

# From Anakin Skywalker to Darth Vader: understanding *Star Wars* based on Theodore Millon's theory of personality pathology

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## Summary

The aim of this work was to psychologically investigate Anakin Skywalker (also known as Darth Vader), using a non systematic idiographic clinic analysis, based on Theodore Millon theory, with solid theoretical and empirical bases for personality pathological traits and personality disorders. The character Anakin Skywalker allows this analysis, since in the films it is possible to observe fragments of his childhood, adolescence and adult life, making viable an analysis of his psychological development. According to Millon's theory and the information from the movies, we present as a conclusion a possible pathological personality functioning for the character.

**Keywords:** Personality disorders; Borderline personality disorder; Personality development; Cinema.

## De Anakin Skywalker a Darth Vader: comprendiendo *Star Wars* en base a la teoría de la personalidad y su patología de Theodore Millon

## Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo fue investigar a Anakin Skywalker (también conocido como Darth Vader) psicológicamente, utilizando un análisis clínico idiográfico no sistemático basado en la teoría de Theodore Millon, con sólidas bases teóricas y empíricas sobre rasgos patológicos y desórdenes de personalidad. El personaje de Anakin Skywalker permite dicho análisis, ya que en las películas es posible observar fragmentos de su infancia, adolescencia y vida adulta, que hacen viable un estudio de su desarrollo psicológico. De acuerdo a la teoría de Millon y a la información de las películas, se presenta como conclusión que el personaje sufre una posible disfunción patológica de la personalidad.

**Palabras clave:** desórdenes de personalidad; trastorno límite de la personalidad; desarrollo de la personalidad; cine.

The author state that this article is original and has not been previously published.

## Technical details

**Title:** Star Wars.

**Original title:** Star Wars.

**Country:** EUA.

**Year:** 1977.

**Director:** Geoge Lucas.

**Music:** John Williams.

**Cinematography:** Gilbert Taylor.

**Film Editing:** Richard Chew; Paul Hirsch; Marcia Lucas.

**Screenwriter:** Geogre Lucas.

**Cast:** Mark Hamill (Luker Skywalker); Harrison Ford (Han Solo); Carrie Fisher (Princess Leia Organa); Peter Cushing (Grand Moff Tarkin); Alec Guinness (Bem Obi-Wan Kenobi); Anthony Daniels (C-3PO); Kenny Baker (R2-D2); Peter Mayhew (Chewbacca); David Prowse (Darth Vader), ...

**Color:** Color.

**Runtime:** 121 minutes.

**Genre:** Action, Adventure, Fantasy.

**Production Companies:** Lucasfilm and Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

**Synopsis:** A young boy from Tatoonie sets out on an adventure with an old Jedi named Obi-Wan Kenobi as his mentor to save Princess Leia from the ruthless Darth Vader and Destroy the Death Star built by the Empire which has the power to destroy the entire galaxy.

**Awards:** Academy Awards: Best Art Direction-Set Decoration (1978). Academy Awards: Best Costume Design (1978). Academy Awards: Best Sound (1978). Academy Awards: Best Film Editing (1978). Academy Awards: Best Effects, Visual Effects (1978). Academy Awards: Best Music, Original Score (1978). Academy Awards: Ben Burtt (178), ...

**Link:**

[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0076759/?ref=mv\\_sr\\_5](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0076759/?ref=mv_sr_5)

[Trailer](#)

## Introduction

Despite the evident richness of cinematographic works, there are few films that allow a thorough psychological analysis of the characters, including the development of personality, since for this purpose a minimum amount of information is needed, from the various stages of development<sup>1</sup>. Among these possibilities, in this study the focus is given to one of the main characters of



American poster (design and artwork by Tom Jung).

the *Star Wars* saga, Anakin Skywalker (also known as Darth Vader), and probably one of the main villains in the history of cinema to the present time. In addition, the *Star Wars* saga itself is amenable to various complex analyzes (eg., Lyden<sup>2</sup>).

In order to enable this psychological analysis of the character Anakin, we use the theoretical proposal of Theodore Millon, with solid theoretical and practical foundations on personality development, especially with a focus on pathological personality traits and personality disorders<sup>3-8</sup>. According to Millon's proposal, personality disorders are patterns in which personality traits function in a maladaptive way in relation to the environment, bringing important losses and injury in the life of the individual and the people around. These patterns are characterized by adaptive inflexibility, which refers to a small and ineffective number of strategies to achieve one goals. They are also characterized by the vicious circle, that is, the functioning itself tends to perpetuate and intensify its pre-existing misalignments. It is also due to

the tenuous stability, which concerns the low resilience of the individual, that is, the difficulty in dealing with everyday conditions that most people can cope with.

