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The Joker and dark personalities: the Dark Triad across his representations in movies

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Abstract

The Joker is one of the most relevant villains in current fiction. Transcending his role in comics and conquering box office sales with impactful movies like The Dark Knight and Joker, the Joker has impacted society with his evil schemes and clever plans to bring chaos to Gotham City. Many authors paid attention to the criticism Joker usually brings regarding society and his role within the movie, but no attention has been placed to his villain traits. This paper aims to explore the numerous versions the movies have had of him to compare them with the Dark Triad, a constellation of traits formed by three major traits: narcissism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism, in order to discern the trait that has inspired more to build his character in movies. After studying all of his versions, they have been grouped according to this triad and it has been concluded that the Joker has mostly been depicted as a Machiavellian villain, doing anything it takes to achieve its goal, either deceiving, betraying or killing people, even if that involves being a victim of his own plan.

Keywords: Joker, Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, movie

Introduction and methodology

Many villains have captivated the audience, either through movies, novels, comics or series, with their wicked and malevolent acts, but very few reach the popularity Joker has in modern culture. A distinguished villain from the successful DC Comics' series Batman, the Joker has inspired renowned movie directors like Tim Burton or Christopher Nolan to film movies with his figure as the main evil entity, and he even had a standalone movie telling an alternative story of his origin focusing on his personal life and how he became the villain everyone knows nowadays, starring Joaquin Phoenix playing as the insane killer clown. This focus on renowned celebrities paid off, as The Dark Knight is ranked 13^o in the All Time Worldwide Box Office for Super Hero Movies with a revenue of \$1,006,234,167; and Joker is ranked first in the All Time Worldwide Box Office for R Movies with a revenue of \$1,069,121,583. These numbers in box office aren't a mere coincide, as both have a rating of 8.9 out of 10 in Metacritic's user score (Metacritic, 2008-2019) and a mark of 94% for The Dark Knight and 88% for Joker in Rotten Tomatoes' audience score (Rotten Tomatoes, 2008-2019).

The success of these movies has prompted researchers to investigate the Joker's influence

in society nowadays and the ways in which movie directors have portrayed him. For instance, Sorcha nì Fhlainn focused on his political influence in Batman (Burton, 1989) and The Dark Knight (Nolan, 2007). For Joker's role in Tim Burton's film she states:

“We may then read the attempt to poison Gotham's citizens as a step toward bringing about the grotesque body en masse – by ridiculing make-up and revealing the perceived ugliness of the people beneath worn make-up based masks. In one scene, Gotham's newscasters are onscreen looking particularly grim because the Joker has poisoned an array of cosmetics – this achievement works twofold: the Joker forces those in the spotlight to reveal their true face which are usually concealed and compensated for with make-up, and simultaneously destroys the faces of those who do use the poisoned make-up by altering their appearance into a Joker-like grin, but none are equal to his own perfect smile.” (Ní Fhlainn, 2011)

Joker's goal in this movie is to “unmask” people's true identity by poisoning everyone who uses makeup, criticizing their tendency to cover their faces, and also poisoning the greedy public at the parade. He believes people is as rotten to the core as he is, and he does everything he can to show that. Another author that discusses his role in the movies is Martin Del Campo, who focused in The Killing Joke (Liu, 2016). He argues that Joker transcends his role as a villain in this movie. The Joker is a whole entity, he incarnates evil in Gotham, just like Batman is justice. As he states in his dissertation, “The villain is not a force to be defeated, The Killing Joke proclaims. The villain is an integral part of the hero's existence, and the Joker represents the evolution of the villain that is both charming and entertaining while engaging in horrific acts.” (Martín Del Campo, 2017, p. 44). Just like good cannot exist without evil and vice versa, Batman cannot exist without Joker.

These authors have explored Joker's role in movies and what he conveys in them. Nevertheless, few regard has been put into his evilness. Most papers written about Joker revolve around his significance and critic inside the story, but his inner evil has been mostly ignored. One way to analyze this evil character is by comparing him to the Dark Triad traits. The Dark Triad is a constellation of traits that describe negative aspects of an individual through three major traits: narcissism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism. These traits can be appreciated in fiction as well, as the dissertation The Antihero in Popular Culture: Life history Theory and the Dark Triad Personality Traits (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012) demonstrates by discussing these traits and how they are reflected through numerous characters in fiction such as Tony Stark or Prince Vegeta, which have high

narcissism traits.

First, narcissism is described as a grandiose feeling of superiority. While the other two traits of the Dark Triad also involve feeling extremely proud of themselves, narcissists genuinely believe they are superior to others. As the dissertation previously mentioned states, “Narcissists do not just feel good about themselves – they feel that they are inherently better and more deserving of the respect and admiration of those around them.”(Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012) Narcissism is also commonly depicted as the most “innocent” trait of the Dark Triad, as the other two traits involve more antisocial outcomes. Broadly speaking, narcissists are charismatic people, which means they are usually outgoing and enjoy being surrounded by people. Nevertheless, this charisma is usually a masquerade to hide his attention-seeking intentions. Because of this, they also tend to be selfish, hostile, degrading and lack empathy. There are two types of narcissism: the grandiose and the vulnerable narcissism. Grandiose narcissists like to show off and draw attention to themselves, and they usually are aggressive and dominant; while the vulnerable narcissism depends on others’ perception of them and is very defensive, they hide a strong feeling of insecurity.

Next, psychopaths mostly seek power and self-pleasure. They are mostly parasitic entities that have a way too high self-esteem and adore submitting people around them. Despite being usually extraverted and outgoing, they quickly show their lack of empathy and tend to cause violence within affective relationships. Jablonska makes a clear distinction of psychopathy on her paper: “People with the traits of Machiavellianism or psychopathy have similar affective, behavioral and cognitive characteristics and desires [...] people with Machiavellian or psychopathic traits differ in impulse-control abilities. Manifestations of psychopathy may appear more sinister when compared to narcissism.”(Jablonska, 2020) Psychopaths are usually depicted as impulsive, antisocial and selfish people, who lack remorse and have little emotional control. Furthermore, Jonason et al.’s dissertation distinguishes two kinds of psychopathy. The first one is the instrumental psychopathy, which is characterized by low affect and empathy, and they are considered the “emotionally stable psychopaths”; while the second one is the hostile psychopathy, which are depicted as manipulative, impulsive and aggressive (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012).

