
***The Wire* and its characters**

An examination of David Simon's *The Wire* in relation to character engagement, and what significance its characters serve for the success of the serial

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Abstract

The following paper will examine David Simon's HBO hit show *The Wire* in relation to its characters and what importance they serve for the interest in the series. Based on several stances by Simon, it is clear that he considers the city of Baltimore to play the most pivotal role in the *The Wire*, and that is what spectators should be focusing on. Elements like characters and narrative are simply a part of the entity. Likewise, it seems as if Simon disapproves of how spectators watch the show, as they mainly focus on the character, rather than city. The thesis of this paper disagrees to Simon's notion, and instead has the ambition to prove how the characters play the pivotal role in *The Wire*, and how they also are the ones, who create and maintain spectators' interest in the show. This will simultaneously provide an answer to why spectators focus so intensely on the character of *The Wire*. In order to support the thesis, there has been used the theory of mainly Murray Smith, Jason Mittell and Margrethe Bruun Vaage, who all specialise in character engagement on different levels.

The approach by Murray Smith is called 'the structure of sympathy' and has first of all been used to illustrate the process of spectators' engagement with characters. Throughout the analysis, it has then served the purpose of clarifying the different processes spectators go through, when experiencing a character and what factors are evident for spectators' ability to feel sympathy for the characters. Smith's work has also contributed to knowledge on the antihero character and provided suggestions on why spectators are drawn to this type of character.

The work of Jason Mittell has served to highlight the importance of characters in complex serialised television, but also to introduce characters in general and what significance they hold in a narrative. In continuation of Smith's work, Mittell presents which factors he considers to be important in relation to a successful character engagement.

Bruun Vaage's work has been used to provide a detailed introduction to the antihero character and also describes why spectators are drawn to this type of character, and why they are able to engage with antiheroes. Both Smith and Mittell's work on this specific subject has also been included for beneficial reasons, as this

will provide more possible solutions to why spectators can engage with immoral characters.

After the theory section, this paper provides an analysis of five different characters of *The Wire*, which seeks to highlight the significance of each individual character, and how they contribute to an interest in the show. In order to do so the analysis considers why spectators might find the characters appealing and interesting, and why spectators would find the characters worthy of their allegiance.

The paper then brings up a discussion regarding this paper's thesis, and Simon's stances on how characters should be interpreted simply as an element in the bigger whole, and how he neglects the importance of the show's characters. The discussion serves to evaluate all statements, and in the end reach to a conclusion.

In conclusion, on the basis of the theory used throughout this paper, the analysis shows how characters have the ability to control spectators' feelings and opinions towards them easily. The discussion leads to the viewpoint saying how Simon's stances are reasonable, but his attitude towards spectators' glorification of characters can be problematic. Referring to the analysis, the characters do hold an indispensable significance, which should be considered more significant than other elements, meaning if the characters were not appealing, and spectators could not engage with them, the show would not have an audience.

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Preface

”To that end, *The Wire* was not about Jimmy McNulty. Or Avon Barksdale. Or Marlo Stanfield, or Tommy Carcetti or Gus Haynes. It was not about crime. Or punishment. Or the drug war. Or politics. Or race. Or education, labour relations or journalism. It was about The City” (Simon in Alvarez, 2004, p. 3).

According to journalist, writer and creator of the HBO serial *The Wire*, David Simon has what seems to be a very specific vision on what he wanted to communicate with the show *The Wire*. What he wanted to do was to tell a story about the city of Baltimore. At the Observer Ideas Festival of 2014, at London’s Barbican, David Simon further explains the premise, and what him and his crew based it on:

“We kinda wanted to have an argument on where we were going, what the stakes were or what it seemed like they were in our post-industrial city of Baltimore. Now if we only write something that makes you think about Baltimore, it’s problematic. So we were trying to be specific to what we knew and what we were very familiar with, but also write to what seemed to be the condition of Western democracy and of the post-industrial world that was enveloping the Western democracies. I think the proof that we some success at not being completely polemical is that everybody: liberals, conservatives, libertarians, Marxists, free-market capitalist, they all eventually got to *The Wire* and found something that validated them. Validated their pre-existing notions. They would point to it and say that’s what’s going on there is exactly what I’ve been talking about” (David Simon, 2012)

In this case, I translate Simon’s use of the word ‘validate’ into a strong engagement with *The Wire*, meaning that spectators understand and acknowledge his story, its authenticity and they believe in it. In the first quote cited in the preface, Simon also states that the city of Baltimore is the central element of *The Wire*. However, I disagree. Instead, I trust the characters of *The Wire* to the central element and be cornerstone in the creation of the communication that enables the validation that Simon talks about. Based on my interest in the characters of *The Wire*, it makes me wonder why Simon in several cases seems to neglect the importance of his

characters. It seems as if he is somehow bothered by how spectators praise the show by mainly focusing on how much they enjoy its different characters. An example shows in an interview Simon made with *The New York Times*:

“But I’m indifferent to who thinks Omar is really cool now, or that this is the best scene or this is the best season. It was conceived of as a whole, and we did it as a whole. For people to be picking it apart now like it’s a deck of cards, or like they were there the whole time, or they understood it the whole time - it’s wearying” (Simon, 2012).

I will also argue how this notion is further supported by the first quote, in which Simon states how *The Wire* is not about any of its characters, but simply the city; nothing but the city. Due to the lack of understanding, I think Simon misses out on the positive aspect of how spectators consider the characters to be an attraction, as I believe spectators’ interest in the characters opens up for an interest in Simon’s story about the city. It appears as if Simon is not satisfied with how some spectators have been watching the show, and he disapproves of spectators focusing on the characters, which I roughly translate to a disapproval of the characters’ importance, at least to some extent. This thought has turned into the breeding ground for my master thesis: I trust, opposite David Simon, the characters of *The Wire* to be the central element of the serial, which generates spectators’ interest in and engagement with the serial. In order to support my thesis I have found the following quotes:

Ryan Fan, *The Wire* fan, expresses his thoughts on *The Wire* in the following way: “I can say this assuredly: “The Wire” taught me empathy. “The Wire” taught me compassion. I know that sounds generic, but let me show you what I mean. The character that best taught these two valuable traits to me was Bubbles” (Fan, 2019).

Patrick Ho, *The Wire* fan, provides his answer to the question “Why do people like *The Wire* so much?”: What makes the show great is its honesty in its characters. While some characters certainly weren’t all that realistic, like the mythological Omar, they were almost all relatable. You are able to understand and empathize with the characters even if you’re from a completely different cultural background. David Simon really draws you into the story that way; you’re invested and you care because

these are real, complicated people. There's a reason why nobody can objectively identify a character as the protagonist or antagonist of the show. (Ho, 2012).

Supported by these quotes, I will argue that the validation of the argument, which Simon refers to in the second quote, is undeniably linked to the characters of *The Wire*. I will argue them to be the central element in the creation of a strong engagement with the show, which is crucial for the establishment of this validation in general and the continuance of it. Consequently, the characters are the ones, who communicate the argument that Simon and his crew wish to point out, and they are therefore indispensable. The characters of *The Wire* are therefore of extreme importance as they are the ones, who are destined to deliver the story about the city, and what argument that Simon wishes to highlight.

In order to carry out this thesis, I have chosen to use the theory of respectively Murray Smith, Margrethe Bruun Vaage and Jason Mittell. I have chosen to work with the theory of these specific scholars due to their involvement with character engagement, which provides statements on why and how characters are of great importance. Additionally, they examine how spectators can establish character engagement in general, and why spectators tend to be fascinated with morally bad characters, which I find evident to examine in relation to the characters of *The Wire*.

First off, I will examine Murray Smith's structure of sympathy and elements such as emotional simulation, affective mimicry and motor mimicry. In continuation of this, I will explain the difference between sympathy and empathy. Secondly, I will examine Jason Mittell's work on the importance of characters in TV serials and films. Lastly, I will scrutinise the rise of the antihero and examine why spectators are able to connect with these morally bad characters, and how the morally flawed aspect can provide a positive outcome in regard to character engagement. In this case, I will also examine Bruun Vaage's terms fictional relief and reality checks. The theory section will be followed by an analysis of respectively Jimmy McNulty, Kima Greggs Roland Pryzbylewski, Omar Little and Bubbles, in which I will incorporate the given theory and highlight the importance of the characters in relation to *The Wire*. Lastly, I will make a discussion based on my thesis, analysis and Simon's statements, and explore whether or not my thesis can be proved.

Theory

The following chapter will concern theory on character engagement, the importance of characters in serials and the antihero character. The examination is mainly based upon the thoughts of respectively film theorist and philosopher Murray Smith, film and media scholar Jason Mittell, and cognitive film scholar Margrethe Bruun Vaage. Through the examination of the following chapter, one will learn that each scholar work within the same scholarly discussions, therefore some scholars' work impounds the work of the others. This has resulted in references back and forth in each section.

Murray Smith's work on character engagement

This first chapter will examine Murray Smith's work on character engagement, and spectators' emotional response to on-screen characters with main focus on Smith's analytical system called 'the structure of sympathy'.

Murray Smith suggests that on-screen characters are to be considered crucial components in a narrative text (Smith, 1995, p. 4). Smith argues that human beings have a tendency to react emotionally to on-screen, fictional characters, and this is to be considered a central element in the enjoyment and engagement of watching narrative films (Smith, 1995, p. 1). Scholars mainly recognise this process as 'identification', however Smith rejects this segment. Explained through the words of film theorist David Bordwell, identification is generally said to signify when a person simulates the feelings of another human being (Bordwell, 2019). Smith argues that we as spectators, in all likelihood, do not mimic the thoughts and feelings of a character; instead we can feel sympathy for a character. Therefore, Smith considers identification as a misinforming term to use in relation to character engagement. He has instead developed his own system known as 'the structure of sympathy' (Smith, 1995, p. 1).

Character engagement can overall be described as a part of imaginative activity, yet it holds two different and more advanced concepts. The first concept concerns utilizing cognitive skills beyond a simple recognition of the fictional narrative by imagining and setting up hypotheses. As for the second one, Smith explains that fiction feeds our 'quasi experience', which signifies humans' ability and

unconscious desire to open up to something new and unknown. Yet, both sorts are controlled by the fiction's narration (Smith, 1995, p. 74). A spectator's meeting with fictional characters will give rise to some type of response, which results in a type of imaginative activity. This type of imagination is like no other type of imagination as this is controlled by the texts and what they choose to present (Smith, 1995, p. 76). In relation to this, it would be evident to introduce the concepts empathy and sympathy.

Empathy is a wide concept and is only loosely defined, however, in everyday discourse it is defined to be a process in which a person jumps into the mental state and emotions of another person (Smith, 1995, p. 76). Nevertheless, the concept is continuously in debate on whether or not it can be classified as the ability to 'perspective-take', when one imagines being in the position of another, or whether it regards the ability to replicate the emotions of another. Regardless of the confusion of the concept, Smith argues that the real difference between empathy and sympathy is that in the process of empathy, the perceiver does not have to share any values, goals or beliefs with the perceived. The perceiver simply erases his/her own qualities and simulates the ones of the other; Smith defines this as imaginative substitution. On the contrary, within the process of sympathy, it is key to keep one's own qualities, while responding emotionally to another person and their context (Smith, 1995, p. 96). When examining empathy and sympathy it would be evident to include the two concepts acentral- and central imagining, which relates to the structure of sympathy.

According to philosopher Richard Wollheim, these concepts describe two different ways of imagining. Central imagining can be determined from the sentence: "I imagine...", and describes how a spectator imagines situations from a character's point of view (Wollheim quoted in Smith, 1995, p. 76). In this case, there is no need for any visuals, as the spectator pictures these events inside his/her own mind, as if the spectator was in the same position. The concept of central imagining also covers other smaller, yet similar distinct concepts, respectively: emotional simulation and affective- and motor mimicry. Smith states that these concepts are 'comprehension mechanisms', which supports the structure of sympathy. These will be examined later in this chapter (Smith, 1995, p. 81). On the contrary, there is acentral imagining, which can be expressed through the sentence, "I imagine that... insert pronoun". Through this process of imagining, a spectator imagines the events presented from the outside of any character's perspective. The spectator simply imagines being the fly on the wall when picturing a scenario inside his/her head (Wollheim quoted in Smith, 1995,

p. 76-77). Smith explains that the structure of sympathy is bound to an acentral structure, which synominises with sympathy; hence the name of the concept. The structure of sympathy nevertheless uses components from central imagining, which refers to the concept empathy (Smith, 1995, p. 96).

Emotional simulation

The concept emotional simulation is described as a concept, which is connected to practical reasoning and humans' urge to hypothesizing how one will act in certain situations, and how one's feelings would be in the given situations. In this case one hereby projects oneself to e.g. the character on screen and imagines sharing the same beliefs, desires and emotions as the character. Additionally, one then considers how one would react, and what the character might be thinking. This type of imagining is voluntary as the observer willingly chooses to imagine his/her own reaction to the situations that he/she is introduced to. In conclusion, this concept is the one being closest to central imagining, as the observer simply imagines their reaction to the situation, but does not simulate it (Smith, 1995, p. 97).

Affective mimicry and motor mimicry

Affective mimicry describes the process of a reflexive simulation, where a spectator automatically reacts to the facial and bodily emotions of an on-screen character, regardless of their knowledge of and interest in the character. This kind of reaction is, opposite emotional simulation, not voluntary as this happens per reflex. In the same manner, Smith introduces a modern version of the concept called 'motor mimicry', which describes the same process simply happening through a psychical reaction. The spectator mimics the physical actions of the on-screen character (Smith, 1995, p. 99)

The Structure of sympathy

Smith defines the structure of sympathy as three concepts that describe three levels of character engagement. These concepts have been constructed to provide an answer to how and why spectators can engage with on-screen characters. The three concepts are known as recognition, alignment and allegiance. The entire concept is

assisted by emotional simulation, affective- and motor mimicry, which has been examined earlier. These components suggest that spectators are not passive subjects of the structuring power of the text, but active individuals that react to the text presented. This indicates that there is a relationship between the spectator and these three levels of character engagement (Smith, 1995, p. 82).

Recognition is the first level in the structure of sympathy and has tended to be recognised as a more or less obvious level of engagement. However, this concept still holds great importance, as it contributes to the joined concept. This level describes the construction of a character seen in the eyes of the spectator, and how the spectator learns to distinguish this character from others. What is important in relation to recognition is the notion of a referential point; also known as a mimetic hypothesis. A spectator would simply not be able to engage with simple traits and is thereby in need of a bodily silhouette. Granting that a spectator is aware of the fact that a character is not a real person, but simply a fictional figure, the spectator still expects the character to hold traits of a real human being (Smith, 1995, p. 82).

The second level of engagement is called alignment and describes how a spectator will be provided with information on a character's actions, knowledge and feelings through visuals and sound, which a spectator then places in a structure of alignment. This concept hereby concerns the amount of information on the characters that a spectator is given. Through this level, Smith proposes two joined concepts called spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access, and they are both crucial in the analysis of alignment. Spatio-temporal attachment concerns how a narrative is either restricted to keep to one single character, or if it chooses to move in between several characters. The degree of access to each character often differs, and depending on how much information the spectator gets on each character can determine how a spectator will perceive the character. The subjective access then refers to the amount of access the spectator is acquired on each character's actions, feelings and thoughts. These two concepts then regulate the amount of narrative knowledge that a spectator will be provided (Smith, 1995, p. 83). Through this concept the spectator starts to grow an attachment to the character, while getting an understanding of the character. This creates the basics for sympathy in which the next and last concept will cover.