In Millon’s proposal, the establishment of a personality disorder has to do with the individual’s initial predispositions and also with individual learning (initials and continuity), which is an accepted idea in psychology and psychiatry in general<sup>9</sup>. Based on this, for the present study a non systematic idiographic clinic analysis was performed, focusing on the learning and predispositions of the character throughout his life. Here, Anakin’s life stages were separated into childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Thus, the aim of this study is to understand the character Anakin Skywalker from the Millon’s theory perspective. From this, the broader scope of this work is to illustrate the applicability of the assumptions and knowledge concerning personality pathological traits from a character which fragments of several stages of his life is known.

**Psychological analysis of the character Anakin Skywalker**

As the first phase of life to be analyzed, in Table 1 Anakin’s patterns of relationship and also his psychological characteristics are presented, all relating to his childhood. For the analyzes presented, Millon’s theory was used as the base, as previously presented.

Anakin was a slave in his childhood and as such, was submissive to an authority, in this case, a male authority (Watto). To a certain extent, this was the only male figure of authority in his life, since Anakin had no known father. Thus, Anakin’s initial learning of the male figure was negative, that is, on the one hand, a figure

with power, on the other hand, authoritarian and dictator. Anakin also sees in this figure the possibility of committing unlawful acts. Also the second male figure to which Anakin relates, Qui-Gon Jinn, although not displaying dictatorial or illicit behaviors, soon becomes an authority figure before Anakin and also exhibits behaviors of disrespect to the authority (eg, Qui-Gon front To the Jedi Council). In both male figures, although traits of openness to experience are observable, also antisocial workings of disregard for rules are present.

In a different way, the female figure present in the boy’s life, his mother (Shmi Skywalker), is a more positive representation, since besides reinforcing to the boy the idea that he is special, it is also a caretaking presence in his life. Soon the boy learns that the female figure is one that can give him security and care. Also the second female figure in his life, Padmé Amidala, shows special affection with the boy, reinforcing once again the feminine figure as protective and positive in his life.

Considering the male and female figures at the beginning of Anakin’s life, the contrast is evidente, on the one hand, the male figure with power and authority over the boy (eg, Watto and Qui-Gon), and on the other, his mother and Padmé with more limited powers before the boy, but with clear representations of affection and care for him. These early apprenticeships of male and female figures intertwine with the initial predispositions exhibited by Anakin, for instance: his active and autonomous tendency (ie., tendency to change the environment rather than being passive to eventual external changes); aggressiveness channeled into the external environment, which allows him to deal with the advent of being a slave (eg, building a droid - C-3PO, running on Pod-Racer);

**Table 1.** Anakin childhood related domains.

Domain	Childhood
Role	Slave
Relationship with authorities	Caretaker female authority, with little power; authoritarian male authority with much power
Relationship with male figures	No known father Negative male relationship, and implying disrespect to authority
Relationship with female figures	Positive female relationship, implying idealization
Predispositions/temperament	Traits with an active tendency, with external channeling of aggressiveness; creativity and intelligence; autonomy; disrespect for authority
Learning	Mother displays traces of openness to experience and detachment, reinforces the idea that the child is special, and teaches the child moral values.

creativity and intelligence, not only demonstrated in the ability to build machines, but also in dialogues with adults; and also some tendency to disrespect authority (eg, with Watto, by deceiving him to participate in Pod-Racer or with Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan Kenobi, later, by disrespecting them and piloting a Naboo Fighter) .

In short, we can see some of Anakin’s predominant traits already presente in his early childhood, as well as constant patterns exhibited by the male and female figures of authority in his life. In Table 2 the functioning and relational patterns in Anakin’s adolescence are presented.

On the one hand, the role played by Anakin in childhood has changed abruptly, since he ceased to be a slave to be part of a specific group (ie., Jedi). However, considering the history of Anakin’s release by Qui-Gon and the boy’s need to flee his home planet, choosing to be a Jedi apprentice turns out to be a “choice”, that is, in fact he did not have other viable options. Perhaps this imposition by the circumstances explains part of his behaviors as adolescent, that can be configured like opposition behaviors. For example, the relationship with authority figures is marked by disturbances, so young Anakin tends to disagree with the orders and directions given to him (eg, by Obi-Wan, his new master, and by the Jedi Council in general).

Alongside this, there is also a clear shift in the pattern of relationship between Anakin and the male figures of authority. Unlike the male figures present in his childhood, who more or less directly demonstrated tendencies to exhibit illicit behavior, in his adolescence the figures were extremely lawful and conscientious, including his Jedi master Obi-Wan and the Jedi Council as

a whole. Faced with male figures with these characteristics, Anakin’s respectful relationship clearly declines, with explicit attempts to circumvent these authorities.

In contrast, Anakin’s relationship with the female power figures in his life, specifically Padmé and his mother, becomes increasingly strong, with the boy’s explicit search for closeness and necessity to keep in touch with these two people. The idealization on the part of the boy becomes more evident when he denies any rule or obstacle in order to be present in their lives and also in the attempt to save his mother from dying.

