

After reading Atkinson's and Calafell's essay, I started thinking about how many film and TV shows feature male protagonists who repeatedly demonstrate an avoidance of responsibility following morally questionable actions. From Raymond in *Everybody Loves Raymond* to the three main male characters in *Friends*; from Tracy Jordan in *30 Rock* to several of the characters in *Lost*; from the perpetually adolescent Seth in *Knocked Up* to the men in the extremely popular *Hangover*. With such models of hegemonic masculinity so abundant, it is no surprise that these narrative fragments can be bound into incredibly powerful 'master' narratives that determine the dominant approaches to some of the most important questions that we deal with on a daily basis.

Take, for example, the notorious "we were on a break" excuse that Ross used repeatedly to justify to Rachel his decision to sleep with the copy-girl, hours after she asked him to take a break from their relationship following a fight. After Rachel discovers that Ross cheated on her and his begging for forgiveness fails, Ross is happy to play the "we were on a break" card, a break which, "for all [he knew]" was a permanent one. Throughout the series, Ross is often presented as an altruist who would be the first to help his friends although in many episodes, he avoids responsibility for often appalling actions including lying to his parents about smoking marijuana in college (telling them it was Chandler who did it), faking his own death to see if a girl from college he liked would turn up and then appearing in front of her when she admitted that she had a crush on him, and many others. And yet, in the final episode of the series, Ross does 'get' Rachel who decides to not to take her dream job in Paris so that they can be together. Finally together, they proclaim their love and commitment to each other with Ross finding space in this eagerly-awaited (for characters and audiences alike) moment to promise to love her "even when [they] are on a break!" With a disapproving look from Rachel, he quickly realises that this was an inappropriate joke and goes back to hugging and kissing her amidst the thunderous laughter of the live audience.

What I think is extremely significant here is the way in which these narratives of avoidance of responsibility and the nebulous world of gray areas can be transformed into easily digestible "psychological" motivation. As narratives are normally structured around the motivations of predominantly male characters in an effort to achieve an objective, it is interesting to see that gray areas are being increasingly and unproblematically accepted as psychologically "adequate" explanations. In this respect, it might not be that surprising that Darth Vader is redeemed in the end of *Jedi* and Ross not only gets yet another chance with Rachel but can also joke about resorting to a gray area to justify his behaviour.

The question of course here is why do narratives in general and psychological character motivations (as one of its key components) in particular, accept these gray areas as satisfactory explanations for the often morally corrupt actions of male protagonists? Is it because psychological motivation does not have to be as clear cut as it once was during the golden years of Hollywood cinema of the 1930s and 1940s? Several critics have argued that American cinema from the 1960s onwards has somewhat lost its force as a "classical" mode of film practice to the extent that principles of classical narrative such as cause-effect logic, character transformation and of course character motivation have not always been followed. Could it be that gray areas have increasingly found their way into popular narratives so as to compensate for the increasing *absence* of these characteristics? After all, they can still account for clear cut actions even if the motivation is somewhat murky.

Whether this is the case or not, we certainly need to be aware of this trend. With *Star Wars*, *Friends*, *30 Rock* and many major films and TV shows enjoying

huge commercial success, it is clear that audiences have not found it difficult to accept the presence of 'avoidance of responsibility' as another key characteristic of hegemonic masculinity and part of an increasing number of gray areas. In this respect, there are a number of questions we need to consider about the nature of contemporary film and television practice, such as the culture that has allowed this characteristic to develop, the reasons for its apparently unproblematic popular acceptance and the feminist strategies which challenge it.