

Kratos' Fathering in God of War (2018)

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ABSTRACT

God of War (2018) tells the story of Kratos' struggle to raise his son, Atreus, by himself because of his wife's passing. Using the Good Fathering theory by Morman & Floyd, Kratos fathering will be compared to the theory to determine whether he is a bad father or a good father. The top four characteristics to determine his fathering are love, role model, availability, and involvement. The study was done using a descriptive qualitative approach. The data analysis revealed that Kratos was a bad father in the early part of the game, but later he shows changes in four characteristics of good fathering through his actions in the middle of the story.

Keywords: God of War; good fathering; bad father; good father

INTRODUCTION

Video games have been one of the inventions that influence people and the world for the last decade. The definition of the video game itself is an electronic game in which players control images on a video screen (Merriam-Webster, 2022). The global video game industry is valued at \$159.3 billion in 2020. By 2021, the number of people who play video games is 3.2 billion (Statista, 2021). Compared to the current human population of 7.9 billion (Worldometer, 2022), means that around 40% of people in the world play games. Based on this data, I believe that video games can also be a target of research because of their influence in recent years. One of the video games that is worth mentioning is God of War (2018).

God of War (2018) is the fourth released game from the God of War title. It focuses on the story of Kratos and Atreus, a father and son who recently lost Faye, a wife to Kratos, and a mother to Atreus. They must go on a journey to bring the mother's ashes to the highest peak of all realms in the world as Faye's last wishes. God of War won the Game of the Year in 2018, making it a big considered game to be played (The Game Awards, 2018). It is also ported to PC in January 2022, making it the most played game among other newly released games on Steam (Prabowo, 2022). That is why the talk about the game is still around nowadays even when the game was first released 4 years ago.

God of War is categorized in the adventure-action genre, which means the game features characters involved in exciting and usually dangerous activities and adventures (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Kratos and Atreus will face monsters and Nordic Gods in his journey of spreading her wife's ashes on the highest peak of all realms as her last wish. The adventure genre contains a story, and I am going to focus to analyze the story

I choose to analyze the storyline in a video game because it tells about fatherhood, a topic that is rarely featured in games. In the previous three titles, Kratos is pictured as an antihero who is strong, powerful, and ruthless among all other gods. But now he is pictured as a struggling father who must learn to deal with his son in the correct way as a good father. I have played countless game titles from many genres and I have never met a story like this and a topic like fatherhood. That's why I decided to take a step further with this game.

The issue is about the struggle of single fathers. Interestingly, the topic of single fathers is less discussed than single mothers. Try searching “single parent” in Google and most of the searches lead to single mother. The data from Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) confirm that the number of sole-parent families with kids under eighteen is 2.6 million single fathers and 8.6 million single mothers in the United States. The Jakarta Post discussed fathers are struggling to adapt to do domestic duties and the task of nurturing their children. Sani Hermawan, a clinical psychologist, said the struggle of single fathers is to maintain day-to-day basic care of their children and maintain that emotional connection (The Jakarta Post, 2021). Jeffrey Gardere, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, mentions the “inept dad” stereotype through Parents. “Men are assumed to be buffoons who can’t even dress a kid.” A single father, Damon D’Arienzo said that fathers are generally perceived as subordinate parents. This is reflected in the story of Rio Ferdinand, a soccer player, when he loses his wife, he feels that he cannot be enough for their children and to take the mother’s role (Tirto, 2017). Through these findings, even when overwhelmed by the topic of single mothers, single fathers exist in society and are close to us.

This study aims to find out the changes in Kratos from a bad father into a good father. The scope of the research is to only focus on the story only without considering how the story is brought and planned as such in the game. A limitation exists that Kratos and Atreus are only a kind of many other father-son relationships, so the results may vary in many different circumstances. This study emphasized the importance of two-way communication to reach understanding between a son and a father. From the discussion, Kratos and Atreus were able to reach a better relationship by sharing what is on their mind honestly. More importantly, Kratos is able to be a good father because Atreus is being sincere to him about what he felt when he was a bad father.

