

Constructing the Antihero: Wade Wilson's Narrative Identity in Deadpool (2016) Through Chatman's Structuralist Framework

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Abstract. The film *Deadpool* (2016) presents a distinctive form of heroism that challenges the traditional representation of superheroes as morally ideal and law-abiding figures. This study analyzes how Wade Wilson is represented as an antihero through the film's narrative structure, applying Seymour Chatman's narrative structuralism alongside Prusa's mechanisms of positioning, motivation, and charisma. Employing a qualitative structuralist approach, data were collected through repeated film observation and classification of relevant narrative elements, including character, plot, conflict, and point of view. The findings reveal that positioning operates at the discourse level as a pre-emptive focalization strategy, securing audience alignment through non-linear sequencing and fourth-wall address before story-level moral information is available; motivation is distributed across Todorov's disruption and recognition stages as a set of causally anchored story events that ground transgression in recognizable human vulnerability; and charisma functions across both levels simultaneously, converting story-level suffering into discourse-level affective appeal through tonal dissonance and metalepsis. Rather than functioning as the co-present cluster Prusa describes, these three mechanisms appear in this film to operate as an ordered reception sequence enabled by the film's discourse-level arrangement: discourse-level positioning prepares the ground on which story-level motivation can be received sympathetically, and charisma consolidates what both have established. On the evidence of a single case we advance this ordering as a hypothesis about how the mechanisms interact, not as a demonstrated law of antihero narrative.

Keywords: *Antihero representation; narrative structuralism; film narratology; chatman's story-discourse; superhero film*

Abstract. Film *Deadpool* (2016) menyajikan bentuk kepahlawanan yang khas yang menantang representasi tradisional pahlawan super sebagai sosok yang ideal secara moral dan taat hukum. Studi ini menganalisis bagaimana Wade Wilson diwakili sebagai antihero melalui struktur narasi film, menerapkan strukturalisme narasi Seymour Chatman di samping mekanisme posisi, motivasi, dan karisma Prusa. Menggunakan pendekatan strukturalis kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui pengamatan film berulang dan klasifikasi elemen narasi yang relevan, termasuk karakter, plot, konflik, dan sudut pandang. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa positioning beroperasi pada tingkat wacana sebagai strategi fokusasi pra-emptive, mengamankan keselarasan penonton melalui sekuensing non-linear dan alamat dinding keempat sebelum informasi moral tingkat cerita tersedia; motivasi didistribusikan di seluruh tahap gangguan dan pengakuan Todorov sebagai serangkaian peristiwa cerita yang menyebabkan pelanggaran dalam

kerentanan manusia yang dikenali; dan fungsi karisma di seluruh kedua tingkat secara bersamaan, mengubah penderitaan tingkat cerita menjadi daya tarik afektif tingkat wacana melalui disonansi tonal dan metalepsis. Ketiga mekanisme ini beroperasi sebagai urutan temporal non-reversibel daripada cluster yang hadir bersama: posisi tingkat wacana mempersiapkan dasar di mana motivasi tingkat cerita dapat beroperasi secara simpatik, dan karisma mengkonsolidasikan apa yang keduanya telah didirikan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa legitimasi antihero dalam film kontemporer bukanlah efek moral atau psikologis, tetapi efek rekayasa naratif, yang dihasilkan secara sistematis pada tingkat cerita dan wacana.

Kata kunci: *Representasi antihero; strukturalisme naratif; naratologi film; diskursus cerita chatman; film pahlawan super*

INTRODUCTION

Based on the concept of the antihero by Sanchez & Vidal-Mestre (2022), antihero representation can be understood as the way a literary work or film depicts and constructs an antihero character through various narrative elements so that the audience perceives the character as a figure who plays a heroic role but does not meet conventional standards of heroism.

The film *Deadpool* (2016) presents a distinctive and unconventional style that sets it apart from traditional superhero movies. Unlike most superhero narratives that emphasize nobility, self-sacrifice, and moral purity, *Deadpool* introduces a protagonist who deliberately challenges these ideals. Wade Wilson, also known as *Deadpool*, is not portrayed as an ideal or morally flawless hero. Instead, he is characterized as rude, sarcastic, irreverent, and often driven by personal motives. His use of dark humor, frequent violation of social norms, and tendency toward violence place him in sharp contrast to the conventional image of a superhero. Despite these traits, Wade Wilson remains a central figure who attracts audience sympathy, making his character particularly complex and worthy of academic analysis.

