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Authors

Marion, Tyler

Reese, Vail

Wagner, Richard F

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Dermatologic features in good film characters who turn evil: the transformation

Tyler Marion¹ MBA, Vail Reese² MD, Richard F Wagner Jr¹ MD

Affiliations: ¹The University of Texas Medical Branch School of Medicine, Galveston, Texas, USA, ²Union Square Dermatology, San Francisco, California, USA

Corresponding Author: Tyler Marion, 301 University Boulevard, Galveston, TX 77555, Tel: (817) 501-9357, Email: trmarion@utmb.edu

Abstract

Dermatologic depictions in film are often used to symbolize evil. To ascertain whether certain dermatologic characteristics are more representative of evil in movies, skin findings in film characters before and after evil transformation were compared using the *Good Movie Characters Turned Bad* poll courtesy of The Internet Movie Database (IMDb). The poll ranked the 35 most remarkable moral transformations in cinema. Data was analyzed from 27 characters who met study criteria and there was a statistically significant, greater number of dermatologic features seen in characters after an evil transformation. Periorbital hyperpigmentation, infraorbital edema, alopecia, pallor, and nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities (telangiectasias, ecchymosis) were dermatologic traits that were found at a statistically significantly higher frequency post-evil transformation. This work suggests an effort should be made to educate audiences and film makers that skin conditions in reality are not a marker of evil intent.

Keywords: film, dermatologic depictions, evil, periorbital hyperpigmentation, infraorbital edema, rhytides, pallor, alopecia

Introduction

Cutaneous findings depicted in art can symbolize much more than just a dermatologic defect. Positive symbolism can be seen with key cultural figures in society. At times, findings may produce a positive social interpretation. Film actress Marilyn Monroe's

discrete facial nevus has no societal stigma [1]. Her famous "beauty mark" had a lasting impact as people recognized that small, dark moles can be considered attractive. The feature has been adopted by others without natural moles with make-up or "Monroe piercings." In contrast, dermatologic features are commonly associated with evil characters in films viewed by millions of people annually.

As noted by Croley et al., dichotomous dermatologic depictions between heroes and villains date back to the silent film era and have been used to visually illustrate contrasting morality between two different character types [2]. Villains are classically portrayed using features including facial scars, alopecia, deep rhytides, periorbital hyperpigmentation, rhinophyma, verruca vulgaris, and extensive tattoos [2]. Though these negative connotations are presented in fictional narratives, the messages may impact individuals with skin disease. They may face discrimination in important aspects of their lives including academic, social economic, and professional settings [3].

Dermatologic features also have symbolic importance in terms of more subtle stereotypes. For instance, acne vulgaris, a chronic condition in teenagers, has been studied to determine its role in both movies and cartoons. Characters with acne depicted in these movies and cartoons are often belittled by others owing to the imperfections on their faces. This harms the character with acne by reinforcing negative cultural stereotypes [4]. Viewers are then at risk for negative perceptions because they observe that certain dermatology diseases are

not accepted in reality. The negative stereotypes are not limited to acne. *Friends*, one of the most watched television situational comedy programs in history, referenced dermatology 199 times throughout the series, touching on hair, skin growths, cosmetic products, nails, and much more [5]. The enormous viewership of these movies and shows likely result in a potential impact of these dermatologic depictions on society. Certainly, a vast number of stereotypes are portrayed by the media. Vickers et al. found that satire humor was used to depict dermatologic and psychiatric conditions more than any other specialty in the television series *Seinfeld* [6]. This poses a problem for people with skin diseases because the frequent references have the ability to influence viewers and reinforce negative, inaccurate stigmas of various dermatologic conditions.

This study identified significant dermatologic features of film characters that undergo an evil transformation, a topic that has not previously been analyzed in scientific journals. Given the popularity of the film industry, the analysis illustrates dermatologic features that can have a significant impact on culture. Previous studies have analyzed dermatologic features in heroes and villains, but there have not been any studies that examine the same character whose moral perspective shifts from good to evil. Impact on future movie productions is possible because this study can help destigmatize dermatologic findings depicted in evil characters through identification of historic media bias.

