AN EXPLORATION OF THE ANTI-HERO FROM PAST TO PRESENT IN

TWO CULTURES: AMERICAN AND JAPANESE

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Abstract

When we consider the anti-hero, we must understand that this hero type is very dynamic, and always evolving. The anti-hero is different across cultures, and evolves as the zeitgeist of each culture progresses. Modernly, society has seen another uprising of the anti-hero. With new films and TV shows offering practical and identifiable stories of characters that are not considered all good or all bad. The foundation Carl Jung set for archetypes and symbolic meanings, followed by more contemporary research will be recognized and considered. This paper will explore the role of the anti-hero is two separate cultures, American and Japanese. This paper will cover six films, in which the anti-hero will be identified and discussed as a function of their respective culture, and place in society. Themes of motivation, agency and control, and identity and justice will be discussed as they pertain to the anti-hero.

Introduction

In *Diotima, Battery, Electric Personality*, author Criss Jami wrote, "Oftentimes in reality, the genius is in the position of the antihero. Neither the good guys nor the bad guys really trust him because his truth is universal." What about universal truths draws in the anti-hero? Are these universal truths founded through the experiences had by these anti-heroes? Modernly, living in America, we have a full list of individuals portrayed in TV and films that we would call anti-heroes. These anti-heroes, who possess characteristics that can be seen as both good and evil, follow their own agenda to achieve an outcome they think is just, regardless if it is against the law to do so. It is a subjective outcome the anti-hero agrees with. In order to understand this "subjective outcome," we must first understand that every anti-hero has a different way of thinking in terms of morality, and what is right and wrong. In 1971, Lawrence Kohlberg introduced a widely accepted framework of the different levels in which people are able to reason morally. Kohlberg identified three levels, with the preconventional level being the first. The preconventional level consists of individuals who behave in a way that provides the best overall return. How people at this level of morality determine what is good or bad is by how much it satisfies one's own needs, or sometimes, the needs of others. The second level, where the majority of the population is at is the conventional level. In the conventional level, individuals uphold the rules and laws of the community. People at this level have identified themselves with a particular group and will uphold and follow the laws, regardless of what they are. The third, and last level, which almost every anti-hero will fall under, is the postconventional level. In this level of moral thinking individuals hold moral values and principles that exist separately from the authority of

the community that hold them. These individuals consider abstract ethical principles of what is right and wrong, with their decisions being the result of the logical extensions of those principals. Basically these individuals know what the community sees as right and wrong, but will turn to their own inner morality and values to make a moral decision. Kohlberg's model is claimed to have a universal pattern across cultures because these levels are seen as a sequential pattern. One must experience the first level before they can progress to the next. In 1985, Snarey investigated the different levels of moral thinking in twenty-seven different cultures and found that there were adults that reasoned at the conventional level in all cultures, and that preconventional thinking was not the average in every culture, although many child samples indicated so. However, postconventional thinking was not universally found, yet many western urban cultures had a few cases of post conventional thinking. This is partly due to the fact that education, regarding individual rights and justice, in postconventional terms, was not offered in many cultures (Snarey, 1985). This evidence only goes to strengthen the argument that anti-heroes are postconventional thinkers. American anti-heroes are very rebellious in nature. They do not have the qualities or personality traits that you would see in a traditional hero. These anti-heroes have their own agenda, as stated earlier, and they can tend to be selfish. American anti-heroes share a mixture of good and bad qualities, which makes them more human than traditional heroes, who are seen as invincible and god-like.

Japan has had much western influence in film, amongst other areas. In Japanese cinema, the anti-heroes are that of the nihilist type. They are young in age, and are considered criminal outcastes. However, these anti-hero origins can be traced back, spiritually, to the devils and demons that prey on both the good in the bad as they search

for purification or revenge (Thornton, 2008). These are some of the common characteristics that the Japanese and American anti-heroes share. More of these characteristics, similarities, and differences will be discussed later and more in depth.

The anti-hero first introduced itself into western literature and film around the 1950's, and similarly in the Japanese culture. Where did the anti-hero come from though? Well, the lineage of the anti-hero can be traced back to one psychologist, Carl Jung, who spent a lot of time focusing on what makes up human's personalities. Jung was able to differentiate two groups of people by grouped attitudes called introverts and extroverts. Jung proposed three layers of the unconscious, the ego, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The ego is considered the center of consciousness, and is where our awareness and our sense of existence reside. The ego is our active identity. This is where all of our conscious thoughts, feelings, senses, and memory take place. Next, the personal unconscious is all of the things individuals has experienced and contains within themselves. The last component, the collective unconscious, is the idea of an unconscious that all humans share, and is innate. It is from here that symbols are passed down from generation to generation, deemed archetypes. Archetypes are psychic innate dispositions that represent human behavior and situations faced throughout life (Pietikainen, 1998). There are archetypes for life, death, power, and failure. Further examples of archetypes are The Hero, to which the anti-hero is a sub category, who predominantly exhibits goodness and fights evil in order to restore harmony and justice to a society, like Hercules or Superman, and The Mentor, whose role is to protect the main character and provide training and wisdom so that the main character can achieve success.   There are archetypes that represent relationships between two people, like The Hero and The

Villain, or The Hero and The Mentor. Jung spent a lot of his work focusing on and developing his theory of archetypes, and how regardless of the culture, similar symbols prevailed. He spent a good chunk of his life traveling the world, studying myths, cults, and other symbols in the hopes of understanding human nature. Jung argued that these three components of the human psyche interact in order to understand human nature and strive for personal growth.

Why was this important to Carl Jung? Well, with a flourishing imagination at such a young age, Jung was entangled by the behaviors of his peers, maybe more so than others, and like other scientists, was curious and wanted answers. Sigmund Freud shared similar interests with Carl Jung when it came to symbols and character types. Both Freud and Jung even collaborated for a brief period of time before their collaboration ended, due to differing viewpoints on certain ideas. Amanda G. Bratton notes in her honors project, *Antihero: Jung and the Art of Story Telling* that "both observed a collective element in human nature, but disagreed upon its origin."(Barton, 2004) Naturally, this resulted in two separate schools of thought. Jung was more focused on symbols as a function of the spiritual world, where Freud focused on symbols as a function of the scientific world. Carl Jung's work has reached out and touched many different disciplines, most notably religion and literature. Thanks to Jung and the development of character archetypes, we can now analyze stories and have access to knowledge that reveals universal characteristics we see in character archetypes that have been passed down from our ancestors to every generation succeeding them. We have access to certain elements of a particular culture that has remained constant over time.

Since Jung's work there has been much more contemporary research that has provided further evidence and explanations to similarities and differences between cultures in regards to thinking patterns, motivation, morality, and justice. This contemporary research offers a psychological explanation to how an individual, or for the purpose of this paper, an anti-hero might think and act in regards to the values their respective culture holds, and the reasons behind their choices and motivations. I will use much of this research to aid my assertions for the comparisons of American and Japanese anti-heroes as a function of their culture.

As said previously, Jung established many character archetypes that represent the basic attitudes, values, and behaviors of certain roles, but for our purpose, we will only focus on a few archetypes, most notably, the hero archetype. The hero archetype is a broad category that has many sub-archetypal character, such as, the reluctant hero, the romantic hero, the tragic hero, and of course, the anti-hero. What's interesting is that over time, certain sub-archetypal characters have taken the forefront of the hero category. Each has taken the face of the hero category, if you will, for some time, and has been front and center. First, the tragic hero was introduced to us as we learn stories of Oedipus, who is the mythological Greek king of Thebes and how he attempts to run from his fate, only to crash right into it (Barstow, 1912). Then we would see the Shakespearian era of Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth, amongst others, who all possess a fatal flaw that leads them to their own demise. The one fatal flaw that leads the hero to their own downfall is the key component to the tragic heroes.

Once it was time for the tragic hero to relinquish his mask, the traditional, or epic hero, took the stage as we meet a hero that knows no wrong. Now the tragic hero did not

disappear, as we still see stories and films that portray this character, but we needed a new hero that did not possess a fatal flaw, in fact, we needed a hero that didn't have any flaws. We needed a hero that had all the best qualities any man would turn green with envy for. These are heroes such as Hercules, Superman, Harry Potter, and many others. The traditional hero usually undergoes a sort of cyclic journey, where they answer a call to adventure, stepping out of their comfort zone, and embark on a journey that will evolve them into a new, stronger person by the end of their journey. The heroes journey is about standing up to your fears, conquering them, and discovering something great about yourself, whether it be a new power, enlightenment, or a treasure. The heroes' journey is very applicable to many of the heroes we see in films and TV, and they represent the absolute best in every man, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Unfortunately though, the times do change, and these god-like heroes do not continue to provide the same fulfillment as they once did. The people needed something more realistic, something they could better identify with. The compromise was the anti-hero, which leads to the purpose of this paper.

