

Crime and Punishment: The Characterization of Raskolnikov

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the complex psychology and personality of Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov, the protagonist in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel "Crime and Punishment." Using the grounded theory method, Part-1 of the novel is analyzed to break down Raskolnikov's thoughts and behavior into distinct categories. The findings reveal Raskolnikov as a reserved, introverted, and poverty-stricken young man with tendencies of schizotypal personality, demonstrating avoidant and socially anxious traits. He is also shown to be aggressive, demanding, and prone to paranoid thinking, indicating a narcissistic nature. The paper identifies the protagonist's dual nature and detachment from reality as significant attributes, leading to the conclusion that Raskolnikov exhibits a complex mix of moral and criminal tendencies. The study offers an in-depth characterization of Raskolnikov, shedding light on his unique personality traits and exploring potential psychiatric implications. The grounded theory approach allowed for a rich and detailed analysis, contributing to a deeper understanding of the central character in "Crime and Punishment." However, further research from a psychiatric standpoint may provide additional insights into Raskolnikov's psychological complexities.

Keywords: *Fyodor Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov, Grounded Theory, Schizotypal Personality, Avoidant, Socially Anxious, Aggressive, Narcissistic, Dual Nature, Detachment, Psychological Analysis*

Fyodor Dostoevsky in his renowned novel Crime and Punishment published initially in 1866 is set in Russia, Saint Petersburg screens a young impoverished law student Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov who succeeds in murdering a pawnbroker. The novel features the complex psychology of Raskolnikov and his crime. Our protagonist is an intelligent, handsome man yet his complex thinking process and personality leads his fate to his doom. Raskolnikov is a young handsome man. He is quite taller than average men and is currently in his early twenties. Raskolnikov is highly impoverished and is in great debt to his land lady. Here, only a Part-1 of the novel is taken. The psychology and personality of Raskolnikov and his criminal behaviour is broken down into miniature pieces.

The Part-1 of the novel features Raskolnikov from the very start of a misadventure. Raskolnikov lives in a rented apartment which more closely would resemble a closet because of its tiny size. Raskolnikov is dreading with poverty and is mostly 'delirious', feverish, and despises company of any sort. The first part along with many character introductions and events shows Raskolnikov's plan and constant preoccupation with his

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crime ideation of the pawnbroker- Alyona Ivanovna. He makes his acquaintance with Semyon Zakharovich Marmeladov a drunkard he meets at the tavern as he stops for a drink. Marmeladov talks for a long time with Raskolnikov where his persistent disinterest in the company of any person is seen as well. Raskolnikov's crime ideation is further strengthened as he very conveniently learns that Lizaveta (step-sister of Alyona Ivanovna) would be leaving the house at 7 o' clock in the evening and that the pawnbroker would be alone that day when he would attempt the murder.

When he finally arrives at his site for his crime, Raskolnikov works his plan. Although, all along the way to the pawnbroker's house, he constantly muttered to himself as was his habit from his continuously depleting mental health. He succeeds in killing Ivanovna with an axe. He violently attacks her with the weapon and makes his way further into her apartment. To his unfortunate site arrived Lizaveta who ends up getting killed in his rage. Raskolnikov escapes the site due to his sheer luck.

All along the first part, Raskolnikov shows off his mind and thoughts. His personality and perceptions can too be seen clearly. An attempt has been made to decode him and if such personality traits and thought processing is common among criminals of the real world.

METHODS

The study involved the method of grounded theory. A brief description of the method is given below.

Grounded Theory

The method has been in use for long now. As the name suggests, grounded theory works on grounded data as in the data and its interpretation are authentic each other. The methods of grounded provides the researcher a set of strategies that are unique and give ample opportunity to the researcher to study a phenomenon rigorously in qualitative research (Smith et al., 1995).