Finally, Machiavellianism comprises cynical people whose only intentions are to achieve

something, and they do anything it takes to accomplish it: rejecting emotions, deception, manipulation, exploitation... Because of this, they usually ignore morality and have low empathy. These traits come from Machiavelli's famous quote "The end justify the means". Once more, Jonason et al. make a distinction between High Machs and Low Machs, being the only distinction that High Machs have more severe symptoms and traits of Machiavellianism than Low Machs. For instance, High Machs are not good at social environments, since they cannot reach to an agreement with people nor to understand them. They also tend to perform better in autonomous jobs. Low Machs do better than High Machs in social environments and working at highly structured organizations, although they still suffer from High Machs' selfish attitude (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012). Finally, they tend to have short-term relationships, since their manipulative and deceptive attitude prevent them from genuinely loving someone.

After some investigation and reading of papers discussing the Joker as a villain, little attention has been put into his villain traits, and none has been placed into the Dark Triad. Because of this, the aim of this paper is to analyze the Joker's alignment with the Dark Triad's traits, studying his versions throughout the movies and see which trait from this triad was more appealing for building his character in movies. For this, the methodology followed for this paper has been to construct a corpus of the movies in which Joker has had a relevant role. Then, a reading of papers about the Joker has been necessary for making a later analysis of the character, taking into account what the authors have discussed about him for then taking notes of this analysis. Finally, these notes have been studied and rearranged to relate them to the Dark Triad's traits and analyze again the Joker in relation to the traits forming this triad. They will be classified following the Dark Triad's traits, and will be later discussed individually to provide a conclusion to his depiction in movies.

The Narcissistic Joker

The narcissistic Joker has little characterization during movies, but both grandiose and fragile narcissism can be appreciated. First, in the Lego movies he is mostly depicted as the leader of Gotham criminals. In these depictions, he normally does not care about his companions, leaving them in jail just to be replaced with any other villain if he sees the opportunity, as it is the case in Lego Batman: The Movie – DC Super Heroes Unite (Burton, 2013) with Lex Luthor or the villains in the Phantasm Zone in The Lego Batman Movie (McKay, 2017). This is indicating that the Joker feels superior over his comrades, as he acts as if he could decide over the rest of the criminals' lives. In the case of Lego Batman: The Movie – DC Super Heroes Unite (Burton, 2013), he also likes to show off, as he spills chemicals in the chemical factory in a nonsensical way only to reveal later in the movie that he did that to make an explosion that would draw his face on the ground.

His characterization in The Lego Batman Movie (McKay, 2017) is more interesting. In this movie, Joker parodies romantic relationships by making his rivalry with Batman something relevant, being heartbroken when Batman does not recognize him as his biggest enemy. He is being depicted as a fragile narcissist as Jonason et al. state in their dissertation, since his ego depends on external factors (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012), in this case Batman's approval. This makes him abandon his crew of Gotham criminals for the villains in the Phantasm Zone, only to repair his ego and show Batman he is the villain Batman should hate. This makes him a fragile narcissistic villain, as he genuinely believes himself to be better than the rest of villains and does everything he can to show it. There are more instances of fragile narcissism in Joker; for instance, in Batman vs Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (Castorena, 2018) he again complains about Batman not caring about him as a villain and targeting others instead, although this is the extent of his narcissistic characterization. More relevant is a conversation between Arthur and his psychologist in the movie Joker (Phillips, 2019). In this conversation, Arthur, Joker's identity in this movie, had been fired for carrying a revolver to a clown show in a hospital with kids, and he had then killed some workmen that were making fun of him. In this scene, Arthur tells how surprised he was of hearing the song "Carnival" on the radio since it was his clown name. He then reprimands his psychologist for never listening to him because all he has are negative thoughts. In this scene, his fragile narcissism is depicted, as, after all of the events that Arthur had to suffer, getting attention is the only way to raise his ego, which is why he believes "Carnival" being played on the radio is referencing him, his ego depends on people

noticing him, which can also be appreciated on him looking down on her psychologist for not taking into account all Arthur has are negative thoughts instead of listening to her when she says that they will not be able to see each other again. Lastly, Suicide Squad (Ayer, 2016)'s Joker is another version with fragile narcissism. In a party that was been hosted by him, he acts superior and believes to have the superior girlfriend, Harley Quinn. He tells her to go with the man he was talking to and spend the night with him, but he refuses, saying that she was his girlfriend and couldn't do that. He gets very irritated by his refusal, and instantly kills him. There, Joker shows narcissism for believing to be in control over Harley Quinn's life, but also for losing his temper over this man rejecting Harley Quinn. Joker took that as a offense, as he expected him to praise his girlfriend and admire the beautiful girl Joker had for himself. Once more, Joker's ego depends on others' perception of him.

Instances of Joker being a grandiose narcissistic villain can also be appreciated. In Batman (Burton, 1989), he states he is superior to the rest of the people along with Vicky since they're artists. This is related to ni Flainn's take on the Joker. In her article Wait till they get a load of me!': The Joker from Modern to Postmodern Villainous S/laughter, she states:

“the Joker forces those in the spotlight to reveal their true face which are usually concealed and compensated for with make-up, and simultaneously destroys the faces of those who do use the poisoned make-up by altering their appearance into a Joker-like grin, but none are equal to his own perfect smile.”(Ní Fhlainn, 2011)

The way Joker creates art in this movie is by killing and destroying people, turning them into abominations like him. He believes to be superior because he thinks every person in Gotham is a hypocrite behind layers of make-up and just take advantage of anyone they can, and he commits these crimes to show that everyone is as despicable as he is, with the difference that he knows that and uses it in his advantage. That is also why he believes corpses to be more beautiful than models, he adores to see people's suffering for being hypocrites. Regarding the grandiose narcissism traits, he likes to draw attention to himself, which he achieves with the commercial of his deadly cosmetic product and the parade he finances. Batman – Under the Red Hood (Vietti, 2010)'s Joker also shows a grandiose narcissist version, as he considers the current Red Hood less elegant than he was. Joker used to be Red Hood, and Batman and Nightwing interrogate him about the Red Hood that had appeared in Gotham. He denies being him because he believes to be more elegant than him

and that he would make sure Batman knew it was him. Again, he believes to be superior than the rest, considering himself a better criminal than Red Hood.