The anti-hero has been prevalent in particular times of war, chaos, and destruction. Following WWII and the Vietnam War, we saw a prevalence of soldiers who behaved as anti-heroes after their experiences in wartime, and their struggle to reintegrate into society and normal life after undergoing significant experiences that the average citizen could never fathom. Modernly, we are, again, noticing a resurgence of anti-heroes in Hollywood films and TV. Characters such as Dexter, Walter White (who starts as an anti-hero but transitions to a tragic hero), Christopher Nolan's Batman, and many others who have taken the limelight when in their prime. Even with characters we call

superheroes, we are witnessing remakes in the process that offer a darker storyline then previously seen. The most current Superman, which had influence from Christopher Nolan, also offers a darkened view on the conflicts Superman faces within himself, which is not seen in other Superman films. Why is this shift towards the anti-hero gaining popularity once again? Perhaps it is the rise of conflict and tragedy that bring about these anti-heroes. Considering WWII, the Vietnam War, and more currently, the fall of the twin towers, perhaps the United States is realizing that we can be hurt. Its citizens are fleeing from the traditional ideas of what a hero looks like because this world is changing, evolving, and the U.S. is no longer untouchable, and as the world is changing, the people who occupy it must also change and adapt with it. In times of war and tragedy, evil rears its ugly face for the people in the environment to witness and be reminded that it does in fact exist.

In order to stay on track for this paper, I am going to pick three anti-heroes in film from three different time periods in two distinct cultures: America and Japan. I will separate the six films into three tiers of movies. The first tier will cover the mid fifties and early sixties, as WWII ended. The second tier will cover two films right after the Vietnam War in the seventies, with the third tier of films covering the post 9/11 era. As I take you through each tier of films, the audience will learn the underlying themes these anti-heroes face, such as, motivation, agency and control, justice, and revenge. After we have discussed all six films, we will analyze how the anti-hero archetype has evolved over time, and where this archetype is headed in the future. Can the anti-hero evolve further, or is this the end of the line?

Seven Samurai and *Magnificent Seven*

Seven Samurai

The first two films we will analyze take place right after World War II ended. The first, Akira Kurosawa's, *Seven Samurai*, was released in 1954. The three and a half hour long film depicts a Japanese village, set in the fifteenth century during the warring states period, and the struggles the residents of the village face as they attempt to recruit samurai in order to protect their village from ruthless bandits, whose goal is to take the villages food harvest, leaving the villagers with only enough food to barely survive until their next harvest. The villagers live in fear from the bandits, and ultimately turn to the wise old man of the village, referred to as "granddad," in hopes of receiving advice on how they can stop the bandits and save their village. The wise old man tells them that they must go out and hire as many samurai as they can to protect the village and teach the villagers how to fight. Three villagers, Rikichi, Yohei, and Manzo doubtfully set out to find samurai that will help their cause.

Japanese culture has been observed to hold collectivist values as opposed to individualistic values. Culture, in simple terms, is the passing down of knowledge of life and living. This encompasses many traditions a culture could have, its heritage, as well as its history (Matsumoto et al, 1996.). A subjective dimension of culture is the idea of collectivism vs. individualism. The reason that Japanese have been suggested to hold more collectivist values is perhaps due to multiple individuals' having to rely on others for survival, due to a lack of natural resources (DeVos, 1973; Matsumoto et al., 1996). This would corroborate with the plot of *Seven Samurai,* as three members represent the village as a whole, seeking for help. Unfortunately, this will prove challenging for the

villagers considering they cannot pay any samurai with money, instead they only have food to offer. More specifically, they will offer three meals a day. With a couple of failed attempts, the three villagers finally acquire the services of Kambei Shimada, who will eventually be seen as the leader of the group. Kambei then spends a good portion of the film recruiting the other five samurai. The last samurai to be accepted in their group is really the third samurai we met in the film and is the character we will focus on for our purposes of the anti-hero. Kikuchiyo, who is played by the wonderful Toshiro Mifune, is an interesting character that proclaims he is a samurai, only to be discovered through no hard task that he is, in fact, a false samurai. He lies drunkenly about his family lineage in hopes of being accepted by the other six samurai to fight for the villagers cause. His motives for doing so is that he wants to have a high face value with the other six samurai. Face is a concept that is defined as the amount of social value others give you if you live up to the standards associated with your position (Ho, 1976). According to Steven Heine, in hierarchical, collectivist societies, like those found in East Asia, face is very important (Heine, 2011). The idea of face has nothing to do with how you think of yourself, but how well others think you are doing. Much to Kikuchiyo's despair, he does not achieve the goal of gaining face, and instead loses face with his peers because face can be more quickly lost than gained (Heine, 2011). Conventionally, Japanese culture is more concerned with face, and thus will engage in prevention orientation, which is a defensive, cautious approach to not losing something. Kikuchiyo, fitting the role of the unconventional anti-hero ignores this and will spend the rest of the film attempting to gain face with the other samurai. Kambei and the other five samurai refuse Kikuchiyo, until they finally give in to his persistence. Mifune's character is, from the beginning,

noticeably different from the other six samurai, which makes it easy to believe that he is a false samurai. First, the hilt on his sword is noticeably different from all the other swords you see in the film. The hilt is longer, and the guard is larger than the other swords we see in the film. Kikuchiyo does not carry his sword at his waist like his six peers do. Instead, he carries his sword over his shoulder as he walks, once again standing out from the rest. Akira Kurosawa purposely includes these small differences in order to highlight Kikuchiyo and separate him so that it is even more obvious that he is not a real samurai. He fails to show the discipline that Kambei, and the other five samurai exhibit consistently throughout the film, acting on his emotions rather than thinking rationally before he acts. Kambei and the other five samurai are very modest in the abilities and their discipline. They do not show any sign of overconfidence as their westerner counterparts would. Samurai are modest because that is the normal response to give in a social context so that they can gain social approval (Dessi & Zhao, 2013). Kikuchiyo does not share the same capability to be modest in a social context, as he is impulsive by nature. This, once again, fits the image of the anti-hero, as he is unconventional in many aspects of his own culture.

Upon their arrival to the village, the bell inside the bell tower is rung, which is used to signal for when the bandits are coming. The villagers run and panic as they plead to the six samurai to help. Unknowingly, it was Kikuchiyo who sounded the alarm with hopes of proving a point to the panicking villagers to not look at the samurai with such distaste when it is their help indeed that they need. In this scene, Kikuchiyo successfully humbles the villagers by exhibiting the contradictions in the regards that the villagers hold towards the samurai. This message that Kikuchiyo wanted to get across to the

villagers would not have been done by the other six samurai, and could be seen as a cruel move. Yet, it is used to introduce shame onto the villagers for holding those regards towards the samurai. Kambei and the other five samurai understood what Kikuchiyo was trying to do, and approved nonetheless, perhaps understanding Kikuchiyo's motives a little bit more. The audience, at the same time, is getting a taste of Kikuchiyo's tactics and personality, and is being primed to accept the good, as well as the bad qualities that Kikuchiyo brings to the table. There is a pivotal moment during the time in the film where the samurai are training the villagers to fight when Kikuchiyo, attempting to gain face, stumbles upon a generous amount of armor, weapons, and clothing that the villagers have been keeping, and brings it to the other six samurai. Unfortunately, this is not well received by the other samurai, as it is then understood that all these materials have come from samurai that the villagers have killed. This offends Kambei and the other five samurai, and it leaves Kikuchiyo confused. One of the seven samurai then says, "You never know what it's like, unless you've been hunted." In response to this, Kikuchiyo is angered, and defends the farmers, by telling them that they are the reason the villagers are so scared. Not the six samurai specifically, but samurai in general, who have tried to pillage the villagers home, and in return, have received death. This defense that Kikuchiyo provides adds another layer to Mifune's character, as the audience is beginning to put together Kikuchiyo's origins. Also, Kikuchiyo's defense gives the samurai a view of the villagers' perspective of being attacked, and humbles them, just like the villagers were humbled earlier in the film. As he had made the villagers feel shame, Kikuchiyo has made the samurai also feel shame for their one-sided way of thinking. We are witnessing that the addition of Kikuchiyo to this film is acting as a

facilitator of understanding the differing perspectives between the samurai and the villagers, and that although he may be a false samurai, he still has knowledge that the samurai don't have.