As *The Wire* has a multi-protagonist structure I believe it would be evident to connect it to Smith's argument and set an example. *The Wire*, amongst other things, revolves around a set of protagonists who work as detectives within law enforcement,

and each of these are assigned different tasks. This creates different plotlines, and the spectator then follows each of the characters on their different tasks, which implies that the spatio-temporal attachment within *The Wire* moves in between characters. However, given there are many protagonists will affect the subjective access, as each of them must receive screen-time occasionally. Consequently, in spite of the fact that they are all protagonists, they do not get the same amount of screen-time, and the access to each character differs from episode to episode and entire seasons.

Based upon the knowledge provided through alignment, the spectator will now evaluate the character. This process is known as allegiance, and opposite the two earlier concepts, which only require the spectator to be aware of the traits and interior thoughts, allegiance serves to make the spectator evaluate the character and think about their emotional response to the character. Therefore, the spectator starts to review the character in the eyes of his/her own moral border and then places the character in a moral system. Allegiance depends on the knowledge and access given upon the character, as this can affect a spectator's ultimate evaluation of the character. If the spectator has received a lot of information, i.e. traits, state of mind or interests, on the character, the spectator will most likely be able to understand and put up with the character. However, the opposite will be evident if the spectator has almost no knowledge on the character. The spectator will in this case be more likely to judge the character negatively, if the character makes amoral decisions (Smith, 1995, p. 84). As regards, this process can be exemplified by the use of the character Jimmy McNulty.

McNulty is from the beginning of serial one of the characters that get the most screen-time, and one quickly learns of his traits and behaviour. He is a charismatic and attractive male, who does not know how to balance family life and work. Likewise, McNulty struggles to go by the rules in relation to work ethics, which both have positive and negative outcomes. Granting McNulty has a lot of screen-time, a spectator gets familiar with lots of his traits: talented, egocentric, workaholic, skilled in relation to his job and so on. The spectator also learns of his family relationships and life outside work: he is divorced because he cheated on his ex-wife; he also has two boys and spends his small amount of spare time in bars or in the bed with different women. All things considered, McNulty holds a set of positive traits, but also has plenty of flaws. On the positive side, he is hardworking detective and seeks justice within society, but on the contrary, he is also egocentric and neglects his family. In spite of the fact that McNulty holds more negative traits than positive ones,

and the spectator does not agree with immoral traits, the spectator still manages to develop a strong allegiance towards him. This is partially due to all the time spent with this character, as spectators now feel that they know him, and they simply choose to accept him for what he is. This will be further elaborated in an analysis of McNulty existing in the analysis section.

In conclusion, the three levels of engagement explain the process of how and why a spectator will be able sympathise with an on-screen character. The structure of sympathy rejects the notion, which tells that spectators might start to imitate and copy the traits or feelings of an on-screen character, as the concept is bound to an acentral structure (Smith, 1995, p. 85). Yet, the interferences that a spectator goes through when watching an on-screen character will however evoke one's sympathy rather than one's empathy for the character. Therefore, the spectator will simply evaluate and respond emotionally to the character, without the need to simulate or mimic its mental state (Smith, 1995, p. 86).

The importance of characters in serialised complex TV

The following chapter will scrutinise Jason Mittell's theory on the significance of characters in serialised complex TV, with a special focus on how and why spectators engage with characters.

According to Mittell, characters within a serial have tended to become a self-evident piece of the bigger puzzle, rather than being praised for their exclusive ability to create and maintain a spectator's engagement to a serial. Additionally, Mittell argues that the inner core of creating a serial is concentrated on the creation of characters. It is first of all crucial to create some interesting, compelling and human-like characters, because then it will be possible to design a matching plot and storyworld (Mittell, 2015, p. 118). Hereby, Mittell declares that if a TV serial holds compelling and interesting characters, every other element will follow up. Thereby, Mittell states that characters are to be considered one of the most important components in the success of a TV serial. Mittell also underlines his statement through the following quote: "However, we are not being held captive by serial television, so a serial must justify why it deserves our attention week after week; and compelling character are an essential element of any program's appeal" (Mittell, 2015, p. 144).

The importance of characters is first of all linked to industrial norms, where there are actors who play these characters and work as the key constructors. Then there are writers and producers, who have created the traits and looks for the characters, and later has the job to guide and direct the actors. The actors form the first impression and can serve to arouse the first interest in a serial. Compared to other elements of a serial, the actors have the ability to provide an instant interest in the serial before its release. This can thereby create a stronger attachment to a character based upon spectators' knowledge or interest in the actor, who plays this specific character. Mittell argues that character consistency in a TV serial is so much more than an industrial convenience, as he states that the consistency serves to provide character engagement, because spectators become able to develop a long-term relationship with the characters (Mittell, 2015, p. 127). Consequently, Mittell argues that this character engagement holds a focal importance as he considers it to be a crucial part of storytelling. In relation to this, Mittell presents the term 'parasocial relationships' (Mittell, 2015, 127).

The term parasocial relationships was first introduced by sociologist Donald Horton and psychiatrist Richard Wohl in the 1950s, as a result of their interest in a radio broadcaster's ability to make his listeners feel as if they were at home listening to an old friend (C. Giles, 2010, p. 422). The concept refers to a person's encounter with a figure through a medium, where the person starts to perceive that figure as if the figure was a real human being. An example could be seen in the film medium, where its narrative presents a character with human qualities. This will lead the spectator to believe in the character's reality, so the spectator becomes invested in the character and its universe. This makes it possible for the spectator to i.e. sympathise with the character or get nervous on behalf of the character (C. Giles, 2010, p. 454). Yet, it is important to underline that a parasocial relationship does not mean that the spectator believes that he/she is in an actual relationship with the specific figure (C. Giles, 2010, p. 447). However, the parasocial engagement with the character makes it possible for the character to inhabit the spectator's mind when not watching the film or serial. This means that the spectator might consider what the character would do in a certain situation (Mittell, 2015, p. 149).

In the view of parasocial relationships, Mittell highlights Smith's concept 'attachment' and explains it to be another crucial variable in regard to character engagement. TV serials often create a wide range of characters, which can thereby

provide several different types of attachments. Attachment is central as spectators' connection to a specific character can change from episode to episode due to time gaps, story time and screen time. Furthermore, some episodes can restrict attachment to certain characters in order to encourage the possibility of attachment to new characters. Attachment correlates with Mittell's argument on consistency, as they both suggest that the more time a spectator spends with a character, the more knowledge will be obtained. Thereby, character engagement will be strengthened and parasocial relations will eventually spur (Mittell, 2015, p. 130).

An example shows for the character Jimmy McNulty, who has a lot of screen-time, especially throughout the first three seasons. In these seasons, the subjective access provides the spectator with lots of information on McNulty's actions, feelings and so on, which creates a strong set of alignment and attachment. In season four there is a shift within the subjective access, as McNulty quits working in the MCU, moves in with Russel and becomes a patrolman in the Western District. Throughout season four, he is no longer a very visible protagonist, and the spectator's narrative knowledge on him now becomes more limited. This fosters the possibility for another character to get more screen-time, so new attachments can be developed. Within season four the character Roland "Prez" Pryzbylewski, a minor character throughout the first three seasons, is now granted with a high degree of subjective access. Prez now becomes a protagonist within the show, and due to the change of subjective access, the spectator gets the opportunity to form a more coherent and strong alignment with Prez, which also leads to an attachment to him.

Opposite a film which is often presented as a fixed text, serials go on for a much longer time, and then hold a much longer screen time and story time, while going from one episode to another. This process automatically makes spectators' evaluation of characters differ. In such circumstances it is important, as mentioned earlier, to establish some kind of stability in order to help the spectators. This can be done by repeatedly offering spectators lots of information on each character, i.e. through dialogue. Examples could be mentioning names, occupations and relationships (Mittell, 2015, p. 133).

Mittell suggests that television characters are mostly stable characters rather than changeable, meaning in spite of undergoing such comprehensive experiences that television character often do, they rarely change because of these events (Mittell, 2015, p. 134). As regards, Mittell then introduces professor of Film and Television

Studies, Roberta Pearson's work on this subject. Pearson argues that there is a repetitiveness seen in television serial that somehow demands its characters to hold certain stability, compared to the film format where character are better allowed to life-transforming transitions. In serials, stability is needed in order for the characters to exert their given role in the narrative and the serial format. If this, however, was to be broken, it would be challenging to sustain the premise of the serial. For this reason, Pearson states it would be more precise to refer to characters of serials as highly elaborated characters of accumulation and depth, rather than developed characters as the ones portrayed in the film medium. In other words, highly elaborated characters in serials imply a model of change, where traits and aspects of a character are revealed over a longer period of time. This then creates the illusion of the characters being new, even though they have remained unchanged throughout the serial. Character development, on the other hand, implies a change in the character's moral compass and often leads to life changing decisions (Pearson, 2007, p. 56-57). Mittell agrees with Pearson's observations, and includes Murray Smith's concept allegiance as a factor one must consider in relation to the act of change within characters of a serial. As characters of a serial are subjected to a certain premise, the changes that they go through are often less comprehensive and temporary changes, e.g. in attitude or behaviour, and these will most likely dissipate over an episode. Consequently, these minor debaucheries will not be able to create a large shift in spectators' allegiances. However, both change and stability can be evident through exterior markers such as dialogue and appearance, while these can also be considered simple attempts of change. Also, it is mainly a character's actions that are considered to be valid (Mittell, 2015, p. 134).

Mittell does underline that there are cases, where characters of a serial do go through changes, which affects spectators' allegiances. In this case Mittell presents four terms: character growth, character education, character overhaul and lastly character transformation. Character growth regards the process of maturing, and mostly regard young characters. However, this arc can also include adult characters going through a transition into adolescence (Mittell, 2015, p. 137). The character Reginald 'Bubbles' Cousins from *The Wire* is one of the adult characters, who goes through this exact process. When spectators are first introduced to Bubbles, he is a homeless, heroin addict, while being an informant for the police. Bubbles continues down this road throughout several seasons, as he suddenly starts to get more hold of

himself. In season four, Bubbles meets the young boy Sherrod, and Bubbles takes on a parenting role, as he tries to get Sherrod back in school and tries to make sure that Sherrod does not make the same mistakes as Bubbles has made. Bubbles then starts to show signs of maturing, however, his effort falls through. Sherrod begins to do drugs again, and by accident dies from of a mixture of heroin and sodium cyanide, which Bubbles had concocted for someone else. In season five, Bubbles starts to go to meetings to talk about Sherrod, volunteers at a soup kitchen called *Viva House* and is allowed to live in his sister's basement. At last, Bubbles gets clean and is invited upstairs by his sister, where they eat together with her child. All things considered, Bubbles goes from a heroin addict with an unstable life to being clean and living with his sister. This translates into Bubbles maturing and getting a better life. Secondly, Mittell introduces character education, which concerns when an established adult character learns from an important lesson and comes out an even better person. The third concept called character overhaul is controlled by a supernatural and dramatic shift in which a character e.g. switches bodies with another character (Mittell, 2015, p. 138). Lastly, character transformation regards a shift in the character's moral compass and attitudes, which predominantly regards characters in the film medium (Mittell, 2015, p. 139).

In conclusion, Mittell's work wishes to highlight the importance of characters within TV serials. This thought has been validated by the examination of characters' ability to affect spectators' engagement, all the way from actors to narrative structure. Mittell underlines the greatest importance of characters in serials is based upon spectators' desire for stability. Mittell argues that characters of a serial are subjected to a narrative set of rules, and as a result they lack of change, which would normally be interpreted negatively. However, Mittell argues otherwise, as he believes it to be an advance, as the narratives provide the spectators with exactly what they want: stability. This stability, given by the characters of serials, provides spectators with the opportunity to feel connected with the characters, which makes it possible to acquire these parasocial relationships. Due to serials' narrative form, they manage to make spectators change their allegiance towards characters in spite of their lack of change (Mittell, 2015, p. 141).

Based on the above-mentioned considerations, it has been examined how important characters are for spectators in order for them to connect and get drawn to a text, in this case TV serials. It is claimed that the interest in a character and ability to

obtain a strong allegiance is controlled by different factors, whereas the ability to feel sympathy with the characters is of great importance. In relation to these statements in regard to *The Wire*, I believe it would be interesting to examine the ‘antihero’ character. The reason for that lies within the fact that one of the things that this serial is mostly praised for is its characters, and I believe *The Wire* holds a large set of antiheroes. Therefore, I find it evident to examine how it is possible for spectators to engage with some of the antihero characters from *The Wire*, when they are morally bad. The following section will then examine the rise of the antihero, why this type of character is popular and highlight how important antiheroes actually can be for a narrative. These theoretical reflections will aim to support the thesis expressing the importance of the characters of *The Wire* in relation to its success.

The rise of the antihero in American television – how are we able to engage with immoral characters?

Despite the antihero’s flaws, this type of character has managed to prevail and become a predominant type of characters in TV serials (Bruun Vaage, 2015, xi). The following chapter will regard Margrethe Bruun Vaage’s theory on spectators’ engagement with antiheroes in American serials, and Jason Mittell’s work on the rise of antihero. Concurrently, these studies will be supported by the work of Murray Smith and other scholars. Through the mixed theory from different scholars, this section will examine why spectators are able to engage with these morally bad characters, and why spectators are drawn to them. I have chosen to implement the thoughts of different scholars, as I believe that each of their individual work, complements the work of the others, which then creates a stronger understanding as a whole.

In order to obtain a proper understanding of the rise of the antihero, a short outline for what serialised complex TV actually is, would be evident to examine. The essence of serialised complex TV is carried by narrative complexity, which redefines and somehow works against the classic episodic and serial forms of television serials. That is to say complex TV efforts to unite elements from both the episodic forms and serialised narration, while challenging the spectator’s expectations to these. This regards elements such as characters, narrative strategies, plots and so on. Complex

serials hereby demand a deeper engagement from their spectators (Mittell, 2015, p. 18). Due to complex TV's conscious separation from the classical forms of serials, other types of predominant characters have followed, here amongst the antihero.

Bruun Vaage describes the term 'antihero' as a morally flawed character, which a spectator, in spite of the character's flaws, is encouraged to like and feel sympathy for. This character is most likely a male, yet there are a few exceptions. Concurrently, the spectator is consciously intended to also dislike the antihero and recognise that the antihero is morally bad (Bruun Vaage, 2015, xv). Murray Smith explains that the antihero thereby interferes with spectators' allegiance. This is due to the fact that this type of character is often presented to be a predominant character, which will promote and strengthen allegiance to a higher level as most of the narrative is spent with this character. Yet, the character's behaviour creates conflict and provides a negative moral allegiance (Smith quoted Mittell, 2015, p. 142). Furthermore, there are many different types of antiheroes and their behaviour, thoughts and actions can stretch from simple arrogance and cockiness to mean villainous characters (Mittell, 2015, p. 143) As regards, Bruun Vaage argues that the spectator will not only be encouraged to feel conflicted about the antihero, but will initially struggle to place the character in one's moral compass (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. xvi).