Lastly, there are some depictions of him as a despot ruler. In Batman Unlimited – Monster Mayhem (Lukic, 2015), he causes Gotham’s electronic devices to stop working with a virus and calls himself the king Joker I. From there, he acts as a despot ruler, leaving Gotham with barely no resources and even organizes a parade just to show off his power over Gotham. These are, once more, traits of a grandiose narcissistic villain, as he adores to show off and to get attention, imposing his superiority over everyone else. Another remarkable version of the Joker as a despot ruler is in Batman Ninja (Mizusaki, 2018). There, Joker becomes a Daymio, a Japanese feudal lord, getting his own palace and army. In this movie, his intentions are to win the civil war and become the Shogun, the highest authority in Japan in the Sengoku period, to overwrite history and bring chaos all over Japan. His narcissism rises to a point he believes to have the authority to rule over Japan and mold it at his will, which are associated, once more, to the grandiose narcissism. Lastly, in Batman: Return of the Caped Crusaders (Morales, 2016), he intends to duplicate Earth using a duplicating machine to have a copy of the Earth to rule over for himself. He again believes to have the authority to rule over the whole Earth, although this time his intentions behind it are not clearly stated, he just seems to want to rule over it because he believes to have the power to do so.

The Psychopath Joker

The psychopath Joker is mostly depicted as a merciless criminal who has no regard towards others' feelings and does anything he can to cause harm and chaos. Nevertheless, these seemingly dangerous intentions are sometimes eclipsed with childish actions. In Batman (Martinson, 1966), Joker acts in a childish manner, laughing all the time and having no real purpose behind his actions. For instance, the moment he irrupts into UN's building and turns every member into dust, he enters in the room along with the rest of his group and turns every single member of the UN into dust. This is clearly aimed to a child audience, as nobody notices the group of villains getting inside the room and they just keep arguing and shouting while the villains turn them into dust, which makes Joker look more naive and childish than he actually is. Nevertheless, this does not rest value to his evil actions, seeking self-satisfaction and domination over people, as he got rid of the UN members to take over the world. This makes him a psychopath, more specifically a hostile psychopath as he shows to be impulsive and irascible when things do not go his way. He also looks childish in Lego Batman: The Movie – DC Super Heroes Unite (Burton, 2013), where he acts as if he has voices inside my head to dismiss Luthor when he tries to talk to him. He also shoots Batman with his machine to destroy things made of black blocks because Batman is entirely made of black blocks. He does that for no particular reason, just for killing him. He is showing very low affection and remorse with this action by trying to take Batman's life. This is not the only instance of Joker trying to kill Batman for the sake of getting rid of him and in a childish way, as in Batman: Return of the Caped Crusaders (Morales, 2016) he ties Robin and him in a lunch tray to incinerate them inside a furnace. The lunch tray gives the comical and childish tone to his psychopathic actions, proving to be, once more, a merciless and cold criminal. There are some cases in which Joker tortures and attacks people for sport, as it is the case in Lego DC Comics Super Heroes: Justice League – Gotham City Breakout (Peters & Zwyer, 2016), where he teams up with the rest of Gotham criminals to torture the Justice League inside a funhouse. They could have easily taken them down the moment they were beaten; but Joker, since he was leading this group, decides to torture them, showing low remorse for his actions. Also, in Lego DC Super Heroes: The Flash (Spaulding, 2018), he invades Metropolis and attempts to kill everyone with his gas of laughter. He admits to have done that because he was getting bored in Gotham since Batman was not around, and wanted to bring fun to Metropolis. He does not care if his actions bring harm or destruction, he genuinely enjoys people's suffering, but he, again, looks less menacing than he actually is due to this gas of laughter: people do not actually die, they just keep laughing indefinitely

since this is a movie aimed for kids. Nevertheless, his psychopathic actions can be clearly appreciated there.

In movies with adults as the target audience, Joker gains more depth in his psychopathic characterization. In Batman (Burton, 1989), everyone recognizes Jack Napier as a psychopath. There is a first subtle proof of this at the beginning of the movie. Jack Napier acts superior by saying that Greyson needs him and dismissing Alice's compliment. In this first interaction, Joker shows to have a lot of self-confidence, so much he does not care about hurting others with his words. He also shows to have dominance over his relationship with Alice, as she seems to be the one pleasing Jack but he takes little regard on her actions, dismissing anything she does. Psychopaths tend to dominate other people and to show little affection, which is exactly what he does there. Later in the movie, after his transformation into the Joker, he kills Grayson while dancing. He first states his rage for letting him die because of a woman; nevertheless, he starts shooting at him shortly after that while dancing. He takes little regard for killing Grayson; in fact, he seems to be enjoying it. He shows every single trait of the hostile psychopath: he is aggressive, impulsive, no remorse, no regret, he seeks power... Further evidence of this is when he states his frustration by Batman taking the spotlight after having caused a terrorist attack. He gets frustrated for not being recognized as a criminal, hurting his ego. He cannot dominate if someone else takes the spotlight, a psychopath needs attention for getting stronger, so he tries to take Batman down from there. For that, he commits several crimes to get his attention: polluting Gotham's cosmetics, vandalizing the museum while killing everyone in it, luring everyone into a deadly parade... All of these crimes shows his ruthlessness and coldness killing people just to show off or to send a message, making his psychopathic characterization stronger. Finally, his coldness is strongly described when he appreciates Vicky's work taking photographs at corpses. He considers models ugly and a waste of time, while he genuinely considers corpses something beautiful. He is telling Vicky that he enjoys people's death and has little regard for their passing. This accentuates his cold attitude, enjoying death and showing low empathy towards others. This can also be appreciated with Alice, whose face got deformed due to Joker experimenting on her and him telling Vicky Alice had committed suicide so lightly. The Dark Knight (Nolan, 2008) is another instance in which Joker acts with little regard for his actions and shows his cold attitude. He starts off infiltrating in a bank robbery as one of his own men, killing everyone who does not trust him and detonating a bomb in the bank owner's mouth. During the movie, Joker commits several crimes all