Previous research on *Deadpool* can be grouped into clusters based on its theoretical orientation and analytical focus. The first and most dominant clusters concentrate on the film's linguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions. Zagoto et al. (2025), Elleonora (2017), Lestari et al. (2019), Khoirunnisa (2017) each studied the use of abusive language, dysfemism, and taboo language in *Deadpool*'s dialogue, by placing the filmistic text solely as a linguistic corpus. Although these studies have led to rich mapping of character lexical strategies, they do not question how the language functions within a larger narrative structure, namely how Wade Wilson's choice of words interacts with story events, viewpoints, or causality plots.

The second cluster approached *Deadpool* from a rhetorical and ideological perspective. Lucas & Burgette (2024) analyzed the construction of symbolic meaning through the framework of god-term and devil-term, while Zamani et al. (2021) read antihero representations through the lens of Gramsci hegemony to identify potential cultural resistance in the text. Both approaches have indeed gone beyond the linguistic level toward the ideological layer, but their focus lies on the message payload and the political position of the text, not on the narrative mechanism that produces the payload. In other words, they ask what the film says, not how it builds meaning through its own story architecture.

The third cluster focuses on antihero typology and plot structure more generally. Rahmad (2024) studied the structure of three stages in *Black Adam*, Marwa et al. (2026)

explored the concept of antiheroism in "The Mask", and Comerford (2016) explored the philosophy of justice as an ethical framework for understanding antihero figures. These studies do pay attention to narrative, but the approach is thematic or schematic they identify stages or categories without tracing how internal narrative elements work synergistically to construct characters. Syarifah et al. (2022), although using Stanton's structuralism closest to the narrative approach, applied it to literary novels, not films, so as not to accommodate the cinematic dimensions of storytelling.

Consistently absent from all this literature is the analysis that operates a narrative structuralism framework specifically against Deadpool's filmistic text. None of the above studies systematically distinguish between story and discourse in the sense of Chatman (1978) that is, between what is told (events, characters, backgrounds as the substance of the content) and how it is conveyed (order, viewpoint, time, as a form of expression). Furthermore, no research has integrated the psychological dimension of antiheroism through the Prusa (2019) into such structural narrative analysis. The absence of the Chatman–Prusa combination is not merely a technical methodological gap but a substantive interpretive one: without dissecting the story–discourse structure, it is difficult to explain how Wade Wilson's antiheroism is constructed and delivered through the film's own narrative choices, precisely the question that linguistic, ideological, and typological analyses cannot answer alone.

In an attempt to understand this mechanism, this study refers to the theoretical framework developed by Prusa (2019) in his paper "Toward the Antihero Theory". Prusa argues that there are three main narrative strategies that enable audiences to accept and enjoy transgressive characters, namely positioning, motivation, and charisma. The three mechanisms work synergistically to shape the audience's perception of characters who, morally speaking, should be difficult to sympathise with. This framework is considered relevant for analysing how the film *Deadpool* (2016) portrays Wade Wilson as an antihero who is not only accepted within the narrative, but also embraced culturally.

The three theoretical frameworks adopted in this study operate on different analytical registers, and their value lies precisely in how they address what the others leave open. Chatman (1978) narrative structuralism provides the architectural foundation: by distinguishing story (the "what" events, characters, and settings as narrative substance) from discourse (the "how" ordering, focalization, and cinematic presentation as narrative form), it establishes the two-level framework within which any narrative element can be systematically located. Todorov & Weinstein (1969) five-stage equilibrium model operates exclusively within Chatman's story level: it maps the causal trajectory of events equilibrium, disruption, recognition, attempt to repair, new equilibrium and thereby explains how the plot is structured as a sequence of causally connected kernels rather than an arbitrary chain of incidents. Todorov's model is, in Chatman's terms, a grammar of story content. Prusa (2019) antihero theory operates across both Chatman levels simultaneously: positioning is primarily a discourse-level mechanism (the camera, the voice-over, the non-linear sequencing that secures audience alignment before moral evaluation is possible), while motivation is anchored at the story level (the causal events Todorov's disruption and recognition stages produce), and charisma draws on both (its internal dimension from story-level conflict, its external wit from discourse-level tonal and performative choices). The relationship among the three frameworks is therefore not additive but hierarchical and complementary: Chatman supplies the structural grid, Todorov fills the story level of that grid with a temporal logic of causality, and Prusa explains how the audience is psychologically positioned across both levels to accept a protagonist whose actions that grid would otherwise render morally illegible.