THEORY

Good Fathering: Father and Son Perceptions of What It Means to Be a Good Father

In this analysis, I am going to use the Good Fathering theory which tries to define a tool to determine good fathers' characteristics from real experiences of fathers in our current society. *Good Fathering: Father and Son Perceptions of What It Means to Be a Good Father* is a theory by Mark T. Morman and Kory Floyd (Morman & Floyd, 2006). According to the theory, a good father should raise their children with love, affection, involvement, nurture, and consistency. This theory is supported by their research results. The research asked an open question, giving the participants freedom to answer whatever they want to express regarding the attributes of a good father. The participants are 374 men with at least one child in the first and 99 pairs of fathers and adolescent or young adult sons. This theory represents the real experience of fathers on the reality of what happens in our society since the source is an open question and free for participants to answer with whatever they have to say. The research resulted in 20 attributes of a good father agreed based on the responses of the participants, but I am going to only use the top four attributes based on *Table 2: Percentages of Use for Categories in Study One (Rank Ordered)* that represents the most demanded traits of a good father. From three data charts (Study One Fathers, Study Two Fathers, Study Two Sons), these four traits appear two to three times on the top four rankings. The top four characteristics of good fathering based on the data provided from the theory are love (36.1%), role model (32.1%), availability (24.0%), and involvement (31.8%). If compared with the other fifteen characteristics listed on the chart, these four characteristics have the highest percentage mentioned in the questionnaire, and these data prove that the mentioned top four traits are the most demanded things which children want from their fathers.

Their good fathering concept consists of four characteristics: love, role model, availability, and involvement. The first characteristic is love, which means a father gives affection through actions to their children. The second characteristic is role model, which means a father gives appropriate behavior and good examples to their children. The third characteristic is availability, which means a father shows and emphasizes his physical existence. The fourth characteristic is involvement, which means a father actively participates in things that interest his children.

First, based on their concept of love, they propose four actions to represent the trait: love, care for, respect, and show approval toward children. These four actions become the criteria of a good father's love. In addition to this concept, I also found another source saying that a father must love his children unconditionally and make sure that his children feel his love no matter what (All Pro Dad, 2022), which means that a father should show the affection explicitly and blatantly. A father's love can be shown through affection for his children, through a hug, a kind word, appreciation, and respect. Through these definitions, it means that love characteristics emphasize the endeavor of a father to show his affection to his children unconditionally through appreciation, praise, respect, and approval.

Second, the role model characteristics based on their concept of good fathering is that a good father is a role model in every way to his son; Father models appropriate behavior and sets a good example. A father must be a good figure to his son consistently, from his word, his action, and his personality (All Pro Dad, 2022). It is normal to do so since fathers have more experience in life and telling the son the good way and examples is a must. For example, fathers do not only talk about what to do, but they also do the words. Through these definitions, a role model father shows good and appropriate actions of a good father that are meant to be examples for his children, and most importantly, he does his words himself.

Third, based on their concept of availability, they propose three actions to represent the trait: available for the child, "being there," and "always there." The definition of the availability from the theory is "I will always be there to help if needed." It is already a fact that children need the existence of a father as someone who is ready to be there for them. It can be concluded that fathers must emphasize their physical existence in their children's lives, a person who is ready to help them whenever they are in trouble. Through these definitions, an available father will always be ready if his children need him, anywhere and anytime, and make them aware to his children that there is an existence of a father near them.

Fourth, based on their concept of involvement, they propose four actions to represent involvement: is involved in a child's life, does activities, and shows interest. The definition of involvement from the theory is a good father will actively participate in his son's life and interests. For example, it can involve playing with kids and learning things together with what his children are interested in. Involvement emphasizes more direct interaction between a father and a child, doing activities with children, and having more quality time with them. Getting involved with children is also a way to show that their children are important to their fathers. Through these definitions, an involved father is actively participating through actions about things that interest his children.

I will use these four characteristics of good fathering to analyze Kratos as a father pictured as a bad father from the beginning of the game, through his actions, ways of talking, ways of treating his son, and his son's reaction. The theory will be the tool to determine and analyze Kratos's fathering by comparing and contrasting him with the theory. So, these four characteristics will be applied in analyzing whatever happens between Kratos and Atreus in their dialogs and the wordings, ways of treatment, ways of speaking, physical contact, and facial

expressions. Whenever each of these characteristics does not exist in Kratos's characteristics, bad fathering exists.

METHOD

This research will be conducted in a qualitative method. First, I am going to watch the gameplay, specifically MKIceAndFire's video entitled "*GOD OF WAR PC Gameplay Walkthrough Part 1 FULL GAME [4K 60FPS ULTRA] - No Commentary*" (<https://youtu.be/Ne1Lh3zyFyk>) on YouTube. Second, I will write the dialog in the game that represents their relationship condition with the top four characteristics of good fathering based on Morman and Floyd. Third, the dialog will be determined whether it is toward the positive or negative of the traits in chronological order. Fourth, it will be classified if the dialog represents the same idea as any other dialog. For example, if the dialog represents love through praise, it will be put in the same group. Fifth, I am going to find out Kratos' personality that is against the good fathering theory. Last, I will mention Kratos' actions on each characteristic that resembles a good father.