After most of the film has taken place, we are left with the last hour to showcase the climactic battle between the villagers, with the samurai's help, and the bandits, who are ready to reap the villages' harvest. Perhaps the most self-defining moment for Kikuchiyo happens when he and Kambei realize that a wife, child, and husband have fled to attempt to save the old man, who refused to leave his home across the river that has not been protected from the bandits. Kikuchiyo rushes to save the wife and child as Kambei attempts to stop him. As Kikuchiyo approaches the hut, the woman with her child in her arms meets him, and in doing so, she hands him the child and dies. An indescribable expression washes over Kikuchiyo's face as he exclaims to Kambei, "This is me!" It is in this moment that we finally learn of Kikuchiyo's origins; that his parents were farmers and was murdered by samurai when he was a child. The audience is now fully able to understand why Kikuchiyo is, indeed, the anti-hero, as he understands both the farmers' points of view, and the samurai's point of view.

In one of the mini battles, we learn that the bandits are in possession of three muskets, which provide a serious threat to the samurai, as they possess absolutely zero firearms of any sort. To remedy this, one of the seven samurai, Kyuzo, volunteers to retrieve one of the muskets, and does so successfully. Kikuchiyo, who sees this, selfishly wants to go retrieve another one of the muskets, in hopes of gaining face from Kambei and the other five samurai. So far, in this film, Kikuchiyo has slowly been working his way into the seven samurai group, but yet we sill see flashes of his individualism, which

is again an unconventional characteristic he possess. Kikuchiyo embarks on his retrieval

mission, abandoning his post and failing to consult with his fellow samurai. He is

reckless with the retrieval and almost gets himself killed, but is successful in the end.

However, he is not received well once he returns to his comrades as he thought he would

be. Kambei scolds him for abandoning his post and his men, stressing how careless it was

of him to venture out to commit a selfish act. After all, Kikuchiyo is part of a group, and

if that's what he is striving for then he must not act selfishly and impulsively, and instead

keep the groups' needs front and center. This is a display of Kikuchiyo's flaws as an

individual, highlighting his want for glory and acceptance from the other six samurai. Dr.

Oliver Sacks, in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat*, writes that "demanding

never succeeds," and in this case, Kikuchiyo was demanding glory and respect, but

instead, it takes time and must happen spontaneously.

  Unfortunately, as any good film would have it, some good characters must die. As

the samurai are slowly being killed off, Kikuchiyo is becoming enraged with the bandits,

and his fellow samurai's deaths are fueling him to fight harder. As the battle and film are

approaching their respective conclusions, Kyuzo is shot in front of Kikuchiyo, which

proves to be too much for our false samurai. Blinded by rage, Kikuchiyo is also fatally

shot, but before he dies, he has the last say as he stabs the bandit chief, killing him, and

signaling that the villagers have indeed won the battle. Our false samurai anti-hero may

have died due to the negative qualities of his personality, but is able to deal the most

important death to the bandit chief. Kikuchiyo dealing the most important death in this

film symbolizes his full integration and acceptance into the group of samurai, at least in

his own perception. Kikuchiyo was willing to put his life on the line for his group because he believed that he was one of the samurai, as well as one of the villagers.

The Magnificent Seven

Six years after *Seven Samurai* was released, John Sturges decided to remake this film with a western perspective. A western perspective can change many of the subjective dimensions of culture portrayed in a film. As Japanese are seen to be a collectivist culture, placing more importance on the group than the individual, American culture is that of an individualistic nature, placing more importance on the individual than the group. He titled it, *The Magnificent Seven,* which, plot wise, is very similar to that of *Seven Samurai. The Magnificent Seven* is based on a story of seven cowboys who are hired to aid and train Mexican farmers in order to protect their village from the ruthless bandits, whose goal is to take all of their food, leaving the villagers with barely enough food to get by themselves. When watching this film, it is interesting to note which characters in *The Magnificent Seven* embody the characters of *Seven Samurai*. Obviously, Kambei and Gorobei are embodied by the duo of Chris Adams and Vin Tanner, played by Yul Brynner and Steve McQueen, respectively. Kyuzo, the skilled swordsman in *Seven Samurai*, whom Katshurio is in awe of, is embodied by a cowboy named Brit, who is a skilled marksman, and ironically, skilled with knives. Those three characters have firm portrayals in *The Magnificent Seven,* but the character of Kikuchiyo is not represented by a single character in *The Magnificent Seven,* but by two, the young Chico, and the Mexican-Irish Bernardo O'Reilly. Another interesting aspect to note is the way these cowboys carry themselves. The cowboys in this film carry themselves with a sense of overconfidence, as opposed to their modest samurai counterparts. This is, once again, a

tactic used to gain social approval. American culture uses confidence, where Japanese

culture uses modesty (Dessi & Zhao, 2013).

Chico embodies most of the anti-hero characteristics, with Bernardo only

exhibiting a few. As Chris and Vin are looking for "good men" to fight for their cause,

they run into a bit of difficulty. Chico, who was in awe of Chris and Vin standing up for a

funereal burial at the start of the film, wants to join the villagers' cause. Chris, aware of

how young Chico is, gives him a single task of stopping the drawl of a gun, but Chico

fails, with the point proving that Chico is not experienced or knowledgeable about his

own motivations for wanting to join this cause. Chico, offended by this storms out of the

room, only to return a few scenes later, similarly to the fashion that Kikuchiyo showed up

to the dwelling of the other six samurai, drunk and incoherent. Once again, Chico's

immaturity is highlighted just as it was with Kikuchiyo when he doesn't get the response

he was looking for from the other six. However, there is a key difference between Chico

and Kikuchiyo's motivation to join the group. Kikuchiyo wanted to join the group in

order to be accepted as a higher social class then he was. Kikuchiyo actually wanted to be

part of a group, a family, since his was taken from him so long ago. Chico, on the other

hand, wants to join the group for selfish glory. Chico's age also is a factor in this

consideration. He is young, and inexperienced in life, so when he thinks of gunning down

a bunch of bandits to save a village, he is only thinking about the "gunning down the

bandits" part, while putting the idea of saving a village second. This highlights the

individualism of the American culture.

Like Kikuchiyo, Chico stays persistent to join the group in the same fashion that

Kikuchiyo did, trailing behind the group, drawing attention every now and then. It is once

Chico recreates the scene of ringing the tower bell, falsely signaling to the villagers that the bandits are coming that he is finally accepted into the cowboy's cause. This acceptance in the group happens a lot quicker than it did in *Seven Samurai*, which undermines the importance of face, since westerners do not have a great understanding of this concept (Heine, 2011). Westerners are more individualistic than their East Asian counterparts; therefore it would make sense that there is a lack of understanding of the concept of face. Individualist do not need the approval of significant others because the group is second to the self in terms of importance. The individual does not care if they live up to the standards associated with their respective position because there isn't much social value as there is in collectivist societies.

Along with embodying many of Kikuchiyo's qualities, he also represents a lot of Katshurio's character due to his age and inexperience in life. Chico, like Katshurio is dealing with the obstacle of matching his fellow older cowboys in terms of maturity and discipline. The combination of Kikuchiyo qualities and the age of Katshurio produce a stubborn rebel, who is defiant to authority, and who fails to think before acting. This young cowboy, Chico, learns a lot through this movie about himself and about life. One flash of insight that Chico shows is when the seven cowboys are talking amongst themselves, and Chico talks about how the villagers will make a song about the deed the cowboys are doing, and will sing it for years. Chris replies by saying that it is only a matter of knowing how to shoot a gun. Chico then poses the question, "How can you talk like that? Your gun has gotten you everything you have, isn't that true?" Vin then jumps in and shows that there is a downside to living life by the gun; you have no family, no kids, no house, and no prospects. Chris aids Vin by saying that there is nothing or no one

to tie you down, you essentially live a lonely life. Lee, jumping in towards the end of the conversation says he has no enemies because he has killed them all, to which Chico replies, "Well. This is the type of arithmetic I like," exemplifying his over glorification and over confidence of the lifestyle the other six cowboys live. Chico's age is again brought to light when Chris replies to Chico's statement, saying, "So did I at your age." This comment by Chris to Chico is Chris's way of warning Chico about the lifestyle he lives, and that to say it is a glorified life drifting from place to place, is in fact a sacrifice because it requires you to sacrifice many responsibilities and opportunities that life has to offer.

