

AN ANALYSIS OF SYLVESTER STALLONE

If one scrutinizes the circumstances surrounding Stallone's creation of *Rocky*, it would seem to entail nothing more than a fortuitous accident. However, a reasonably intensive analysis reveals that the creation of the character Rocky was actually predicated upon psychological influences that were established as early as Stallone's childhood.*

When scrutinizing the Rocky films (or at least the first three of them), there are two primary factors which will have significant bearing upon this analysis.

1. The first three films bore a striking resemblance to Stallone's own life. (This fact will be clearly illustrated at the end of this paper.)
2. In the first three films, the final fight scenes were *very carefully* choreographed. However, there is more to observe about the final fight scenes than the manifestation of careful choreography. In one respect or another, Rocky emerged as a *heroic* character.

Once a comparison is implemented with these two facts, and various influences from Stallone's life, it will become clear that the creation of Rocky was not a random accident.

We will commence with Stallone's childhood. It will be presumed that you have read the analysis of love/marriage and are cognizant of the way Stallone's father treated him during his childhood. Generally speaking, Sylvester was the victim of malicious diatribe. This would not only have culminated in Sylvester experiencing an abhorrent lack of faith in himself, *in Sylvester's case* there would have been the desire to gain his father's admiration.⁺ Eventually, Sylvester "stumbled" across a way of fulfilling this goal (in one respect or another).

If one reads a biography of Stallone (*Stallone! A Hero's Story*), we find the influence which may have planted the "seed" for the eventual creation of *Rocky*. In 1959, he developed an intensive fascination with the Steve Reeves' film *Hercules*. In Stallone's own words, "I practically tore the seats out of the theatre when I saw my first Steve Reeves picture."¹ According to the author of this biography, Stallone reacted in the following way. "The teenager had always enjoyed action pictures like Kirk Douglas's *The Vikings* and Burt Lancaster's *The Crimson Pirate*. But *Hercules* star Steve Reeves was a former Mr. Universe, and the quick succession of sword-and-sandal epics he made-including *Hercules Unchained*, *Goliath and the Barbarians*, and *The Thief of Bagdad*-grabbed hold of Sylvester's imagination like nothing before. He wanted to *be* the screen superman. Happily, unlike his previous fascination with Superboy, the gym made it possible for Sylvester to do something about it."² At this stage he proceeded to engage in weight training. Furthermore, this was something that his father finally approved of to some extent. Therefore, a well developed physique became a *primary* part of his own personal identity as an individual. In one interview he states the following. "Remember the scene in *Rocky* where Adrian said, 'My father told me that I wasn't born with much of a body so I should develop my brain,' and Rocky said that it was just the opposite with him? That was me.

* In order for the reader to effectively proceed with this analysis, it is imperative that you have already read my paper on love/marriage, thereby ensuring that you possess some knowledge of Sylvester Stallone's life.

⁺ For academic readers who feel that this is an unsubstantiated statement, its validity will be established during the course of this paper.

Muscle and physique were my calling cards.”³ The reader should keep in mind that his father did say this to him when he was a boy (you weren’t born with much of a brain...).

When Sylvester’s fascination with Steve Reeves movies began, an ideal developed in his mind. If only I could be like that, my father would finally respect me. “Being like that” entailed functioning as a heroic character who relied on his body and physique to accomplish remarkable feats. Whether this ideal was conscious or purely unconscious is difficult to state. However, a probable scenario is as follows. He once *consciously* stated this ideal to himself. Subsequent to this, the ideal became an integral part of his unconscious mind. Once he began his professional career, this ideal became a guiding factor (on an unconscious level) in his life.

An analysis of Sylvester’s life reveals that a serious anomaly presents itself when he commenced his professional life as an actor. Although behaviour therapists will scream “bloody murder” at the following statement, I fully believe in its validity. This particular anomaly begins to provide an initial evidentiary foundation to suggest that Stallone’s creation of Rocky was the result of unconscious influences which functioned in the capacity of a “guiding factor”. The anomaly is that he took up to writing scripts when he commenced his struggle to become an actor. This is highly anomalous for two reasons. As far as I know, Stallone is the only actor to reach the highest levels of prominence within the industry while simultaneously functioning in the capacity of a writer. Actors are merely actors, nothing more. Although it is possible that there are some actors/writers whom we’ve never heard of (i.e. they never “made it”) it is phenomenally unusual for an actor to simultaneously write scripts. However, the second reason is even more cogent for rendering this fact *inordinately* anomalous. Academically speaking, Stallone always performed *exceedingly* poorly in school. His marks were extremely low, he had no interest, and as he became increasingly focused on weight lifting, he had no time for academia. Some quotes directly from Stallone are as follows. “My grades went from bad to nonexistent, straight F. I could have laid in a coma and gotten better grades.”⁴ We also have the following. “I was told by my teachers that my brain was dormant, and I took it to heart.”⁵ Why would an academically “challenged” (to say the least) individual suddenly develop an interest in the laborious and, somewhat, studious talent of writing? Although a certain proportion of readers will develop their own explanation of this behaviour, the anomalous fact that Stallone proceeded to write scripts when he initiated his professional endeavours as an actor does *begin* to provide rudimentary evidentiary foundation for an unconscious motivating factor for the development of the character Rocky.