ANALYSIS

KRATOS' BAD FATHERING

First, Kratos is short-tempered to the extent of exaggeration. In a scene, we can see how Kratos was angry toward Atreus because his son was careless about hunting a deer. Kratos was shouting loudly in a high tone, specifically when he said "What are you doing? Now its guard is up, only fire..." He also forcibly took Atreus's bow from his son. As a result, Atreus is shown sad and could not look Atreus in the eye. After he realized that his anger was too much of Atreus' reaction, he stopped. Another scene that shows him being angry in the aftermath of Faye's vision, is where Kratos is shouting "NO!!!...No!, What have you done? Why did you do that?" to his son. His face shows anger since he was squinting and lowering his inner eyebrows. In the first scene, the fact that he stops shouting means that he knows it was too much. Of course, being angry can also be justified since it can represent love, especially when the children have done something too far off, but Atreus does not deserve this. According to the theory, a good father shows his affection explicitly to his children so that the children feel that they are precious, but it is clear that Kratos shows actions that are contrasting with a good father.

Second, Kratos is rude and ignorant toward his children. His rudeness includes mistreatment and bad speaking to children by stopping them from talking. When asked if Atreus can bring her mother's ashes, he tells Atreus to stop talking with "It would serve you to stop talking," ending the discussion abruptly. He does not explain the reason why he does not let his son do so. On another occasion, when Atreus tells Kratos that he hears Faye's voice, Kratos denies the very idea and again, tells his son to stop talking. He should not cut his son like that, but instead, he should have explained the reason for not allowing his son to do certain things. He also should not offend his son by telling him to stop talking. These actions are absolutely against the theory of a loving father.

Third, Kratos was absent physically for Atreus when Faye was still alive. The story was told that Kratos was off hunting a lot, while his wife, Faye, is doing all the job to teach and raise Atreus. In Atreus's monologue on Faye's vision, Atreus said that "He doesn't talk to me, doesn't teach me. It should have been him," which expresses his disappointment in the absence of a father's existence in his life. It is undoubtedly a fact that a son needs the existence of a father. Also, according to the theory, a good father should be present to their children most of the time. Thus, it concludes that Kratos is against the theory of the good father.

Fourth, Kratos does not want to be involved in things that his son is interested in. When they encounter light elves for the first time, Atreus wants to ask them why they are getting killed, but Kratos does not want to, saying that the light elves do not concern them and vice versa. Atreus was about to speak up his mind, but before he did, Kratos cut him again in a reluctant tone of voice, insisting on his statement that "They do not concern us." On another occasion, when Atreus hears Light elves asking for help, Kratos does not listen to him because "I don't care who they are nor what they want," says Kratos in a reluctant tone. In a scene, Atreus also muttered "You never care about anything," which is explicit proof of his lack of involvement in Atreus's life. These things are related to one of Kratos's characteristics, that he does not want to be involved with others' things and problems, and sadly that he also does the same thing to his son. He also does not involve himself in his son's life, reflected by how he does not know how to deal with things with his son which resulted in the bad situation that happens between them. This concludes that Kratos is absent in involvement with Atreus.

THE CHANGES OF KRATOS INTO A GOOD FATHER

The Changes in Kratos' Love

Sharing their grief about Faye's passing opens the gate to understanding. They started to open up to each other when they shared their feelings about losing Faye. Atreus doubted whether Kratos felt lost about Faye in an offensive statement, and Kratos defied the idea to clear the misunderstanding, saying that his silence does not mean that he does not care about his wife. Kratos also shows sad emotions after mentioning his passed away wife, which leaves Atreus feeling sorry about it, showing regret on his face. Kratos also understands that Atreus does not know him and his way enough, saying "You do not know my way. I know it has not been easy," in a low and calming tone, showing honesty. Understanding Atreus is an act of love and also the point of change of Kratos into a loving father.