Examples of antiheroes seen in serials could be gangster Tony Soprano from the HBO hit serial *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) and serial killer Dexter Morgan from the popular show *Dexter* (2006-2013), who are both morally bad, but in very different ways. Soprano is both a murderer and criminal holding a desire to enrich himself no matter what, whereas Dexter is a serial killer. However, us spectators are still encouraged to like them in spite of this, as both these characters are morally compelling in some cases: Soprano loves his family and is close with them, and Dexter does not kill innocent people, he only kills other criminals, who have slipped through the system.

Fictional relief and reality checks

Bruun Vaage has used the studies of respectively Murray Smith, Noël Carroll, Carl Plantinga, Arthur Raney, Jonathan Haidt and Joshua Green to form her two own concepts: fictional relief and reality check (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. xvi-xvii). Bruun

Vaage presents the first concept as what she calls ‘fictional relief’. Fiction relief can be described as a relief that happens when a spectator watches fiction, and simply chooses to allow himself/herself to rely on their moral emotions, while the spectator concurrently overrules and ignores rationality and objectivity. The spectator simply watches e.g. a film or a serials without any further concerns and focuses on the entertaining aspect of the work, rather than connecting the situations to real life rationality. During this instance spectators can easily be manipulated by the serial’s narrative strategies, and thereby accept that it has the ability to control their moral emotions (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. xvii). *The Wire* holds several examples of fictional relief as a large part of the cast have moral flaws and enjoys going against the laws. A more specific example could be seen in S2E8, when McNulty fails to make up with his ex and then gets drunk, and eventually chooses to drive home. After a short while he crashes in his car and ends up at a cafeteria, where he eats and ends up having sex with the waitress. As a spectator, one will most likely find this scenario entertaining, however, the fact that McNulty chooses to drive while being drunk is extremely dangerous, and not something one would applaud in real life. Thereby, the fictional relief makes the spectator find this scenario amusing, and one ignores the dangers of McNulty’s actions.

Yet, Bruun Vaage maintains that this instance is not the only route concerning moral evaluation in fiction film. Bruun Vaage represents her second concept called ‘reality check’. Likewise as serial’s narrative strategies will manipulate the spectator through fictional relief, the opposite manipulation occurs through a ‘reality check’. Now the spectator’s rationality and objectivity has been evoked, and now the spectator parallels the actions of the fictional work to the real world, and contemplates what consequences this could cause (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. xvii). An example from *The Wire* could be the storyline of Hamsterdam seen in season 3, where police chief Bunny Colvin establishes a programme with three free zones in Baltimore, where drugs are legal. A spectator will possibly think about what consequences this type of experiment could cause in real life and consider whether it would work or not.

What draws spectators to the antihero?

Through the work of Bruun Vaage, Jason Mittell and Murray Smith, they have all inspected the appeal of antihero serials and then raised the question on why this

type of character has obtained such interest, and how it is possible to engage with the character in spite of its moral flaws. The following section will submit suggestions on different factors, which might provide a more specific answer to spectators' interest in and engagement with the antihero. Additionally, these considerations also touch upon whether the immoral behaviour is a contributing- or a destroying factor regarding a strong character engagement.

The general intention behind the engagement with an antihero serial is to create ambivalence within the spectator, as he/she is intended to both like and dislike the antihero. Bruun Vaage considers spectators, who have this experience as the antihero serials' intended spectator. There are other spectators who i.e. considers the antihero to be a hero and do not take the moral flaws into consideration. Others simply cannot look above them and therefore hates the character (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 91). This theory section will proceed on the basis of the intended spectator's thoughts and reactions to the antihero.

As mentioned earlier, Bruun Vaage explains that spectators are encouraged to feel conflicted when following the antihero. Bruun Vaage further explains: as well as a spectator is intended to feel positively about the protagonist of a narrative, one is also intended to feel antipathy towards the villain. While the antihero share some traits with the villain, it is crucial to have a proper villain in the antihero narrative in order to create a separation and make the antihero morally preferable. Otherwise, the serial will be morally confusing, and it thereby will be difficult to maintain spectators' interest and engagement with the serial. Bruun Vaage suggests rape to be a strong narrative technique to point out who the actual villain is (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 123). This will then enforce the separation between the antihero and the actual villain. When a character commits a rape, this will most likely affect a spectator's ability to sympathise or engage with a character, as this will naturally evoke antipathy (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 124). In order to elaborate it further, Bruun Vaage presents a quote from Mittell: "Rape is a more taboo and emotionally volatile crime to portray onscreen than murder ... Imagine the show *Dexter*, except instead of being a serial killer, he was a serial rapist" (Mittell quoted in Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 122). In this case, Bruun Vaage also raises the question on how people are more likely to accept murder over rape. She suggests that rape might be just as – or more – disturbing than murder (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 121). On this notice, Bruun Vaage introduces the term 'moral disgust' and suggests it can be seen when one is exposed to or witnesses an

individual doing something eerie, uncanny and not humanlike; for example rape, which serves as a great example. Likewise, Bruun Vaage explains that a murder could easily be considered morally disgusting. However, a fictional serial can through the narrative setting manage to legitimatise a murder by making it appear to be emotionally acceptable, whereas rape is not open for justification. Therefore, if a spectator has an established a strong engagement with the perpetrator, e.g. the antihero of the serial, the spectator is more willing to accept it. The spectator somehow creates the idea saying the murdered person actually deserved what he/she got. The character, who committed the murder, was simply left with no choice but to do it (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 140). In this instance, Bruun Vaage uses *The Wire* as an example, as she examines the episode when D'Angelo Barksdale is at a party with other Barksdale people and strippers. At this party D'Angelo is asked to get them some alcohol, and while he is gone, the character Wee-Bey, a member of the Barksdale crew, takes the young woman Keisha into his bedroom to have sex with her. Keisha is almost unconscious and complains about not feeling well, yet that does not stop Wee-Bey from having sex with her. Bruun Vaage indicates that it is not clear that Keisha gets raped, but highly doubts that Keisha did consent. Especially considering the fact that D'Angelo finds Keisha dead from an overdose after Wee-Bey "fucked her silly" (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 125). As Wee-Bey chooses to have sex with Keisha, even though she is almost unconscious, cannot be justified no matter how it is turned. Therefore, his actions mark him as a clear villain. In conclusion, it is important to separate the antihero from the villain character, so the antihero will become morally preferable regardless of antihero's own immoral behaviour. This will then open up for the possibility for spectators get a stronger engagement with the antihero, and spectators might be able to feel sympathy with the character.

Bruun Vaage impounds Murray Smith's work on character engagement and highlights the importance of moral evaluation in relation to spectator's engagement with the characters of the narrative. This also translates into allegiance. In this case Murray Smith has introduced the terms moral resolution and a moral centre. Moral resolution involves how a text explicitly highlights the moral status of a character, whereas a moral centre regards the existence of a positive moral place within the text (Smith, 1995, p. 213). However, Smith argues that some films efface moral to some extent, meaning no character is perceived to be morally better than others. In this case, Bruun Vaage indicates that it would be incorrect to postulate that an antihero

have neither of the above-mentioned concepts, as the spectator is intended to like the antihero. Nevertheless, Smith suggests another moral structure, which Bruun Vaage finds fitting for the antihero serials. This suggests that the moral structure is not non-existent, but rather 'dynamic or unstable' (Smith, 1995, p. 216). Bruun Vaage explains: as the moral centre in the antihero serial lies within the fact that the antihero is intended to be morally preferable in relation to other characters, even though this type of moral centre conflicts with what a spectator would consider to be morally right in the real world. In relation to this, Bruun Vaage draws attention to her term reality checks as the spectator is suddenly faced with a change of perception of the antihero. Whereas before the reality check, the spectator accepted the antihero's morally bad behaviour, however, the reality check makes the spectator question this behaviour, and therefore questions his/her own engagement with the antihero (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 92). This indicates that the antihero serials are subjected to another set of rules, and the antihero has a strong ability to control spectators' engagement.

Mittell suggests that alignment and elaboration are key elements for spectator's allegiance with an antihero. This means that the more a spectator knows about the antihero in regard to for example their family, interior thoughts and backstory, it will be more likely for the spectator to feel closer engaged with the character, and thereby accept their presence and actions in the story world. Likewise, as the spectator feels closer engaged with the character, the spectators might be able to see things from the antihero's standpoint (Mittell, 2015, p. 44). This notion might come off as a more general thought, as it is important for all character engagement. Even so, it is more crucial for an antihero, as spectators are more likely to watch them negatively, due to their immoral traits. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, Mittell highlights that characters must be compelling in order to keep a spectator interested. In relation to that, Mittell introduces the concept charisma as a crucial component in spectator's approval of the antihero, as it helps one to forget or simply overlook the flaws and bad actions committed by the antihero. Charisma signifies the actor's appearance, performance and how other on-screen characters treat the antihero (Mittell, 2015, p. 144). An actor's earlier work in the film medium can also contribute to the character's charisma, but also familiarity, as a spectator might coin together their conception of the character based upon the actor's earlier work (Mittell, 2015, p. 146).

As narrative strategies are crucial in order for a spectator to establish sympathy towards the antihero, Bruun Vaage argues that the immorality of the antihero is also of crucial importance. Therefore, the morally bad behaviour equally provides elements that encourage alignment (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 89). Both Smith and Mittell agree, and they all present their own statements on why that is so.

A probable determining factor in relation to immorality lies within the amoral fascination of an alienated subject that seems, as if it does not exist in real life. Smith presents this as the 'attractive-bad' character structure. The estrangement of an antihero makes it almost inhumane, which triggers a spectator's interest and imagination. Additionally, this can somehow draw a distance between the spectator and antihero, so the spectators shirk their moral frame (Smith, 1999, p. 225-26). The solution suggested by Smith regards how a spectator might use the antihero serials as a way to live-out or simply enjoy these morally bad scenarios, while they ignore their own moral compass. This concept is known as imaginative slumming (Smith, 1999, p. 228). This type of engagement is an example of perverse allegiance, an acceptance of the villain being a villain. This type of allegiance is simply partial and not a fully committed allegiance, as an allegiance will most likely be supported by the morally accepted behaviour (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 95).

Yet, Bruun Vaage suggests that there are examples on how immoral behaviour is explicitly encouraged to be liked by the spectator. As mentioned earlier by Bruun Vaage, there is a need for a character, who is immorally worse than the antihero in order to make the antihero seem morally preferable. If the antihero faces this immorally worse character, and the antihero commits immoral actions towards this character, it is accepted. The spectator will find this action reasonable, because the immorally worse character deserves to be punished. Consequently, the spectator's allegiance towards the antihero will be affected in a positive manner in spite of the character's morally bad behaviour (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 97). This concept is called 'pro-social punishment', and overall describes how human beings' holds a set of intuitive moral emotions, which describes an urge to punish people, who have done something wrong; even though it has nothing to with one personally (Greene, 2013, p. 57).

Another reason lies within the aspect of the villain traits within the antihero. As explained, an antihero draws upon traits from both the protagonist with hero like features, and also the villain. While the thought on why spectators like the classic

protagonist seems straight forward, others might question why spectators like the villain. Film scholar Aaron Taylor argues that villains are very important for a text, as their function is to activate moral reflection. In other words, the villain of the text indirectly makes the spectator think about and reconsider one's internalisation of Judeo-Christian ethics (Taylor, 2014, p. 185). Bruun Vaage further states that the spectator's liking and interest lies within their immoral traits, and these can therefore be considered beneficial, as these traits paves the way for a moral evaluation. If these antiheroes had been like the classic protagonists, moral evaluation could not have been possible, because there would not have been anything to examine and discuss. However, in this case, the spectators evaluate an antihero from episode to episode, which can lead to a reflection of their own ethical standpoints in relation to whatever the antihero's universe revolves around (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 109)

In order to explain the overall enjoyment of the antihero more explicitly, Bruun Vaage states that this enjoyment specifically concerns low-level bodily mechanisms and moral intuitions (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 96). To explain further, Bruun Vaage incorporates the work of respectively Arthur A. Raney, professor of Communication, and Sophie H. Janicke, media psychologist. Normally, people would naturally try to impound a rational evaluation and search for justice in a universe of amoral. Yet according to Raney, spectators who watch crime TV and stuff alike, have an expectation or demand that these will involve situations and elements, which are not morally accepted in the real world (Raney, 2002, p. 320). In this case, Raney argues that spectator morally disengage when they engage with fiction, which is in favour of the character engagement of the antihero. Later in the study of both Raney and Janicke, they state that when a spectator's moral judgement is willingly weakened in the relation to antihero characters, the spectator will most likely engage with them in spite of their morally bad behaviour. Thereby, the spectator will also be able to enjoy the overall text (Raney & Janicke, 2013, p 163). Reminiscent of Smith's study on how spectators' enjoyment is bound to the power of the antihero, Raney and Janicke also suggest that this type of character live out its spectators' immoral thoughts (Raney & Janicke, 2013, p. 163).

Bruun Vaage also agrees to the thought of Raney and Janicke and further explains that power is a crucial trait for the enjoyment of the antihero (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 99). As mentioned through Mittell, when spectators spend more and more time with the powerful antiheroes, one starts to align with them. Power presents itself

as a strong component due to human beings natural interest and allurement to it. The morally bad behaviour, suspense and villainous crimes seen in the antihero serials contribute to an even more exciting narrative, which spectators are immediately drawn to (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 89). Therefore, when a spectator is able to align himself/herself with a powerful on-screen character, the spectator is provided with the same feeling. This feeling makes the spectator forgets his/her own life for a moment. However, the antihero's power can also turn into something negative, which can weaken the alignment, as power, in some cases, strengthen the immoral sides of the antihero (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 101). This thought can be further supported in the eyes of Blakey Vermeule's, scholar of theory of mind, composition of the concept "Machiavellian intelligence", together with the work of Murray Smith. Mittell draws attention to an idea by Smith, which Mittell has labelled as 'viewer intrigue' (Mittell, 2015, p. 145). This thought describes, in relation to the antihero, how a spectator is aware of the morally bad decisions committed by the antihero, and still continues to engage with the character due to a fascination and captivation of the character. This behaviour and the actions presented to the spectator are things, which the spectator would never have the courage, audacity or desire to be a part of in real life. However, being able to witness it through a fictional universe, gives the spectator the opportunity to be a part of it in some way (Smith, 1999, p. 236). Vermeule has then connected this idea to the concept Machiavellian intelligence. This concept describes how crucial the ability to understand and manipulate others is in order to be successful in a social environment. According to Vermeule, a Machiavellian character can be considered to be superior compared to the narrative's other characters; a certain 'mastermind', which has the ability to manipulate others in purpose of both good and evil. This type of character is often found in complex, puzzled and reflexive narratives; ergo complex TV serials. Vermeule further states that a spectator's engagement with fiction stands in relation to how one is often drawn to figures out the minds of Machiavellian characters, as spectators learn from them and their behaviour. Thereby, the spectators shape their conception of the world through these Machiavellian characters (Vermeule, 2010, p. 86). Even though Vermeule does not speak about antiheroes directly, antiheroes share traits with the Machiavellian characters. This hereby substantiates the comparison, and suggests that the interest and fascination of the Machiavellian traits can function as another component in the explanation on why spectators are drawn to the antihero (Mittell, 2015, 145).

