

(re) Developing the TV Sitcom.

Many sitcom and narrative comedy characters are often categorised as ‘types’ such as ‘the lovable loser’, ‘the idiot savant’, descendants of their archetypal ancestors, the fool, trickster, rogue and comic hero. Such descriptors explain to some degree a character’s comicality not their perpetual compulsion to repeat behaviour that entraps them in a situation - marked characteristics of this form of comedy.

This paper will marshal Freudian, Lacanian and Kohutian theories of narcissism as a framework through which to observe the behaviour and relational dynamic of characters that inhabit the sitcom. I argue that there is at least one character in the sitcom whose entrapment derives from an unconscious struggle for identity which they never achieve; unaware of what prevents them from achieving their goal, in their failure they suffer comic degradation. I posit that their entrapment is borne of a disempowerment that exists in their relationships and is reinforced by the particularity of the ‘situation’. To that end, I propose that there exists in the sitcom three main personality “types”: the narcissistic character (who has power and knows it), the “echoistic” character (who has no power and does not know it) and the key character who has elements of the psychology of both narcissus and echo, the myth from which Freud analysed the narcissistic personality.

This paper will present a theoretical framework for reading the sitcom through a series of questions that then form the basis for developing new programs. It will offer a step by step guide for building a program centred on a key character whose conscious and unconscious fears are manifested through their relationships which also undermine their idealisations.

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