Appreciation is an act of love that a father can show to their children. An action that resembles his love for Atreus is by praising his son for the things that are well done by Atreus since praising is also an act of love. Before the point of change, Kratos once praised Atreus for succeeding in hunting the deer. He also praises Atreus for doing well in their attempt of climbing the giant Thamur, and it was no easy job to rewrite runes unendingly in the middle of enemy crowds. Atreus managed to do the job properly and reach the top of Thamur, which is totally appreciated by Kratos. Atreus was also praised for going through the journey; of climbing a dead giant, riding a giant falling hammer, and fighting some bad gods. From the perspective of Faye, Kratos praised him for coming a long way. Lastly, Kratos praises Atreus for being able to cipher Tyr's riddle and the meaning behind the disappearance of the gate to Jötunheimr. It seems that the riddle behind the completion of the riddle is teamwork, to test the strength of a relationship, and Kratos and Atreus passed it. Atreus is able to realize it, and he praises Atreus for being wise, and Kratos is glad to hear that. We can hear through his low and calm tone of voice that he is honest with his son, showing a sincere love of a father.

Showing respect to Atreus is also an act of love. In the scene, Kratos is shown kneeling, positioning his head on the same level as Atreus. Kneeling is almost always deployed as a sign of deference and respect (Smith & Keltner, 2017). This means that Kratos totally appreciates and respects the achievement of Atreus up until that point in the story. A father kneeling to his children is no easy thing, and Kratos doing this shows that he is a good father who expresses his feelings sincerely to Atreus.

Naming his son Atreus shows his love through hopes. Kratos also shows his love by naming his son Atreus for a good reason and deep meaning. Atreus was a Spartan warrior that

“wore a smile even in the worst of times,” and brought hope to other Spartans who lived grimly in a vicious life cycle. By naming his son with this name, Kratos wants to associate Atreus with the Atreus of Spartan, for his son to be a light in the dark and a hope to others. This also shows that he has high hope and love for his son for being a good person.

The Changes in Kratos' Role Model

Kratos shows a father as a quick helper when their children are in trouble. When Atreus encounters a stranger whose boar is shot, Kratos approaches them and quickly saves Atreus from the blame. In the dialog between Atreus and the stranger, Atreus seems confused and does not know how to deal with the problem. When Kratos knew that Atreus encountered a stranger, he fastened his step and he also panting when approaching his son. As soon as he arrived, he handled the situation well, and Atreus also looked relieved. It is good to admit his fault and protect his son, and it is a starting point of Kratos being a role model throughout the story.

Kratos shows a father as an advisor. A good father shows a good role model to his children, and one of the ways to do it is to teach the children lessons for their greater good. First, Kratos tells Atreus to not trust people easily. This happens after they meet the stranger, called the witch, and Atreus seems to be too open to her. In this dialog, Kratos is a little bit high on tone, but it is not a problem since he is telling something an important lesson. Second, Kratos also teaches Atreus to not talk in a bad way to others, in this case, Sindri and Faye. Kratos tells his son that there is no justifiable reason to talk badly to people and dishonor his mother. He told Atreus that what his son was doing was “needless and unkind” and “You shall not dishonor her.”

Kratos shows an example of a man of his word. Kratos shows this by showing mercy to others. In this case, when their opponents cannot fight anymore, they should not kill them, instead, show them mercy. He first taught him when they encountered Magni and Lodi, but Atreus did not listen to him at that time and proceeded to kill Lodi. This condition occurs to Kratos himself when he fights Baldur, and Kratos spares Baldur. This is a very good example of a role model father because Kratos shows a man who does his word.

Kratos shows a father who overcomes his bad character. This means that he learns from his mistake, shows the actions of a good father, and gives a good model to his son. Atreus was careless during their trip to the highest peak in Midgard. Instead of shouting as he did before, his response is way better than before, by saying “That was careless,” calmly without any rise in tone and anger. This is a good improvement and change in the way he told Atreus when his son does something wrong. Instead of shouting, He learned that being harsh to Atreus will bring no good, and proceeded with it.

Kratos starts to be there for Atreus when his son needs him. When Atreus confesses about his hearing skill when they met Brok, Kratos listens to what Atreus has to say. He also encourages Atreus to tell him again if he hears things again. Encouraging his son to tell him if it happens again emphasizes the existence of a father who is ready every time for his son. When his old version would always be absent from his son, Kratos now starts to be there in his son's life. This is a good example of an available father and also a point of change for him to be a good father.