In conclusion, an antihero is a morally flawed character, which a spectator is encouraged to like, but also dislike. Even though antiheroes hold morally bad traits, they are constructed to be morally preferable compared to an actual villain. Therefore, it is important to separate the two. This is done by making the villains commit crimes, which erases the spectator's ability to sympathise with them. In spite of this, the antihero still holds immoral traits, which generally breeds confliction in the spectator's engagement, and can affect it both positively and negatively. Spectators willingly disengage morally when they follow morally complex characters, such as the antihero. This means that the spectator ignores an antihero's morally bad behaviour, compared to if it was a regular protagonist. Morally bad behaviour can further be considered to be a force for the antihero, as they provide the spectators with the possibility to align with someone who is much different than themselves. Thereby, when the spectators get the opportunity to align with powerful and morally bad characters, they, to some extent, get the opportunity to feel powerful and live out selfish behaviour and morally bad situations. However, the allegiance will in some cases continue to only be partial towards an antihero, as the morally good aspect of a character carries a large part in the ability to fully engage and sympathise with the antihero. All in all, the rise of the antihero is due to many different factors, however, the overall reason is due to the fact that the antihero is both morally good and morally bad. The morally good traits makes it possible for the spectator to have sympathy for them and makes them morally preferable, while their immoral traits are an attraction, which creates fascination and provides the spectators with the ability to follow exciting situations far from their own life.

A male centred universe

There is a lacking amount of women with an antiheroic status and with the same amount of hideousness as the male antiheroes. Therefore, antihero serials are considered to be male-centred, however, there are exceptions. The women are rather portrayed as being more questionable and shady than resolute antiheroes (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 171). Yet, there are actual female antiheroes, who like their male counterpart, commit crime and hold flaws in a more extreme type of manner. At this point the gender relations are reversed so the female antihero is the one, who commits

crime, holds flaws and bad behaviour. Yet, what separates the two is the gravity of their moral transgression, as the female antihero will most likely be considered less harmful as they do not kill others like many of the male antiheroes do. However, she will still be punished for her actions. In relation to this, Bruun Vaage states that serials with female antiheroes are often presented to be more comedic and less dark with a shorter half-hour format and sitcom qualities. She further suggests that commercial TV might not feel confident portraying female antiheroes as morally flawed and as dark as male antiheroes (Bruun Vaage, 2015, p. 173). Mittell also argues this conjunction, and suggests it to be governed by cultural norms of certain genres, e.g. the crime genre. In these cases the antiheroes in general tend to be very masculine males. Furthermore, the cultural norms will likely allow men to behave bad and be respected for their showboating and arrogant actions, while women are subjected to a stricter set of rules and norms. If female characters were to act like the classic male antihero, they would most likely be considered uncharismatic and demented. Yet, there are exceptions (Mittell, 2015, p. 150).

In conclusion, the female antihero is rare, but does exist. Yet, this type of character is rarely portrayed as bad as the male counterpart, and this is most likely due to cultural norms, which does not allow the female characters to act out this type of behaviour.

Analysis

This analysis' main purpose is to support this project's thesis. In order to do so, I will examine and analyse a smaller selection of the main characters from *The Wire*. This regards Kima Greggs, Jimmy McNulty, Roland Pryzbylewski, Omar Little and lastly Reginald 'Bubbles' Cousins. This section will then analyse how and why spectators form an allegiance towards these individual character. In view of this, I will also analyse how each of the characters' presence in the serial contribute to a general interest in the show together with a deeper engagement with the serials. The analysis of each of these characters is based upon the above-mentioned theory, mainly in relation to the structure of sympathy, but also the antihero aspect. This will be used to underline the significance of some of the characters and explain why these specific

characters are admired in spite of their moral flaws. Simultaneously, this analysis will also determine whether these characters' moral flaws can contribute to a deeper engagement with the individual character, or instead create a distance between the character and their spectators.

Jimmy McNulty

This section will analyse the character Jimmy McNulty as an antihero and examine why he is such an interesting and popular character in spite of his moral flaws. Meanwhile, I will also examine the change in McNulty during season five of *The Wire*, and discuss whether or not those changes will affect spectators' final allegiance towards him as a character. I have chosen to analyse McNulty in order to illustrate why spectators like the antihero character, and thereby detect how a character like McNulty contributes to spectators' interest in *The Wire*.

Jimmy McNulty works as a detective in the Baltimore Police Department, and he is very skilled in his profession. As regards, McNulty trusts his instinct and goes his own ways, which are disapproved by some of the higher rank people such as Daniels. Nevertheless, McNulty always manages to pull through as his persistency often leads to him to solving cases or finding out important information. In spite of McNulty's successful work throughout the seasons, he does not have a well functioning private life. McNulty has a habit of cheating on his wife Elena and neglecting his children, while also exploiting them to help him on cases. This leads to the divorce between him and Elena, and limited visits to see his children. In between McNulty's work life and life with his family, he enjoys going out on bars, get drunk and be with women. His enjoyment with these things fluctuates throughout the serial, and it depends on how successful he feels in his life. For example, in season two when Elena confirms that their marriage cannot be fixed, McNulty starts to drink heavily. Later in season four after moving in with port authority officer Beadie Russell and her children, he seems more calm and almost quits drinking.

I believe some of McNulty's moral flaws are grounded in a massive ego, in which McNulty believes himself to be superior compared to everyone around him. He always believes that he is one step ahead. This is exemplified through McNulty's countless attempts to cheat on his wife, while being certain that she will not find out. Ultimately, as she finds out, he is certain that he will find a way to make it right again.

However, as mentioned earlier, this thought also functions as the driving force in McNulty's desire for success, which shows when he is at work. As a result, his ego also brings some good with it.

As one quickly learns, McNulty makes a lot of bad decisions throughout *The Wire*, yet we as spectators do not question them or our liking for him to a deeper level. Likewise, we certainly do not question our interest in him. I believe there are several elements to be in evidence into why that is so.

At first, and for a longer run in the serial, McNulty is one of the characters, who gets the most screen time, which invites spectators to consider him to be a main character. Thereby, spectators quickly learn of his success at his job, his chaotic private life and how he manages to make it in the end. Ergo, the more knowledge that spectators receive upon McNulty, the easier it will be for spectators to align themselves with him. Additionally, as spectators are first introduced to McNulty in a work situation, which is where he prospers, one is immediately gets a good impression of him. This process is evident even though spectators quickly get to know about his morally flawed traits too.

Secondly, I believe McNulty's status as a skilled police detective can contribute to an explanation on why spectators like McNulty. When McNulty has the title of being a police detective, he is interpreted to be one of the good guys. He is the one who solves cases and operates on the right side of the system, meaning he is a police detective who wants to fight crime; at least to a certain extend. However, spectators does not know about that to begin with. Thereby, it would be evident to place McNulty on what would be considered the right team, the police, calculated that spectators will expect the police to be the law-abiding, good characters, and the criminals to be bad and evil villain-like characters. At least to some extend. When McNulty then does something which is morally bad, for example encouraging Kimba to cheat on her wife and helping her do it, spectators will be more overbearing, because of his job status, and good skills. It will also be easy for spectators to compare McNulty to those on the bad team, the criminals, and convince themselves that even though McNulty does this morally bad thing, at least he is not a criminal, who sells drugs and shoots other gang members and so on. His status as a police detective can therefore contribute to the verification of his morally bad traits, because it will always be possible to find someone, who is morally worse than McNulty. Also, as McNulty's hard work as a police detective mostly pays off, he becomes credible,

and he shows stability. This stability can contribute to an even stronger alignment, since spectators often enjoy this segment in a serial, as suggested by Mittell (Mittell, 2015, p. 133).

Equally, spectators can also expect McNulty to show stability when he is being morally bad, as he continuously fails the opportunity to get a hold on his private life. An example shows in S5E1, after McNulty has been sober for a long while and has been living with Russell, his fortitude is weakened due to budget cuts on the Marlo Stanfield case, and McNulty starts to drink again. Therefore, his morally bad traits can become an advance in relation to a stronger alignment, as these traits are normally linked to him. The familiarity and predictability is linked to recognition, and as like Mittell highlights, spectators like familiarity and appertaining stability (Mittell, 2015, p. 133). In conclusion, this familiarity and stability that McNulty shows, creates the notion of the spectators feeling that they know McNulty and his next move, which can lead to a satisfaction of his presence.

Also, I will argue McNulty's charisma, the concept examined by Mittell, to be a pivotal factor in spectators' ability to form an allegiance with McNulty. In this case, spectators can become attracted to McNulty's appearance, and as spectators find out how many of the women of *The Wire* desire McNulty, some spectator be affected by how desired he is. This does, however, not necessarily have to concern an attraction to him. Spectators can simply become fascinated with McNulty and fascinated by the way he acts and speaks. In S2E6 when D'Angelo Barksdale is killed in jail, it is staged as a suicide, but McNulty, as the only person, finds the episode odd. Therefore, he searches for answers and quickly finds out that it was murder. Later McNulty informs D'Angelo's family about his thoughts. An episode like this would most likely cover other immoral episodes, for example, when McNulty and his team in S2E9 are on a case, which purpose is to intervene a brothel. McNulty is entering under false identity, and then has to contact the team after some time. McNulty, as the womanizer he is, ends up having sex with some of the prostitutes, even though he is at work. In spite of the fact that fellow police detectives find this episode amusing, it is highly unprofessional and most likely happened because McNulty could not contain himself. McNulty's persuasive charisma shows when he time after time manages to persuade Rhonda Pearlman to let him into her house after bar visits. Even though this is a morally bad thing to do, as McNulty only visits her for sex and comfort, but the way he approaches her and has the ability to persuade her disguises the immoral part of the

situation. In conclusion, I will trust these factors can ultimately affect spectators' perception of McNulty and potentially blur or outweigh his moral flaws, which can lead to a certain acceptance or disregard of them. Therefore, spectators will find it easier to accept and put up with McNulty's behaviour, even though he is morally flawed in many instances.

However, in season five, I will argue spectators' allegiance towards McNulty faces a the possibility for a change. McNulty forges evidence in order to obtain a larger funding for his department; spectators are now faced with a comprehensive change in McNulty's attitude, which raises the question: can we as spectators ignore this kind of behaviour and find a way to continually be on McNulty's side in spite of his extreme flaws?

Up until now, I trust McNulty's behaviour to have been predictable: one might had expected for him to try and get back with his ex-wife, fool around with women and not being able to develop a proper relationship, be dedicated and successful at his job, not caring a lot about his children to then caring a lot about them, and finally find love which did not last in the end, because he is who he is: a generic character. However, this new situation that McNulty has ended up in is even odd for a character like him. Considering, how McNulty has always gotten away with transcending the limits, did he finally reach the limit in season five? And how does his behaviour affect spectators' engagement with him as a character?

It is clear to say that McNulty crosses the line when fabricating the evidence in season five, and I do not believe that it can be justified. However, in continuation of this, I do not consider the legal aspect of his actions to be the most noteworthy part. I will argue for it to be the sudden, notable change in McNulty's behaviour. McNulty has always struggled with his private life; however, he has always been successful in his work. Therefore sudden change seems out of place and is difficult to figure out. Due to his absurd behaviour, McNulty almost becomes alienated from the McNulty from the earlier seasons. Consequently, due to the significant change in his police work, the former stability that has been considered a strong feature of McNulty's is now gone.

Throughout season five, McNulty cannot exert his role in the narrative properly. In relation to Pearson's statement on this specific subject, when character stability is broken, it can be challenging to sustain the premise of serial, which this is a worthy example of. Likewise, as McNulty all of the sudden changes so drastically, it

can be difficult for spectators to process this change in his character, which will affect their current evaluation of McNulty. As McNulty becomes alienated, a distance between him and the spectators emerges, which makes the spectators more likely to evaluate him and his actions negatively. This is in spite of the fact that spectators have most likely put up with his moral flaws in the past, as all actions, opinions and thoughts must be brought into consideration. Also, McNulty's charisma starts to fade as he starts to seem desperate and weak. As a result, his former, appealing traits can no longer function as a disguise for his bad behaviour. I trust this affects spectators' allegiance with McNulty, and spectators will be more likely to judge his behaviour negatively. McNulty borders on pathetic, and his behaviour is below his standards, compared to his successful police work seen in the other seasons. He was once considered to be a respectful police detective, but is now reduced to something less appealing and admirable. For that reason, the alignment gathered throughout the other seasons cannot be joined with McNulty's new self, which I believe to have a bad impact on spectators' allegiance.

Throughout the first four seasons, spectators have developed a tolerance towards McNulty's morally bad behaviour. Spectators accept that he is morally flawed, and he makes bad decisions, however, when things go wrong for him in season five, we as spectators do not pity his misfortune. All his charisma and skilled police work have carried him through and vanish in season five, and when he is punished for his bad decisions, we as spectators do not feel sympathy for him. The cause of this can be grounded in different aspects depending on different scholars. According to Mikkel Jensen, English and history scholar, *The Wire* rejects the ideological premise, which serves to romanticise the outsider character. Likewise, the serial also rejects that this type of character in a narrative can solve its societal problems (Jensen, 2019, p. 73-74). Instead, *The Wire* serves to de-romanticise the outsider and considers McNulty, the outsider character, to be an anti-social character, which does not hold the abilities to accomplish such a task (Jensen, 2019, p. 73). I agree to this argument, and will support it by my notion, which indicates that if everything that blurred McNulty's immoral and less compelling traits, e.g. his charisma, is taken away, spectators will finally see him for what he actually is: a selfish, alcoholic outsider, who does not have his life together and mainly cares about himself. Ergo, throughout the first four seasons, spectators have been able to romanticise McNulty's immoral traits, by placing him within the outsider trope, which Jensen refers to. However, in

the last season of the serial, everything that blurred McNulty's immoral traits fade away, and spectators are no longer able romanticise McNulty. Instead, spectators can see right through McNulty and they experience him for what he actually is.

In conclusion, from the beginning of *The Wire* spectators get familiar with Jimmy McNulty, who as very charismatic and skilled police officer, who fails miserably in his private life. McNulty holds several immoral traits, which spectators quickly learn of, however, spectators are immediately encouraged to like McNulty. As a result, spectators choose to ignore the immoral traits, and thereby put up with McNulty's bad behaviour. As spectators focus on McNulty's charisma, skilled police work and his ability to charm women, he becomes worthy of their allegiance, which enabled the possibility for spectators quickly form a strong allegiance with McNulty from the beginning. Consequently, spectators have chosen to accept McNulty for what he is, and he continues to be morally preferable through the first four seasons. In season five spectators witness a notable change in McNulty that affect their allegiance towards McNulty, as I argue this change to cause a confusion on how to elaborate on him. McNulty now become alienated, as everything that made McNulty appealing fades away. This will most likely weaken the foundation for a strong allegiance and spectators' ability to sympathise with him. In continuation of the Jensen's theory, I argue McNulty's immoral behaviour have been romanticised through the serial. However, because of the significant change McNulty's goes through in season five, McNulty does no longer hold the traits, which blurred his immoral behaviour, and he is therefore stripped from spectators' ability to romanticise him. In the end of the serial, spectators have a completely different allegiance towards McNulty, as spectators probably no longer feel strongly aligned with McNulty and what he stands for.