Methods: The top 35 most remarkable character changes on an Internet Movie Database (IMDb, <https://www.imdb.com/>) poll for registered members was used to analyze the dermatologic features of recognizable and relevant characters who had an evil transformation [7]. IMDb was used because it is a popular and up-to-date online database containing in-depth film information and has a large set of visitors. The data from the IMDb poll, *Good Movie Characters Turned Bad*, was retrieved on November 30th, 2017 and consisted of a total of 8,429 votes (**Table 1**), [7]. Permission for the use of the copyrighted poll was granted for this study. The poll was designed by an IMDb user, selecting 35 film characters with significant evil transformations. The

character list created by the IMDb user was uploaded with no specific order and allowed users to vote on the character that they believe had the most remarkable moral change. Members were only allowed to vote once and any vote made by a nonmember was not recorded.

For this study, each film was analyzed in high definition, with an emphasis on the evil character listed in the poll. The presence or absence of specific dermatologic features were recorded before and after evil transformation. The dermatologic features analyzed in the study included: periorbital hyperpigmentation, freckles, alopecia, infraorbital edema, facial scars, rhytides, pallor, tattoos, lentiginos, verrucae, nevi, and nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities (telangiectasias, ecchymosis). Evil transformation was defined as: the change in any character initially depicted with ethical traits and then transforms into antagonist, subsequently demonstrating immoral actions including murder, offensive coercion, non-coercive exploitation, violence, rape, and lack of compassion. Additionally, if any character's evil form is represented in a film sequel, the dermatologic characteristics in the later movie were included in the analysis.

Study Eligibility Criteria

All film characters were required to meet certain inclusion criteria. Characters not resembling homo sapiens were excluded from the study such as inanimate objects, animals, and creatures that walk in a quadrupedal manner. Characters given a background story of being a good person but never shown in that time period were excluded (such as Saruman of the "Lord of the Rings" series). If a character did not transform into a true antagonist or did not demonstrate immoral actions, that character was excluded from the analysis (Nina Sayers, Madmartigan, Mary Tudor, Willie Stark). Aaron in *Primal Fear* had a unique, complex storyline constantly alternating between a good and evil state, which appears to be related to dissociative identity disorder. Ultimately, it was revealed he was faking his good personality the whole time. Owing to the complexity and alternating personality, Aaron was excluded from the analysis. Emma and Liv in

Table 1. Summarized results from IMDb poll (November 30, 2017).

Rank	Movie	Year	Character	Number of Votes Received
1	Godfather: Part II	1974	Michael Corleone	1,331
2	Star Wars: Episode III- Revenge of the Sith	2005	Anakin Skywalker/ Darth Vader	1,193
3	The Shining	1980	Jack Torrance	1,060
4	The Dark Knight	2008	Harvey Dent	913
5	Thor	2011	Loki	438
6	X-Men: First Class	2011	Erik Lehnsherr	415
7	Full Metal Jacket	1987	Gomer Pyle	390
8	The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey	2012	Gollum	314
9	The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring	2001	Saruman	303
10	X-Men: The Last Stand	2006	Jean Grey	258
11	Black Swan	2010	Nina Sayers	232
12	Carrie	1977	Carrie White	185
13	Batman Returns	1992	Selina Kyle	184
14	The Exorcist	1973	Regan MacNeil	170
15	X-Men: First Class	2011	Raven Darkholme	150
16	Watchmen	2009	Adrian Veidt	148
17	The Incredibles	2004	Syndrome	108
18	Frozen	2013	Hans	101
19	Primal Fear	1996	Aaron	81
20	Spider-Man 3	2007	Harry Osborn	73
21	Willow	1988	Madmartigan	56
22	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	2005	Peter Pettigrew	50
23	A Face in the Crowd	1957	Larry 'Lonesome' Rhodes	45
24	The Amazing Spider-Man 2	2014	Max Dillon	39
25	Charlies Angels: Full Throttle	2003	Madison Lee	39
26	Blue Ruin	2013	Dwight	28
27	The Aristocats	1970	Edgar	22
28	Kingsman: The Secret Service	2014	Arthur	20
29	Bride Wars	2009	Emma & Liv	18
30	Wuthering Heights	1970	Heathcliff	17
31	Macbeth	1948	Macbeth	16
32	Little Nicky	2000	The Devil/Satan	12
33	The Limey	1999	Wilson	9
34	When Knighthood Was in Flower	1922	Mary Tudor	6
35	All the King's Men	2006	Willie Stark	5

Bride Wars were excluded because they were in a relatively harmless fight and do not commit any immoral actions. Satan in *Little Nicky* did not have an evil transformation and was therefore excluded from analysis. Satan's son, who was evil, took over as the ruler of Hell, but there was not an actual transformation of the original Satan. If any character was essentially evil the whole film but was initially portrayed as good to the viewers, they were included because their actions changed after viewer discovery (Adrian Veidt, Madison Lee, Hans).