Kratos starts to emphasize his physical existence to Atreus. In a scene, Atreus cannot finish the hunted deer, then Kratos holds his arm and they end the deer together. To help his son, he holds his son's arms, and together, they thrust the knife into the deer. On another occasion, Atreus killed a person who was trying to kill them, but he still could not cope with the situation. Kratos then holds his shoulder first, then holds his head, and calms him down. In another scene, when landing from Thamur, Kratos is holding Atreus in his embrace until they

land on the ground. In these scenes, It is shown that he uses physical contact, and also shows an available father who emphasizes his physical existence to his son. This shows that Kratos is there for Atreus when his son needs him.

Kratos worries about his son as an available father. Worrying about your children if something happens to them means that a father will always be ready to be there for his son. In a scene, when riding the elevator to the peak of Midgard, Kratos worries about Atreus on the flinched elevator. In this scene, we can see in Kratos' tone of voice that he is worrying about Atreus. We can see how he reacted to the flinched elevator by calling his son's name in a hurry and in a quite high tone in a good way.

The change in Kratos' Involvement

Kratos shows his involvement with Atreus by following Atreus's interests and answering questions about things that Atreus is curious about. Kratos shows involvement when Atreus asks about a monster named "Nightmares." Even though by simply asking what "Nightmares" is, Kratos is actually following Atreus's interest, getting involved with his son. This also happens when Atreus asks what "scorn poles" is. Not only that he answers what the thing is, but he also tells a story behind it, that Faye was the one who taught Kratos about it and how to disable it. When Atreus fixes the traditional lantern, at first when Atreus approaches the traditional lantern, Kratos seems reluctant to respond to his son, reflected by his tone of voice of complaining and not looking at Atreus. Right after Atreus succeeds in making it fly, Kratos appreciates his hard work and asks a further question about what he wrote on the lantern, showing involvement. When climbing the giant Thamur, Atreus seems to ask many questions about Kratos's plan, and Kratos gladly answers in a yes-or-no answer, triggering Atreus to ask further questions until he gets his own answer. Though this might seem like Kratos is lazy, in my point of view, I see that this is a good way for Atreus to be more curious about Kratos's plan, getting involved with each other.

Kratos shows big changes in getting more involved in his son's interests. As mentioned before, Kratos does not want to get involved in other people's business, like how Sindri is going to get eaten by a dragon. At first, he seems reluctant to help, but looking at Atreus's determination, willingness, and innocence to help Sindri, Kratos finally decided to help Sindri and plan up how to fight the dragon. This change is no easy task; Kratos has always been an individual person, but he decided to change; to be more involved in his son's life. Kratos also accepts to be taught runes by Atreus. Atreus was excited to teach Atreus about the language as thanks to Kratos for teaching Atreus. Kratos seems to be reluctant at first, but he is willing to be taught later. This marks another change for an involved father. Kratos finally decided to tell his dark past to Atreus while previously he tended to shut up about it. Kratos was talking hardly about his past as he does not afford to look at Atreus until he tells that Kratos killed his own father. He then holds Atreus when he says that he is going to be the god he chooses to be, to not live in the endless cycle of god's patricide and matricide. Telling his son's most demanded question shows Kratos' total involvement with Atreus that even when he is required to do things that he hates to do, he is willing to do it for the sake of his son.

CONCLUSION

By contrasting Kratos and the good fathering theory, it is proven that Kratos was a bad father at the beginning of the game, proven by his characters that are against the traits of good fathering. They are short-tempered, rude and ignorant, absent physically, and not involved. But when they finally understand each other, Kratos shows changes through actions that align with the top four characteristics of good fathering. In love, he understands, appreciates, respects, and hopes through naming Atreus. In the role model, he acts as a quick helper, advisor, a man of his

own word, and a father who overcomes his bad character. In the availability, he is present when his son needs him, emphasizes his physical existence, and worries. In the involvement, he follows Atreus' interests and shows changes in getting more involved.

What is emphasized through this research is that Kratos is willing to change into a good father for his son and Atreus is willing to speak up his mind to Kratos. It is not only the determination of the father to change, but it also includes the role of the son to tell him what he feels and what he really wants from his father. That is why they finally come to a good father-son relationship.

Due to the limitation of the author, this research is limited in that I only analyze the top four characteristics of good fathering from Morman and Floyd. The author also encourages more research regarding the fathering topic since it becomes a quite well-discussed topic in the pedagogical field. There are also a lot of unmentioned limitations due to the author's limited knowledge, and further research regarding this topic and other characteristics will be a great addition to the subject matter. Through this research, the author hopes that this research can expand knowledge in the related topics. The author also hopes that this research can be a great reference for students who are also interested in conducting related research topics.

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