

PEAKY BLINDERS

on mental illness.



By Kiyana Khadivfard.

There is an increasing number of mental diseases in society.

And these ailments can have an impact on our general mood, health, and physical condition. mental health can dominate our lives and exert control over us. Numerous mental health conditions exist, including eating disorders, addiction, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,), depression, anxiety, and anxiety.

Many people who have mental health issues are aware of how difficult it is to speak up and come forward to receive support. A mental illness may make your life miserable and interfere with regular activities including job, school, and relationships. Most of the time, symptoms can be controlled with medicine and talk therapy (psychotherapy), although this is not always the case.

In the creative and entertainment industries, the subject of mental health and mental diseases is especially important. But how can they depict these ailments without going overboard or being unnecessarily dramatic?

Those were the challenges that Steven Knight was going to have to consider. Steven Knight, the creator of the British historical crime drama television series *Peaky Blinders*.

Based in Birmingham, England, recounts the crimes committed by the Peaky Blinders gang in the immediate years following World War One. An actual urban youth gang of the same name that operated in the city from the 1880s through the 1910s served as the inspiration for the fictitious group.

So how did the television series *Peaky Blinders* depict mental health?

From the moment *Peaky Blinders* was conceived, PTSD was one of the main subjects that series developer Steven Knight wanted to explore. His familiarity with the illness was both professional and personal. While writing *Hummingbird*, a film about the postwar lives of Afghanistan veterans, Knight consulted real-life soldiers about their experiences with PTSD and reintegrating into everyday society.

This, like many other components of the play, has historical precedent. Shell shock was still a relatively new and enigmatic malady during the interbellum era, and neither the military nor the medical community knew how to treat it. One Liberty University study article states that it “fell prey to various social conceptions of the period” as a result.

Soldiers with PTSD symptoms were often ridiculed rather than treated. They were just not strong enough to endure the horrors and tribulations of war, in the eyes of their comrades. Post-traumatic stress disorder was viewed as emasculating in this hypermasculine culture that still exists in military groups today.

I will be breaking down and analyzing the seasons that most impressed me to explain what and how mental illnesses were shown within each character and scene.

The main cast of Peaky Blinders is Thomas Shelby (Cillian Murphy), Arthur Shelby (Paul Anderson), Polly Gray (Helen McCrory), John Shelby (Joe Cole), Ada Shelby (Sophie Rundle), Alfie Solomani (Tom Hardy) and Michael Gray (Finn Cole).

The two main characters I will focus on are Thomas Shelby (Cillian Murphy) and Arthur Shelby (Paul Anderson), who are the two characters I will mostly be analyzing. These two personalities have a significant impact on how mental health is presented and how it is depicted.

Like most people today, he often retreats inside his impenetrable shell, as do most people nowadays, which causes him to struggle with his inability to confide in a trusted confidant about his issues. Tommy struggles to fall asleep and occasionally has tremors, which are also clear signs of depression. Despite his anti-heroic steadfastness, the character is incredibly relevant to contemporary people watching at home who may also be engaged in a mental conflict. I will be analyzing how he does, in fact, display these feelings throughout each season.

Peaky Blinders deserves praise for how well it depicts how World War One affected people's minds. Shellshock, a post-traumatic stress disorder, affected many soldiers. The corrupted insanity that Arthur Shelby's character struggles with continuously results in erratic outbursts of fury and violence.

Throughout the show Tommy and his brothers' ascent from the lowest rungs of Small Heath's working-class slums to the wealthiest of Birmingham's social hierarchy is chronicled in Season One. Our fascination for the perilous and alluring life of the Peaky Blinders is stoked by the splendor of a tremendously violent, drug-fueled, and alcohol-hysterical interwar Britain.

(J.H.19)

Depression and other mental diseases may be very taboo subjects, especially among men. It can be difficult to talk about mental illnesses like depression, especially among men. Peaky Blinders does an excellent job of capturing these conditions. Two exceedingly difficult topics were represented by the show's writers. One was the aftermath of the conflict and how inhumane it was for the soldiers.

The show's creators portray the condition, sometimes known as combat stress or war neurosis, as a real and logical ailment. Due to their ignorance of the mental condition, the British Army court-martialed thousands of soldiers for cowardice and desertion because of their misunderstanding of the mental disorder.

But the truth is beautifully portrayed in the program. The horrific tragedies of the Great War and the ruthless and barbaric instructions of the British High Command both claimed the lives of the men. When they returned to Britain, many soldiers, including the Peaky Boys, were suffering from PTSD.

The show addresses the social stigma associated with the condition and illustrates how working-class war victims chose to endure their suffering in silence. For one another, they were all present. PTSD is predicted to afflict one in three people in the current environment. (J.H.19)

What is PTSD?

PTSD, also known as post-traumatic stress disorder, has symptoms of Aggressive outbursts, panic attacks, depression, and night terrors. Which then were known as shellshock.

The question lies on how does Peaky Blinders tackle these symptoms? And how do they portray it through one single character?

