



## **PSYCHOLOGY OF...**

OSUN Connected Learning Contest Winner

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**Course: Neuropsychology**

This assignment was assigned toward the end of the semester as a way to apply knowledge from the semester to a situation that is of interest to the students. It served as a diagnostic summative assessment, as students explored psychological issues in a context (a pop culture work) in which that issue was not directly an intentional choice. Students had the opportunity to read a "Psychology of..." book of their choice from the BenBella series - we were able to get online access codes for the books since school closed before the books were distributed. Some students were still unable to access the books on the technical side, though, so I designed the assignment to serve as a stand-alone assignment just in case. This assignment was originally going to be a component of our final exam portfolio, but it was adjusted to become a mini-project due to the changing course situation in quarantine.

### **Practical and pedagogical value**

This assignment was successful because it allowed students to delve into a pop culture work (TV show, film, book) of interest to them. There was a lot of leeway, so students explored characters ranging from Scar (from "The Lion King") to BoJack Horseman (from the Netflix series). Because students had the freedom to explore something they enjoyed for entertainment, they seemed quite invested in exploring the topic fully. I only required 1-2 pages, but some students went all-out with their responses because they had so much they wanted to write about.

## The assignment

The “Psychology of . . .” books that some of you had the chance to read a few weeks ago explore psychological themes in pop culture works. Sample chapters from these books include:

- Homer’s alcoholism and the risk of dependence in the Simpson children (*The Psychology of The Simpsons*)
- Prejudice between vampires and werewolves (*The Psychology of Twilight*)
- Superman’s personality and identity – from Kansas, Krypton, or both? (*The Psychology of Superheroes*)
- Projection of a parent’s negative traits (*The Psychology of Dexter*)
- Mental illness and self-harm tendencies of Dobby the house elf (*The Psychology of Harry Potter*)

This week we’re going to try an abbreviated version of the assignment that was originally going to be part of the final exam portfolio. Your job this week is to choose a (preferably mainstream) pop culture work (TV show, movie, book, comic book, etc.), and identify and explore a psychological theme in it. You can choose **one** of the prompts below or come up with your own – check in with me if you’re doing your own to make sure you are on the right track. Your assignment is to write a 1-2 page *Psychology of . . .* style chapter about your chosen theme.

Your chapter should include a clear thesis statement at the beginning in which you identify the theme you are exploring, and then discuss at least **3** specific examples from the pop culture work to support your thesis. Make sure to cite at least **1** credible source using a footnote with an APA style end reference citation that references a psychological theory or concept to tie into your chapter. The chapter should be formatted like a standard essay: typed, double-spaced, 12-point font and 1-inch margins.

### Psychological Diagnosis

Diagnose a character in your pop culture work with a mental illness explored in class. You should choose a character who is NOT explicitly written as having a psychological disorder (e.g. you shouldn’t choose Sam in *Atypical* on Netflix, who is written/diagnosed as having autism spectrum disorder). Identify specific traits/behaviors the character displays and explain how they support your diagnosis.

### Evidence of Psychological Theories

Choose a psychological theory or model we’ve covered (dream theories, memory models, classical and operant conditioning, social psychology, etc.) and discuss how the characters or events in the pop culture work illustrate this theme. You can focus on a specific event or plotline in the work, or you can use evidence of the theme throughout the work.

### **Character Therapy Session**

Select a character from your pop culture work who engages in destructive (or self-destructive) behavior. Look up a mainstream personality theory and explain how the behavior fits into that theory, and then identify examples of events/behaviors from earlier in the work or in the character's life that have motivated the character to behave in this way.