Kima Greggs

The following section will examine the character Detective Shakima "Kima" Greggs and analyse whether or not she can be defined as a female antihero. In that connection, I will impound Jason Mittell's theory on how cultural norms can be connected to the portrayal of female antihero and uncover whether or not this has had an effect on the portrayal of Kima, and spectators' perception of her. For that matter, I will argue the analysis of Kima is extremely interesting to examine due to her being

the only female lead, while primarily holding the traits of a classic male police detective. I trust this engagement to be worthy of analyse, because I believe the composition of these elements contribute to an interest in the character Kima, and therefore *The Wire*. So, how is spectators' character engagement affected, when they are confronted with a masculine female antihero?

The character Kima works as a detective at the Baltimore Police Department and works with narcotics. From the first episode, spectators learn Kima is openly gay, and lives with her spouse Cheryl. From the beginning of the show, Kima comes off as a strong, determined and successful detective, who has the skill and ability to be in law enforcement. She is tough and does not let anybody treat her badly, and shows her worth in the business. An example shows during a street bust in S1E, when Kima shows how high-level she is compared to several her colleagues, which then leads to her promotion as narcotics detective. The fact that the spectator immediately learns of Kima's good traits and her talent as a police detective launches the process of what could become a positive allegiance towards her. Spectators will consider her to be one of the good characters. This is further supported by Kima's relationship with Cheryl. Throughout season one, their relationship is very loving, and they seem to be happy together, as Kima to some extent prioritises Cheryl and a life with her. Kima also works closely with the character Bubbles, who helps her on the Barksdale case by providing information on different members, while Kima provides Bubbles with money, car rides and food. Through her relationship with Bubbles, Kima is portrayed as a kind character, who somehow helps a troubled person and gets to be his connection to civilisation without drugs and crime. Based upon Kima's actions and behaviour spectators will most likely consider Kima to be an appealing character, and they have most likely considered her worthy of their allegiance.

What I find very interesting about Kima is her being a female, while also being extremely masculine. I believe this conflation raises questions on spectators' perception on her. Her masculinity can primarily be determined by the resemblance between her and male colleagues. For example in relation to their matching clothes consisting of big boots, loose pants and t-shirts. Her masculine side also shows in her approach to her work, but is also visible when spectators watch how her fellow detectives treat her. I think an episode in S1E1 works as a great example to illustrate both notions: Kima is in the office with Herc and Carver, having trouble typing on an old typewriter, and Herc points out that they should all be given computers. Carver

then says: “What the fuck would an ass-ignorant motherfucker like you do with a computer?” - Herc replies: “Dunno. Trade stock and shit”, and then Kima says: “Jerk off, you mean” (TWS1E1). Then they all laugh as Herc tries to hit Carvers’ head with a tennis ball. Carver ends the conversation by saying: “We get a computer up in here, Herc’ll be deep into some porn sites and Kima still be pecking out her twenty-fours on that old piece of shit”, and Kima responses with a smile. This conversation translates into what is referred to as ‘locker room talk’, and Kima is on equal terms as her male colleagues (TWS1E1). It appears as if Kima is ‘one of the guys’, and her gender does not play a role.

Later in season one, Kima gets severely wounded in an undercover mission, where the narrative leaves the spectator doubting whether or not Kima will survive. As regards, Simon had planned on killing of Kima, however,Carolynn Strauss, who was the president of HBO Entertainment at the time, talked to David Simon about the potential she saw in the character Kima. This lead for Kima to become one of the main characters throughout the serial (Abrams, 2018, p. 30-31). I agree to Strauss’ thoughts on Kima, as I will argue the moment spectators realise how bad Kima is hurt, is the catalysts that make spectators realise how important they might consider Kima to be. I believe the importance of Kima, seen in the eyes of spectators, is due to her being a female having a male dominated job, in which she executes better than many of her male colleagues. Also, she manages to balance both her job and private life. In continuation of Strauss’ point, I think spectators look forward to see how Kima will unfold and what her presence in the serial will bring.

Ultimately, based upon Kima’s actions and the knowledge provided on her within season one, it is clear that Kima in many ways stands out from the rest of cast. She is first of all perceived as an independent and experienced police detective, but the fact that she is a woman separates her from the other characters. Opposite her colleagues, Kima manages to balance work life and her private life. American author and wife of David Simon, Laura Lippman describes Greggs to be *too* admirable in the beginning of the serial, which I to some extent agree to (Lippman in Alvarez, 2004, p. 62). It is interesting to watch someone do so well, but it is almost too perfect. Spectators might expect for her to do something immoral, or is at least find it interesting to follow her and see her fold out. Also, Kima is morally preferable and stands out from her colleagues both due to her gender, and the fact that her private life is in order. This further results in spectators noticing her, and thereby paying more

attention to her and how she is. As spectators are highly aware of this distinctive character, and the fact that she is given a lot of screen time through season one, spectators will most likely develop a strong allegiance quite quickly. However, as the serial continues Kima starts to change in mind-set and actions, which I trust to affect spectators' alignment and allegiance towards her, as she does not remain *too* admirable for that long.

Within season two, Kima and Cheryl run into problems in their relationship, as Cheryl expresses her worries about Kima's job and the dangers of it. Kima acknowledges her concern, but finds it boring to have a desk job, and she quickly goes back to her regular assignments. Simultaneously, Cheryl wishes to expand their family, which Kima reluctantly agrees to, so Cheryl goes through an artificial insemination. After this event, Kima starts to change, and she repeatedly tries to find ways to keep her from home. She is consciously distancing herself from Cheryl and gets annoyed with Cheryl questioning her lifestyle. Spectators now experience a different Kima than the one in season one, which I believe to affect their allegiance, as spectators might question her behaviour and the choices that she makes. The once flawless character starts to show immoral traits, however, we as spectators are still encouraged to like Kima. This can be based on her skills in law enforcement, and supported by her relationship with Bubbles. Later in the show, Cheryl gives birth to their son Elijah, and Kima starts to question whether or not it was a mistake for her to become a parent. Kima eventually talks to McNulty about her problems in S3E3, as she points out:

“How come they know you're police when they hook up with you, and they know you're police when they move in, and they know you're police when they decide to start a family with you, and all that shit is just fine, until one day. One day it is, you have a regular job, you need to be home by five o'clock” (TWS3E3)

This quote communicates how Kima is clearly frustrated with the current situation, and she does not know how to handle the situation. She eventually tells Cheryl that she only agreed on having the child because of Cheryl's desire to have one. This type of behaviour probably makes spectators question whether or not Kima is worthy of allegiance, as she continues to show immoral behaviour. This might be further enhanced, based upon her and Cheryl's relationship in season one, as

spectators might not have expected Kima to act like this. In S3E8, the situation escalates when Kima and McNulty are assigned for a mission together. Kima indirectly entrusts her thoughts with McNulty, and asks him how he made it work, when he cheated on his ex wife Elena. At that time, Kima has already been separated from Cheryl shortly, but has recently moved back in. However, Kima tells McNulty that “I ain’t even sure I even want to be back”, and McNulty quickly figures out why Kima is asking him about his past (TWS3E8). McNulty fills her in and later helps Kima conceal her infidelity towards Cheryl. Kima seems to enjoy her life outside of her home, as she experiences a freedom, which she did not have before. This eventually leads to the final separation of the two. At this point of the serial, Kima’s immoral behaviour becomes extremely dominating, which weakens the former strong allegiance towards her. I trust this to be due to the fact that her immoral behaviour is linked to infidelity. Her actions are purposely done for her own enjoyment, and the fact that it is highly exposed for spectators makes it possible for spectators to justify. As concerns, it would be evident to include the theory on female antiheroes.

Based upon the theory of Bruun Vaage (2015, p. 173) and Mittell (2015, p. 150), as examined in the theory section, the female antiheroes are most often not as bad as the male ones, which might be linked to the belief saying that due to social norms, spectators will most likely not be willing to accept women to have extreme moral flaws. Ultimately, I consider to Kima a female antihero, as she is a morally flawed character, who we as spectators are encouraged to like. Just like an antihero, she does hold morally good behaviour, which relates to her great police work and the relationship between her and Bubbles. Simultaneously, spectators might also be fascinated by her and her approach to life compared to other women. Kima is frank and always has the nerve to put her foot down, when she feels someone is treating her badly. She is a brilliant police detective, who manages to solve cases much better than many of her male colleagues, and they have a lot of respect for her. I believe this can have a positive affect in relation to spectators’ evaluation of Kima, as this fascination and admiration of Kima makes her more appealing, while is also, to some extent, overshadows her immoral behaviour. Moreover, I think some spectators might find it interesting and appealing to watch a female do the same things and hold the same traits as a male stereotype. They might consider her presence in *The Wire* to be a subversion of society’s norms and expectations for women. Consequently, some spectators might praise her for being who she is.

I do find it interesting how Kima, from the beginning of the serial, has been portrayed as a very masculine character, both in her looks, attitude and actions. I then ask myself: Does that affect the perception of her as a female antihero? And if so, is it positively or negatively?

To answer this question I have used the notions of Bruun Vaage and Mittel on the female antihero, in which I agree to their work. I do consider it more difficult to accept Kima's behaviour, and I believe it could be grounded in cultural norms and expectations, which they propose. Kima is a female and regardless of how masculine she is portrayed, spectators might unconsciously have certain expectations to how she should act based on her gender. Since her immoral actions are related to infidelity might trigger spectators even further, as I consider it to be more rare for women to cheat on their love interest than men in relation to the film- and serialised television mediums. As a result, it could have been more surprising for spectators to experience a female doing it, and therefore more difficult for the spectators' to place in their own moral compass. Likewise, due to the possible surprising aspect of this narrative turn, spectators are possibly more likely to judge Kima's actions more negatively. However, I do believe Kima being so masculine can help in some situations, as it can help to conceal some of her immoral behaviour, as she to some extent can be interpreted to be on equal terms as her fellow male colleagues. An example could be in S1E3 under a drug raid, when the young drug dealer Bodie hits an officer, and the police officers start to beat Bodie up. Kima runs towards them and as she gets close by, she joins the other officers in the beating. Bruce A. Williams and Andrea L. Press analyses this exact situation, and suggest how this episode shows spectators that Kima is "one of the guys" (William & Press, 2017, p. 5). I will agree to this notion, and assert how Kima is on equal footing with the other officers. I do not think spectators are very surprised by Kima's reaction to the situation, even though they might have expected something else. Likewise, I do not think spectators to be so indignant about her reaction that it might affect their allegiance with her. Also, I think this example can be linked to the concept pro-social punishment introduced in the theory section. Even though Kima does something immoral as hitting Bodie, even though other officers have the situation under control, Bodie is still immorally worse and deserves to be punished, because he hit a police detective. Therefore, spectators might consider her bad behaviour to be positive, or they at least accept it. If that would have been some other female character, I trust spectators would have interpreted this type of

behaviour differently. Based on these observations, Kima's gender will ultimately affect spectators' evaluation of immoral behaviour to some extent, however, her masculinity and how other characters perceive her can have a conceal her immoral behaviour. As a result, spectators will be more likely to evaluate her in accordance with other male characters.

However, other than the notion suggesting Kima's gender to be the reason for spectators being less willing to accept her immoral behaviour, I believe the presence of the character Jimmy McNulty complicates it even further. I will argue that as the serial continues Kima slightly turns into a female version of McNulty, which can be based on several similarities. Both of them are skilled police detectives, workaholics and do not know how to find a balance between their work and family. They are both independent, selfish and like to handle things their own way. Moreover, none of them manages to keep a fully functional relationship with their family, as they both cheat on their wives and neglect their children. What really separates the two is that McNulty gets away with his behaviour, which is explained in the individual section on McNulty, whereas Kima is more likely to be judged negatively. I believe this situation to be partly grounded in the presence of McNulty, which will be defended in the following sections.

First off, McNulty has been morally bad from the beginning of the serial, and continues to be it throughout most of the serial. As a result, spectators have learned to put up with his behaviour right from the start. With Kima, on the other hand, spectators have first learned to align with her based on her morally good behaviour from season one, and seeing her change for the worse in season two and three, might confuse the spectators. Neither does she show stability, which Mittell argues to be of great importance for characters in TV shows (Mittell, 2015, p. 133). Instead, she has become capricious, and I believe it to cause a distance between her and spectators.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, I agree to the notion suggesting how spectators will most likely be affected by gender norms and expectations suggesting how women are more likely to be judged negatively, when being immoral. Therefore, when comparing the two, I think McNulty being a male allows him to gain more widespread acceptance from spectators. Kima on the other hand will more likely be judged more negatively as spectators unconsciously do not expect a woman to behave the way she does.

Additionally, other characters glorify McNulty, his actions and how he is with women, while also being enchanted by his strong charisma, which presumably blur his immoral behaviour. Kima does not possess the same amount of charisma, and other characters do not desire her in the same manner as McNulty. Consequently, spectators then notice and evaluate her immoral behaviour differently. In conclusion, Kima does not have the charisma that McNulty has, and neither is she desired the way that he is. Therefore, she cannot conceal her bad behaviour by being charismatic and coveted by other characters. I trust spectators are more likely to immediately spot her immoral behaviour and evaluate it through their individual allegiance towards her, whereas spectators are more likely to ignore McNulty's immoral behaviour.

Ultimately, the fact that there is already a workaholic-womanizer character, McNulty, who spectators are fascinated by and gets away with immoral behaviour, makes it difficult for Kima to obtain the same amount of acceptance. It is difficult, if not impossible, to be accepted and liked on the same level as McNulty. Likewise, I will argue that it is more difficult for her as she is a woman, and this is even though she holds the traits and behaviour of several of her male colleagues.

In conclusion, I will consider Kima Greggs to be a female antihero with many masculine traits. I trust this to hold both an advantage and disadvantage concerning spectators' allegiance towards her. Her being a female creates boundaries, as spectators will most likely be affected by society's norms and expectations concerning females. Kima's masculine traits are mostly based on male stereotypes and are connected to her fellow male colleagues. These traits are related to her looks, work ethics and approach to life, but also how other characters perceive her. Kima starts off as a morally preferable character, which almost seems too perfect and appealing. As then show continues, Kima changes, and she transforms into a female antihero. Kima's immoral behaviour is mainly related to her neglecting her wife and son together with her infidelity and selfishness. Based on the analysis, I trust the change in Kima to primarily affect spectators' allegiance towards negatively. I do, however, believe it to mainly be linked to her gender, as spectators would have been more prone to accept her behaviour if she was a male. In that case, her masculine traits and how characters perceive her prove to have a positive affect, as it presumably helps to make spectators ignore her immoral behaviour. I do believe the presence of McNulty and the fact that he is a male comes off as extremely dominant, which makes it difficult for spectators to ultimately accept Kima's behaviour as strongly as

they do with McNulty's. Likewise, her being a female also holds positive factors, which can strengthen spectators' allegiance towards her. Since Kima is so different compared to her fellow female characters, and she acts so masculine can be interpreted to be deliberate defiance towards society's gender norms, and spectators might really enjoy watching a female with immoral and masculine traits, which match the ones of the male characters. It can therefore be difficult to find one solution to how spectators will perceive Kima, but I trust the complexity of her character creates an interest for spectators. She is difficult to figure out, and she is not like any other character, and that makes her exciting. Consequently, her presence in the narrative creates wonder, and I believe this wonder gives rise to an interest in *The Wire*.