Statistical Analysis

For analysis of individual dermatological features before and after transformation, the McNemar test was used. By using the McNemar test, comparisons could be made between specific dermatologic traits to see if specific features are more commonly represented in evil characters. For the mean number of total dermatologic features before and after transformation, a Wilcoxon signed rank test was used. The Wilcoxon signed rank test was helpful in distinguishing whether or not dermatologic features

as a whole appear in film characters after they turn evil. SAS 9.4 for Windows was the software used for statistical analysis.

Results: Data was analyzed from 27 film characters who had an evil transformation. An additional 8 characters on the list did not meet the study criteria and were not included in the analysis. The analysis of the dermatologic findings is displayed in **Table 2**. Of the 27 characters, 22 (81.5%) analyzed had at least one additional dermatologic feature after evil transformation (**Table 3**). There was a statistically significantly higher number of total features on the characters post-transformation (3.5 ± 1.4) compared to the characters pre-transformation (1.3 ± 1.1), which was calculated with the Wilcoxon signed rank test ($p < 0.0001$). Periorbital hyperpigmentation ($p < 0.0001$), infraorbital edema ($P = 0.0020$), alopecia ($P = 0.0156$), pallor ($P = 0.0002$), and nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities ($P = 0.0313$) were each statistically significantly higher in proportion post-transformation. Periorbital hyperpigmentation was seen in a total of 2 (7.4%) characters before evil transformation and 18 (66.7%) post-transformation. Infraorbital edema was noted in a total of 7 (25.9%) characters pre-transformation and 17 (63%) post-transformation. Alopecia was noted in 4 (14.8%) of

characters pre-transformation and 11 (40.7%) post-transformation. Pallor was seen in a total of 2 (7.4%) characters pre-transformation and 15 (55.6%) post-transformation. Nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities were seen in no characters pre-transformation and 6 (22.2%) of characters post-transformation.

There was an increase in facial scarring post-transformation with 6 (22.2%) characters having facial scars compared to 1 (3.7%) character pre-transformation. However, this difference was not statistically significant with a P-value of 0.0625. Rhytides were also seen more post-transformation with 12 (44.4%) characters having rhytides post-transformation compared to 8 (29.6%) pre-transformation. For tattoos, lentigines, verrucae, and nevi, no statistics were calculated owing to the fact that there were no features present, or that the characters presenting with these features pre-transformation had the same persisting features post-transformation.

There are several characters analyzed in this study who demonstrated remarkable change exemplifying how dermatologic features are used as a direct symbol of evil. Individual analysis was completed on

Table 2. Analysis of dermatologic features pre- and post-evil transformation.

Dermatological Feature	Pre-transformation N=27	Post-transformation N=27	P-value
Periorbital hyperpigmentation	2 (7.4%)	18 (66.7%)	<0.0001
Freckles	3 (11.1%)	4 (14.8%)	1.0000
Alopecia	4 (14.8%)	11 (40.7%)	0.0156
Infraorbital edema	7 (25.9%)	17 (63.0%)	0.0020
Facial scars	1 (3.7%)	6 (22.2%)	0.0625
Rhytides	8 (29.6%)	12 (44.4%)	0.2188
Pallor	2 (7.4%)	15 (55.6%)	0.0002
Nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities	0	6 (22.2%)	0.0313
Tattoos	1 (3.7%)	1 (3.7%)	-
Lentigines	0	0	-
Verrucae	0	0	-
Nevi	6 (22.2%)	6 (22.2%)	-
Total (mean)	1.3 ± 1.1	3.5 ± 1.4	<.0001

a few of these characters to illustrate the negative context of these dermatologic features.

Anakin Skywalker

Anakin Skywalker, better known as Darth Vader, is a prime example of a good character with dramatic dermatologic changes after an evil transformation. In the *Star Wars* series, Anakin begins as a moral character who slowly progresses toward the dark side and eventually has a complete evil transformation. When Anakin is a good character, viewers can easily see untarnished skin with a full head of hair. Anakin is actually portrayed as a handsome young man who was able to earn the affection of the attractive young senator, Padme

Amidala. However, he is severely burned when he transforms into Darth Vader. Darth Vader no longer has clear skin and instead exhibits plentiful rhytides, scars, alopecia, and significant pallor. Even an untrained viewer can easily see the dramatic dermatologic changes in the once handsome protagonist.