If we read certain parts of the biography previously mentioned, we find a particular feature which is one characteristic of an unconscious mechanism. *The gradual emergence of a particular concept within the sphere of consciousness*. When reading about his struggling days as an actor we find the following. “Looking back on that period, Sylvester considers it valuable that he’d had to struggle, not only because it toughened his professional skin but because it gave him a unique perspective about people. He spent a great deal of time travelling to and from auditions by subway, and there he discovered what he calls his philosophy about people. Looking at their faces, he realized, ‘They had no hope. They had no *heroes*.’ Considering that, and also thinking about how badly his downbeat screenplays had done, he began to form an idea in the back of his mind of someday giving people a hero or two who would mean as much to them as Steve Reeves and Kirk Douglas had meant to him.”⁶ We also have the following. “However, the more he wrote and the more he moved through New York, the more he was drawn to fiddle with characters cut from a heroic mold-as he describes it, ‘a representative of the

common man.’ Nothing he wrote struck him as being perfectly representative of those ideals, but he knew that when he found such a character he might well have the key to the success that was eluding him.”⁷

We will now proceed with Stallone’s actual creation of Rocky subsequent to him moving to Los Angeles.. The following are Stallone’s own words from *The Official Rocky Scrapbook*.

“The turning point came without a doubt at my twenty-ninth birthday party. It was in July and I was sitting across the table from my wife who was getting wider with pregnancy and my dog who was eating his own fleas because we were so broke. My wife had purchased a \$1.15 cake at a local store and we were looking at one another and talking. She was saying, ‘Make a wish,’ and I looked around and I wished I was out of this place so badly and I knew that the only way I was ever going to get out of this place was not through ‘physicalization’ but actually through creative endeavor, dedication, discipline. Then I got a pang, I got a pang of fear, of fright, of uncertainty, knowing that the situation could only be getting worse. *It is getting worse; it is not getting better. I have a child on the way and there is nothing in the fire. I am going down for the third time. What am I going to do now?*

I’ve had these electrical jolts of paranoia several times before and every time they came on me, I would go to my writing table and scratch out a new idea. This time was no different. I made my excuses as soon as I had gorged myself on cake and ice cream which tasted as if it had been made by Dupont, and headed for my writing room, which was a folding table outside the garage. I was again hit with another jolt and that was the realization that all I had been writing had been trite, that it had been done before and I was simply yielding to a vogue. What did *I* really enjoy seeing up on the screen? I enjoyed heroism. I enjoyed great love. I enjoyed stories of dignity, of courage, of man’s ability to rise above his station and take life by the throat and not let go until he succeeded. Yet no one was making films like that. ‘They’ would call that corny, outdated, and thirtyish or a throwback to the forties or the unrealistic fifties. Well, not me. I knew I had a story in me but I didn’t have any idea what the handle would be, where to fix my energies.

Through fate or whatever, I ended up at the Muhammad Ali/Chuck Wepner fight. Chuck Wepner, a battling bruising type of club fighter who had never really made the big, big time, was now having his shot. But the fight was not regarded as a serious battle. It was called a public joke. He would barely go three rounds, most of the predictions said. Well, the history books will read that he went fifteen rounds and he established himself as one of the few men who had ever gone the distance with Muhammad Ali and he can hold his head up high forever no matter what happens. I am sure that moment meant more to him than any money he could ever receive from fighting because now he had run the complete circle. This is why he had been training for thirty-four years.

That night I went home and I had the beginning of my character. I had him now. I was going to make a creation called Rocky Balboa, a man from the streets, a walking cliché of sorts, the all-American tragedy, a man who didn’t have much mentality but had incredible emotion and patriotism and spirituality and good nature even though nature had not been good to him. All he required from life was a warm bed and some food and maybe a laugh during the day. He was a man of simple tastes.