Omar Little

This section will examine and analyse the character Omar Devone Little in relation to the antihero character, and how he separates from the prevalent antihero. As regards, this analysis seeks to identify if Omar's unique being has affected the popularity of the character positively or negatively and ultimately spectators' engagement with Omar. With regard to that I will argue whether or not spectators are able to form a strong allegiance with Omar, Omar and his approach to life can serve to arouse an even deeper interest in *The Wire*. Also, I believe his lifestyle can attribute to suppress prejudices towards people who are different than the norm. Therefore, I will claim that Omar is a strong point of interest in *The Wire*.

The character Omar Little is first introduced in the third episode of season one, and he finances his lifestyle by robbing other criminals. Omar is not like any of the other criminals of *The Wire*, as he is above all not subjected to any organisation or gang, but simply plays by his own rules, his own moral code. As Omar states: "I mean, don't get it twisted, I do some dirt too. But I ain't never put my gun on nobody, who wasn't in the game. The man must have a code" (TWS1E7). This quote suggests he only comes after other criminals and does not harm or rob innocent people. Opposite almost all other characters, Omar also manages to have happy, slick relationships throughout the serial, and he is openly homosexual.

I will argue Omar to be an antihero based upon his immoral behaviour, which mainly relates to his immoral work with crime and murder, however, spectators are entirely encouraged to like Omar. His ability to show affection, his talent and

persuasive charisma are amongst significant factors, which all assist in making Omar morally preferable. Consequently, this makes spectators consider him to worthy of their allegiance. The following run-through has the purpose to illustrate this notion.

Spectators quickly learn that Omar is almost considered a legend in the streets of Baltimore. In S1E3 Omar and two others make a bust in the projects, shoots a guy in the leg and manages to leave without further notice. This scene shows spectators how organised and skilled Omar is in his work, but it also shows how others perceive him. As a result, I believe this to be the catalysts for spectators' fascination with Omar. This fascination creates an interest in Omar, which will make spectators want to know more about him. This fascination is probably enhanced in S1E5, when Omar establishes another bust near the projects. Omar enters the street with a sawed-off shotgun while whistling "A-Hunting We Will Go", and pedestrians immediately notice him and start yelling: "Check it out, here he come", "Watch out, man, here come that fool" and "Yo, yo, come on! Omar's coming, man!" (TWS1E5). These outbursts signal people know who Omar is, but also that he is feared. They know what he is capable of, and they do not want to mess with him. Spectators might interpret these reactions to be a sign of respect from the other criminals, but also Omar being a skilled at what he does. In the same episode Avon Barksdale also offers a reward of 2000 dollars on Omar, but makes it double as he finds out Omar is homosexual. Based on the reward it is clear Barksdale considers Omar to be a threat, and despises him even more because of his sexuality. When someone like Barksdale considers Omar to be a threat, spectators will know that it is seriously. In conclusion, Omar's ability and the way others perceive him can also function as a factor, which can contribute to disguise his immoral behaviour. Based upon the theory suggested by Smith, the estrangement of an antihero can trigger spectators' interest in the antihero, which I believe to be the case with Omar (Smith, 1999, p. 225-226). Instead of questioning why he is so feared, spectators will very likely find the estrangement of Omar interesting. They will be drawn to Omar and his ways of doing things.

In the following episode, S1E6, Omar explicitly shows that he is also homosexual, as he sits with his boyfriend Brandon and friend, where they talk about their bust from the other night. While holding hands with Brandon, Omar tells him: "Everybody in these projects been knowin' Omar, you heard. I just don't want them coming down on y'all, baby-boy" (TWS1E6). In this scene, Omar does not only show he is homosexual, but he also shows affection and explicitly expresses how important

his boyfriend is to him. I trust Omar's ability to show affection can affect spectators' evaluation of Omar positively, as it makes him morally preferable. As with McNulty, his ability to show affection can conceal his immoral actions, e.g. committing crime. This notion is further confirmed when the Barksdale gang torture and kill Brandon, and Omar has to see the body. His immediate reaction is to cry as he leans down to hug the body, but ultimately goes away to scream in pain. In order to pay Brandon's last tribute, Omar agrees to help McNulty and Kima as he provides crucial evidence on Barksdale gang members. These actions suggest Omar really loved Brandon, and based on that spectators will find Omar worthy of their allegiance. Omar does not only show affection for his boyfriends throughout the serial, but also his family and other vulnerable people. An example could be in S1E4, when a young female Shirley needs money, and comes to him for money, which Omar immediately agrees to. The way she approaches him suggests how this is a repetitive event, which tells how the character consider him to be someone, who is willing to help. This trait can be considered morally appealing, which can strengthen spectators' allegiance with him even further.

What is also interesting about Omar is his moral code. This code simply refers to how he is only interested in harming others, who are in the game, not innocent people. The fact that he then sticks to this code makes him morally preferable; in spite of it indicates he is capable of committing crime and murder. In addition, when Omar acts aggressively, he does it for a reason. Therefore, as spectators get to know about Omar's ways of doing things, and the reasons behind them, makes his actions almost justifiable. For that reason some spectators might be more willing to accept or put up with his actions. Therefore, spectators will find him worthy of their allegiance, and they will be able to sympathise with him. Omar's being so persistent regarding his moral code can also be linked to him being extremely honest in almost everything he does. An example shows in S2E6 as Omar testifies in court, and he is asked to uncover his job description in which he replies: "I robs drug dealers" (TWS2E6). Spectators might have expected anyone else to be lying, but not Omar, as he stands by who he is, and what he does.

Followed by the foregoing section I think spectators consider Omar to be interesting because of his unusual approach to the criminal world. Opposite most of the other criminals, he does not work against the police, but the other criminals. The police are not Omar's enemy, which one might think, considering he is a criminal. I

consider him to be a modern Robin Hood, who steals from the other criminals and gives back to the poor, who need money and other resources. Through Omar's Robin Hood approach to his criminal path tells spectators that Omar is not materialistic. This is both illustrated in the example of Shirley and her kid, who need money to pay rent, but also when Omar speaks about money throughout the serial. For example when he robs Marlo Stanfield. Marlo says: "That's my money", in which Omar replies: "Man, money ain't got no owners, only spenders" (TWS4E4). It seems as if Omar also enjoys ridiculing those, who consider money to be of great importance. An example shows when Omar burns a lot of Marlo's money: "Now you make sure you tell old Marlo I burned the money. 'Cause it ain't about that paper. It's about me hurtin' his people and messin' with his world" (TWS5E6). He explicitly confronts the character Fat Face with why he is burning the money, and it seems as if he enjoys having the ability to disturb Marlo so easily, because he knows how he feels about money.

In relation to Omar's moral code, it seems as if he has a full set of rules, which are not to be broken or bended. Consequently, Omar is persistent in his approach and stands by his words and actions, which shows integrity. I believe spectators admire him for that, and spectators enjoy the fact that they know what they can expect from him. He provides the stability, which Mittell refers to as a crucial factor in spectators' engagement with a character (Mittell, 2015, p. 133). Spectators can trust Omar and he does not change his person or values in the show, which enables the possibility of a steady allegiance. There are no notable effects, which can affect spectators' allegiance with him negatively. Omar having the strict set of rules suggest that there must be a deeper meaning behind, and I think it lies within Omar's purpose with all the crime. Opposite the other criminals, Omar is in search for justice and does not commit crime just to commit crime. He commits crime for a greater good, and if there is no point in it, he does not participate in it. For example, in S2E11 when Omar shoots Brother Mouzone, after Stringer Bell made him believe that Mouzone had murdered Omar's boyfriend Brandon. Omar then realises that Stringer Bell has manipulated him, and Omar calls an ambulance. He could easily have left Brother Mouzone to die, but it is not for him to do something like that. This action shows how Omar is also morally good, which I believe to strengthen spectators' allegiance towards Omar.

Following this thought, Omar explicitly points out several times how he is only going for other criminals, and not law abiding citizens. This is illustrated when he, while being in court, says: "Hey look! I ain't never put my gun on no citizen"

(TWS2E6). I interpret this dictum as if Omar does not want others to think bad of him and misunderstand how he plays 'the game'. It seems important for him to have the right reputation, and if people do not like what he does, it okay, but to despise him for the wrong reasons seems to be outrageous for Omar. This shows effort, which can be appealing for spectators, which again make them align themselves with Omar.

I will also argue *The Wire* illustrates how life is not always fair, however, Omar sometimes manages to prove the universe wrong; it is possible for justice to be served, when Omar is coming. Omar brings justice to the board, for example when Omar teams up with Brother Mouzone and manages to corner Stringer Bell at his development site, where they kill him (TWS3E2). Regardless of spectators' interest in Stringer Bell, I trust Omar's actions provide spectators with a relief, and a sense of justice, which is rarely seen in the universe of *The Wire*. I trust spectators really enjoy how Omar brings this to the table, and they probably look forward to watch him and follow his next move. Again, this can further contribute to an interest in Omar, but also a fascination with him, which makes one wonder why he succeeds in doing it.

I consider Omar's reputation to be one of the catalysts for the fascination of him. It triggers a glorification, which makes the characters of *The Wire*, perhaps also the spectators, consider him to be some type of superhuman or god-like character. An example shows, when his boyfriend has eaten the last cereals, and he needs to go out for some new ones. Omar considers carrying a gun in his pyjamas, but he finds it is too difficult to find a proper spot for it, so he walks without any on him. This suggests that even Omar knows how feared he is. On his way to the grocery store some pedestrians notice him and runs away from him, while yelling "It's Omar!" and "Omar comin'!" (TWS4E3). Some people even throw down their drugs from a roof, as if they were for him, possibly out of fear, even though Omar has not noticed their presence. However, what I find most interesting about this specific sequence is how it humanises Omar. Omar's desire for Honey Nut Cheerios takes him down to a level, which makes it possible for spectators to connect with him differently. Omar shows that he is not that different than anyone else, and not a god-like character. As a result, when spectators get to experience both sides of him, it will possibly strengthen their allegiance towards him.

In conclusion, Omar is primarily controlled by a morally good intention, but his actions are still immoral, however, the fact that he comes from a good place blurs the immoral part of him. He might rob and kill other criminals, yet he uses their

money to help others and he wants to help the police, when he has the opportunity. Also, Omar hold the ability to show affection towards others, primarily portrayed through his relationship with his boyfriends throughout the show. As a result, it is possible for spectators to find Omar appealing and thereby form a strong allegiance towards him.

In conclusion, Omar also differs from every other character in the show, which forms a fascination with him, which is further enhanced by other characters' perception of him. I believe that spectators also feel comfortable watching him, because he is who he is, and there is nothing between. He does not change notably throughout the show, but continues to hold onto his values, which I think spectators admire about him. All in all, I consider Omar to be one of the more straightforward characters within *The Wire*, in spite of how distinctive he is. I trust this to be grounded in his ability to be both tough and affectionate as it humanises him. This humanisation is then a significant factor for spectators' ability to feel sympathy for Omar, as it allows spectators to ignore his immoral traits, and instead pay attention to everything appealing about him. Therefore, Omar functions as a catalyst for spectators' interest in *The Wire*.

Roland 'Prez' Prezbylewski

This section will analyse the character Roland 'Prez' Prezbylewski in relation to Roberta Person's theory on how characters of serial should be referred to as highly elaborated characters. Peason argues how these characters are subjected to a format, which does not allow the characters to notably change after experiencing life-transforming transitions. Characters of films are, on the other hand, subjected to another format, which allows them to actually change throughout the narrative and thereby undergoes 'character development'. However, I will postulate that this process is also possible for characters of TV serials. I will furthermore argue that they can occur without ruining the premise of the serial. Instead, I believe that this process can lead to a deeper character engagement, and as a result lead to an even stronger interest in the overall serial.

Therefore, I will detect how it is possible for a character from *The Wire* to experience character development. Moreover, I will examine the process to demonstrate how it can improve spectators' perception of the character. For this purpose, I have chosen to analyse the character Prez, as I will argue that this specific character undergoes a character development, which transforms him into a more appealing character that spectators can form a strong allegiance with.

Prez, which he is mainly referred to throughout the serial, is first introduced in S1E2, and he also works as a detective within the Baltimore Police Department, like many of the other characters. The first time spectators watch Prez, he shoots up against a wall in the meeting office. Daniels angrily approaches him, and Prez explains it was because he wanted to show Carver how light his trigger pull is, but he forgot to take the clip out of the chamber. He 'apologises' to Daniels by saying: "Shit, I'm sorry, Lieutenant", while trying to justify his actions by saying: "It's an accident, okay, gimme a fuckin' break already" (TWS1E2). Through this incident, spectators quickly learn that he is disrespectful and also very cocky in his approach towards others, as he rejects his own flaws and bad actions. Daniels then asks which unit he is from, and Prez tells that his other boss sent him to the casualty section a couple of months back, and the other detectives start to giggle. This might indicate that the casualty section is a desk job or something less prestigious. This invites spectators to think that Prez might not be the brightest and most serious detective.

As the episode continues, Prez is drinking beer with Herc and Carver. Herc is insisting that they go to the Franklin Terrace Towers and "let these motherfuckers know who you are" (TWS1E2). Prez is the first one to accept the offer, which again shows signs of immaturity. At this point, spectators learn how Prez is controlled by his impulses and his desire to evoke some type of trouble. This is further confirmed, when they go the towers. Herc and Carver confront two people, push them a bit and make them get down on the ground, however, they quickly choose to go back to the car. When they return a young man is eating a bag of chips while leaning up against their car. When he does not want to move away from the car, Prez chooses to punch him right in the face, while grabbing him and pushing him down from the car. As a result, the young man starts to bleed heavily from his eyes. Carver then asks Prez: "What the fuck's matter with you?" (TWS1E2). This situation clearly shows signs of a group dynamic, as all three of them consciously look for trouble, but their individual approaches differ a lot from each other. When Prez then pushes the boundaries, the

others dissociate from him. This incident makes it difficult for spectators to align themselves with Prez and eventually develop a positive allegiance towards him, as these actions almost resemble villainous behaviour. Moreover, the fact that he has not at one point shown remorse, or said anything that can make spectators understand why he did it makes it even more challenging.

Prez gets suspended from street duty and starts to do deskwork. Later in season one while working in the office, Prez gets really bored with it and starts to examine the pager codes made by the Barksdale gang. He eventually ends up cracking the codes, and he thereby contributes to the solving of the case. Now, Prez shows dedication and skill. As a result his actions seem more judicious compared to earlier, and spectators learn that Prez holds other traits than being cocky and unpredictable. This makes it possible for spectators to look at Prez a bit differently, which can be used in their evaluation of him. Now, the villainous behaviour starts to fall into the background, and spectators might find it easier to align themselves with him.