over Gotham: he takes the mafia boss down, he kidnaps and kills the Batman replicas one by one, causes Rachel's death and Harvey's corruption... He takes little regard for all the suffering he causes. He does not care if he has to take countless lives to reveal Batman's true identity, or to have the mafia chasing him only to overtake it, or even to corrupt the only symbol Gotham has of justice. He only pursues one thing: to cause chaos all over Gotham and provoke its downfall. Alfred states the Joker's intentions when Bruce asks him what it is that he wants: "Some people want to see the world burn". Joker does not care about human values, as he states in the interrogatory where he says that he's an outcast and to be above the curve, he is incapable of feeling what others feel. The only thing that brings him joy is to cause harm and set the world on fire, he enjoys others' suffering, just like his version in Batman (Burton, 1989) does.

Another versions of him that enjoy making people suffer are the ones in Batman – Under the Red Hood (Vietti, 2010) and Batman: The Dark Knight Returns(Oliva, 2012). In the former, Joker shows his ruthlessness from the beginning: he is keeping Robin hostage, torturing him and killing him by detonating a bomb. The fact this happened is caused by Ras'al Ghul miscalculations: he hired Joker to keep Batman entertained while he robs Europe's banks. Nevertheless, he did not expect him to kill Robin, his psychopathy was out of the equation for him. Joker proved to be even colder than anyone could think: if he sees the opportunity to torture and kill someone, he will take it, no matter the cost. The ending of the movie gives further proof of this: when Red Hood activates the bomb, Joker holds Batman, strangling him while stating his purpose: to let everyone die and satisfy himself. He does not care about hurting or killing people, he does not even care about his life, he is willing to die if that brings chaos over other people's lives. Batman: The Dark Knight Returns (Oliva, 2012), he does not care about dying either. He blackmails Batman by reminding him all of the people that have died because Batman let him live, and he laughs at Batman for that. Joker tries to taunt Batman to kill him, but he ends up saying that it does not matter if he does or not, because everyone had already seen that Batman can lose his temper. Prior to this scene, Joker had cause chaos over an amusement park and threatened and killed many people while taunting Batman to chase him. Then, Joker snaps his own neck, making it look like Batman had killed him. With this, Joker raises even more doubts about Batman being someone beneficial for society or not, if he is mad or if he actually helps Gotham. Joker's intentions were to drive Batman mad and cause suffering all over Gotham, which he clearly achieved. He took little regard for every person he killed, all he

cared for was to satisfy his psychopathic intentions and to harm people, showing his cold attitude.

His versions in Batman: The Killing Joke (Liu, 2016) and Joker(Phillips, 2019) are different ones. In the former, Joker is a ruthless and cold psychopath just like the others, but this one proves to be able to lose his temper and have more human feelings. During the movie, flashbacks of his past are shown to give him a backstory and more human. Joker connects his past with his intentions in the amusement park he buys: to torture Gordon and drive him mad. He believes that anyone can become crazy with just one bad day, just like he had. Nevertheless, he ends up frustrated by Batman telling him Gordon was still sane and asked him to act according to law. Joker was willing to bring pain to Gordon just to enjoy his suffering and to prove his madness. He, once more, was showing his cold attitude and lack of empathy; nevertheless, this time he also shows his mental and emotional instability. Because he is depicted more human than his other counterparts, this Joker is able to lose his temper and develop more depth in his psychopathic traits. Next, his version in Joker is also one with human feelings, possibly his most human version to date. This version of the Joker is clinically mad, he visits the psychologist to get therapy. In these visits, we know that he has suicidal thoughts, he has crippling depression and a mental condition: whenever he feels nervous or insecure, he begins to laugh uncontrollably. During the movie, several hallucinations are shown, giving the audience a picture of Arthur's psychological status where he lives imaginary scenarios that he takes as factual. For instance, during the movie Joker is constantly getting closer to his neighbor, with whom he imagines to have a relationship, but in the end it is revealed that she does not know anything about that. He also discovers his mother always had schizophrenia, abusing him unconsciously when he was a kid. All of these show that Arthur is a mentally and emotionally unstable person, which derives to psychopathy. This leads to impulsivity, which he shows by strangling Alfred when he asks Arthur to leave the mansion and when he kills both his mother and his old coworker. Lastly, due to all of this suffering Arthur had to swallow during his life, he ends up becoming mad and turning into Joker, feeling joy from killing people as he shows by killing Murray in front of everyone and smiling at camera after that. Nevertheless, before shooting at his head, he lost his temper trying to explain why no one cares about him and how despicable humanity is. He has emotional instability, he feels pleasure killing people and values himself too much, not being able to care about others. This makes him a hostile psychopath, an unstable and dangerous psychopath who does not care about others.