Against this theoretical background, this study addresses the following research questions: how does the discourse-level structure of *Deadpool* (2016) construct Wade Wilson's antihero identity through narrative perspective, voice-over narration, and non-linear sequencing and how do Prusa (2019) mechanisms of positioning, motivation, and charisma operate within the story-level elements of character configuration, causal event structure, and layered conflict.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the representation of Wade Wilson as an antihero in *Deadpool* (2016) through Seymour Chatman's narrative structuralism theory. The primary data source was the film itself, supplemented by scholarly books and journal articles on narrative structuralism and antihero representation.

Not all scenes in *Deadpool* (2016) were included in the analysis. Rather than treating the entire runtime as equivalent data, this study applied a purposive sampling strategy Creswell (2009) in which scenes were selected on the basis of their demonstrable relevance to the research objectives. A scene was considered relevant if it contained at least one identifiable narrative element as defined by Chatman (1978) framework, specifically events or existents at the story level, or narration, sequencing, and point-of-view decisions at the discourse level, that could be interpreted in relation to Prusa (2019) mechanisms of positioning, motivation, or charisma. This criterion ensured that data selection remained theoretically anchored rather than impressionistic: a scene was included not merely because it was memorable or thematically suggestive, but because it furnished concrete evidence of how story and discourse elements interact to construct Wade Wilson's antihero identity.

The selection process proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, the researcher watched the film in its entirety on three separate occasions, using a structured observation protocol that logged every scene containing dialogue, visual narration, or character interaction. In the second stage, each logged scene was screened against the dual-level criteria described above, retaining only those scenes that satisfied at least one story-level criterion (a plot event, a character function, or a conflict layer) and could be cross-referenced with a discourse-level technique (voice-over narration, fourth-wall address, or camera perspective). Scenes that advanced the action without activating either a Chatman's narrative element or a Prusa mechanism, such as transitional montage sequences not accompanied by narration, were excluded. The final corpus comprised eight scenes distributed across three analytical categories (positioning, motivation, and charisma) as presented in Table 1, alongside five narrative dimensions (character, plot, conflict, narration, and point of view) in Table 2. This purposive, criterion-based approach strengthens the internal coherence of the analysis by ensuring that every data point is directly traceable to the theoretical framework rather than selected on the basis of dramatic salience alone.

The analytical procedure followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), comprising three interlocking stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data condensation stage, raw observations were reduced to analytically manageable units by assigning each selected scene to one or more of Chatman's narrative categories and Prusa's mechanisms. The opening overpass sequence (06:31–06:42), for instance, was initially logged as a general action scene; after applying the condensation criteria it was reclassified as a discourse-level event activating the positioning mechanism, because Wade's first fourth-wall break at that timestamp

constitutes a narrational choice that compels audience alignment before any moral judgment is possible. Observations that did not yield such a double classification were condensed out of the corpus. In the data display stage, condensed data were organized into the two structured matrices presented as Tables 1 and 2, allowing the researcher to track how narrative elements cluster; the cancer-diagnosis scene (27:06–27:13), for example, appears under motivation in Table 1 and simultaneously under both story:conflict (emotional conflict) and story:plot (disruption stage) in Table 2, which the display format made immediately apparent as a point of analytical convergence. In the conclusion drawing/verification stage, patterns identified in the display were interpreted and then verified against the theoretical framework and prior studies in an iterative checking process: each pattern was cross-referenced with Chatman's and Prusa's accounts and with the relevant literature before being retained.