Gollum

Gollum from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy makes dramatic changes after his evil transformation. His character, originally referred to as Sméagol, begins his life as a fun-loving hobbit with long hair. When he finds a darkly magical ring, the corrupting power of the talisman is demonstrated by his physical

Table 3. Additional dermatologic findings after evil transformation.

Character	Movie	Additional Dermatologic Findings After Evil Transformation
Michael Corleone	Godfather: Part II	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, infraorbital edema, pallor
Anakin Skywalker	Star Wars: Episode III- Revenge of the Sith	Alopecia, infraorbital edema, facial scar, rhytides, pallor
Jack Torrance	The Shining	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, pallor
Harvey Dent	The Dark Knight	Alopecia, facial scar, hyperpigmented striations, nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities
Loki	Thor	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, facial scar, pallor
Erik Lehnsherr	X-Men: First Class	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, alopecia, infraorbital edema
Gomer Pyle	Full Metal Jacket	Alopecia, pallor
Gollum	The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, freckles, alopecia, infraorbital edema, rhytides, pallor
Jean Grey	X-Men: The Last Stand	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, pallor, nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities
Carrie White	Carrie	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, infraorbital edema, pallor
Selina Kyle	Batman Returns	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, infraorbital edema, rhytides, pallor
Regan MacNeil	The Exorcist	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, infraorbital edema, facial scar, pallor, nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities
Raven Darkholme	X-Men: First Class	Periorbital hyperpigmentation
Adrian Veidt Syndrome	Watchmen The Incredibles	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, infraorbital edema, pallor
Harry Osborne	Spider-Man 3	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, infraorbital edema, facial scar
Peter Pettigrew	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, alopecia, rhytides, pallor
Larry ‘Lonesome’ Rhodes	A Face in the Crowd	Pallor
Max Dillon	The Amazing Spider-Man 2	Periorbital hyperpigmentation, nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities
Madison Lee	Charlies Angels: Full Throttle	Nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities
Arthur	Kingsman: The Secret Service	Periorbital hyperpigmentation
Wilson	The Limey	Alopecia, rhytides, nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities

transformation. Sméagol loses himself, ultimately becoming nearly unrecognizable as Gollum, who has significant alopecia and a pallor. The substantial difference leaves almost no similarities of the character before and after transformation. Additionally, Gollum has much more pronounced rhytides, periorbital hyperpigmentation, as well as infraorbital edema.

Harvey Dent

In *The Dark Knight*, Harvey Dent, the district attorney of Gotham City, is initially presented as a pure, moral character. He sustains a burn, deforming half of his face, earning him the nickname "Two Face." He illustrates a very unique example for comparison because half of his face still looks the same after the accident. This allows a direct comparison of his former virtuous self and the evil man he becomes. After the accident, he has newly acquired alopecia, and scars on the left (sinister) side of his burned face. The freshly charred skin post-transformation makes such an impactful difference essentially erasing all characteristics of himself when he was still a good character.

Regan MacNeil

Regan MacNeil, in *The Exorcist*, is a 12-year old girl who is originally portrayed as shy and non-aggressive with a dermatologically clear complexion. Regan becomes possessed by a demon and demonstrates an evident evil transformation, developing several abnormal dermatologic features: lacerations and scars, periorbital hyperpigmentation, and infraorbital edema. Regan also develops significant pallor. In her case, all of these defects resolve once the exorcism is complete.

Discussion

There was a statistically significant difference in the mean total of dermatologic features seen before and after evil transformation. The mean total of features observed before evil transformation was 1.3 whereas the mean total after transformation was 3.5, which is a mean increase in frequency of 2.2. The significant difference in the number of dermatologic findings in the same exact character is an indication that these

features have a negative association and are used to identify evil characters.

Certain dermatologic features were more prevalent than others. Periorbital hyperpigmentation was the dermatologic feature seen most frequently post-transformation and had a statistically significant difference compared to pre-transformation ($p < 0.0001$). Periorbital hyperpigmentation was observed in 16 characters post-transformation that initially did not have any hyperpigmentation. In short, more than half of the characters who had an evil transformation acquired darkness around their eyes. This finding is consistent with Croley et al., who found 30% of the top 10 villains had periorbital hyperpigmentation whereas none of the top 10 heroes exhibited the condition [3].

Infraorbital edema was another statistically significant characteristic seen much more frequently in 17 characters post-transformation compared to 7 pre-transformation. Although 7 characters initially had some suborbital swelling, 10 additional characters were observed with newly acquired infraorbital edema after becoming evil. Suborbital swelling has not been extensively studied in film, but our data suggests it is used as a negative trait. Additionally, infraorbital edema was present with periorbital hyperpigmentation in 11 characters post-transformation suggesting there may be a tendency to concurrently present these to depict evil characters.