Grounded theory methods provide the researchers a set of procedures that are logically consistent for data collection and analytic procedures. The aim of grounded theory is the construction of theory as it is an inductive strategy for analysis. This means that the researcher may start from an individual data or interview and generalize the findings to other similar sets of data. The researcher develops the theory by staying in direct and constant touch with the data. This helps the researcher to formulate the memos and hypothesis frequently while being in the analytic process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The method of grounded theory can be used in qualitative research anywhere (Smith et al., 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These can be used from highly interpretative structured data to data that are exploratory and explanatory in nature. "The interpretative tradition relies on knowledge from the 'inside'. That is, this tradition starts with and develops analyses from the point of view of the experiencing person" (Smith et al., 1995, p. 10).

Grounded theory is different in this sense from other research methods as the positivist assumptions consider research from the 'outside' base. The emphasis is more on the observer's concerns and the interpretation of the research participants whereas in grounded theory there is an insider view which makes the research more holistic in terms of actions, feelings, attitudes, and experiences of the research participant that are seen more human and not as means of data collection for personal interests (Smith et al., 1995).

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Collecting data in GT. The researcher in grounded theory is involved in the data collection process in a sense that there is simultaneous participation of data collection and analysis of the data at the same time which is the beauty of the form of research. Such an involvement helps the researcher to make efforts in the analysis process of the collected data but it also helps them to foster their efforts in the required direction and take control of the data (Smith et al., 1995). This way the researcher can keep a keen eye on what is an important data what is not. This tracking helps the researcher to build a better theory than solely relying on numerical procedures of research (Smith et al., 1995).

The data collected from grounded theory is rich and detailed in nature because the researcher can make out newer topics that are to be explored. The hall mark of the grounded theory procedures is that the theories are derived directly from the data and not some preconceived notion, biases, or concepts from the researcher's side. They are authentic and crude information (Smith et al., 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Coding the data. The first step in analyzing the data collected is coding which is the process of defining what the data are all about. Unlike in quantitative research where codes refer in preconceived codes (all planned), in qualitative GT, codes are created directly from the data that the researcher studies (Smith et al., 1995). This is an important step in the data analysis process as the codes would lead directly to the future theory of the researcher. Line by line coding helps the researcher to make accurate codes that keep on getting generalized till the last of formation of the theory (Smith et al., 1995). Line by line the data familiarizes the researcher and helps resolve any doubts of the researcher regarding the data be it personal or preconceived notions about the data.

Within the process of coding there are more steps wherein coding is done in deeper levels. The next step is to take those line by line codes and perform what is called focused coding. In focused coding the researcher tries to create codes that are more general category of them that help the researcher to capture the data (Smith et al., 1995). A category helps the researcher to subsume some common codes and patterns that arise in some codes.

Memo writing. Memo writing is an intermediate step between coding and the first draft that the researcher prepares. It helps the researcher to expatiate on the assumptions or the understanding that they form while being in the process and is more like note making while coding or data collection. It is done to preserve certain thoughts, ideas, hypotheses etc. that may be lost as the research proceeds with more complex steps (Smith et al., 1995). Memo writing is also breaking down of the data codes in broader writings that are more elaborate (Smith et al., 1995).

Objective

To understand the personality of Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov from 'Crime and Punishment'.

Coding Raskolnikov's personality- Below elaborated is the personality of Raskolnikov.

"He had successfully avoided meeting his landlady on the staircase; And each time he passed, ...matters of practical importance; he had lost all desire to do so. Nothing that any landlady could do had a real terror for him. But to be stopped on the stairs... slip out unseen" (Dostoyevsky, F., (1886). Crime and punishment, p. 7-8).

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Memo 1- Raskolnikov is a reserved, introverted man who does not like to meet and chat around. He is poverty stricken which can explain his irritability. Seems that he despises any communication at all (“But to be stopped on the stairs... slip out unseen”).

“He became acutely aware of his fears; From time to time, he would mutter something, from the habit of talking to himself, to which he had just confessed. At these moments he would become conscious that his ideas were sometimes in a tangle and that he was very weak; for two days he had scarcely tasted food.” (Dostoyevsky, F., (1886). Crime and punishment, p. 9).

Memo 2- He has insights about himself. He seems to be psychotic in a sense that he speaks to himself. He seems to be avoidant, socially anxious, and anti-social in some ways.