The second ingredient had to be me, my particular story, my inability to be recognized. I felt Rocky to be the perfect vehicle for that kind of sensibility. So I took my story and injected it into the body of Rocky Balboa because no one, I felt, would be interested in listening to or watching or reading a story about a down-and-out, struggling actor/writer. It just didn't conjure up waves of empathy even from me and I was sure it wouldn't do it from an audience either. But Rocky Balboa was different. He was America's child. He was to the seventies what Chaplin's Little Tramp was to the twenties."⁸

Prior to proceeding any further, the following must be emphasized. Stallone's version of these events cannot be accepted as entirely accurate. He claims that this entire episode transpired on his twenty-ninth birthday, July 6, 1975. However, the Ali-Wepner fight was on March 15, 1975. What *may* have actually transpired is as follows. In March, Stallone attended the Ali-Wepner fight. Although he was suitably impressed with Wepner's fortitude, he failed to recognize that this was the key to the character he was seeking. On July 6, during a time of extreme stress (the realization that his situation was getting worse), an epiphany suddenly coalesced in his mind that what he had witnessed a few months previously would provide the basis of what he was seeking.

Rocky enabled him to function in the specific capacity that he had been (unconsciously) seeking since he was a young teenager. A *heroic character who relied upon his physical prowess for the accomplishment of his heroic actions and who was, in essence, Sylvester Stallone*. These two elements clearly manifest themselves in *Rocky*. Firstly, the story of *Rocky* was a mirror image of Stallone's life (more on this at the end of the paper). As Stallone himself wrote, "So I took my story and injected it into the body of Rocky Balboa..." Secondly, the final fight scene was carefully choreographed so that Rocky emerged as a hero. Regardless of the magnitude of punishment that he endures at Apollo Creed's hands, time and time again, Rocky rises up from the canvas and continues to fight on (just like Stallone continued to persevere in his quest to make it in show business regardless of the frequency and magnitude of failure that he experienced).

Consequently, these two elements, a heroic character who relied upon his physical prowess for the accomplishment of his heroic actions, and someone who was, in one respect or another, Sylvester Stallone "fulfilled" the unconscious desire that he had been seeking since his early teens. The word fulfilled is in quotation marks for the following reason. Playing a character who conformed to these parameters was not the "end" that Stallone was (unconsciously) seeking. It was a *means* to an end. The *true* "end" he was seeking was to gain his father's admiration. The reader may feel that with the commercial success of *Rocky* and the winning of the Academy Award for best picture, this would have been accomplished. Since he proceeded with *Rocky II* and *Rocky III*, my theory must be invalid. This is simply not the case. This is because he failed to gain his father's admiration with *Rocky*. From one interview we have the following.

"Interviewer: Your father was the one who said you weren't born with many brains, so you'd better develop your body, a line you used in *Rocky*. What does he think about you now? Has he given you any credit yet?"

Stallone: Yeah, finally at sixty-five he's come through. I started out so low in this business and never studied in any fine school, and yet went from that to an Oscar. But all he said was, 'It could have been a little better...in the fights.'"⁹

Therefore, despite the fact that he won an Oscar for *Rocky*, his father still wouldn't give him the admiration he craved. So he continued to play a heroic character who relied on his physical prowess and mirrored his own personal life in *Rocky II* and *Rocky III*.

"Interviewer: When did he finally say, 'Okay, kid, you've finally done something right?'
Stallone: Right after *Rocky III*, when he saw me get my shape back."¹⁰

It was then that he finally gained the admiration that he had so ardently yearned for since his childhood.

A certain proportion of readers are now utterly convinced that this entire thesis is entirely erroneous and devoid of any merit whatsoever. This is for the simple reason that Stallone would not have proceeded with *Rocky IV* and *Rocky V* if there was any merit to this paper. I am fully cognizant of this objection. However, all we must do is properly scrutinize *Rocky IV* in order to come to the realization that the objection is invalid (the following analysis will also be applicable to *Rocky V*).

Even a cursory examination of *Rocky IV* will reveal a clear and unequivocal chasm between it and the first three Rocky movies (or more specifically, between the time that he did *not* experience his father's admiration and the time he *did* gain his father's admiration). The two elements that prevailed in the first three Rocky movies did *not* even incrementally manifest themselves in *Rocky IV*. Firstly, the plot did not in any way, shape, or form bear any resemblance whatsoever to Stallone's own personal life. Secondly, the final fight scene was starkly different from the first three. *Rocky did not emerge as a heroic character*. The final fight scene was nothing more than a "hodge-podge" of disparate images edited together. His own words illuminate how drastically things had changed in his staging of the final fight in *Rocky IV*. In one interview, when referring to the fight choreography in *Rocky III*, he states the following. "The fight choreography is very precise. Miss a step and you're in for a detached retina."¹¹ Furthermore, the choreography for the final fight comprised fourteen pages of the screenplay for the third installment.¹² However, when referring to the fight scenes in *Rocky IV*, these are some of his comments. He, "decided to throw choreography to the wind and really go for it." He chose to sacrifice, "all sense of style, proportion, and distance and just revert to animal savage instinct."¹³ As the reader can clearly see, there is an inordinate chasm between his attitude towards the fight scenes in *Rocky IV* and *Rocky III* (the same careful style of choreography prevailed for the first two films as well).