Seven Samurai and *The Magnificent Seven* Comparisons

Although Chico is the character that displays most of Kikuchiyo's qualities, he is not the only anti-hero amongst the seven cowboys. We meet two other characters that are not correlated to any of the seven samurai we meet. One of the magnificent seven, Lee, is a death-dealing outlaw who can't show his face anywhere that's civilized without having to watch his back. Lee's character is an interesting one, as he does not have an abundant amount of lines in the film. The lines he does have, though, give us insight on his outlook on life, and the issues he is dealing with. In one scene we witness Lee, plagued with a nightmare, most likely of someone that he has killed in the past and is woken up by two of the villagers who heard the screams. The second cowboy whose could be considered somewhat of an anti-hero is Harry. Harry is an old friend of Chris, who's a greedy cowboy, always looking for treasure. A couple of times throughout the film, the audience witnesses Harry trying to poke questions at the villager regarding a treasure up in the mountains. The audience can easily see that it is not the villagers' cause that he is really

there for, and that his ulterior motive is to find something valuable. The fact that there are multiple characters that could be considered anti-heroes, again, highlights the amount of individuality that is present in American culture. After choosing to disband from the other six cowboys, due to him not wanting to participate in what is deemed a suicide mission, Harry returns in his most noble moment to save Chris from being cornered by the Mexican bandits. Unfortunately, for his act of bravery, he is only rewarded with a bullet to the stomach and ultimately death. Even in his final moments, Harry asks Chris, again, if there was really a treasure that they would have found, looking for some sort of confront in knowing his death was for naught. Chris indulges Harry by telling him there is a treasure they're after, followed by Harry smiling, then closing his eyes to die. Even in his final breath, Harry displays how greedy he is, although he had a very noble moment indeed.

In *The Magnificent Seven,* it is not just Chico who is an anti-hero, but most to, if not, all of the other six cowboys. They all lead lives by the gun, being outlaws and drifters with stories of their own struggles. They all have their own reasons for joining the group, yet they rise to the occasion, and band together for the villagers' cause. The characters that carry out the mission of protecting the villagers has been discussed, but their place amongst the seven and their place in time has not been. Cowboys, unlike samurai, are not looked upon as being the tip of the social class, and being known as honorable warriors. Instead, cowboys are considered outlaws, that choose their own fate and can change the way they live their life whenever they so choose, as highlighted by Chris's regard to Chico, and again in the final scene where Yul and Vin tell Chico to go back to the village to be with the girl he likes. Cowboys, in this time period, need not rely

on others, ignoring collectivist values and putting the needs of the self in the forefront. Samurai, on the other hand, are confined to their social class, and cannot coexist with the villagers that they train and protect. The samurai need each other to exist. The end of *Seven Samurai* highlights this idea, when Gorobei says they have lost, because, as samurais, they must move on to the next fight, unlike the villagers.

Obviously, one major difference between these two movies is the portrayal of the anti-hero. In *Seven Samurai*, the anti-hero is just embodied by one character, where as in *The Magnificent Seven* it is most if not all of the cowboys that embody anti-hero characteristics. This difference alone is reflected by the different cultural portrayals of heroism. Both Samurai and Cowboys are one of the many different hero portrayals that reflect their respective cultural values. For samurai, their cultural values are represented by the Bushido code, which means "the ways of the samurai." The influence of the samurai warrior to Japanese culture is enormous as Dr. Inazo Nitobe, former Under-Secretary General of the League of Nations, and specialist on the issue of Bushido says, "They (samurai) were not only the flower of the nation, but its root as well. All the gracious gifts of Heaven flowed through them. Though they kept themselves socially aloof from the populace, they set a moral standard for them and guided them by their example (Nitobe, 1998). The Bushido code was a way of life for the samurai, and actually was more important than life itself. Bushido codes also refer to the importance and meaning of the duty of loyalty and self-control (Nishi). Unlike the samurai, and their Bushido code, Cowboys had a different code they followed that represented American cultural values, which is deemed the Chivalric code. The ideas of the breakdown of

Chivalric code is different from source to source, but are the ideal virtues as the senses of loyalty, faithfulness, honor, and most of all, pride.

Kikuchiyo fails to live up to the Bushido code because he does not understand the ways of the samurai, and is not a true samurai. This idea alone enhances his stance as an anti-hero, yet through the film Kikuchiyo slowly learns some of the principles of Bushido. Unfortunately, he does not make it through the battle to further practice the code. Kikuchiyo is almost a mirror image of the cowboys from *The Magnificent Seven*. He acts as an individual at first, mostly concerned with his ambitions of glory, acceptance, and pride. The spread of anti-hero qualities amongst most of the cowboys goes to show the individualistic nature of Americans, as everyone has their own outlaw background, besides Chico due to his age and inexperience in life. Cowboys, in this film, are depicted as not being loyal to each other because they do not need each other to survive. Everyone is looking out for their own, unlike the samurai and their bushido code. Once again, we may see similar characteristics in the anti-heroes in these two films, but the cultural values they embody are very different, and their motivation for protecting the people and their land are different as well. Kikuchiyo, and the other six samurai protect the villagers land for honor, and exemplify loyalty to one another, yet the cowboys protect the villagers land for Pride mostly, with a small sense of loyalty to one another. This sense of loyalty, in Japanese culture, could be traced back historically as Matsumoto and colleagues suggested that the Japanese had to rely on each other for survival due to lack of natural resources. Americans never had to deal with that issue. It should also be noted that the Japanese regard a task as having high importance, yet the Americans discount the importance of the task (Heine et al, 2001). This would correlate with the idea

that most of the seven cowboys did not hold the task of protecting the villagers as being

the most important, as they had ulterior motives for doing so. Harry's main motive was to

find treasure, Lee's was to find a safe haven from the ones that want him dead, and

Chico's was to seek thrills and glory. All of the seven samurai held the task of protecting

the village, as being the most important task, for this was how Kikuchiyo gained face and

acceptance into the group of samurai.

Taxi Driver and *Battles Without Honor and Humanity*

Taxi Driver

This next section analyzes two films released in the 1970's, *Taxi Driver* and

Battles Without Honor and Humanity. In these two films, we will focus on the theme of

agency and control as it pertains to the anti-hero character. Different cultures will

perceive their identities to be either fixed and stable, or malleable, and this is one theory

of self. Similar to this theory of self, individuals of a given culture will hold worldviews

that are different from the worldviews that other cultures hold. Within these outlooks on

the world, the amount of control one perceives to have over a given situation can

influence decisions, motives, and way of life. It is suggested that there are two theories

that explain worldviews. The first is entity theory of the world, where the world is seen as

fixed and out of someone's control to change. The second is incremental theory of the

world, where the world is viewed as reflexive and responsive to our efforts to change it

(Heine, 2011). This theory of different worldviews, hand-in-hand with this theory of self,

creates a situation where the culture will hold different theories on how individuals in that

culture can, should, and do act (Heine, 2011). *Taxi Driver* stars Robert De Niro, who play

Travis Bickle, a young Vietnam War veteran that is slowly spiraling into madness as he roams the streets of New York in his taxi, planning to rid the streets of all the filth he observes every night. Because Travis Bickle is the anti-hero in this film, he is the main focus for analysis, as he is attempting to find his social identity and assert his primary control over his life. Primary control is the idea that people will strive to shape their existing reality so that it aligns with their perceptions and goals (Rothbaum et al., 1982). American culture has long since been associated with having individualistic values, and asserting primary control over situations. Americans, as individuals, can produce change, with the individual being the source of control (Su et al., 1999). Travis will discover throughout this film that he is the source of control and will attempt to align his goals with the perception of his reality.

The film opens with a scene of Bickle's eyes, as the wander from side to side, already setting a weary tone for De Niro's character. As we dive into the film we learn that Travis has a hard time sleeping at night, having intense cases of insomnia that progressively gets worse. Travis goes to get a job as a taxi driver, and wants to work the night shift because he says he would be up anyway, so he might as well make some money doing it. When the employee that ends up hiring Travis asks if his driving record is clean, Travis jokes cynically that his driving record is as clean as his conscious, already displaying his twisted sense of humor. Travis keeps a journal to write his thoughts down and as he is writing, he narrates the content of his entries, which consists of his perceptions of the streets of New-York City.