We do not claim data or investigator triangulation in Denzin's (2017) sense; coding was performed by a single analyst, and the absence of an inter-coder reliability check is a limitation acknowledged below. The study's limitations include its focus on a single film, its reliance on a single analyst's qualitative interpretation without an inter-coder reliability check, and findings that are context-specific rather than generalizable.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

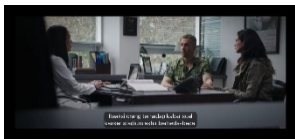
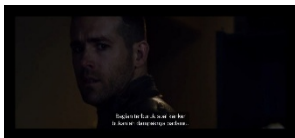
This chapter summarises the findings of a research on how the film Deadpool (2016) portrays Wade Wilson as an antihero, utilising the idea offered by Igor Prusa in his book "Towards the Antihero Theory." Following the use of research methodologies to collect data on the portrayal of antihero in the character in question, the results are shown below.

Wade Wilson Portrayal as an Antihero

The researcher used Igor Prusa's antihero theory to explain how the figures represented antiheroes. The fundamental goal of this research is to identify and explain the representation of antiheroes as demonstrated through Positioning, Motivation, and Charisma, as seen below.

Table 1. Antihero Portrayal

No	Anti Hero Elements	Data	Narrative Function	Structural Interpretation
1.	Positioning	 Scene 06:31-06:42 (No Dialogue)	Establishes audience alignment with Wade through fourth-wall awareness	Chatman's discourse-level focalization positions viewers within Wade's perspective before moral judgment can occur.
		 Scene 38:29-38:34 Colossus: "Join us, use your	Contrasts Wade with conventional superhero ideals	Colossus functions as a structural foil, highlighting Wade's liminal position between hero and villain.

		power” Wade: “Hands up Colossus: Be a superhero”		
2	Motivation	 Scene 27:06-27:13 Wade: “You’re clowning? You’re not clowning. I sense clowns inside” Doctor: “People’s reacts differently in late stage cancer”	Initiates narrative disruption	Cancer serves as a relatable human vulnerability that legitimizes Wade's later transgressive actions.
		 Scene: 36:04-36:26 Wade: “The worst part about cancer is what it does to you. Or what it does to people do you love. Who knows this guy could save my life. I knew there’s only one way that I could save her. Isn’t that what superheroes do?”	Triggers transformation arc	Wade's actions are driven by survival rather than altruism, reinforcing antihero motivation.
		 Scene: 1:35:18 Colossus: “...Spare enemy, in this moment everything else goes away, the way the world sees us, The way we....” *Gunshot (Wade kills Ajax) Colossus: “Why?” Wade: “You’re rambling on”	Resolves revenge plot	Narrative causality frames moral transgression as emotionally justified.
3	Charisma	 Scene 06:44-06:52 Wade: “Oh Hello! I know right. Whose balls did I have	Establishes self-aware persona	Humor and metalepsis create audience attachment despite moral ambiguity.

to fondle to get my serial movie.”



Scene 44:23-44:39
Wade: “Hey is Ajax your actual name or because it sounded made up. What is the really? Kevin? Bruce? Scott? Mitch is it Basil Fawlty.”
Ajax: “You joke away, The thing never that never lasted away is sense of humour”

Demonstrates coping through humor

Comedy functions as psychological armor against trauma.



Scene 01:00:44-1:00:52
Blind Al: ”Soda water and lemon for blood. Or wear red, dumbass!”

Normalizes violence through irony

Dark humor reinforces authenticity rather than heroic idealization.

Story Level

At the story level, Wade Wilson's antihero identity is constructed through the configuration of characters, plot structures, and layers of conflict that form the narrative substance in Chatman's (1978) terms. From the opening scene on the overpass (06:31–06:42), Wade is placed in a liminal zone between hero and villain, not by supernatural powers, but by limited, real ammunition. Colossus does not appear as an independent psychological character but as a structural foil: his moral perfection becomes a benchmark that makes Wade's imperfections feel more authentic, and Wade's refusal to join the X-Men (38:29–38:34) confirms his position between the two moral poles.

Wade's motivation is rooted in what Chatman (1978) calls a causal story event. The late-stage cancer diagnosis (27:06–27:13) is the disruptive event in Todorov's model that destroys his equilibrium of life with Vanessa and becomes the source of all his transgressive actions. Unlike Superman's weakness for kryptonite, cancer is a familiar threat that resonates directly with the audience's experience, making it an operative motivation at the level of lived experience (Prusa, 2019). Wade's decision to enter the Weapon X program (36:04–36:26) is driven not by altruism but by survival instinct; "Isn't that what superheroes do?" is pronounced not as a declaration of heroism but as an irony that recognizes the limits of his own motivation. In Chatman's framework this decision is a crucial kernel that triggers all the physical, psychological, and narrative transformations that shape Deadpool's identity. At its peak, Ajax's murder (1:35:18) is satisfying not because of its morality but because the entire causal chain, from cancer diagnosis to torture at Weapon X, has built a complete narrative justification.