Consequently, the reader who insists that the tenets of this paper are erroneous by virtue of the fact that he continued with the Rocky movies despite gaining his father's admiration, are simply wrong as there are inordinate differences between *Rocky IV* and the first three Rocky movies. Some readers may still object. It is my position that *the reason* that Stallone proceeded with show business and created the character of Rocky was to gain his father's admiration. Since this was *the reason*, he shouldn't have continued once he gained his father's admiration subsequent to *Rocky III*. What these readers must give due consideration to is the following. Although the unconscious mind was the *true* motivating factor, conscious desires should not be

completely dismissed. These conscious motives are what motivates almost any person to enter show business. Namely, the desire for fame and money. From Sylvester's perspective this was the reason he entered show business (obviously he would be oblivious to unconscious motives on his part). For *Rocky IV*, he was paid fifteen million dollars up front, and contractually assured twenty five per cent of the gross. Furthermore, *Rocky IV* (in conjunction with Rambo II) established Stallone as *the single biggest movie star in the world* for the first half of 1986. Therefore, even though his *true* unconscious motives were completely fulfilled subsequent to *Rocky III*, his conscious motives dominated for the two subsequent Rocky films.

This now brings us to the most recent installment in the Rocky series. Specifically, *Rocky Balboa*. This film is rather unique as it constituted a return to the style of the first three movies. Specifically, a plot which was autobiographical, and a final fight scene in which Rocky emerged as a hero. How can this behaviour be explained? Was his father "bothering" him again thereby causing him to feel the need to regain his father's admiration? This hypothesis is weak (even *if*, for some reason, his father had once again turned on him). A more valid postulate is as follows.

Sylvester Stallone had completely lost his level of stardom. The days of him being the biggest star in the world were nothing but echoes of the *distant* past. The fame and adulation he once received from the general public were completely gone. Even though *Rocky V* was a financial failure, the reality remains that the Rocky films were generally successful and were always responsible for Stallone's success. Therefore, in an attempt to regain the eminence of years past, he chose to return to it once again (as there was no other viable hope of producing another successful film). Although he was not striving to regain his father's admiration, there was the ardent desire to regain the *public's* admiration. Since gaining admiration was the (unconscious) genesis of the Rocky films, it was only natural that there would be a return to what prevailed in the first three films, despite the fact that the focus of regaining that admiration had been dramatically altered.

One final "loose end" must be addressed. What if Stallone had not witnessed the Ali-Wepner fight? What then? In my opinion, some time in the course of his life he read or heard about a person who would have fulfilled the requisite criteria he was seeking. This person was "buried" (loosely speaking) somewhere in the "recesses" of his mind. On his twenty-ninth birthday, when he experienced his inordinate level of stress and fear, the memory of learning about this person would have coalesced in his mind and he would have created a character that conformed to the parameters of that person's accomplishment(s).

Although the following does not *directly pertain* to Stallone, I feel that it is paramount that it be stated. There are those who are advocates of the mystical concept of fate, or "fulfilling one's destiny." These concepts are not scientific in the least. However, what may be a reality is the following. For an incremental portion of society, there may be influences which are established on an unconscious level some time in one's childhood. These influences will function in the capacity of a "guiding dimension" (i.e. taking up to writing despite abhorrent academic performance) and render professional abilities virtually inevitable. The reader may feel that the only distinguishing factor between this and destiny is semantics. However, the latter is mystical nonsense. The former is science.

Conclusions

Sylvester Stallone's creation of Rocky was not the result of a random and fortuitous accident. It was predicated upon psychological influences established during his childhood. Specifically, experiencing malicious diatribe at the hands of his father and yearning to gain his father's admiration. When he saw Steve Reeves movies as a boy, he yearned to be that kind of hero in the (unconscious) hopes that he would gain his father's admiration. The evidence to support this is as follows.

1. The anomaly pertaining to the fact that he began to write when he commenced his acting career.
2. The gradual emergence in consciousness of the idea to create a heroic character during his years of struggle.
3. The most important piece of evidence pertains to the inordinate chasm (in two different and specific respects) between *Rocky IV* and the first three Rocky films when he finally gained his father's admiration.