There is also an explicit continuity of the personality traits already evidenced in the boy’s childhood. In his teens, impulsivity is rather characteristic, which is not atypical for this period of life, but also traits of anxiety (eg, related to fear of losing his mother and Padmé), grandiosity (eg, believing that he can be much better than he is already and better than his current masters) and machiavellianism (eg, showing disregard for the norms of the group that he is part). Also the continuity of the initial learnings are coherent with Anakin’s childhood, since it tends to use more primitive strategies, mainly, some predilection for using illicit acts to reach its objectives and/or to deal with difficult situations. An obvious example of this is to kill an entire Tusken raider tribe in an attempt to save his mother.

There is a consistent continuity between Anakin’s early predispositions and learning and his behaviors during adolescence. Specifically, the establishment of more troubled relationships is remarkable, in addition to the prominence of some personality traits that can bring harm to him and the people around him,

**Table 2.** Anakin youth related domains.

Domain	Youth
Role	Jedi apprentice
Relationship with authorities	Troubled hierarchical relationship
Relationship with male figures	Respect relationship increasingly weakened as the figure shows less tendency to exhibit illicit/disrespectful behaviors
Relationship with female figures	Positive relationship with female figure, implying idealization; he blame himself for not saving for not saving one of the central female figures
Predispositions/temperament	Traits of impulsiveness, anxiety, machiavellianism and grandiosity
Learning	There is a tendency to use “primitive” strategies, involving illicit acts, to deal with difficult situations.

facing the obstacles present in his life as a teenager. In Table 3 the characteristics demarcated in his adulthood are presented.

At first, there seems to be a breach in Anakin’s pattern of relationship with authority figures, since the early trends seemed to suggest a major disruption in these relations, which did not happen. However, in fact, possibly because of some rather obvious pathological personality traits (see Table 3), Anakin strengthens his relationships with figures of power who have clearly illicit tendencies (ie, Palpatine); at the same time, he breaks with the figures of power, male and female, without this illicit tendency. The direct product of this is that he himself becomes a figure of illicit power, with very obvious traits of psychopathic functioning. In this determination of his own path, an before more veiled early tendency of Anakin becomes more evidente: his excessive preoccupation with himself and his goals, and disregard for others, including evident emotional detachment, though accompanied by some suffering.

Thus, Anakin’s journey, including his life and his psychological functioning, starts from a state of slavery, with a powerful male dominating figure, a positive and idealized female figure, and a few traits related to grandiosity and impulsivity. And, in fact, there is little change in his adult life, in which he himself has become the male dominating figure, although he is also submissive to one, yet without the presence of a female figure, but with a lacerating guilt over the losses he considers to be his fault. In addition, the personality traits that were milder in childhood became quite obvious and, because of their predispositions and learning, also dysfunctional.

**Final considerations**

The aim of this work was to investigate, using the non sistematic idiographic clinic analysis, one of the

main characters of the Star Wars saga, and one of the renowned villains in the history of cinema, based on Theodore Millon theory, with solid theoretical and empirical bases for personality pathological traits and personality disorders. The character Anakin Skywalker allows this analysis, since in the films it is possible to observe fragments of his childhood, adolescence and adult life, making viable an analysis of his psychological development.

Based on the analysis currently carried out, and especially according to Millon’s theory, in which 15 pathological personality styles are presented, similar to the personality disorders contained in the DSM-5<sup>9</sup>, Anakin seems to present a borderline functioning. This corroborates the previous literature<sup>10</sup>. Borderline functioning, or borderline personality disorder, is related to an evident inability to take a balanced, or not extreme, position; presente intense and constant fluctuations in the emotions, with contradictory thoughts and emotions; and feel a constant fear (anxiety of separation) in being left or abandoned by those the person loves.

All these elements are present in Anakin’s psychological functioning, for instance, in the relationship with Padmé. The extreme relationship between love and hate is such that he comes to attack Padmé almost to death. In addition, Anakin’s relationship with Padmé guides the boy’s life so that he transgresses the rules of the Jedi Council so he can stay with she, which is also related to Anaking’s fear of losing Padmé. The same can be said about Anakin’s relationship with his mother, in which Anakin also has extreme behaviors and emotions, with obvious fear of losing her. However, it is important to note that another typical behavior of people with borderline functioning is self-mutilation and suicide attempts, which is not present in Anakin’s pattern.

We hope that the present analysis contributes to the psychocological understanding of an important

**Table 3.** *Anakin adulthood related domains.*

Domain	Adulthood
Role	Master/Lord Sith
Relationship with authorities	Authoritarian male authority with power
Relationship with male figures	Ambivalent, implying a break from licit male authority and submission to illicit male authority
Relationship with female figures	Break with female figure
Predispositions/temperament	Traits of impulsiveness, anxiety, machiavellianism and grandiosity
Learning	Emotional detachment

character in a complex piece of cinema. In addition, we also hope that the present reflection encourage this type of analysis to the fictional characters, since they can also help, in a playful way, the understanding of terms and knowledge with higher levels of complexity.

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