Wade's charisma at the story level works through actions that define character functionally (Chatman, 1978): ridiculing his torturers in the middle of an extreme

procedure (44:23–44:39) shows that humor is not merely a surface trait but a coping mechanism against psychological stress, while the domestic drama with Blind Al (1:00:44–1:00:52), which treats violent wounds as routine, confirms the internal dimension of Prusa's charisma. The mask-removal scene in front of Vanessa (1:38:26) validates Wade's charisma as genuinely authentic. The entire story-level structure moves through Todorov's five stages (equilibrium, disruption, recognition, attempt to repair, and new equilibrium) with a new equilibrium established across three layers of conflict (internal: shame over disfigurement; external: value contention with Colossus; emotional: the impact of cancer on the relationship with Vanessa), each of which activates one of Prusa's mechanisms. That the disfigurement (00:42:26) functions as the recognition stage should be read specifically: it is the moment at which Wade fully registers the irreversibility of his transformed condition, rather than a second, separate disruption.

Discourse Level

At the discourse level, Wade's antihero identity is formed through the narrative and cinematic choices by which, in Chatman's (1978) account, the substance of the story is actively shaped for the audience. The camera's point of view is configured to place the audience within Wade's subjective perspective before they can assess his moral position — a discourse-level decision that secures the audience's partiality at the level of form rather than content.

The first-person narration through voice-over is an ideological instrument (Chatman, 1978): by narrating his own story, Wade functions simultaneously as Chatman's filter, through whom events are perceptually centred, and as his slant, whose attitude frames them, controlling how his actions are presented before the audience can form an independent evaluation. The Weapon X decision scene (36:04–36:26) shows this explicitly, as the rhetorical question "Isn't that what superheroes do?" reframes Wade's selfish motivation as an ironic analogy to heroic sacrifice.

Non-linear sequencing is a crucial discourse choice within Chatman's temporal frame: the film opens with the overpass sequence in the present before retreating to Wade's equilibrium with Vanessa. This ensures that viewers have identified with Wade's charismatic persona before the film asks them to sympathise with his vulnerability. In the Ajax murder scene (1:35:18), editing constructs Colossus's moral speech as dramatically ineffective, while timing the shot at the peak of his heroic rhetoric serves as a cinematic punctuation, a deflation of superhero convention through temporal irony. Charisma at this level is constructed through calculated dissonance: extreme torture (44:23–44:39) is cut with deadpan comedy, and the domestic exchange with Blind Al (1:00:44–1:00:52) is presented without dramatic scoring. Metalepsis, Wade's awareness of his status as a fiction, positions the audience as co-participants in his ironic attitude toward the genre. All of these elements such as framing, editing, temporal sequencing, and performance register work systematically to ensure that, as Chatman (1978) argues, meaning in narrative is produced not by content alone but by the systematic relationship between story and discourse. Importantly, this ordering is a reception sequence enabled by discourse arrangement, not a story-chronological one: discourse establishes alignment before the story asks for sympathy.

The findings in Table 1 show that Wade Wilson's identity as an antihero in *Deadpool* (2016) is not the product of an isolated narrative element, but the outcome of three interrelated mechanisms proposed by Prusa (2019): positioning, motivation, and charisma. These mechanisms operate at different narrative levels yet work synergistically,

guiding the audience to accept and even celebrate a protagonist whose values deviate sharply from conventional superhero ideals.

Regarding positioning, the film strategically manipulates point of view at the discourse level to align the audience with Wade from the outset. The opening overpass sequence places viewers inside Wade's subjective perspective before any moral judgment can form, while the first fourth-wall break turns the audience into his implicit partisans, supporting Chatman's emphasis on narrative perspective as a discourse-level technique. Colossus functions as an idealized foil whose textbook heroism paradoxically makes Wade's flaws feel more authentic, placing him within Prusa (2019) liminal zone between hero and villain.