Alopecia was seen in 40.7% of characters after evil transformation and only seen in 14.8% of characters pre-transformation. Seven characters who originally did not exhibit signs of alopecia began balding or became completely bald after becoming evil. This is also consistent with Croley et al., who noted alopecia in 30% of the top 10 villains and observed alopecia in none of the top 10 heroes [3].

Nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities and pallor were additional dermatologic characteristics with a statistically significant difference before and after evil transformation. There were no characters with visible hyperpigmented skin abnormalities pre-transformation, but 6 characters had this dermatologic finding after turning evil. For instance,

the presence of visible facial telangiectasias are noted in Jean Grey and Electro only after their evil transformation. Only two characters were observed with pallor before transformation but there were 15 noted with pallor after transformation, greater than half of the characters analyzed. The significant increase again suggests that these traits are being used to signify evil in films.

There were no statistics calculated for lentigines, tattoos, warts, and moles owing to the feature staying consistent before and after transformation or not being present at all. However, this does not necessarily mean these dermatologic features are not viewed negatively. The study specifically analyzed dermatologic traits that changed after a given character turned evil, not characters that were always evil. Therefore, it is possible that some of these traits are considered more static characteristics that are difficult to change in the time line of a movie. For instance, witches have a history of stable stereotypical warts on their noses and were even referred to as a "devil's mark" in the 17th century [8].

Rhytides, freckles, and facial scars were found more often in characters post-transformation, but the differences in this study were not statistically significant. Rhytides likely did not have a statistically significant difference because many characters who had rhytides post-transformation had those same rhytides before they turned evil. However, 4 characters who originally had no rhytides acquired rhytides after transformation which is a 14.8% increase. Only one character had a facial scar pre-transformation whereas 6 characters exhibited a facial scar after evil transformation ($P=0.0625$). Although the data for facial scars was not statistically significant, there is still reason to believe facial scars have a negative stigma considering 5 characters acquired new scars after turning evil. Additionally, Croley et al. found that 20% of the top 10 villains had large or multiple facial scars and no top 10 heroes had similar scars, supporting the finding that facial scars may be used to represent evil [3].

Limitations

There are several limitations worth taking into account for this study. The IMDb list used as the data source includes a significant number of memorable

characters who undergo an evil transformation. Yet many examples are not included on the list. For example, the many film versions of Dr. Jekyll's conversion to malevolent Mr. Hyde traditionally depict hirsutism and hyperpigmentation. Numerous films feature characters for whom physical scarring is temporally associated with emotional scarring. A more comprehensive list would likely convey a greater variety of skin defects used to demonstrate evil intent. A factor to consider when examining the same character is the fact that some dermatologic features can be more readily changed and still fit the plot of the movie. For instance, alopecia, infraorbital swelling, and periorbital hyperpigmentation are dermatologic changes that can be made easily in the realm of the film by the use of makeup and costumes. Some dermatologic features noted after evil transformation correlate with age; these include alopecia and wrinkles. However, it is unlikely that these are just incidental findings given the frequency of the use of these dermatologic features in movies to depict evil characters.

Conclusion

Films use dermatologic features to exemplify the role of characters, specifically using certain skin findings to demonstrate evil. The use of these dermatologic features is evident when film characters have an evil transformation after beginning the film as a virtuous character. It is likely filmmakers use these features to enhance the significance of particular character's role, but these dermatologic representations potentially add to social stigma and can distress people with these traits. Society highly values clear skin, indicated by the success of the cosmetic industry. Therefore, it is likely that scarring and telangiectasias on a film character are viewed as imperfections representing undesirable qualities such as being evil. Multiple studies have reported benefits of cosmetic makeup in terms of enhanced first impressions, perceived age, and overall self-esteem [9]. Imperative psychosocial aspects of facial blemishes, which include nonspecific hyperpigmented skin abnormalities and pallor, can be seen by the high demand to use makeup to conceal unwanted dermatologic features.

Film remains a widely viewed media. It is likely that cinematic messages impact belief and behavior. The stigmatizing of specific dermatologic features may be consistently reinforced. It is imperative to educate

audiences and film makers that in reality, dermatologic conditions such as alopecia, scarring, infraorbital edema, and hyperpigmentation do not signify immoral tendencies.

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