vice versa. A major reason for this uncertainty is that the movie does not provide any background information about The Joker’s life. We know nothing about his family, his childhood, or any part of his previous life and personality, and therefore, we cannot conclude where a particular trait stems from. What probably makes the character of The Joker so fascinating is not just that he is mad and creative, but also the rationale behind his mad acts and the inconceivable ways in which he works to prove them right. Thus, we cannot say that creativity and madness are interlinked, but, subjects that have elements of both madness and creativity, make more fascinating cases for sure.

Today, though creativity is considered a fluid concept, madness, which is now referred to as mental illness or mental disorder is defined in terms of very strict criteria’s as set forth by the DSM IV-TR (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). The DSM IV-TR lays down the causes and symptoms of various mental disorders, and only when one fulfills the set criteria’s, is one categorized as a patient suffering from that particular mental disorder. However, our present study in which we analyzed the character of The Joker, clearly shows that both madness and creativity cannot be defined in strict terms as they are very fluid concepts whose meaning and interpretation might vary from one person to another. Also, how these terms are perceived is majorly affected by the cultural context in which they occur. A behavior that might be considered to be abnormal in a particular cultural setup may be considered very normal in the other. For example, it is a common practice at a Muslim shrine in the state of Maharashtra (India), to toss off newborn babies from the side of a 15 meter tall temple, as it is believed that this would strengthen the child, give it good luck, courage and intelligence. Thus, it would be incorrect to define fluid concepts like madness and creativity in stringent boundaries.

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