In *Self and Social Identity,* Ellemers and colleagues discuss how the social context impacts the social identity and how groups affect the way people see themselves and

others around them (Ellemers et al., 2002). As Travis works more and more shifts, he starts to separate himself from the broad group of New Yorkers and drift into a new group, created by himself, (theoretically speaking) to which he is the only member of. We learn that he is disgusted with what he sees on the streets of New York at night, as hey says, "All the animals come out at night. Someday a real rain will come and wash the scum off the streets." This thought will continue to stick with him throughout the course of the movie, as he begins to think of himself as a vigilante. Slowly, as he witnesses more "filth," as Travis would say, the audience witnesses his physical appearance getting worse. Travis looks tired with bags under his eyes, and his thoughts are slowly eating away at his psychological state, which wasn't too strong to begin with. One can only witness so much evil before they snap. Travis is troubled with being complacent. He says he needs a sense of some place to go, some sort of purpose for him, but hasn't found it yet, exhibiting his struggles to assert primary control. One day he spots a woman, Betsy, whom he immediately feels a connection with. After a few days of watching her through the windows of her office building, which is a campaign office for a presidential candidate, Charles Palantine, Travis gains the courage to go inside the building and talk to Betsy. This is successful for him, as she accepts his request to take her on a coffee date. They seem to hit it off until they have their second date at the movies, which turns out to be an X-rated movie. Betsy is immediately offended and refuses to have anything to do with him after that. Travis is shocked by how offended she is, which goes to shows his degree of understanding with what is and isn't acceptable in a social setting, and how he is slowly losing touch with reality. Travis continues to try and talk to Betsy, but does not succeed, and it finally climaxes when he goes back into her office building, making a

scene, exclaiming to Betsy, "Your cold and distant like the rest of them!" This scene is a perfect example to showcase that Travis has separated himself into his own group, with the rest of the city being in their own group.

So far, there has been a high level of noninvolvement with Travis and New York City. Since Travis has yet to involve himself with nightlife of New York City, he is left to his social perceptions of others interacting with the city. Travis's idea of self is implicated through instrumental motives relating to his relative goals, outcomes, and audiences. If Ellemers and colleagues theory of the noninvolved self were to hold true, then it would suggest since Travis is uninvolved, he would hold no bias towards the social world. However, Travis, clearly changes and the role of motivation and affect become more apparent (Ellemers et al., 2002). As the film continues, Travis goes from being noninvolved to being a group directed threat, with low commitment to the group of New York City. Travis begins to exercise what Ellemers and colleagues call individual mobility. Travis does not like the negative identity that New York City holds, and instead will attempt to align with a preferable identity that is instrumental to his individual identity (Ellemers et al., 2002).

One night, Travis has an interesting interaction with someone who is in his cab when this stranger asks Travis to stop off on the side of the street and to keep the meter running. The stranger asks Travis to look up at the building on his left and we see a silhouette of a woman in the window, which turns out to be this stranger's wife. This stranger then goes on to say how that is his wife and how she is cheating on him, and that he will murder her with a .44 Magnum. Travis is at a loss for words, as this is the moment where he realizes that he must begin to take matters in his own hands in order to deal

with the filth on the streets. Travis says that he will be someone who finally stood up (to the filth on the streets). He continues to spiral downwards as he illegally purchases four guns, and becomes familiar with using them in various settings, preparing for something he isn't aware of yet because he still hasn't found a purpose for himself.

Travis gets his first taste of blood a few nights later as he stops a robbery at a convenient store, killing the man attempting to flee with the cash from the register. This is important because Travis shot this man without any hesitation, and now the audience knows that he actually is capable of killing a man, as it is no longer just talk. We finally learn what Travis's purpose is, or at least, what he thinks his purpose is. He plans to assassinate the presidential candidate, Charles Palantine, but must wait for the right moment. Travis writes a letter to his parents lying about his well being, saying he has been in a relationship (with Betsy), which is absolutely false, and sends his best regards.

Aside from this mission he has set out for himself, we witness a few encounters Travis has with an assumed prostitute, whose name we later learn is Iris, and her scumbag pimp, Sport. He decides to play a hero and attempt to rescue Iris from her pimp, by telling her that she shouldn't be doing what she's doing, and that she should be living at home with her parents while attending school. Iris claims she can leave whenever she wants, but once we witness her trying to, we see the manipulative hold Sport has on Iris, preventing her from fulfilling her wish of leaving. Travis decides to act on his plan for his assassination attempt, and attends a rally for Charles Palantine, only to be spotted by a secret service agent as he is trying to pull a gun out of his jacket. Travis reacts quickly and aborts the mission, running off. The next scene is after nightfall where Travis returns to where Sports dwelling is. At that moment he changes his mission, and settles on a sort

of rescue mission for Iris. He kills Sport, and a few of the other hoodlums that are in the building, but is also shot once in the arm, and nicked in the neck. All of this takes place in front of Iris, as she watches in horror. The cops finally rush in guns aiming at Travis. He would have attempted suicide, but did not have enough ammunition to do so.

Fortunately, he does not get arrested, and is instead taken to the hospital and deemed a hero for rescuing Iris and receives a letter from Iris's parents, thanking him for saving her life, as she has now returned to her parents and is attending school. At the very end of the movie Travis receives some reconciliation with Betsy as he drops her off in his cab at her home. He refuses to let her pay her fair as he smiles and drives off. The very last scene is Travis driving into the night as he looks in his rear view mirror, only to be agitated by something else, implying that he is still mentally sick, and that the cycle has begun again. Travis makes a wonderful example of an anti-hero as he is obviously mentally ill throughout the movie, with his erratic and irrational thinking patterns, yet the audience is hooked on De Niro's character, and wants him to succeed with whatever he is doing, no matter how morally wrong it is. Unfortunately, Travis, with his mental instability that we can probably attribute to his time served in Vietnam before he was honorably discharged, is a product of his environment in the nighttime streets of New York, where the degenerates come out to play. Travis could only take so much as, what he perceived as filth, ate away at his mental state, until he finally cracked and acted out. What is scary is that the audience is left with the fact that he is still out on the streets, and is bound to have another episode of a mental break. Travis is a prime example of the incremental theory of the world because the citizens of New York City responded to his

efforts to change things. Through his own action Travis was able to achieve recognition for cleaning some of the filth off the streets and returning a girl to her family.

Battles Without Honor and Humanity

Travis Bickle is very different from the next anti-hero under discussion, which is Shozo Hirono, from *Battles Without Honor and Humanity*. This film was released in 1973, but takes place in a eleven year time span of 1946-1955 in post war Hiroshima, where multiple Yakuza crime families are struggling to gain dominance over each other. The film is mainly centered on Hirono, who is an ex-solider and Yakuza street thug. We get an idea of the tone of the time period, when the narrator of the film says that it is a time where it was every man for themself. In the opening scene we witness a scuffle between Yakuza members that results in Hirono, killing a Yakuza member himself, landing a prison term. While in prison he befriends Hiroshi Wakasugi, a member of the Doi family, and becomes Sworn brothers as Hirono helps Wakasugi get out of prison through a fake suicide attempt. In gratitude of helping Wakasugi get out of prison, Yoshio Yamamori, future boss of the Yamamori family puts up bail for Hirono. Shortly after, the Yamamori family is established with Hirono and others swearing their loyalty to the Yamamori boss.

Different from American culture, Japan holds more collectivist values and emphasizes the importance of the group, as opposed to the importance of the self. People from Japanese culture tend to assert secondary control, which is when people align themselves with existing realities, leaving realities unchanged, accepting ones circumstances, but exerting control over their psychological impact (Morling & Evered, 2006). Such is the case with Hirono's place in his respective yakuza family. Swearing

loyalty to a yakuza family is an oath for life, and any attempt to leave that family is a death wish. This highlights the importance of the idea of the group in Japanese culture. Hirono is not a yakuza boss himself, so he must act in accordance with the group, considering their best interests at all times.