In season two Prez talks to his father-in-law alias Stand Valchek, commander of the Baltimore Police Department, and expresses how he wants to continue working on the detailed work, as he feels as if he has found his place in law enforcement. Prez now shows a softer side of himself, and he becomes more sympathetic as spectators learn more about his interior thoughts and what he actually desires. I will argue that this knowledge can profitably be compared to Prez's earlier behaviour, and therefore provide an answer to why he acted the way he did. He was not comfortable and got bored, which made it difficult for him to excel. As a result, he became destructive. By getting to know Prez better and being provided with some type of answer to his immoral side, spectators will more likely get closer aligned with Prez.

In S3E9, when Prez is a part of the Major Crimes Unit, McNulty and Prez receive a call on duty regarding a gun shooting. On their way there, they split up, and Prez, while being in the car, sees a dark shadow running down a dark alley. The next scene reveals that Prez has shot the man, and it turns out that it was a police detective. This leads to Prez's final suspension within law enforcement, as some claim that his actions are racially motivated. Also, spectators learn that Prez is very upset with the situation and feels such remorse that he wants to quit law enforcement. This is in spite of being supported by his close colleagues, Freamon, Daniels and Massey, who are all African-American. At this time in the serial, spectators have experienced Prez's good and bad sides, and he has therefore become worthy of their allegiance. Comparing to

season one, Prez does no longer hold a strong villain-like behaviour, but is more diverse, and spectators can now sympathise with him. This ability is further enhanced when they are confronted with his reaction on the gun shooting.

In season four Prez's career takes a new turn when he starts to work as a math teacher at Edward Tilghman Middle School, which holds a lot of vulnerable and brazen young teenagers. When Prez starts to work at the school it is clear that he has changed even further. Now, he is more oppressed and more wary in his approach towards others, while also being more of a paragon. An example could be in S4E2, when Prez, before his first class, is cleaning the classroom and removing old gum from under the desks. One would definitely assume that the old Prez would never have done something like that, and giving a good first impression could not have bothered him at all. As his first class begins in S4E3, Prez struggles to present himself as an authoritative figure, and he fails to make the students respect him. He is no longer this loud and cocky character, but more humble and low-key. Likewise, he is not in control anymore, which might contribute to a vibe, which indicates that he does not believe himself or trust his instincts. This approach could have been interpreted negatively by spectators, but to see this change in a character like Prez is interesting for spectators. They might wonder, whether or not something good will come with it. At this point, spectators will evaluate Prez differently, even compared to the Prez, which they knew from season three. Spectators might even feel sorry for him, when they experience the lack of respect he receives from the students, because they know that he has changed for the better and does not deserve this treatment. This new side of Prez creates interest, and spectators have reached a place, where they are rooting for him to succeed in his new job, whilst also wanting to figure out how it will proceed.

As season four continues, Prez manages to get more connected with the students, and they start to learn from each other. An example shows when Prez learns that the student Duquan Weems alias Dukie lives with family, who are drug addicts and alcoholics, who prioritise drugs and alcohol over running water, food and the ability to change clothes. Therefore, Prez provides Dukie with lunches, new, clean clothes and offers him to shower at school. Prez and Dukie get even closer when Prez introduces dice in math class to explain probability to the students. At the same time Prez recognises how smart Dukie actually is and therefore lets him use the school computer for other assignments. The fact that Prez recognises his potential, and he

wants to help Dukie show that he cares about him, which presumably will be considered appealing for spectators. Prez no longer considers these young and partly criminal children, as someone, who should be put behind bars, but rather someone who needs guidance and help. The fact that he also knows what is ahead for these children, might evoke some sort of compassion, which enhances his desire to help them. In this instance, he learns that he has the power to make a difference, as he can guide the children in the right direction. When comparing these observations with his former behaviour, Prez has clearly gone through a distinctive character development, like the ones Pearson refers to.

At this time in the season, spectators have gotten even more involved with Prez's emotional side, which fully confirms them in his ability to be a good person. Due to his transformation he has become one of the morally preferable characters in *The Wire*. This makes him stand out, and spectators are more aware of him, so when he does something good, they will consider it in their evaluation on him. Because of that spectators most like establish an even stronger allegiance towards him. Moreover, this is enhanced further due to the large amount of time spent with him. Lastly, the fact that he has not been respectable from the beginning makes his new, good traits even more appealing. It constructs an interest that would not have been there if he had been morally preferable from the beginning.

At the middle school teachers are taught to give the students a lot of tests, and Prez starts to question this specific method, as it shows the main purpose of the tests is for the school, ergo the city, to look better on paper. First Prez refuses to be subjected to the rules by trying to create methods, which are more relatable to the students, e.g. the dice as mentioned earlier. However, he is eventually forced to use the tests. These actions show how committed Prez actually is in the students' education, which again affects spectators' allegiance with him. Throughout the entire season four, spectators are continuously exposed to Prez's morally preferable sides, which again contribute to strengthen the interest in him, and the desire to root for him.

In conclusion, at the beginning of the serial, Prez was not a likeable character under any circumstances, which was problematic in relation to spectators' moral evaluation of him. He was capricious and so were his actions and opinions, and most of the things he did could not be justified nor explained. Therefore, spectators would find it difficult to align themselves with him, as they would rather question his actions than feeling sympathy towards him. However, when spectators become aware of the

reasons for his actions, it becomes easier to put up with them. Simultaneously, when Prez shows kindness and skill within the police and also becomes less psychical in his approach, it opens up for a more committed alignment. This quickly which evolves into an allegiance with him, and spectators become able to sympathise with him. I will argue that this was strongly confirmed, when Prez accidentally shoots a police detective, as I, being a spectator, could fully sympathise with him at that point. I felt bad for him, and as I had obtained a certain amount of knowledge on him, I knew that this action was carried by accident. Later, as Prez then starts to work as a teacher, and spectators gets very involved with how affectionate and passionate Prez actually is, this allegiance turns even stronger. Prez has now become morally preferable, and spectators will root for him and hope for him to succeed in life.

In relation to the work of Pearson, as first mentioned, I trust that this analysis confirms that characters of a serial can go through a successful character development, on the same level as characters of films. Prez went from a morally flawed, cocky and strange police detective into a likeable, passionate and trailblazing teacher. As I suggested from the beginning, the life changing transformation that Prez went through in the serial showed to be positive. First off all it made a despised character into one of the more interesting characters in the serial, who spectators would root for. Secondly, Prez's transformation illustrates how people are not destined to be stuck in one spot of society, but they are able to move forward. For that reason, they are able to change for the better. I will argue that the choice of portraying a story like this, a story with a happy ending, in the universe of *The Wire* is of great importance, as the universe primarily holds tragic or wretched endings. The fact that some of the characters' storylines show diversity can contribute to a dynamic, which give rise to an interest in who experiences which kind of destiny.

I also believe that the successful transformation, as the one Prez goes through, also fits the format of *The Wire*, since the serial holds so many narrative threads for such a long amount of time, while it also changes subject and focus on lots of elements each season. Therefore, I evaluate this change to fit in the narrative, and it creates a dynamic within the serials. Also, I consider the change to be much needed as not many other characters go through a transformation like the one Prez goes through. The transformation makes Prez one the characters that is the most relatable, because he gets to be in between of it all; he is not police and he is not criminal. It is appealing

to follow someone, who is not a part of that story, but something else that is important in another way.

All in all, I think Prez is a great example on how characters of a serial can go through character development successfully. First off, if Prez had not changed, spectators would never have been able to develop a strong allegiance towards him. Second, without the transformation he could not have been able to contribute to spectators' interest in the serial, instead he would possibly have been a character, which spectators would despise. In that case, I will say that the transformation that Prez goes through works a great example on how characters can affect and control spectators' engagement and interest. I consider this exact ability to be one of the crucial answers to why characters are of such great importance in a TV serial.

Reginald 'Bubbles' Cousins

This following section will concern the character Reginald Cousins, mainly referred to as Bubbles. I found Bubbles worthy of an analysis, because of how he and his storyline differ from others characters and their storylines, but also due to the fact that he can be considered to be a popular character. Opposite many of the other characters, which have been analysed, I do not think Bubbles can be considered an antihero. Therefore, I will argue that the popularity of Bubbles is based on another foundation than a lot the other characters. As I argue throughout the analysis of e.g. McNulty, his immoral traits are turned into something positive that spectators somehow praise and really enjoy watching, however, I believe it is different in Bubbles' case. I trust spectators enjoy watching Bubbles because of his kindness and morally good sides. Even though he holds a few immoral traits, which will be examined later, his morally good traits and actions takes precedence over the immoral ones. Moreover, Bubbles is close to be the only character, who experiences a happy ending, which I find notably interesting based upon my own anticipation on his fate in the show. Therefore, I have chosen to make an analysis of Bubbles and his storyline, and hereby determine how it affects spectators' engagement with him. Also, I will use Bubbles' happy ending as a tool to illustrate and support the notion telling that Bubbles is a popular character, who spectators root for.

Spectators are first introduced to Bubbles in S1E1, and they quickly learn that he is a drug addict. Bubbles does not have a home and therefore stays in abandoned building with his friend Johnny Weeks, who he spends most of his time with. Bubbles and Weeks cover their drug addiction by copying money and then swapping them for drugs from Barksdale drug dealers. Based on these actions it is clear that Bubbles is in the low part of the society, and he does not have a sheltered everyday life. Based on that knowledge, it might be difficult for spectators to figure out what purpose Bubbles has in the narrative, as they might consider him to be nothing more than a flat drug addict character with no individuality. This assumption does presumably change, after spectators watch Bubbles reaction to when Weeks gets beat up by the Barksdale gang. Bubbles immediately searches to find a way to get back at them, which leads him to team up with Kim. Bubbles starts provide the police knowledge on the Barksdale gang members, while Kim promises to punish them for beating up Weeks. At this point, in spite of having following Bubbles shortly, spectators have learned that Bubbles is more than the drug addict character, which spectators might had assumed. This assists in the development of a solid, positive alignment towards Bubbles, as spectators' possible perception of him is belied. Despite of him being a drug addict, who does not have a strong base, he has the desire to help others around him and help the way he knows of. This also shows that Bubbles is a morally preferable character, and his moral flaws, e.g. copying money, are almost erased as characters gets to know about his other traits. As a result, spectators will most likely start to align with him, as his morally good traits and actions are considered more appealing, but also interesting.

What I mean by interesting is linked to the same point of interest as with the other character that I have analysed in this paper. All of the characters, including Bubbles, are very distinctive characters, who all stand out based on different terms, which makes them differ from others. I will argue that it makes spectators notice them, and as a result, spectators will be more attentive to their actions. As for Bubbles, who is a drug addict, it is interesting for spectators to watch the drug addict character being portrayed in another way. In relation to this, Andre Royo, who plays the role of Bubbles, emphasises, when talking about the approach he used, when he was to play Bubbles: "I wanted Bubbles to be human first, addict second... I wasn't trying to play the addiction. I was trying to play the person" (Royo quoted in Abrams, 2018, p. 27). I think this reflects clearly, when one follows Bubbles, based on several

factors. Spectators become aware of the fact that he is a drug addict, but I do not consider this to be the main focus. Instead, spectators get the opportunity to watch Bubbles do things that does not revolve around drugs or getting money for them. They learn how Bubbles is a very articulate and skilled salesman, e.g. when he sells t-shirts from a supermarket cart, or when he tricks the Barksdale members with the hat trick. These examples also show signs of intelligence, as he is a persuasive communicator, and he is skilled at finding out ways to get money. Moreover, spectators also learn about how emotional Bubbles is concerning his loved ones, and how he finds pleasure in helping others. I consider his relationship with the young Sherrod to be the strongest example to illustrate this notion. Bubbles has the desire to help Sherrod and show him a non-toxic path in life. The effort he puts in helping Sherrod also shows that Bubbles care about others than himself. Another example, which supports this notion on a humanisation of the drug addict, concerns Bubbles relationship with Kima and the other police detectives. In relation to that Royo claims: “He (Bubbles) finds pleasure in helping the cops. It ain’t just about the \$20 to get high. If you really want money for dope, you can do it a million different ways for a lot more money than snitching” (Royo in Alvarez, 2004, p. 96). I agree to this statement, since it seems as if Bubbles enjoys contributing to things and being a part of something, as he might often feel useless in society. In conclusion, Bubbles being who he is, proposes a humanisation of the drug addict character, which I trust to have been unexpected, but also very appealing for spectators. When spectators experience Bubbles and discover how much more he is than a drug addict, they will most likely be fascinated with him and keep an eye on him. As he then shows out to be morally preferable and kind, he is even more interesting to follow and form an allegiance towards. Therefore, I believe the humanisation of the drug addict character to be of great importance, as it contributes to an interest in Bubbles’ storyline, and therefore also in *The Wire*.

I find the humanisation of Bubbles evident to link to the concept parasocial relationship, as mentioned in the theory section. As Bubbles is presented with human qualities, spectators will presumably become more invested in Bubbles and his life. This then leads to spectators being able to sympathise with him, ergo they form an allegiance towards him. Therefore, humanising Bubbles makes it possible for spectators to form a sort of relationship with him, where they want to invest their time

in him and his storyline. I consider this to be of great importance, as it assists to work in the process of making spectators invest themselves in the overall narrative.

As mentioned in the theory section on characters, Mittell suggests how spectators can start to think positively and negatively about a character based on how the other characters perceive the specific character (Mittell, 2015, p. 144). In Bubbles' case there are some examples of how other characters do not approve of him, because he is a drug addict. For example in S1E6 when McNulty and Bubbles drive to McNulty's kids' soccer game, they meet McNulty's ex Elena. When McNulty introduces Bubbles to her, and Bubbles then tries to shake hands with her, she simply rejects his handshake and gives him elevator eyes. Instead of copying Elena's perception of Bubbles, I believe spectators will take Bubbles side. At this point in the serial, spectators have started to align themselves with Bubbles and form an allegiance. They know what good traits he holds, and they know that he is a good man. Her reaction might be one of the first catalysts in the process of a fulfilled allegiance towards Bubbles, since I presume spectators would sympathise with him in this specific situation. What would give rise to an allegiance in this case, would be because spectators might not think Bubbles deserves that type of treatment, since they know about how kind he actually is.

I will argue that being a drug addict character might hold some positive components in relation to spectators' engagement with Bubbles. Since Bubbles lives in dire straits and lives a tough life, without holding any explicit villain traits, it will be easier for spectators to accept him being immoral at time. Instead of feeling antipathy towards him, they might feel sorry for him, because they do not consider him or his actions to be a threat towards the morally good part of the universe. As spectators then start to align themselves with Bubbles and learn more about him, they will sympathy for him. As a result, I believe they will consider his immoral behaviour to be caused by desperation, not immoral intentions. Therefore, they might not judge him negatively in the same way as with other characters.

