

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Nowadays, mental illness is no longer a taboo topic. Studies and papers by WHO and psychologists have brought the subject about mental illness to light; nonetheless, people who suffer from mental illness still have not got the help they can afford. In 2001, WHO states around 450 million people—one out of four people—suffer from mental or neurological disorder. With this alarming number, WHO urges governments to seek solutions for mental health care that is more affordable for people, such as community health centers (Härtl). Community health centers are more affordable as they are “community-based and patient-directed organizations that serve populations with limited access to health care”. They provide comprehensive primary health care and access to health care as the fee is adjusted to the person’s ability to pay (“What’s a Community Health Center?”). However, it seems that most governments and communities neglect the need for mental health care, especially in developing countries, as the former director of mental health in WHO, Shekhar Saxena claims (Newey and Gulland). Without the

professional's help, the patient may not be able to control their mental illness, which could result in the change of behavior of the patient. This change is depicted in the portrayal of Arthur Fleck in *Joker* by Todd Phillips.

Todd Phillips is an American director who is known for directing comedy films. He has directed *The Hangover I* (2009), *III* (2013), and *The Due Date* (2010). Other than directing, he also co-writes a few comedy films he directs (“Todd Phillips”). He chose to move from comedy to something as dark as *Joker* because he was struggling with the current culture (Erbland). In other words, nowadays he finds it harder to make jokes because people are easily offended by jokes made by comedians, including him as a comedy writer and director. Fascinated by the people who are “out of step in the world”, Phillips decided to direct the origin story of Batman's number one villain, Joker (Gross).

Joker is Batman's most notorious villain. He makes his first appearance in the DC Comic Universe in *Batman #1* as the comic reveals Batman's origin (Collins). Other than in the comics, Joker has made appearances in a few of Batman's films and television series. To name a few, his character has been adapted to *Batman* (1966-1968)—the first Joker's on-screen appearance, *The Dark Knight* (2008), *Batman: The Killing Joke* (2016), and *Suicide Squad* (2017) (Bradshaw). Rather than showing Joker as a terrorist and violence maniac, the recent adaptation of Joker in *Joker* (2019) drives the audience to scrutinize and empathize with the protagonist (Dockterman).

Joker (2019) is the most recent live action adaptation of Batman's number one villain's origin, the Joker. Arthur Fleck, later known as the Joker, is a failed comedian who works as a clown in Gotham city. Occasionally, he makes a make-

believe world where he is a successful comedian and in a beautiful relationship with his neighbor, Sophie. One day, being provoked, he kills three men on the train. The murder gains attention from the society; and soon, people start wearing clown mask as a part of a movement to support him. Fleck then shoots Franklin Murray, his idol comedian, during a live show where his actions and jokes are criticized. Not long after the chaos that precedes after the live murder, Fleck is dragged into the police car to be sent to an asylum; however, the masses crash the police car and free Fleck from the car. In the end, Fleck is seen to be in the asylum in a session with a psychiatrist.

As seen through the paragraph above, it is clear that the portrayal of the protagonist, Joker, is the most significant element in this film. In general, portrayal refers to “a depiction of someone or something in a work of art or literature; a picture” (“Portrayal”), while protagonist is defined as “the leading character or one of the major characters in a play, film, novel” (“Protagonist”). In this research, the *mise-en-scène* and the cinematography in this film, along with the dialogue, are going to be analyzed as those are seen to support Fleck’s characteristics. *Mise-en-scène* refers to everything that appears before the camera; be it the composition, sets, props, actors, costumes, and lighting (Bordwell). According to Oxford Dictionary, cinematography means “the art of making motion pictures” (“Cinematography”). Aspects of *mise-en-scène* that are going to be analyzed are costume, make-up, property, and actor placement; meanwhile, the cinematography aspects that are going to be analyzed are camera angles, shots, lighting, and color.

The analysis will only use the Formalism approach to analyze the film. Formalism refers to “an interpretive approach that emphasizes literary form and the

study of literary devices within the text” (“Literary Theory”). This approach is suitable for this study because Fleck’s characteristics can be analyzed through the dialogue, cinematography, and the mise-en-scène. From analyzing Fleck’s characteristics using this approach, it can be revealed that the system—whether it is the society or the government—has a role in negatively shaping and affecting a mentally ill person’s characteristic. With the dialogue, the mise-en-scène and the cinematography aspects, it can be seen that the changes in Fleck’s characteristics happen as a reaction to the society’s and government’s actions.

Statement of the Problem

The statements of the problem are as follows:

1. How is the protagonist portrayed in the film?
2. What is the purpose of the director in creating such a character?
3. How do the mise-en-scène and the cinematography support the portrayal of the protagonist?

Purpose of the Study

According to the problems above, the purposes of the study are:

1. To show how the protagonist is portrayed in the film;
2. To show the purpose of the director in portraying such a character;
3. To show how the mise-en-scène and the cinematography support the portrayal of the protagonist.

Method of Research

The method of research used in the analysis is library research. I began the study by watching Todd Phillips' *Joker* (2019). After that, I searched for further information and references to support my analysis. Next, I analyzed the characteristics of the protagonist and connected those characteristics using the Formalism approach. Other than the script itself, I analyzed the mise-en-scène and the cinematography aspects within the film to give an insight into how the director himself shows the protagonist's characteristics through the shots. Lastly, I drew a conclusion from my analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of three chapters, preceded by Acknowledgements, Table of Contents and Abstract. The first chapter is Introduction which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. The second chapter is the analysis of the portrayal of the protagonist in Todd Phillips' *Joker*. Chapter Three is the conclusion from the analysis of the protagonist. This thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, containing Synopsis of *Joker* and Biography of Todd Phillips.