Conflict soon follows as the Yamamori family is asked to do a favor for an assemblyman, which is to kidnap a rival voter that would help a rival assemblyman win a vote. The Doi family, who support the rival assemblyman, are friends with the Yamamori family, so one could see how conflict is inevitable. The Doi family find out of the betrayal through a man named Kanbara, who is a member of the Yamamori family. This betrayal leads to a fight between the two families, and is almost lead to bloodshed before Wakasugi stops his boss from attacking the Yamamori family. This highly offends the Doi boss, and results in Wakasugi becoming a guest member of the Yamamori family. Kanbara soon becomes a member of the Doi family, and proceeds to tell them all of the Yamamori family secrets. The Doi family then starts imposing on Yamamori turf, leading to the Yamamori boss's decision that the Doi boss should be killed. Wakasugi volunteers to do so, but Hirono wont let him break Yakuza code, which highlights the importance of commitment to the group, since Wakasugi is a member of the Doi family. Instead, Hirono volunteers to kill the Doi boss himself. After Hirono attempts to kill the Doi boss by shooting him five times, he flees to a hideout that the Yamamori family has set up for him. Kanbara, claiming that Yamamori (Yamamori boss, whom Hirono is loyal to) sent him, visits Hirono in his secret hideout, and tells Hirono that he has to move him to a new hideout. Reluctantly, Hirono takes the bait, only to realize Kanbara has betrayed him, again. Hirono is arrested and sent to prison for a long term, while Wakasugi gets revenge

for Hirono by killing Kanbara. Wakasugi then retreats to a secret hideout that gets tipped off to the police by an unknown source we later learn is the Yamamori boss.

While Hirono is in jail the Yamamori becomes more successful and expands their business. But with this expansion, more conflict follows. Tetsuya Sakai, who pledged loyalty to the Yamamori family with Hirono, and is also a captain of the family, is growing tired of the high commission his boss is taking from his men's' earnings. Sakai wants to become self-sustaining and the boss to reduce the amount of money he takes from his men, but is in disagreement with Yamamori and two other captains of the Yamamori family. This creates conflict within the Yamamori family, as the Yamamori boss is lying to Sakai. When Sakai finds out Yamamori's plans of betrayal, an internal war breaks out, with Sakai eventually leading a one-sided victory over the other Yamamori captains.

At this time Hirono is released from prison on parole and is immediately greeted by Yamamori, who lies to Hirono in hopes of getting him to kill Sakai. Hirono meets with Sakai, and tells him that Yamamori sent him to kill him. Instead of following through with the killing of Sakai, Hirono pleads with Sakai to make peace and rebuild the Yamamori family. Sakai had other plans though, and instead forced Yamamori into retirement by blackmailing him. Sakai then proceeds to start a company and join forces with another Yakuza family. However, the last active living captain of the used-to-be Yamamori family, Yano, is trying to reach the Yakuza family before Sakai does in hopes of ruining Sakai's chances of joining forces. Sakai has Yano killed for this. Yamamori then asks to meet with Hirono in hopes of retaining his loyalty. Hirono refuses, stating that both Yamamori, and Sakai are bad, and breaks his allegiance with Yamamori.

Breaking his allegiance with the Yamamori family was a death sentence, Hirono knew, and it marked for the first time that Hirono was going to quit acting with secondary control, and begin acting with primary control, shaping his existing reality so that it fit his perception.

As Hirono is walking out the door, he realizes that it was Yamamori who tipped the police on Wakasugi's hideout, but fails to act on that. Hirono then finds Sakai and tells him that he has broken his allegiance with Yamamori, and that he and Sakai are no longer brothers. Hirono then says he swears to kill Sakai, and if Sakai doesn't want that he must shoot Hirono immediately. Sakai refuses to kill Hirono, and instead lets him go, saying he will kill Hirono another day. Immediately after Sakai separates from Hirono, he is assassinated. At Sakai's funeral, Hirono attends and interrupts the ceremony by talking to the picture of Sakai, saying that Sakai wouldn't want this fake show being put on for him, even though he is already dead. Hirono then proceeds to shoot up the ceremony, without harming anyone. As Hirono shoots at all the decorations of the ceremony, he names all of the brothers that have died from the internal war Yamamori had caused. After he shoots up the ceremony, Hirono threatens Yamamori, by saying he still has bullets left in his gun, then leaves the ceremony as the movie ends.

Taxi Driver **and** *Battles Without Honor and Humanity Comparisons*

Hirono, the anti-hero of this film, is an honorable Yakuza member who got caught up in the middle of an institution, incited by lies and betrayal. Perhaps the fact that he is the only honorable Yakuza member is what makes him the anti-hero, however ironic. He obviously has killed people, and commits crimes, as comes with the territory of being in the Yakuza, but his moral principles and loyalty is what draws the audience to favor and

root for him. In this film we get to see how the Yakuza as an industry create the role of the anti-hero that Hirono fills, unlike Taxi Driver, where the focus is strictly on a central role, Travis Bickle, and his self-creation into the role of an anti-hero. The theme of agency and control that these two movies share reflects the values of their respective culture. The anti-hero of both films share similar characteristics: they are both unconventional, they both have qualities that aren't hero like (shooting people, stalking people, having obvious mental issues), but they both are able to gain the support of their audience through their methods. Where these two anti-hero characters differ is in the way they carry out actions and the thinking behind these actions. Due to East Asia's collectivism values, they, as a culture, are impervious to a lone person trying to change a situation (Chiu et al., 1997). The Yakuza films, having their own respective genre, have always been organized around the conflict between social obligation and personal inclination (Varese, 2006). Take Hirono for example, he is just one member of the Yakuza, amongst thousands. He is sick of the lies and betrayal of all the people he thought were loyal to him, yet all he can do is just walk away with his life because he cannot take down the whole Yakuza by himself. It would be unheard of because the majority of power is concentrated in groups and leaders of groups, which Hirono refuses to be a part of, and is not a leader himself. However, in American culture, and as Travis Bickle exhibits for the audience, the individual can produce the change that is wanted. Further contemporary research backs up this idea with the study of control strategies between American and Japanese individual. Morling (2000) found that Japanese individuals are more likely to adjust to a situation, where Americans are more likely to influence a situation. Japan are likely to see groups as agents that produce change, like

the Yakuza, where Americans see the individual as the agent to produce change, like Travis Bickle, who takes his idea of justice into his own hands to produce a change in New York City.

Kill Bill and K-20

Kill Bill

In the last tier of film, we will discuss how the role of the anti-hero is shifting and becoming an accommodating role, more specifically how women fit into the roles of anti-heroes. We can identify and hone in on the different qualities that mean and women have when they fill the role of the anti-hero, and how they are looked at differently due to their gender. We then will discuss Japan's shift from Yakuza gangster films, to more modern superhero/anti-hero films and manga. Its important to note that although I am just now covering the role of a woman as an anti-hero, women have played anti-heroes for quite some time, especially in the Japanese culture. In Japanese period films, Fushimi Naoe pioneered the anti-heroine in roles such as Tange Sazen's vamp girlfriend in *A New Edition of Tales of Ooka;s Administration*. However, most of the time women filled the role of the tragic heroine (Thornton, 2008).

Kill Bill is one of the eight current films director Quentin Tarentino has released, and it centers around a female lead character known as "The Bride", played by the wonderful Uma Thurman. The Bride, at the start of the film awakens from a four-year coma, as we learn that there was an attempt on her life by a group of assassins, and their leader, Bill, which she was once apart of. Her quest throughout the movie is to seek revenge on the four assassins and Bill for trying to kill her. Another little extra piece of information is The Bride was pregnant, which is why she left her profession as an

assassin when Bill and his assassins attempted to murder her. So when she awoke from her coma, the baby was gone, leading her to not only seek revenge for herself, but also for her daughter. The story is spread out into two films, the first being released in 2003, with the sequel following it in 2004.

