

Title:

Darth Vader: The Making of a Monster

Word Count:

744

Summary:

Darth Vader, despite being considered a cultural icon, was ultimately a human being. He had human flaws that were exploited by those around him to corrupt him and turn him into the monster he became.

Keywords:

fear and anxiety, separation anxiety, performance anxiety, status anxiety

Article Body:

Ever since his first appearance in "Star Wars: A New Hope," Darth Vader has slowly attained the status of a cultural icon, a near-universal symbol of villainy and oppression. The all-black attire, the distinct sound of his mechanically-aided breathing, and the imposing nature of his presence earned him a spot as one of the most intimidating fictional characters in history. His mere presence was enough to instill fear and anxiety in his lesser officers and his targets, effectively crippling most resistance forces by merely arriving. Not only was he known for causing fear and anxiety among enemies by reputation, he also caused fear and anxiety by his willingness to strike down his foes from the front lines, something his fellow commanders refused to do.

However, beneath the mask of near-mechanical dominance lay the mind of Anakin Skywalker, a young man confused by his emotions and fearful of his losses. Anakin Skywalker was a man of many traits, some of which led to his eventual transformation into one of the most memorable and sympathetic characters in popular culture. He was extremely loyal to those he cared about, willing to risk anything and everything to help them, and asking only that they be loyal to him in turn. He was a talented Jedi, skilled in mechanics, but somehow wary of why his exceptional talents didn't seem to be enough to earn him the rank of "master." Finally, perhaps on some level, he seemed to buckle under the pressure of what his peers believed him to be. He had a destiny, he was occasionally told, and he often felt the weight of that destiny squarely on his shoulders. These qualities, while generally positive, were eventually exploited by the Dark Side and used to fight the very things he was supposed to protect as a Jedi.

The weight of his destiny pressed upon him a form of performance anxiety,

pressuring him and goading him to take more risks. His assumed destiny as "The Chosen One" placed a great burden on his shoulders, one that made him think that he should be able to easily achieve the feats Jedi far older and more experienced than he could achieve only with great difficulty. His performance anxiety eventually was turned into a desire for greater power, and a sense of inadequacy whenever events proved beyond his ability to control. With the right prompting, his performance anxiety became a full obsession with power, one that would drive him to become the second most powerful figure in an oppressive regime.

His increasing ability to use The Force, combined with his perceived lack of recognition from his Jedi Masters, became a twisted form of status anxiety. Indeed, within the films and the novels, he often expressed worry over how he seemed to be ignored by his superiors. His status anxiety led him to believe that his abilities alone should have earned him the rank of Jedi Knight and, later, Jedi Master. The young Jedi's status anxiety was aggravated to near-breaking point when he was appointed a seat within the Jedi Council - the ruling body of the Jedi priesthood - but was denied the rank of "Master," which was something all other members had. This apparent lack of recognition from his peers, combined with the ample praises given to him by those outside the Jedi, slowly built up into arrogance and overconfidence, as well as a resentment over his perceived "persecution."

However, the final nail in the coffin was his loyalty and devotion. He experienced separation anxiety when he was taken away from his mother as a boy. While he eventually learned to suppress it, along with all other negative emotions, it resurfaced and when he learned of his mother's death. His grief turned him into a killer, lashing out against his mother's killers and slaughtering them as if they were animals. His separation anxiety was even worse when he received visions of his wife, Padme Amidala, dying. His unwillingness to accept the inevitability of her death turned into an obsessive form of separation anxiety, making him willing to do whatever was needed to prevent her death. This separation anxiety and readiness to do what he thought must be done was exploited into convincing him to slaughter young and defenseless Jedi, as well as his more talented peers. Indeed, it was the separation anxiety turned into obsession that ultimately led to his downfall and transformation. Although, in some ways, it also led to his eventual redemption.