Lastly, in Batman: Assault on Arkham (Oliva, 2014), he shows his psychopath traits through his relationship with Harley Quinn. In this movie, they had broken up, and Harley seems hurt by that. When Harley gets arrested and encounters Joker, Harley loses his temper and lunges at him, shooting at his cell. Later in the movie, Joker flees his cell and ends up encountering the Suicide Squad, where Harley Quinn begs him to forgive her because everything he did was for him, and he accepts. Shortly after, it is revealed that Harley Quinn had been acting the whole time: they had never broken up, it was just a trick to hide the dirty bomb Joker was planning to detonate to kill half of Gotham's population. Nevertheless, he treats Harley with little respect despite being clear that they were still together. All of these hint that Joker has an abusive relationship with Harley Quinn, abusing her and treating her with very little respect. This is confirmed when Harley Quinn admits Joker abuses her physically. Psychopaths tend to get violence involved in their relationships due to their lack of empathy and remorse, prioritizing their dominance and satisfaction. Both Harley and Joker tend to hurt each other, although Harley does so out of hatred and Joker because of his lack of remorse. Joker also dominates over Harley Quinn, as she ends up begging him to forgive her. All of these depict Joker as a psychopath, not only through actions but also through his relationship with Harley Quinn.

The Machiavellian Joker

The Machiavellian Joker is mostly depicted as an entity whose only intention is to achieve his goal, even if it is merely to provoke chaos and if he has to torture and kill people on his way. He mostly betrays his partners if he sees the opportunity; nevertheless, there are a few instances in which he works in a group with no issue. In Batman (Martinson, 1966), he works along Riddler, Penguin and Catwoman to steal the dehydrator from the commodore Shmidlapp and turn every member of the UN into dust and so to govern all over the world. With this, Joker shows he is willing to do anything to govern the world, as it is to kidnap the commodore to keep him hostage and make him believe he is still in his ship so that the rest of the group can steal the dehydrator, or getting rid of the UN members; however, he never resorts to betraying his group. In Lego DC Comics Super Heroes: Justice League – Gotham City Breakout (Peters & Zwyer, 2016), Joker taunts Superman so that he shoots his laser vision at him for deflecting him with a spoon, breaking Arkham’s walls and setting all of the Gotham criminals free. From there, he works along with the rest of criminal to set Gotham into chaos and torture the Justice League. Finally, in Batman: Return of the Caped Crusaders (Morales, 2016) and Batman vs Two Face (Morales, 2016), he also works in a group to achieve his goals. In the former, he works along with Riddler, Penguin and Catwoman again to take over the world with a duplicating machine the had stolen. In this case, Joker teams up with Riddler and Penguin to expel Catwoman from their group due to her supporting Batman. In the latter, he teams up with the rest of the villains to reveal Batman’s true identity, collecting everyone’s money to buy his identity in Two Face’s auction. All of these Jokers follow Machiavellianism’s major rule: the end justifies the means. He kidnaps, tortures, expels and even teams up in order to achieve his goal. Nevertheless, him teaming up contradicts the Machiavellian tendency to betray his partners in order to achieve his goals. This turns teaming up as a mean to achieve his goal: in Batman (Martinson, 1966), he teams up in order to get the dehydrator and turn every member of the UN into dust; in Lego DC Comics Super Heroes: Justice League – Gotham City Breakout (Peters & Zwyer, 2016), he sets the villains free in order to take over Gotham; in Batman: Return of the Caped Crusaders (Morales, 2016), he teams up with Riddler and Penguin to get rid of Catwoman, who was the one meddling with their schemes; and in Batman vs Two Face (Morales, 2016), he teams up with the rest of the criminals in order to unveil Batman’s true identity. This seems something a “Low Mach” would do. In Jonason et al. dissertation, they make a distinction between “High Machs” and “Low Machs”. High Machs are more willing to betray the people they work with, follow lower ethical standards

and deceive than Low Machs. They also tend to perform better by themselves, working in jobs that require to work in a group tends to be something they reject because they need to be in control (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012). In this case, Joker is a Low Mach, as he works fine within a group. High Machs tend to work worse within a group since they want to take control of everything at all cost due to their tendency to win at all cost, but Low Machs, while having these defects as well, they are not as noticeable as it could be within High Machs, they work better in a group than High Machs do. Because of this, the fact Joker is teaming up in order to achieve his goals and willing to cooperate makes him a Low Mach in these cases.

These were the Low Mach versions of the Joker in movies. Other versions, such as Lego Batman: The Movie – DC Super Heroes Unite (Burton, 2013) or The Lego Batman Movie (McKay, 2017) ones, do the completely opposite as the versions previously discussed: they betray their comrades if they consider it necessary. In The Lego Batman Movie (McKay, 2017), he invades Gotham along with all of Gotham criminals to detonate a bomb and destroy it completely. Nevertheless, the moment Batman stops them and dismisses Joker as his biggest enemy, he enters into an existential crisis, parodying affective relationships as if Batman was his ex. This served Joker to think of a new plan: to set the villains from the Phantasm Zone free and use them to wreak havoc in Gotham. He had the goal of destroying Gotham from the very beginning; nevertheless, he was willing to betray his own comrades and even sending them to prison just to accomplish his goal. He also managed to manipulate Batman to trick him to do just what he wanted. He tricked Batman by sending himself to prison to make him go paranoid and send him to the Phantasm Zone just in case Joker was scheming anything in jail. In Lego Batman: The Movie – DC Super Heroes Unite (Burton, 2013), he first appears commanding Gotham criminals again, just to later use them as bait while he flees along with Lex Luthor. From there, he works along with Luthor only to betray him later. Luthor wants to be the president of Metropolis and he allies with Joker to achieve that, and Joker asks him if he can be vice president, to which Luthor answers no. However, Joker betrays Luthor by using his gas to get people on his favor. Luthor wanted to use that gas to convince everyone to vote for him, but Joker says that he never mentioned it only works to get people on his own favor, and that he now wants to be president. In both movies, Joker does anything it takes to achieve his goals: in the former, he gets rid of Gotham criminal just to replace them for others he considered to be better and he also managed to manipulate Batman to do what he pleased; while in the latter he used his old group of villains

as bait to flee and he later deceived Luthor to steal his place as president. Joker shows to be a High Mach figure in these movies, a character who is willing to do anything it takes to achieve his goals.