For the purpose of The Bride's story we will talk about both movies as a whole. First off, Tarentino decides to take it upon himself to not disclose The Bride's real name. When she was still an assassin her nickname was "Black Mamba," but we never learn her real name until halfway through the second film. Whenever her real name is said, it is bleeped out to keep the audience in the dark. As an assassin, Black Mamba was skilled with blades, and the talent as we witness has not left her. One characteristic of Tarentino's films is that they rarely follow a chronological order, as the films often jumps to different points in time, leaving the audience to fill in the pieces as the movie progresses. The Bride is considered an anti-hero because she is obviously the good guy in the film, although her actions are genuinely bad in nature. The first fellow assassin we get to witness The Bride coming into contact with, although her name is second on the list, is Vernita Green, a.k.a., Copperhead. The Bride, professional and composed, finds Copperhead at her suburbia home where she has started a family and has a daughter of her own. The two then indulge in a fight, when a couple of minutes into the scuffle they hear a school bus stop in front of the house, dropping off Copperhead's daughter. The two compose themselves in a comical fashion as the young daughter walks in and is introduced to The Bride as "One of mommy's old friends." After sending her upstairs, The Bride and Copperhead calmly go to the kitchen to talk as Copperhead apologizes for the sinful act they committed towards The Bride. The Bride accepts the apology, but still

insists that she still must kill her, and that using Copperhead's daughter, as an excuse will not save her. The Bride and Copperhead set a time to meet later that night in a field where no one will witness them fighting in order to settle their differences. Like all assassins, Copperhead still has a trick of her sleeve and attempts to shoot her through a cereal box, but it is a failed attempt as The Bride counters by throwing a knife straight into Copperhead's chest, killing her instantly. Unbeknownst to The Bride, Copperhead's daughter witnessed the whole thing. As The Bride is leaving, she tells Copperhead's daughter that she wasn't supposed to see that, and that if she is still sour about it when she is older, Black Mamba will be waiting. This scene is our first example of The Bride filling an anti-hero role. Wanting to be a mom herself, The Bride surely knows that murdering Copperhead in front of her daughter is disgraceful and horrid, but The Bride will not falter when it comes to the path she has set before her, a path of revenge in which no one will stop her. Not even a child. What makes The Bride's journey that much more important, is that the audience is already on her side, because she lost her daughter before she was even born, which makes the audience more content with the fact she murdered a mother in front of her daughter.

Next we jump back in time as we see The Bride prepare for the first name on her list, O-Ren Ishii, a.k.a, Cottonmouth. We are given a great amount of background information on Cottonmouth's character in a short form of anime. The Bride narrates the story as she talks about Cottonmouth's account of witnessing her parent being murdered in front of her, and then getting the revenge she vowed on her parents murderers once she was older. The purpose of this background information is to imply that perhaps the two were close at one point in time, and perhaps because, in general, The Bride's current

mission is not so different from the one Cottonmouth had in regards to getting revenge. Once The Bride has woke up from her coma, Cottonmouth has become the leader of the Yakuza in Tokyo. Upon The Bride's arrival to The House of Blue Leaves, as it is referred to, she is met with the Yakuza gang, the Crazy 88, which she must first get through to get to Cottonmouth. The Bride slashes her way through the whole gang and finally meets Cottonmouth outside in the snow, where the two battle it out. Cottonmouth figures she has the upper hand until her leg is cut by The Bride's blade. From that point, Cottonmouth knew The Bride was a formidable opponent, and apologizes for taking part in the attempted murder of The Bride. Once again, The Bride accepts the apology, but is still firm on the objective of killing Cottonmouth. They then touch swords a few more times before The Bride decapitates Cottonmouth, exacting her revenge. As noted earlier, of all the fellow assassins, we receive the most background information on Cottonmouth, which leads the audience to infer that the two were close. As one could imagine, assassins probably do not get close to many people, let alone other assassins, due to the nature of the business. Although at one point they might have been close, The Bride still must do what she thinks is right, and obtain revenge, which she does after slaying a gang of eighty-eight Yakuza members. Not very hero like, yet the audience is behind The Bride one hundred percent.

In the second volume of the film, Kill Bill, we get more background information on the relationship between the assassins' leader, Bill, and The Bride, whose real name we finally learn is Beatrix Kiddo. We know that they were former lovers, and that this fact alone, is why they made an attempt on her life after she left the group to marry someone else whom she could actually live a good life with. In the second volume of this

film, Beatrix aims to kill the other two assassins still remaining on her list, Bud, who is Bill's brother, and Elle Driver, a.k.a., California Mountain Snake. She runs into trouble trying to kill bud by waking herself into a trap and ends up being buried alive. While she is escaping from her grave, California Mountain Snake kills Bud. Once Beatrix escapes from being buried alive, she returns to Bud's trailer only to find that Bud is dead. California Mountain Snake is still inside, and the two begin to fight. In the end, Beatrix snatches out the Mountain Snake's eye, and leaves her alive, completely blinded in Bud's trailer. This is an interesting move on Beatrix's part considering she does not finish the Mountain Snake off when she so easily could. I would say Beatrix's reason for doing so is that she wants California Mountain Snake to suffer, and to kill her would be giving her an easy way out. The audience can look at this as a heroic act by sparing the Mountain Snake's life, yet I would consider it more cruel because now she must suffer being blind for the rest of her life. All things considered, Beatrix found the revenge she wanted in regards to her old nemesis.

In the conclusion of Beatrix's revenge story, she tracks down Bill through his adoptive stepfather. The only reason Bill's adoptive stepfather gave Beatrix the information was because he knew Bill would want him to. Once she arrives to Bill's location she is greeted by Bill and a four-year-old little girl, which we learn is her daughter that she thought was dead this whole time. After a brief catch-up period between Beatrix and Bill, it is understood that they both still have business between them. Beatrix, unable to be derailed from her mission, gives Bill the Five-Point-Palm-Exploding-Heart-Technique, which is to be known only by the master who taught Bill and Beatrix, leaving Bill stunned over the fact that it was taught to her. After you have

been hit with that move you have five steps before your heart explodes. Bill, like an honorable man, accepts this defeat and bids farewell to Beatrix as he embarks on his final five steps. Afterwards Beatrix is rejoined with her daughter, and is finally able to move on from her path of revenge on the group of assassins that attempted to take her life.

Kill Bill Analysis

Identity, or who an individual thinks that they are can make conflict a very emotional situation. Beatrix, as the audience witnesses is betrayed by a former lover and a group of peers that could be considered the closest thing to friends that she has (especially talking about Bill and Cottonmouth). This betrayal didn't only affect her cognitively, but also emotionally, and the result of this emotional pain resulted in violent acts of revenge (Clayton & Opotow, 2003). Minow (1997) argued that identity is most noticeable when an individual undergoes a psychological shift in the understanding of who they are and their entitlement to social resources, which is represented by Beatrix in *Kill Bill.* First, Beatrix identifies herself as an assassin, then once she is pregnant, a mother. After the betrayal of her squad, she identifies herself as a mother who will use her skills to obtain revenge, and attain what she perceives as fair justice. When describing justice as resulting from the intersection of the self and society, Baumeister (1998), describes three aspects of self experience, with the last one being the executive function to make decisions and take responsibility for those decisions. These executive decisions affect the relationship between individuals, how others perceive one, and how one view themselves, which can be a good, moral person, or a bad, immoral person (Baumeister, 1998). Beatrix has already affirmed her own morality as good, but when the audience takes into account the reason for Beatrix want for revenge they look at the fact that her

assassin squad attempted to take her life, as well as her unborn daughter's life and they too are able to affirm Beatrix's morality as good.

K-20

Historically, in Japanese cinema, the anti-hero has represented the angry spirit of a defeated, slain hero, in search for redress. Whether it is at the cost of the enemies or the innocent, it makes no matter. During this process the anti-hero will make its will and identity known (Thornton, 2008). This leads us to our final anti-hero, K-20, from the movie, *K-20: The Fiend with Twenty Faces.* This movie takes place in 1949, in a world where WWII never happened, and Japan has signed a treaty with the UK and the U.S. As a result, a social caste system is implemented and individuals are forbidden to change their occupation, fall in love freely, and must marry within their respective class. K-20 is a notorious Robin Hood figure who steals from the rich and distributes it to the poor, however he is not the main character in this movie, he is instead, a supporting role to the main protagonist, Heikichi Endo. This movie follows a hero's journey of Heikichi Endo, who is a circus performer that is a member of the lower class society, struggling to make money and put food on the table. At the beginning of the film, Heikichi is approached by a man named Kozo Tonomura, who allegedly works for a magazine to take pictures of the famed detective, Akechi Kogoro's wedding, who has been trying to capture K-20 for some time. It is discovered that Kozo, who was actually K-20 himself, fooled Heikichi, and had him framed for being K-20. Heikichi is broken out of prison by a band of thieves and thus begins his hero's journey by training to become a thief, like K-20, in order to get revenge on K-20, and bring him to justice in order to have his name whipped clean. Through these efforts, it is discovered that K-20 has plans to gain access to a device that

is capable of wireless energy transmission and use it as a weapon to destroy all of the corporations, thus ending the caste system that has been implemented. Heikichi then must beat K-20 to the device so that he cannot use it; fore it is far too dangerous in his hands. As the film climaxes and the audience witnesses the battle between Heikichi and K-20 over the energy device, it is revealed that K-20's true identity is the famed detective Akechi Kogoro, who was once in the lower class, but had to buy his way into the upper class and build a reputation as a famous detective. Akechi uses the fact of him and Heikichi sharing similar origins in order to persuade Heikichi to join him in his quest to eliminate the upper class. Heikichi refuses, and ends up destroying the energy device, which kills Akechi (K-20) with it.