Since the series was set based after the First World War, that was already a deal breaker for the main character.

Steven Knight used this to his advantage and emphasized using Thomas Shelby's character to portray these types of behaviors as an after effect of what the war had caused to this one single character who is mostly known to rule the harshest gang in all of Birmingham.

In the last two seasons of Peaky Blinders, Tommy's unshakeable demeanor is secretly ruled by depressive thoughts, suicidal impulses, and inner struggle. Family issues, Grace-related hallucinations, and outside conflicts all turn out to be the main causes of his mental anguish. His discomfort cannot be relieved by any amount of gin, rum, or whiskey, not even self-prescribed opium. (J.H.19) For example, in season 5 finale we were given the boldest cliffhanger in the show's history with Tommy Shelby's mental trauma culminating with him facing down his dead wife – and horse – while pointing a gun at his head, poised to pull the trigger.

Most defiantly in every season, Tommy's symptoms became worse, and in season 6 is where his body started to go into shock, where he would have multiple seizures, hallucinations of his past murders by showing stacked bodies, and the same scene of the mine where Tommy would be during the war. Getting dragged down there every time he would go into shock, or it would get caused by immense stress from everything that was going on around him.

Throughout the show especially at the end of season 3, Tommy finds it difficult to trust his own family which indeed he starts to have doubts about his own plans getting ruined. So, what he does is puts his family through a test and in the end of the season we are shown that the Shelby family is being dragged out and arrested by the police, but Tommy is the only one who is free.

This of course builds a reputation with Tommy, knowing that now even his own family despises his work and what his mentality is like. However, that still does not stop Tommy from carrying out his plans. And in season 4 is where we get Arthur's perspective of him finding "peace"

Arthur Shelby who also suffers from PTSD and mental instability. (As shown throughout the seasons of how his anger issues plays out in every episode and in every situation, they are put in)

He's the second iconic member of the Peaky Blinders. He also suffers from PTSD and mental instability. During childhood, he was ignored by his father and received severe neglect. He grew up with gangsters and cut throats, always feared in school. The story of Arthur Shelby is remarkably interesting. As a young teen, Arthur deals with a lot of trauma and family issues which result in his behaviors.

His aunt who had died due to drug overdose now plays a part in his role where he does a lot of. And as a young boy, his father was his role model, the only person he trusted, but when his father abandoned the family early on, it affected Arthur more than the rest of the family.

Later, when he is in his late 20s, he is sent to war, where he loses all humanity. So, when his father comes back as shown in season 1. This certain episode shows how Arthur is happy to finally see his father which puts him at a lot of ease, making him believe that he is finally back and is a "changed man."

He starts to become more reasonable and more healed as a result, however that does not last long when he finds out that his father left with all his money stolen from him.

Arthur once again becomes helpless as the sole person he believed in and admired flees and robs him. His pride is crushed, and he does not know how to show his face to his brother Tommy and to his aunt Polly. How will they perceive him? How will he face them? Knowing that, they might think he is incompetent and a fool for trusting his own father. He struggles with that thought and tries to commit suicide in season 1. (E.M)

So, what is Arthur's solution? He needs someone to appreciate him, someone who is there for him and someone who can control him. He needs someone who can eliminate all his insecurities and to gain his pride as a man, and his wife Linda is his sole protector in this case.

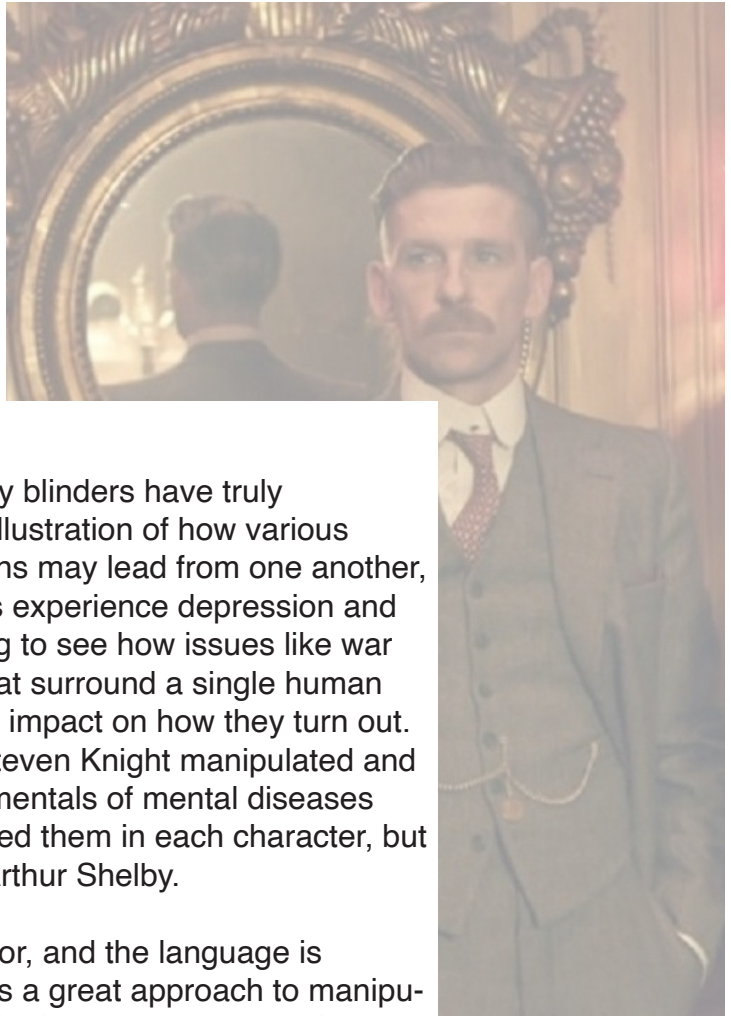
However, that does not last long after meeting Sir Oswald Mosley in season 5.