As promised, there will be brief descriptions of how the first three Rocky films bore a striking resemblance to Stallone's own personal life. (There will also be a description of *Rocky Balboa*.)

Rocky- Rocky lead a "hand to mouth" existence. He was impoverished and seemingly had no future. The only "ray of light" was a woman he met and dated named Adrian. Then out of the blue, he experiences a random stroke of luck. The heavyweight champion of the world offered him a chance at the heavyweight championship of the world. At the end of the fight, to everyone's utter shock and amazement, he remains standing and successfully went the distance with Apollo Creed. With the accomplishment of this feat, he succeeds in establishing himself and ending his years of anonymity.

Stallone- For years he struggled in show business without any success to speak of. He seemingly had no future within the industry (he certainly did not possess leading man good looks). Sasha was the only ray of light in his life. Via a *seeming* stroke of luck, he creates the character of Rocky. Upon its release, it becomes a commercial success and ended Stallone's years of painful emotional struggle by establishing him as a star.

Rocky II- From his prize money from his fight with Apollo Creed, he immediately augments his materialistic wealth via various purchases. Furthermore, he marries Adrian. At the beginning, he's convinced he won't box again. Therefore, he attempts to engage in other jobs. However, he fails miserably at these. After being publicly goaded by Apollo Creed, he returns for a rematch with the champion. In the end, he beats Creed and becomes the new heavyweight champion of the world.

Stallone- Obviously he also elevated his own materialistic wealth subsequent to the success of *Rocky*. In *The Official Rocky Scrapbook*, there is a clear indication that he did not intend to engage in any further Rocky movies ("...since *Rocky* has now become a beautiful thing of my

past,...”¹⁴). He made two other films. Both of them were miserable failures. He became apprehensive of maintaining his materialistic wealth and his stature as a major star. Therefore, he returned to the one thing which he encountered success with. Upon the release of *Rocky II*, he was once again established as a major star and his finances flourished.

Rocky III- Rocky has been the champion for a few years. Unfortunately he has become complacent. A new “hungry” fighter challenges him for the title. He succeeds in knocking Rocky out and causing him to lose the championship. Subsequent to the fight, Mickey, Rocky’s long time trainer dies. Apollo Creed steps in to train Rocky. For Rocky to win there are two things he must do. Get back to the “roots” he knew before he became successful. Secondly, he must drastically alter his boxing style. He proceeds with both of them. In a dramatic final fight, Rocky knocks out Clubber Lang and regains the heavyweight championship of the world.

Stallone- (In order to fully comprehend how this mirrored Stallone’s own life, it is imperative that you have read my analysis of his life in my paper on love/marriage. If you have not, what follows will be opaque.) Some time after his “fling” with Anton, his manager died. He felt “knocked out” by life (as described in the paper on love/marriage). When he was able to emotionally recover, he realized that he had to return to the stable life he once knew before becoming successful. This entailed returning to Sasha and the boys. If he was to proceed with another Rocky movie, at some level he must have recognized that drastic changes would be needed if he hoped to succeed with yet a third installment. There was one primary difference between the style of *Rocky III* and the first two. With this first two, there were times prior to the final fight which were slow, or outright boring. In *Rocky III*, virtually every scene was able to effectively hold one’s attention. Upon its release, it became an outstanding commercial success and re-established Stallone as one of the biggest box office stars in the world.

Rocky Balboa- In the opening, we learn that Rocky’s wife Adrian has died. Although his son is now an adult, it becomes evident that Rocky experiences a strained and distant relationship with him. Rocky does not seem to be living in abject poverty as he maintains a restaurant which seems to provide him with a decent income. However, his glory days are behind him and he is confined to regaling customers in his restaurant with stories of great fights of his past. Through a propitious set of circumstances, he is offered a bout with the heavyweight champion of the world. At Rocky’s age the very notion seems positively ludicrous. However, in a dramatic final showdown, Rocky goes the distance with the much younger champion and regains the public’s respect and admiration.

Stallone- By the time he created this film, Sasha was no longer even an incremental part of his life. This was represented by Adrian’s death. Although I’m not certain, I believe his relationship with his eldest son is distant and (somewhat) strained. Although he was quite affluent (and thereby leading a physically comfortable life) his glory days were long gone. His film career had been so abysmal for such an extended period of time, it seemed impossible that he could ever effectively come back. Although he experienced difficulty gaining financing for this film, a studio finally agreed to fund it. As previously written, this film was nothing more than an attempt to regain the public’s admiration. (The attempt failed as the film could not be legitimately viewed as a box office success.)

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