K-20 Analysis

It's noticeable that over the film, *K-20: The Fiend with Twenty Faces,* not much of a summary was offered. This is in part because K-20, the anti-hero under discussion, is not the main protagonist, and is actually somewhat a villain in this film. Secondly, the audience is not offered much background information on K-20. The background information we do hear about him is very brief and is from a second hand account. Perhaps if more information were given to the audience about K-20 and why he wants this device to destroy the upper class then some understanding would follow. Due to this lack of information, K-20 is painted out as the villain. Although K-20 is considered a villain in regards to this film, he is still an anti-hero because his goal is to bring equilibrium back to the society he lives in, he just happens to be taking it a little too far. K-20 has lost himself in his own mission. K-20 is a Robin Hood figure that takes from the rich and gives back to the poor, however, there is such a thing as going too far, and in

this instance it is up to Heikichi to stop K-20. K-20 represents the anti-hero because he is more than willing to do things that aren't heroic, such as framing Heikichi and potentially ruining his life, in order to complete his mission. A second example that supports K-20 as the anti-hero is the fact that both him and Heikichi come from poor backgrounds. K-20 was part of the lower class, like Heikichi, but was able to buy his way into the upper class. Therefore he has an idea of what both lives are like.

These two films were chosen in comparison for multiple reasons. First, the audience gets to witness and experience the anti-hero as a function of the other characters in the story. K-20 is an anti-hero, yet is seen almost as a villain in the film because of what he is trying to accomplish. Beatrix, a female anti-hero is seen as the "good guy" in her respective film, although she is obtaining revenge, which is taught as something that is frowned upon. Secondly, the audience gets to explore the perception of these anti-heroes as a function of their place in the film. As stated earlier, K-20 is not the main protagonist; he is a supporting role to the main protagonist. On the other hand, Beatrix from *Kill Bill* is the main protagonist. This offers a great comparison of the perceptions that two anti-heroes can attract. K-20 wants revenge on the upper class by destroying their corporations, which can be understood by the lower class, yet due to the inclusion of another character that is advocating for the morally right outcome, which goes against K-20's will, we perceive K-20 as a villain. Beatrix does not have the influence of another character that advocates against her obtaining revenge, so the audience perceives her as a hero because the fact that revenge is not an ideal virtue is overlooked. Perhaps if the inclusion of such a character was offered in *Kill Bill* then the audience might face more

conflict about whom they are actually rooting for. Yet, both characters are indeed anti-heroes.

Kill Bill and *K-20* Comparisons

A common theme in both films is that of justice and revenge. If one were to trump the other, it would be justice, with revenge tagging along. Both anti-heroes want a sort of justice that only they can inflict, which supports the argument that both characters are anti-heroes, and post-conventional thinking, but what does this say about both cultures regarding this theme? Susan Clayton and Susan Opotow defined justice as an abstract system of beliefs and standards prescribing the appropriate relationships between people and their fates (Clayton & Opotow, 2003). In their article, both Clayton and Opotow discuss the role identity has in regards to justice. They stress that justice is dealt with differently as it pertains to an individual's identity or a group identity. There is such a thing as individual and collective identities, and their relation to justice focuses on different levels: the individual and the group. Many researchers have identified that certain people might consider a particular outcome to benefit them personally in terms of fairness, but not for the group as a whole (Clayton & Opotow, 2003). This would offer a different perspective on justice then, regarding an individual or collective focus. In *K-20,* the audience witnesses the chance Heikichi has to take the energy device to use for himself to generate power for his poverty stricken village, yet he does not falter from his mission to destroy the device because he knows it will be too dangerous for the group as a whole. However, K-20 himself has a more individualistic perspective on justice and wants to use the machine for his own benefit, highlighting his distance from his cultures' collectivistic values and supporting his position as an anti-hero. These two films offer a

different perspective on the role of justice as it pertains to the self as a function of individual and group identities. Beatrix had a group identity, but was betrayed and now sees herself as an individual using justice reasoning to affirm her own morality on what is right and wrong, while K-20 has long since distanced himself from his group, as he is now seen as a villain and attempts to use the wireless energy device to restore fairness to his society, but is stopped by a protagonist who knows that if this device is not destroyed it will cause more harm than not.

Conclusion

One topic of discussion is the amount of influence that both the American and Japanese film industries have had on each other. *Seven Samurai* was seen as a masterpiece in film and has influenced many filmmakers around the world. The character of Kikuchiyo laid the foundation of the anti-hero and influenced the role of the anti-hero in other films ever since. *Seven Samurai* was so influential that America had to make a remake, but give it a western cowboy twist. These two films offer different takes on anti-heroes as a function of their cultural values as we see different factors these anti-heroes use for motivation. America, holding individualistic values, use self-enhancement, glory, and pride as factors of motivation as we see most of the seven cowboys join a cause they don't really care about for different reasons, highlighting the lack of importance of the group as a whole, only to return to their fight as a group because they can't set aside their own pride and accept defeat. Japan, holding collectivist values, stress the importance of the group and the task at hand. We witness the anti-hero of the film, Kikuchiyo, start off as a loner, lie about being a samurai so that he can be part of a group, and complete a task, with a group.

Paul Schrader, the author of *Taxi Driver*, was heavily influenced by urban Japanese gangster stories when he wrote an essay on Japanese gangster films for the New York magazine *Film Comment* in 1974 (Varese, 2006). Schrader even went on to write a movie script for the film, *The Yakuza.* Schrader even said that such movies (Yakuza films) differ drastically from the American counterparts, as they reflect the conflict between social obligation and personal inclination, whereas they avoid the dilemma of social mobility of gangster films and the despair of post-war *film noir* (Varese, 2006). The Yakuza films have been so influential that they earned their own respective genre and influenced many American directors and script writers, such as Paul Schrader, to make films about urban stories with an American individualistic take, such as *Taxi Driver*. These two films offered two perspectives on agency and control that two anti-heroes dealt with. Travis Bickle, being an individualist, took his fate into his own hands and felt that he had primary control over his existing realties and used that to align his goals with accordingly. Shozo Hirono, on the other hand was a product of the Yakuza, and deal with the conflict of social obligation and personal inclination as he saw that not one of his allies could be trusted and that he could not produce the change he wanted and had to settle for secondary control. Hirono knew that he could not change the system himself since he was not a leader of a group or part of a group entirely.

It is known that Quentin Tarentino, the director of *Kill Bill*, had much influence of the Yakuza film genre on his film. The inclusion of the Yakuza gang, the use of samurai swords, and Cottonmouth's background story being depicted in anime supports the argument of the Japanese film influence on Quentin Tarentino. Japanese culture has had an increased amount of western influence over the past couple of decades, and it is

highlighted in modern Japanese films. In America, superheroes are popular characters to make films about, yet in Japan that is not the case. Yet, in *K-20*, the audience is under the impression that K-20 is a vigilante superhero, which would indicate some western influence. In these two films the audience has a glimpse on the role justice has in regards to individual and collective identities.

Identity is can be viewed from an individual or a group perspective. Each of these anti-heroes has their own individual identities, as well as a group identity. America and Japan each have their own identity as well as all the other countries around the world. Through the lens of identity, pressing justice issues and the impact of social change come into focus, and through the lens of justice, identity takes on a deeper significance (Clayton & Opotow, 2003). Currently, many new films and TV shows depict the anti-hero and their conflict with what is just in a not-so-nice world, and sometimes it causes them to do some not-so-nice things in order to achieve what they think is just. If the fluidity of identity can be considered by society, then perhaps a development in the understanding that justice depends on changing environmental, social, and political contexts will occur. If cultures can understand the complexity of the constructs, identity and justice, then it will be recognized that these two constructs are contingent on context and can change in meaning as environmental, social, and political changes take place. It is with this understanding of identity and justice that the audience will begin to understand the make-up of the anti-hero character.

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