He is told by Mosley how his "spies" found his wife had been seen with someone else, which completely breaks him. Arthur out of anger, breaks the chair as he hears these said by Moseley After Mosley leaves Arthur throws the chair and paces back and forth just to control himself.

He is put into a panic mode where he thinks Linda would end up like his father and leave him, so Arthur later in the episode takes all his anger out on the man she has been with, which was a doctor. (E.M)

And in the end, he showed how deeply he regretted what he had done. "These hands belong to the devil."

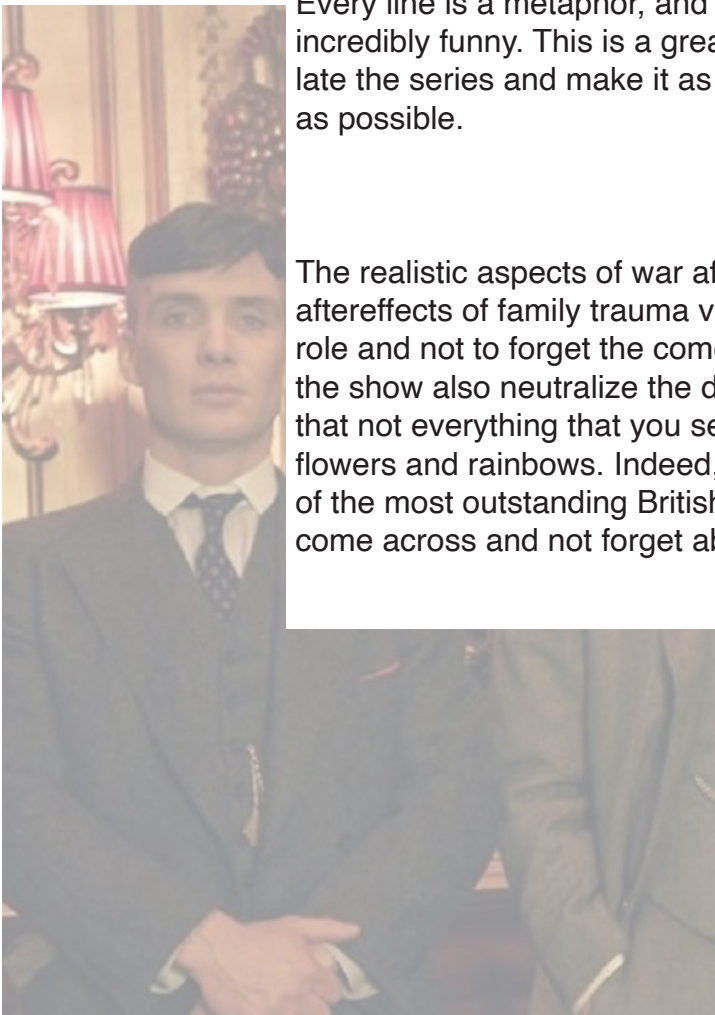
Tommy, Arthur, and the other members of the Peaky Blinders gang never end up getting the proper psychological help they need to get better. Instead, they turn to drugs, alcohol, sex, and other forms of self-medication that offer temporary relief of their pain at the expense of worsening their PTSD symptoms overall.



I must admit that Peaky Blinders have truly presented a fantastic illustration of how various mental health conditions may lead from one another, as someone who does experience depression and anxiety. It is fascinating to see how issues like war and other tragedies that surround a single human may have a significant impact on how they turn out. It is fascinating how Steven Knight manipulated and understood the fundamentals of mental diseases like PTSD and displayed them in each character, but notably Thomas and Arthur Shelby.

Every line is a metaphor, and the language is incredibly funny. This is a great approach to manipulate the series and make it as accessible to viewers as possible.

The realistic aspects of war aftereffects and the aftereffects of family trauma very much play a huge role and not to forget the comedic relief aspects of the show also neutralize the dark matter, showing that not everything that you see can at once be flowers and rainbows. Indeed, Peaky Blinders is one of the most outstanding British series that you can come across and not forget about.



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