As the seasons continue, Bubbles remains a drug addict, but I do not think that he continues because he wants to, but because he cannot stop. Back in S1E7 Bubbles and Weeks goes to an NA meeting, where they meet Walon, a recovering drug addict, who makes a speech on how it is to be a drug addict. Bubbles seems to listen very carefully to Walon. Next, a male enters the stage and asks if anyone has been drug free for six months, followed by three months and all the way down to 24 hours. To

that he asks the audience: “Does anybody have 23 hours or a sincere desire to live?”, and Bubbles gets up to get a hug and what looks to be a keychain, which symbolises the 23 hours of being drug free (TWS1E7). Weeks point out to Bubbles that they did drugs that exact morning, but Bubbles does not answer. He simply looks down at the keychain. I interpret this scene to be Bubbles’ epiphany, where he realises that he would like to be like the other attendees, who a living a life free of drugs. Even though Bubbles does not succeed in this before later in the serial, spectators will possibly intercept the interior thoughts, which I believe he has. As spectators most likely get aware of his ambition to move onto a better life, I trust they will root for him to get through the process. This will be linked to how spectators have formed an allegiance towards Bubbles, which most likely will be strengthened even further, as Bubbles shows to mature. When Bubbles has the urge to become responsible and wants to take care of himself, spectators will therefore find him more appealing and morally preferable.

Eventually, in the end of season three and moving over to season four, Bubbles begins to prepare himself for a better life, which I trust to be linked to him slowly finding a purpose in his life. I trust the catalyst for this change in Bubbles is linked to his relationship with the young boy Sherrod, who he meets in season four. When Bubbles meet Sherrod, he takes the teenager under his wings and efforts to get him on the right path. Bubbles becomes a father figure for Sherrod, and he tries to guide him and signs him up at the local school, so he can get the education, which Bubbles never got. Even though this situation is much different from what Bubbles has been doing in the past seasons, I think it seems so natural for him to something like this, when scrutinising his urge to help in the earlier seasons. As a result, spectators will possibly consider Bubbles even more worthy of their allegiance, because of his moral goodness, and his desire to show responsibility for his own life and others’. Unfortunately, Sherrod accidentally takes some drugs from Bubbles, which were meant for someone else, and Sherrod dies. Immediately, Bubbles gets extremely upset and turns himself in and tries to commit suicide. Due to the extremities of this event, it invites spectators to reevaluate their allegiance towards Bubbles, and consider whether or not it will affect their perception of him. However, due to the circumstances and Bubbles immediate reaction to this event, I trust spectators’ allegiance will most likely remain the same. Also, it can become even

stronger, because Bubbles shows such strong remorse and the fact that it was an accident.

In S5E5 Bubbles continues to feel remorse regarding Sherrod's death. When he gets a negative HIV test, he seems extremely surprised. He acts as if he does not deserve to have a negative test. Walon then confronts Bubbles and says: "This is you, tryin' to make the past be everything, mean everything" (TWS5E5). As a spectator I agree to this notion. As with the earlier example, Bubbles showing such strong remorse after the death of Sherrod, invites spectators to feel sympathy for him. What this example also demonstrates is how remorseful Bubbles actually is, but also how different he is compared to many of the other characters. He explicitly shows remorse and acknowledges that he had done something, which can be linked to a tragic event. This makes him very appealing for spectators, and spectators will presumably feel sympathy with him based the fact that it was an accident, but also because he acknowledges it happening. Other than that, Bubbles continues to move towards a better path, as he continues to be clean. He eventually moves into his sister's basement, gets a job and also works for charity. Finally, he also confronts his grief concerning Sherrods' death, as he decides to let speak up about it at a meeting.

"My name is... my name is... Reginald. Round the way, they call me Bubbles. I'm a drug addict. Celebrating my anniversary. My people couldn't make it here tonight. I left a trail of fire behind me. Time going to make it right, I guess. Same thing get me right with myself" (TWS5E9).

In continuation of the quote, Bubbles continues to talk about Sherrod and how he has been grieving a lot over his death, but it has become better, however, it will never go away. It is clear that he still affected by the situation, but he has managed to reach the conclusion that he cannot keep blaming himself. When listening to Bubbles' words and comparing his lifestyle and mind-set from season one to the Bubbles of season five, there is a clear change. First off, he has matured a lot, taken responsibility and has rediscovered himself and found out his worth. As introduced back in the theory section, Bubbles has gone through a character growth. I trust this growth to make him even more appealing for spectators, because he acknowledges his mistakes.

In regard to the change, there is one certain aspect I find very noteworthy. At one point, Bubbles changes a lot throughout the serial, while he also stays the same in

many ways. He starts off as a drug addict, who's world mainly revolved around narcotics and how to get them, but slowly manages to get a hold of himself and starts a drug-free lifestyle, which he eventually succeeds in. However, his morally good traits have remained stable since season one, and as the serial continues they become more present. In respect of this, I will argue that spectators' allegiance towards Bubbles is not highly affected by whatever Bubbles undergoes. Instead, spectators rather focus on his morally good traits, and how they remain the same throughout the narrative. Although, one could claim that spectators consider him more worthy of their allegiance as he changes his lifestyle, because it erases most of his immoral behaviour.

When referring to the introduction in this section, the importance of the Bubbles character also lies within his destiny and how it differentiates from other characters'. His storyline and what the transformation, which he goes through, provides spectators with a redemption, which is not elicited in the same way throughout any other storyline in *The Wire*. For example, spectators end up rooting for Prez, but spectators have been rooting for Bubbles to succeed since the beginning and all the way to the end. The character that spectators are rooting for actually gets the happy ending, which I will argue to have been highly unexpected, as spectators most likely would have thought that Bubbles would have experienced an unhappy ending. I trust this to be one of the main reasons why spectators would find Bubbles and his story for interesting. Moreover, I will argue that it functions as a point of interest, because spectators might be eager to find out what will happen with Bubbles.

Based upon this analysis, I trust the popularity of Bubbles partly lies within his stability and kind personality. From the beginning until the end, spectators will find it difficult not to root for Bubbles, because he is always morally preferable throughout the serial. Even though he reaches some immoral decisions, they are not bad compared to the ones committed by other characters. Additionally, his kindness and morally good actions seem to overshadow the immoral ones. He has no mean agendas against others, except for the male who continues to rob him, and he is also kind and wants to help others. The fact that enters the journey for a better life makes him even more worthy of spectators' allegiance. Spectators might become irritated with some of the relapses, but he as continues to prove that he can and will get better, spectators will continue to root for him.

In conclusion, Bubbles can be considered a popular and appealing character based on different factors. First off, Bubbles is morally preferable throughout the entire serial, which is mainly illustrated through his kind personality and eagerness to help and support others. Moreover, it shows through his ability to show his emotions and how he has the urge to make things up, when they go wrong. This mainly shows through his relationship with Sherrod. This is in spite of the fact that Bubbles makes some immoral decisions throughout the show, e.g. stealing, as his immoral actions are disregarded in favour for his morally good ones. Also, Bubbles' destiny can be considered an appealing feature for spectators as this provides them with a redemption, which I assume they have been hoping for throughout the show. Opposite other characters, Bubbles gets a happy ending, as he sobers up, gets a job and place to stay, while he develops a relationship with his sister again. Therefore, the story of Bubbles brings a joyful aspect to *The Wire*, which I trust spectators enjoy, especially because it was Bubbles who got it; the character, who has been morally preferable all along. Moreover, Bubbles shows consistency and stability throughout the show. Even though he reaches a healthy place in his life, he does not have any noteworthy, negative changes in his personality, which can make spectators reconsider their allegiance towards him. I believe this analysis shows how this stability has become an advantage for spectators' allegiance towards Bubbles, as spectators will find it comforting to watch him. Instead of fearing that he might go through a negative transition, spectators instead look forward to watch him on his journey to get a better life.

Discussion

The following section will concern a discussion on this paper's thesis, which suggests how the characters of *The Wire* should be considered the pivotal centre of the show, and how they contribute to an interesting the show, up against Simon's stance on how he considers the city of Baltimore to be the pivotal centre of the show. Moreover, Simon considers the characters to be a component in a great whole, not the most pivotal factor. Likewise, it will discuss Simon's attitude towards spectators' glorification of and interest in the characters of the show in relation to the thesis and

Simon's stances. In order to do so, I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of both statements, and ultimately weigh up the statements and reach to a conclusion.

Based on Simon's stances on *The Wire*, presented in the preface, he considers the city of Baltimore to be the centre of *The Wire*. I consider his stances to be grounded in the fact that Baltimore serves to be the narrative base, and everything in the show leads back to Baltimore. Additionally, *The Wire* serves to be a realistic representation of Baltimore and what this city holds. I do understand where he is coming from, but at the same time I find it difficult to fully comprehend what he suggests. I trust this to be linked to the fact that I believe there are different factors, which determine how spectators watch and perceive the show. This could e.g. concern spectators' background, age, race, gender, general interests, nationality and so on. For example, spectators from a different part of the world might not know of the political conditions in the US, and might find it difficult to fully understand or engage with it. Also, I believe spectators from the US, who presumably are more familiar with everything depicted in *The Wire*, perceive the portrayal of e.g. the political conditions differently than a European. Therefore, each individual's starting point will ultimately have a saying in how spectators will perceive the show, and what they consider to be interesting. Therefore, I find it problematic how Simon presents his vision the way he does. However, in spite of my lack of understanding regarding Simon's words on The City, I do not consider his statement to be any less accurate. Instead, I will once more include the notion saying spectators' background most likely will dictate how spectators will perceive the show.

In continuation of the above-mentioned, I would mainly consider Simon's attitude to be problematic, as it seems as if he neglects the importance of the characters. Likewise, he seems to disapprove of how spectators watch the show, as spectators mainly seem to focus on his characters, rather than conceiving it as a whole. I understand his vexation at some point, because all elements do serve a purpose, and the show could not have become what it is, if some of them had been missing. However, his stance on how he does not care about who thinks Omar is cool now, seems problematic to me. He considers the city to be the most important aspect of the show, and it seems as if he considers his vision to be the only truth. Likewise, it seems as if he wants spectators to be impartial when they watch the serial, as if they were to simply follow a set of instructions, made by Simon, which dictates how one should watch the show. In conclusion, I partly agree to this, as Simon is one the

creators of the serial. Consequently, the serial is partly based upon his considerations, thoughts, knowledge, which then fosters a legitimate authority and the right to proclaim this statement. Therefore, his vision holds a greater value than most, but I do not think it has a monopoly over what is the most important aspect of the show. I would argue how the most important elements are in eye of the beholder, and there is not only one truth.

Also, when comparing two fragments from two quotes of Simon, I will argue that he contradicts himself. The first quote says: "... For people to be picking it (*The Wire*) apart now like it's a deck of cards... it's wearying" (Simon, 2012). The second one says: "To that end, *The Wire* was not about Jimmy McNulty. Or Avon Barksdale... Or education, labour relations or journalism. It was about The City" (Simon, 2009). Simon does not approve of the fact that spectators pick the show apart, but I think he does that himself. He has a whole consisting of many different, but all essential, components, but he strips the show from all its components into nothing but the city. He then claims the show to be about nothing but the city, and it seems to me as if he does not acknowledge the other components' function in the serial. Also, all the components, which he claims that the show is not actually about, are all components that form and represent The City. Therefore, I will disagree to Simon's statement saying that the show is not about anything else but the city. Relatedly, I think it is impossible to not pick the serial apart, meaning I think it is natural for spectators to pick out the elements, which they find the most interesting and appealing based on their background and general liking. Likewise, focusing a lot on specific components, e.g. the characters, does not synonymise with neglecting other important components, such as The City.

Throughout this paper I have searched to prove the indispensable importance that the characters of *The Wire* serve, and how they succeeds in producing an interest in the show. However, taking Simon's statements into consideration, The City does have a concealed, yet significant and profound importance, as every element in the serial can be linked to the city of Baltimore. Because of the city's socio economic relations, slums have emerged, and if they city's slums were not there, there would most likely not be the same amount of economic and crime related difficulties in the city. Because of the city's difficulties, politicians are motivated to form their election campaign based on that. Likewise, the people working in law enforcement are forced to take certain precautions and acts certain ways because of the city. The criminals

and drug addicts act the way they do, because of the city's conditions. All the characters would not be who they are, if it was not for the city. Likewise, the city would not be what it is, if it was not for the characters. Everything can be linked to the city, and the show does revolve around many aspects of Baltimore. Therefore, the city does hold a crucial significance for *The Wire*. Moreover, I will agree to the notion saying that spectators are a part of a bigger whole, which Simon partly signifies as quoted earlier. The characters would definitely not be able to execute their role in the narrative, if the show was lacking of e.g. a great plot or if the visuals were poor. All components each serve a significant role in the show, and they are therefore indispensable in their own way.

In conclusion, I do, to some extent, agree to Simon's notion, which suggests the characters to be a narrative component in the great whole. However, I still trust the character to be the most important part of this greater whole, as the characters are the ones who communicate the entire narrative. If they were not interesting, appealing or fascinating, I do not think it would be possible for spectators to be interested in the serial. The characters are the attraction, which arouses an interest in the work. Therefore, based upon this paper's study and the above-mentioned discussion, I do consider my thesis to be proven.

Conclusion

Based on statements of David Simon, creator of HBO's hit show *The Wire*, which claims The City to be the pivotal factors of the show, while somehow neglecting the importance of its character, I have, throughout this paper, searched to prove him wrong. I claim that the characters of *The Wire* serve an indispensable and focal importance, which is linked to the success of the serials, and spectators' interest in it. In order to succeed in this, I have searched to prove their significance by using the theory of respectively Murray Smith, Jason Mittell and Margrethe Bruun Vaage.

Murray Smith's concept 'the structure of sympathy' has served as an essential component to explain what determines spectators' level of engagement, and what makes it possible for spectators to feel sympathy for characters. Moreover, both the structure of sympathy, and Mittell's work on serialised characters have served as a determining factor in explaining the importance of characters in such narratives, and characters' ability to control spectators and their engagement. Lastly, the work of Bruun Vaage, but also Smith and Mittell, on antiheroes has assisted in explaining why spectators are able to engage with immoral characters, considering *The Wire* holds several antiheroes.

For this analysis, I chose to analyse respectively Kima, Prez, McNulty, Omar and Bubbles. Based upon the analysis, I trust it to be proven that each of the characters and their individual storyline holds a different, but equally important set of components, which contribute to spectators' interest in them, and therefore also *The Wire*. Furthermore, the analysis also showed how characters and their actions have a great power over spectators' ability to form allegiance towards them, which I will argue to synonymise with the importance of their presence in the overall show.

Followed by the analysis, I brought this paper's thesis and Simon's statements into further evaluation. Considering both Simon's and my own statements, and being able to include my recent knowledge from the analysis, has served to be useful in the validation of both statements. Through the discussion, Simon's statements on the importance of The City, and why he considers it to be the focal element within *The Wire* were examined more profoundly, which resulted in a greater understanding for his statements. However, his attitude on neglecting the importance of the character has sustained to be problematic, as, based upon the analysis, the character serves a

indispensable importance. Therefore, I trust my thesis to be proven, because if the character of *The Wire* were not interesting and appealing and spectators would not be able to sympathise with them, *The Wire* would not have had an audience. As a result, Simon would not have been able to communicate his story about The City.

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