Some of his versions use Machiavellian ways at punctual occasions to achieve a certain goal. For instance, Batman Unlimited – Monster Mayhem (Lukic, 2015) version commits a crime such as kidnapping Soto to make him create a virus to infect all of Gotham electronic devices so that he could control over the city. In Batman – Under the Red Hood (Vietti, 2010), he keeps Black Mask and his men hostage, who had hired him to kill Red Hood, inside a trailer just to cause a ruckus and attract Red Hood. Lastly, in Return of the Dark Knight, he acts as if he regretted everything he had done and tricked his psychiatrist to take him to a talking show so that he could make a terrorist attack there and attract Batman. Nevertheless, there are some versions of him that use Machiavellian ways as their whole characterization. Batman Ninja's version has a purpose behind the civil war, which has been previously stated: to become the shogun and govern all over Japan. He is willing to send troops to war and cause chaos all over Japan just to become the ruler and overwrite history. Nevertheless, another trick he plays during the movie shows to be more interesting. After detonating gunpowder barrels in Batman's ship, Joker and Harley Quinn are shown to have lost their memories and have turned into farmers. This convinces Batman that they have had a change of heart, but it turns out to be a trick to deceive him. He reveals that he had never changed, he just had induced both Harley Quinn and himself into hypnosis therapy to convince themselves they are farmers, and they planted a plant which had a scent that turned them back crazy. Joker used an intricate plan to deceive both Batman and himself, he admits that he needed to deceive himself in order to deceive Batman. His Machiavellianism drives him to do the impossible to get people just where he wants, even if that means to be a victim of his own plan. Batman: The Long Halloween (Palmer, 2021) also shows this Machiavellian Joker who gets people just where he wants. In this movie, Joker chases Holiday because it is a new criminal that has taken the spotlight in Gotham, which Joker heavily disapproves of. He infiltrates inside Harvey's house, telling him that he had seen Gilda and spent some time with her. Then, he shows Holiday's weapon, and accuses him of being Holiday. He threatens him to cease all criminal activity because he wants to be the only criminal in Gotham. Later in the movie, he steals an airplane to gas everyone in the New Year party to have a fifty percent chance of killing Holiday. All of these show Joker's Machiavellian intentions: he threatened Gilda only to get to Harvey inside his house, and

he did this just to get rid of Harvey. Lastly, as a last resort, he gasses Gotham to get rid of half of its population and so increase the chance of killing Holiday. He has very low morality trying to kill half of Gotham population just to increase the chances of killing Holiday, which shows his focus on the goal and ruthlessness to do so. He going after Harvey, threatening his wife and assaulting him inside his own house, is further proof of this, as he does anything it takes to get Holiday out of the picture, willing to kill any suspect so that he becomes the only psychopathic criminal in Gotham. His only goal during the movie is to kill Holiday to be the only psychopath in Gotham, proving his ruthlessness and low morality to achieve his goal. His version in Injustice (Peters, 2021) commits a serious crime too to achieve his goal. He kidnaps Louise, Superman's wife, to make Superman chase him. On his way, he tends traps to kill anyone chasing him, and he gets rid of Flash this way, killing him. When Superman gets to him, Joker deceives Superman by gassing him with Scarecrow's gas of fear to make him believe Louise is Doomsday, dragging her to space and killing her. This makes a bomb to detonate and explode all of Metropolis. In Batman's interrogation with Joker, he reveals why he has done that: he just wanted to corrupt Superman to see what would happen if someone considered a god suffered a loss just like Batman did. With this, Joker causes worldwide chaos: the world and the Justice League gets divided on those who support Superman's new ruthless laws against war and those who do not. This is the epitome of Joker's schemes: he used any way devoid of emotion he had to make Superman kill his own wife and turn him ruthless, resulting into worldwide disruption. All of these versions show Joker's evil intentions through Machiavellianism: in all cases, he manipulates people to do exactly what he wants. In Batman Ninja (Mizusaki, 2018), he manipulates Batman into thinking he had a change of heart by deceiving himself; in Batman: The Long Halloween (Palmer, 2021), he gets Harvey Dent just where he wanted to get information about Holiday; and in Injustice (Peters, 2021) he manipulates Superman to turn him exactly what he wanted: a monster. All of these actions show he is a High mach, ignoring morality and focusing only on the goal and manipulating others to get what he wants. Nevertheless, there is one interesting version of him that, while being manipulative as well, does not cause harm. In Justice League (Snyder, 2021), he is presented inside Batman's dream to push him forward. In an apocalyptic future in which Superman had turned evil, Joker is there to remind Batman everything he had done wrong and all the people he had let die because he refuses to die. Joker is Bruce Wayne's guilty mind reminding him everything he had done wrong, and so it proves Machiavellian ways to push Batman: he sabotages Batman's mind to make him feel guilty and so to brighten him up so that he can

act before it is too late. Even inside Batman's mind, he acts with low morality and ignoring morality, but this is shown just to help Batman moving forward.