“But there was such accumulated bitterness and contempt in the young man’s heart, that, in spite of all the fastidiousness of youth, he minded his rags least of all in the street. It was a different matter when he met with acquaintances or with former fellow students, whom, indeed, he disliked meeting at any time” (Dostoyevsky, F., (1886). Crime and punishment, p. 10).

“Give me four roubles for it, I shall redeem it, it was my father’s. I shall be getting some money soon.’ ‘A rouble and a half, and interest in advance, if you like!’ ‘A rouble and a half!’ cried the young man; So, she carries the keys in a pocket on the right ... but how degrading it all is.’ (Dostoyevsky, F., (1886). Crime and punishment, p. 17).

Raskolnikov is aggressive and demanding. He seems to care less for the societal attitudes of greeting and behaving a certain way. He seems to be extremely observant and intelligent. He seems to believe in the stereotypical features of masculinity added the fact that he is also taller than average.

“Has she a secret conscience-prick at sacrificing her daughter to her son? ‘You are our one comfort, you are everything to us.’ Oh, mother!’ His bitterness grew more and more intense, and if he had happened to meet Mr. Luzhin at the moment, he might have murdered him; It’s clear that Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov is the central figure in the business, and no one else; So, he tortured himself, fretting himself with such questions, and finding a kind of enjoyment in it.” (Dostoyevsky, F., (1886). Crime and punishment, p. 83-89)

Memo 3- He's always suspicious of people, even family he's short tempered and has little control over his aggression. He is mostly blinded by poverty and has his ego at most priority. Too much self-importance and narcissistic personality. He's masochistic as well only a bit. He seems moody at times changing it instantly and out of blue.

“Good God!’ he cried, ‘can it be, can it be, that I shall really take an axe, ... He was shaking like a leaf as he said this” (Dostoyevsky, F., (1886). Crime and punishment, p. 116).

“He already knew all about Lizaveta ...astonishing about this meeting” (Dostoyevsky, F., (1886). Crime and punishment, p. 119).

Memo 4- He had a violent dream and at first he was scared from the act of murder but logic and morality had left him all ready, and even being scared he did it. His so-called cold personality added to his behaviour. Thoughts of a criminal like that in poverty before the crime. He gave his thought back to his murderous plan. As if he could free Lizaveta as well from Ivanovna who dominates her in the most brutal way possible. this too is the sign of

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rebel from Raskolnikov against the society who dominates the poor to become poorer. He seems to rationalize his idea of murder thinking it to be a good deed.

“I want to attempt a thing like that and am frightened by these trifles,” he thought, with an odd smile. ‘Hm ... yes, all is in a man’s hands and he lets it all slip from cowardice, that’s an axiom. It would be interesting to know what it is men are most afraid of. ... Yes, maybe it is a plaything.’ (Dostoyevsky, F., (1886). Crime and punishment, p. 8)

In the above paragraph, a monologue of our protagonist is presented wherein it is quite explicit that Rodion can have hours of shattered, baseless, and unsophisticated conversations with himself. He deviates easily from his topics and is easily distracted in his speech. He shows weak temperaments in his monologues that are very typical of him on the entire novel. Raskolnikov changes his patterns of thinking and his emotional states. He tries to trace his thoughts back from where they started and indulges in meta-cognition.

“He was positively going now for a ‘rehearsal’ of his project, and at every step his excitement grew more and more violent” (Dostoyevsky, F., (1886). Crime and punishment, p. 11)

‘I am doing ...’ Raskolnikov began sullenly and reluctantly. ‘What are you doing?’ ‘Work ...’ ‘What sort of work?’ ‘I am thinking,’ he answered seriously after a pause. ‘And you want to get a fortune all at once?’ He looked at her strangely. ‘Yes, I want a fortune,’ he answered firmly, after a brief pause.(Dostoyevsky, F., (1886). Crime and punishment, p. 57-58).

Raskolnikov seems to be man of perfection and tries his best to go as planned. He seems to be less of a risk taker. Along with this his violent and immoral attitude is also visible. Although, a perfectionist Raskolnikov is a disadvantaged man of poverty, powerlessness, and pressure than he takes upon himself to provide. He dreams unrealistically of money and wealth. He at the same time wants to make a huge fortune at one go and looks down everyone.

