Antagonist (Week 9 Sem 2)

1   Antagonists - characters we see since childhood

Since we are small, we have been well-exposed to the concept of 'antagonist' well. (Examples: 光之美少女/ xx 戰隊/ 麵包超人 (Anpanman) and so on…)

In the childhood cartoons or soap operas that we now watch, there are always protagonists that are usually 'kind, upright', and those antagonists that are depicted with negative characteristic traits. A common mode of development of such stories of opposing parties is that, 'the protagonists start off weaker than the antagonists, but eventually they gained strength while the antagonists encounter problems with their flaws in personality/executing their decisions, and end up defeated by protagonists'.

Their views directly opposite to the main protagonists, antagonists are often unpopular and would cause harm to the protagonists (typically viewed positively), and antagonists are often the ones that the readers hate.

2   Why are there antagonists?

We humans value collectivity, and would often align ourselves to others in order to gain acceptance and recognition. However, there are always two sides of any arguments and we disagree on certain matters.

The official meaning of 'antagonists', by Cambridge, is
'a person who is strongly opposed to something or someone'.

Antagonists are shaped with disagreements and oppositions. We might oppose sth/sb due to specific, often personal, reasons. Typically, we tolerate certain margins of disagreement and accept them, but beyond certain extents of disagreement, we could enforce our own actions (e.g. voicing out/ having our takes on certain matters distinctly/ doing something in secret to hinder the protagonists' progresses) that run counter to the intentions of the party of doers.

3   The 'bad' individuals - antagonists' motives and causes
On a personal level, some reasons for antagonists to exist are listed below:
- The protagonist does harm to them.
- They do not agree with the protagonist
   in the way something is executed.
- They do not agree something in principle.

From an external (social) perspective, antagonists are seen rather negatively:
- Some antagonists might start with a good intention, but end up using 'wrong' methods, especially by hurting others/ acting harshly to achieve goals inconsistent to those of the protagonists
   (e.g. Severus Snape in Harry Porter);
- Some might be inborn evil with their minds twisted, with such personality developments usually explained as the plot concludes and they fall (quite common in some Korean Dramas).
- By being an antagonist, some may enjoy the opposition and attention they catch, which is unique.

4   Antagonists are seen subjectively and stereotyped
When seen analytically (e.g. digging through the show scripts or noticing the details), we might have more comprehensive pictures of the antagonists, in particular, to realize their virtues. As mere 'viewers', we are often provided with inadequate time to digest certain characters comprehensively, that our understanding towards them are often mere one-dimension impressions - 'Good', or 'Bad'. When protagonists are often accepting, kind and thoughtful (that they are to be hailed), antagonists are, by default, on the another end of the spectrum, in order to create contrast.

By spotting antagonists' similarities in certain popular films or shows, we could note a string of negative antagonistic traits that often go together - 'selfish', 'indecisive', 'immoral', 'crazy', 'harsh', 'egoistic', and so on - this fuels the negative perception of antagonists. In other words, this simple

dichotomy results in stereotypes and labels, which are often unreal depictions for antagonists both in shows and real life.

5　　My antagonistic mind
As for me, I feel like *I 'am' an inborn antagonist* - I am thrilled in facing against opponents of similar capabilities, I hold hobbies and mentalities largely distinct from my peers' (e.g. more collective/ comfortable vs efficient…, personal vs collective interests), and that I feel *the notion of getting socially accepted actually makes me complacent without giving myself constructive comments*.

I have always realized that I position myself rather far away from my peers. Years ago, there was a period when I pondered about myself, questioning myself in a highly critical and negative light.
Am I wrong for being different from my secondary schoolmates? Why do I get sidelined? I tried embracing their ideas, following their rules, just to find out I am actually much less comfortable
and feel depressed. I understood them, but I didn't agree with.

Later in my secondary school life, I realized that my antagonist's mindset, paradoxically, kept me more motivated and competitive and made me more comfortable. Understanding that I am solely on my way and surrounded by people that stands in stark contrast to me in terms of ideologies, mindsets and habits, part of me told myself I shall learn their habits, with another part telling me that I shall stick to my own rules and be consistent.

Being an antagonist also means I shall be able to reinforce my own distinct opinions and stand up courageously, even when under huge voices of criticism. Those fierce words are, indeed, effective in pointing out the potential mistakes I might have committed; they are worth reflecting, but I shall not let them affect my decisions and deny myself right away. Sometimes, I am just quite certain that I am not wrong - and I have to be.

6　　Antagonists are not necessarily strong

While standing as an antagonist increases my competitiveness and grants me courage, it comes at huge costs. The pejorative tag associated with being such an 'outcast', as opposed to the main peer group of 'protagonists', means I am probably not going to make good starts when finding acquintances. Another
downside is that, this strategy only goes well when one has that kind of self-discipline - raise your standards, or risk getting defeated. Sometimes, what others do might actually be more 'correct' than mine, and sometimes the strategies I adopt to outperform or maintain my lead might be less moral than it should be. Because that everything I do is largely dependent on my own mentality, I need to be harsh to myself.

My ultimate weakness as an antagonist is that, I allow myself to slack and escape from my responsibilities. I wish to be a respectful antagonist, but it seems I have not fully upheld my standards and the obligation I have with this antagonist's mindset. I admit that I have certain personal flaws, and that is why I need to stay reflective to myself. Antagonists improve from time to time in order to stay stronger than the protagonist. I am an antagonist, but I know I would become stronger.

P.S.
Except for the hike with friends yesterday, I was feeling burnt out throughout this week's holiday. Tired of studying and all those happening around me, I was incredibly wasteful in managing my time. I slept late at night (after scrolling on my phone for an hour or two), just to feel even more tired as I
wake up at 9 or 10 every day. I resorted to playing video games for several hours every day to make myself slightly happier. I shall feel lucky that this is a week to take a break, rather than to set myself on the course of failure - at least my obligation of making everything is executed smoothly is temporarily
non-existent, and the costs of not fulfilling each of my to-do list items are still low.