His versions in Batman (Burton, 1989) and The Dark Knight (Nolan, 2008) go beyond provoking chaos. These versions prove to have a real purpose behind his scheming. In the former, Joker causes two major terrorist attacks: first, he pollutes Gotham's cosmetics to kill anyone who uses them and leave a chilling smile on their faces; then, later in the movie, he lures Gotham population into the parade he organizes with money so that he could gas everyone and kill them. Ní Fhlainn makes a point on these attack, which has been previously discussed in the introduction for this paper. Joker considers people rotten to the core. He believes that, within everyone, lies an ugly face just like his, and does these two attacks for that. With the commercial of his cosmetic product, he wants to kill anyone who hides their face with cosmetics to reveal their true nature and show how rotten they are. So is the intention with the parade, he lures everyone with money to show people's greedy nature and that they are only moved by interest, people are only willing to do anything if they get profit from it. He is very cynical, deceiving everyone with his promises with the parade and showing low morality laughing at the fact he had poisoned every cosmetic product in Gotham. All he cares about is to show how immoral Gotham is by being even more immoral, justifying the means for his end. The Dark Knight (Nolan, 2008)'s Joker also has meaning behind his actions. His goal throughout the movie is to disrupt Gotham's order and wreak havoc. For instance, his intentions behind revealing Batman's true identity is to cause a ruckus in Gotham with Batman's true identity and destroy this figure, drowning the city into chaos. Later in the movie, he collects the money the mafia owes him and sets it on fire in front of them. He states that Gotham deserves "better criminals", he blames them for being too shallow and one-sided. Lastly, he first tries to show people's true murderous intentions by forcing them to explode one other's boats when civilians and prisoners were fleeing the city, but he fails due to them ignoring the button. Nevertheless, he reveals that, while they had not been corrupted now, they will be when they discover Harvey Dent, Gotham's symbol of justice, got corrupted. He had been preparing his trump card during the movie: he corrupted Harvey Dent on purpose by killing Rachel to make the symbol of justice lose hope in justice, turning him into an evil entity. He had the Machiavellian thought of corrupting the correct person to achieve his goal: to wreak havoc all over Gotham by showing people's true face. Joker is clearly a High Mach here: he was always one step ahead of Batman, Gordon and Harvey, prioritizing the competition for who stops who. He did

everything to ensure victory: he tortured and killed people, he threatened people's lives, he exploded an entire hospital and even laughed at that by doing a comical act of making sure everything explodes... He has a very low morality doing all these terrorist attacks just to destroy Gotham.

Most of these versions have psychopathic motives behind their actions. There is no other reason behind his acts other than "the end justifies the means", there is no background to explain his actions, he usually only has the goal to wreak havoc all over Gotham. Nevertheless, there are two instances in which Joker had a background that he used as fuel to accomplish his goals. The first one is Batman: The Killing Joke (Liu, 2016) version. In this movie, Joker has a known past, in which flashbacks telling his story are shown. These flashbacks involve him struggling to get money to have a decent life along with his wife and future son and, since his attempts trying to get at the comedy show fail repeatedly, he decided to get involved with the mafia to get money. Nevertheless, his wife ends up dying due to an accident and they get caught by the police, falling into a tank of acid and melting his skin. From there, he acquired the identity of the Joker, the product of a bad day, which he tries to impose to society. He kidnaps Gordon and rapes his daughter Barbara, singing Gordon a chilling song about the uselessness of memories and how becoming mad to forget them is the correct way while taking them into an insane ride where he shows Gordon pictures of him raping Barbara. Joker genuinely believes anyone can become what he is by being traumatized just like he did, ignoring, again, morality and using people on his favor. He used Barbara as a tool to traumatize Gordon, provoking a traumatizing memory in Gordon. Then, Joker expected him to run away from that memory to become mad and so become what he is: a person who had a bad day. Nevertheless, despite all these acts, Joker proves to be a Low Mach. While it is true that he used merciless actions devoid of emotion, he performed his plan along people with deformities to make Gordon look guilty. These people are outcasts, rejected by society, and Joker uses Gordon as the symbol of the people that hate them. Joker uses, again a group of people as a mean to achieve his goal and was willing to work with them. This makes him a Low Mach rather than a High Mach. The other version having a background and using it as fuel to commit crime is Joker (Phillips, 2019). His past has previously been mentioned in the Psychopathic Joker: a man who had a mentally ill and abusive mother who had a mental condition which barely anyone understood. All of his past makes him hold grudges against people, considering everyone egoistic bastards who do not care about outcasts like him. This leads him to, first, kill his

own mother for being an irresponsible and selfish one; then, he kills his ex-coworker for leading him to his unemployment and acting as if he had nothing to do with it; and, lastly, attending Murray's show and killing him in front of everyone for laughing at him in public. Joker believes every single death he provoked was clearly justified for the suffering they brought Joker, taking revenge on their actions. He is clearly an outcast, someone you cannot reason with or make him feel empathy. He is too focused on his goal, to take revenge on anyone, to care about others, because he genuinely believes nobody cares about him. This makes him a High Mach, as he clearly cannot work with other people and uses every mean he has to accomplish his revenge.

Lastly, Joker's Machiavellian mind can also be appreciated in his relationships. First, in Batman: The Killing Joke (Liu, 2016), some prostitutes state that Joker usually hires their services before committing a crime, and that it was odd that he did not do that this time. Machiavellian people focus on short-term relationships focused on sexual intercourse, as they are focused on pleasing their needs and goals, so they have no time for consistent relationships, they just want quick satisfaction. Next, his versions in Suicide Squad (Ayer, 2016) and Birds of Prey (2020) give a better image of him in a Machiavellian relationship. He starts off as Harleen Quinzel's patient, who he seduces and manipulates to set him free. He ends up successful, making her fall in love with him. Then, he blames her for "filling his head with stupid ideas so that he could only feel anger" and shocks her head. From there, Harleen chases Joker to convince him to take her with him. Although he first dismisses her, he ends up taking her to a tank of acid, inviting her to jump into it as long as she is willing to die and live for him. From there, she becomes Harley Quinn, Joker's girlfriend, who is protected by him and anyone who dares to mess with her will pay the consequences. At first, Joker saw Harleen only as a gateway to escape Arkham and, for that, he manipulated her so that she convinced herself she was helping Joker but she was actually setting him free. Then, he ceased seeing any kind of use in her, which is why he dismisses her; but, as long as he saw Harleen was willing to do anything for him, he took advantage of that to have a loyal person alongside him. He took advantage of her to the point she got mad and even obsessed with him, not being able to imagine herself without him. This was product of Joker's Machiavellian ways, manipulating and taking advantage of her and only focusing on having someone on her favor. This gets clearer in Birds of Prey (2020). In this movie, Harley Quinn starts telling her story and how he knew Joker. There, she tells she was the mastermind behind many Joker's crimes, but he never took her into account and ended up breaking up

with her when he did not find any use on her anymore. This breaks Harley Quinn completely, which leads to her trying to find a new identity throughout the whole movie. This gives a further view of Joker's Machiavellian attitude in Suicide Squad (Ayer, 2016): he saw an opportunity in Harley Quinn to have someone who would stay with him no matter what so that he could take advantage of her whenever he wanted. Her submissive and dependent attitude was perfect for someone who wants to be in control of everything like him. All of these versions prove to be High Mach, as they are willing to deceive and manipulate women just to get what he wants and please himself to achieve his goals, disposing of them as soon as he sees no use in them.