“The feeling of intense repulsion, which had begun to oppress and torture his heart while he was on his way to the old woman, had by now reached such a pitch and had taken such a definite form that he did not know what to do with himself to escape from his wretchedness”; “At once he felt easier; and his thoughts became clear. ‘All that’s nonsense,’ he said hopefully, ‘and there is nothing in it all to worry about! It’s simply physical derangement. Just a glass of beer, a piece of dry bread— and in one moment the brain is stronger, the mind is clearer and the will is firm! Phew, how utterly petty it all is!” (Dostoyevsky, F., (1886). Crime and punishment, p. 19).

Raskolnikov seems to be of a dual nature as he is experiencing a sort of duality within himself. He adhering to his plan of murdering Alyona Ivanovna and at the same time feels disgusted with himself. He seems to detach himself from himself as if he is observing himself from afar. His anxieties and his interpretation of himself switches as he ‘gains’ his consciousness back. Raskolnikov can be a strange paradox of morality and criminality.

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Table 1.0- “Raskolnikov personality coded”

Codes	Initial coding	Focused codes	Final codes
Raskolnikov is a disadvantaged man of poverty, powerlessness	Reserved, introverted man	Thoughtful Opportunistic Unrealistic	Schizotypal personality Anti- Social
Despises any communication at all			Narcissistic
Avoidant, socially anxious, and anti-social			
Rebellious			
Aggressive and demanding logic and morality had left him all ready	Raskolnikov can be a strange paradox of morality and criminality		
Extremely observant and intelligent.	Intelligent		
Always suspicious of people, even family	Psychotic		
Masochistic, Insightful			
Moody, Stereotypical Rodion can have hours of shattered, baseless, and unsophisticated conversations with himself. He deviates easily from his topics and is easily distracted in his speech. He shows weak temperaments in his monologues that are very typical of him on the entire novel	Too much self-talk		
Raskolnikov seems to be man of perfection and tries his best to go as planned. He seems to be less of a risk taker.	Perfectionist		
He is experiencing a sort of duality within himself	Detachment from self and reality		
He seems to detach himself from himself as if he is observing himself from afar.			

DISCUSSION

The current paper aims to characterize Raskolnikov, the protagonist of the novel Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoevsky. The paper made use of grounded theory method in order to code his personality. For this purpose, a deep reading was done of part 1 of the novel and

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line by line coding was done. This was done to make the text more familiar. Following the steps of grounded theory, the table for Raskolnikov's personality was prepared. According to this paper, Rodion is a person who is avoidant of any social interaction, prefers to keep it to himself, is aggressive and demanding, very stereotypical as someone believing in masculine roles. He seems to be detached from the reality around him and spends hours and even months of indulging in self talk. He is also suspicious and distrustful of people with paranoid thinking.

These observations lead to him to be a person with schizotypal personality. These results are largely unique to this paper due to the uniqueness of the method. Although, many researches have been done to characterize Raskolnikov. According to Kaman (2019), our protagonist is split in nature and had the persona of a "lunatic, a poet, and a lover". Kaman (2019) describes Raskolnikov as a person with dual nature with rich intellect. These conclusions are congruent to the results of the current paper. Raskolnikov is a smart man but has demeaning character who looks down on other people. These conclusion are also true to the findings of the other paper.

It was also found that Raskolnikov is of a narcissistic nature. These findings are also common. According to Garber (1976), Raskolnikov is narcissistic with unsatisfied oral needs which for his perpetual dislike and deprivation for closeness and warmth. Garber (1976) defines Raskolnikov as a swelled man who wants to be served and can be judgemental if not. The current paper being an exploratory one lacks the details from psychiatric point of view. This can be taken as one limitation of the current paper. Although, it was seen that no other paper characterizes Raskolnikov as being schizotypal from a research point of view. Therefore, this result is unique of this paper.

CONCLUSION

The current paper was aimed to understand the personality of Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov from 'Crime and Punishment'. The findings of the paper were found to be consistent with others of the like but certain traits of the protagonist were unique to the current paper; his schizotypal personality to be exact.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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