

Title:

In the Shadow of The Bat

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903

Summary:

Bob Kane's creation, the Batman, is among the most psychologically complex characters to have ever appeared. Perhaps in keeping with this vision, as well as the re-imagination introduced by Frank Miller, many of the other characters in the Batman mythology also have complex psychological makeups.

Keywords:

status anxiety, performance anxiety, social anxiety, separation anxiety

Article Body:

Psychologically complex and realistic characters are not exactly what one would consider as "old traditions" in the comic book industry. Indeed, during the earliest decades, the concept of a "flawed hero" was discarded in favor of the "Superman" ideal. However, as readers became more discerning and Stan Lee's Marvel Comics began to create more realistic heroes, things had to change. Superheroes had to progress from the simplistic motivations and personalities of the old days, adopting increasingly realistic and complex identities. Quite arguably, the most psychologically complex casts of characters to have ever been created is the so-called "Bat family" of DC Comics.

Chief among this "Bat family" is the Batman himself, who presents what might be the largest array of mental disorders and psychological issues to be found in a single fictional character. He exhibits signs of an obsessive-compulsive disorder, with his mind fixated on the death of his parents. The fixation inevitably pushed him to become the crime-fighting urban legend of his native Gotham City. He frequently showed signs of separation anxiety towards the younger heroes he often trains as his wards and sidekicks, particularly after the "Batman: Death In The Family" storyline, where the second boy to take up the Robin suit, Jason Todd, is killed. His separation anxiety also manifested when the possibility of Barbara Gordon, the original Batgirl, sustained a near-fatal wound, as well as when Cassandra Cain, the fourth Batgirl, had lost her ability to effectively defend herself. In many ways, the Batman also exhibited an obsession with control, with a silent arrangement going on that any superhero who wishes to operate long-term in Gotham City had to have his direct approval.

The Batman's chief aides, the many incarnations of Robin, also have their own

set of problems. Dick Grayson, the first Robin, also has a set of issues. As the Batman's first actual sidekick and active ally in crime fighting, there were moments when he exhibited signs of performance anxiety and status anxiety. Early on, some of his actions can be interpreted as being his attempts to alleviate his performance anxiety after being chosen as the mythical Batman's sole companion on the streets. In time, one might be led to assume that Grayson eventually formed the Nightwing persona as a means of alleviating his status anxiety, and to enable himself to establish his own identity outside the "shadow of the Bat." However, as shown by his adherence to the core principles of his mentor's methods, he was not fully able to overcome the power of his roots. Indeed, one might be tempted to interpret his current place as the protector of the city of Bludhaven as his way of overcoming his status anxiety, essentially becoming that city's own version of Batman.

Jason Todd, the second Robin, also had his fair share of disorders and problems to work through. Like Grayson before him, Todd had to live in the "shadow of the Bat." However, there was added pressure for him, as he had to also live up to the legacy left behind by the first Robin. He experienced a lot of status anxiety because of the pressures set before him by his mentor and his predecessor, though he eventually came into his own. His death in the line of duty prompted the Batman to reconsider the prospect of taking in another youth to aide him in his war against crime, effectively developing into a projected form of separation anxiety early on in the career of the third Robin, Tim Drake. Due to Jason Todd's death, Drake had to overcome both the nominal trials to become Robin, as well as the Batman's own doubts on whether he could allow the boy to join him on the streets.

In addition, there is the complicated case of Cassandra Cain, the fourth - and current - Batgirl. Trained from an early age to be the ultimate killing machine, Cassandra was raised without even being taught how to speak. This, along with her reclusive childhood, has left her with a deeply-rooted sense of social anxiety. While the time spent in Bludhaven with Nightwing and the third Robin helped her gain a better footing on the social scene, her general aloofness and reluctance to participate in large-scale social gatherings showed that she did not overcome her social anxiety. Cassandra Cain also felt the pain of rejection and status anxiety over not being chosen to protect Gotham City during the Batman's absence, subconsciously believing that she had not earned that right. However, she is shown to have allowed that feeling to evolve into resentment and anger, though how much of that is due to her own doing. Forced to use psychoactive drugs, her erratic behavior had also become suspect.

Finally, there is the Batman's expansive rogues' gallery. Each of the classic Batman villains exhibits some sort of mental disorder or psychological

imbalance. The Joker, for example, is clearly insane, with mental instabilities running down many levels. Mr. Freeze, in his re-worked origin, exhibits signs of separation anxiety, as he is utterly unable and unwilling to accept that he cannot save his wife's life. The Ventriloquist and the Mad Hatter arguably both represent dissociative identity disorder, though the former makes for a stronger example than the latter. Even Bane, "the man who broke the Bat," has his own share of issues, with one of them being a mild form of status anxiety brought on by his aforementioned achievement.