Conclusion

After analyzing every single movie according to the Dark Triad traits, the obvious answer for the question of which trait has been more appealing for building the character of the Joker in movies is the Machiavellianism. This is the trait that not only has appear through most of the movies included in the corpus annexed in this paper, but also the one that builds the character of the Joker most of the time. From movies aimed for children like The Lego Batman Movie (McKay, 2017) to more serious movies like The Dark Knight (Nolan, 2008), the Joker has proved to be a villain that does anything it takes to accomplish his goals, no matter if that involves deceiving, either people, people close to him or even himself as he had shown in Batman Ninja (Mizusaki, 2018); killing or disposing of people, even himself as he did in Injustice (Peters, 2021) to corrupt Superman; or manipulating others to achieve his goals, betraying them if necessary, as he did throughout the Lego movies. Furthermore, among Machiavellian classification, the most noticeable Machiavellian Joker has been the High Mach, as he has mostly been shown as a character who cannot work within a group since he either ends up betraying and disposing of them, or proves to be an unstoppable force impossible to reason with. After declaring Machiavellianism as the most noticeable trait of Joker throughout the movies, it can also be stated that the Narcissistic Joker has proved to be the less appealing of the three to build the character of the Joker. Even though both grandiose and fragile narcissism have been discussed to prove Joker's alignment with this trait, not much could be discussed about him other than either seeking to impose his figure over the rest of the population or to seek attention from others. Lastly, the psychopath Joker is right in the middle: not properly represented, but represented very often nonetheless. Instrumental psychopathy cannot be found anywhere in any of the Joker versions, he is always presented as a hostile and mentally unstable criminal with no remorse.

Overall, the conclusion for this paper is that the Machiavellian Joker is the most appealing trait over the other two traits forming the Dark Triad. Nevertheless, this paper is prone to get outdated. Dark Triad may be studied more in depth in future papers and prove to be an outdated constellation, or it could also be expanded or modified in some way. Furthermore, due to the relevance the Batman franchise has, more movies featuring the Joker could be released, making the corpus in this paper lack these movies. For this reason, this paper invites further investigation over the Joker's representation in movies, Dark Triad traits and

the relation this character and triad have to draw a better view of the character and the appeal it inspires to make movies featuring him.

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Appendix

Title	Director	Year	Studio
Batman	Leslie H. Martinson	1966	Greenlawn Productions
Batman	Tim Burton	1989	Warner Bros. , Guber-Peters Company, Polygram Pictures
The Dark Knight	Christopher Nolan	2008	Warner Bros. Pictures, Legendary Pictures, Syncopy
Batman - Under the Red Hood	Brandon Vietti	2010	Warner Premiere, DC Entertainment, Warner Bros. Animation
Batman: The Dark Knight Returns	Jay Oliva	2012-2013	Warner Premiere, DC Entertainment, Warner Bros. Animation
Lego Batman: The Movie - DC Super Heroes Unite	Jon Burton	2013	ttanimation, Warner Premiere, Warner Bros. Pictures
Batman: Assault on Arkham	Jay Oliva	2014	Warner Bros. Animation, DC Entertainment, MOI Animation
Batman Unlimited - Monster Mayhem	Butch Lukic	2015	Warner Bros. Animation, DC Entertainment
Lego DC Comics Super Heroes: Justice League - Gotham City Breakout	Matt Peters, Melchior Zwyer	2016	Warner Bros. Animation, LEGO, DC Entertainment
Batman: The Killing Joke	Sam Liu	2016	DC Entertainment, Warner Bros. Animation, The Anser Studio
Suicide Squad	David Ayer	2016	Warner Bros. Pictures, RatPac-Dune Entertainment, DC Films, Atlas Entertainment
Batman: Return of the Caped Crusaders	Rick Morales	2016	Warner Bros Animation, DC Entertainment
The Lego Batman Movie	Chris McKay	2017	Warner Animation Group, DC Entertainment, RatPac Entertainment, Lego Systems A/S, Lin Pictures, Lord Miller Production, Vertigo Entertainment, Animal Logic
Batman vs Two Face	Rick Morales	2017	Warner Bros Animation, DC Entertainment
Scooby Doo! & Batman: The Brave and the Bold	Jake Castorena	2018	Warner Bros. Animation, Hanna-Barbera Cartoons, DC Entertainment
Lego DC Super Heroes: The Flash	Ethan Spaulding	2018	Warner Bros. Home Entertainment
Batman Ninja	Junpei Mizusaki	2018	Warner Bros. Japan, DC Entertainment, Kamikaze Douga, YamatoWorks, Barnum Studios
Batman vs Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Jake Castorena	2018	DC Entertainment, Nickelodeon, Warner Bros. Animation
Joker	Todd Phillips	2019	Warner Bros. Pictures, DC Films, Village Roadshow Pictures, Bron Creative, Joint Effort
Birds of Prey	Cathy Yan	2020	Warner Bros. Pictures, Dc Films, LuckyChap Entertainment, Clubhouse Pictures, Kroll & Co. Entertainment
Justice League	Zack Snyder	2021	Warner Bros. Pictures, Access Entertainment, Dune Entertainment, DC Films, Atlas Entertainment, The Stone Quarry
Batman: The Long Halloween	Chris Palmer	2021	Warner Bros. Home Entertainment
Injustice	Matt Peters	2021	Warner Bros. Home Entertainment