For motivation, Wade's transgressions are anchored to weaknesses the audience can recognize from lived experience. His cancer diagnosis is familiar and emotionally resonant, unlike the fantastical vulnerabilities of conventional superheroes, and his decision to enter the Weapon X program reflects a simple human wish to survive and return to the person he loves illustrating Prusa (2019) claim that an antihero becomes acceptable when his weakness appeals to rather than alienates viewers. This motivation culminates in the Ajax confrontation, where Wade's choice to kill is experienced as satisfying despite its moral transgression.

Charisma emerges from a combination of external wit, fourth-wall humor, an imperfect costume, exemplifying being-cool-by-being-uncool Prusa (2019), and internal vulnerability expressed through dark humor under suffering.

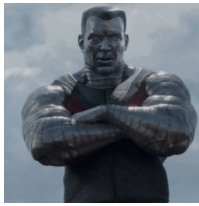
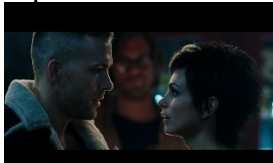
Together, these mechanisms answer how *Deadpool* (2016) represents Wade Wilson as an antihero, confirming, per Chatman's structuralist framework, that antiheroism emerges from the systematic arrangement of story and discourse elements that legitimize moral ambiguity in contemporary superhero narratives.

Narrative elements in the Film that shows Wade Wilson as an Antihero

The researcher thoroughly examined the film's main narrative components, such as characters, story, and conflict, in order to address this study topic. Seymour Chatman's narrative theory, which makes a distinction between discourse (the way the tale is delivered to the audience) and story (events, characters, and locations), was used to construct the narrative analysis. Using this paradigm, the researcher looked at how character development and narrative frameworks help create meaning in the movie. The study concentrated on determining how narrative events, conflicts, and character roles relate to one another and support the film's overarching plot and thematic meanings. This method allowed for a thorough comprehension of the film's narrative structure and its importance in illustrating the main topics the research examined.

Table 2. Narrative Aspect

No	Narrative Aspect	Data	Chatman Level	Prusa Mechanism	Key Evidence from Deadpool (2016)
1.	Character	• Protagonist: Wade Wilson 	Story	Positioning / Motivation / Charisma	Ajax (antagonist) legitimizes Wade's revenge (motivation); Colossus (idealized foil) sharpens Wade's liminal identity (positioning); Vanessa (emotional anchor) validates

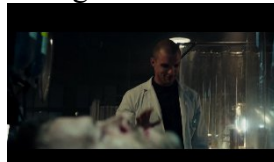
		Antagonist: Ajax			his coping humor (charisma).
					
		Supportive Character: Colossus			
					
		Vanessa			
					
2.	Plot	Equilibrium  Scene 00:21:54 Wade and Vanessa at the “Sister Margaret’s” apartment/bar, including a montage of their relationship as they exchange dark jokes, followed by the moment Wade proposes to Vanessa in their room.	Story	Motivation	Todorov’s five stages scaffold Prusa’s mechanisms: cancer diagnosis (disruption, 00:26:55) and disfigurement (recognition, 00:42:26) ground motivation; revenge campaign (attempt to repair, 01:12:21) operationalizes it; Vanessa’s acceptance (new equilibrium, 01:38:26) resolves charisma.
		Disruption			



Scene: 00:26:55

Wade fainted in his room, was taken to the doctor, and then sat with Vanessa as she heard the diagnosis of terminal cancer

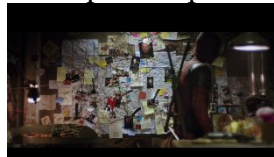
Recognition



Scene: 00:42:26

Wade left Vanessa quietly in the middle of the night, wrote a letter, then went to the Ajax facility, followed by scenes of torture in the “tank” where Wade's genetic mutation was triggered, his face was permanently disfigured, and he escaped while setting the facility on fire.

Attempt to Repair



Scene: 01:12:21

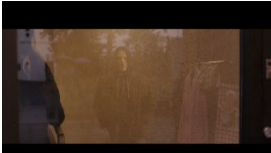
Wade (as Deadpool) hunted down Ajax's henchmen one by one for a year to find out where Ajax

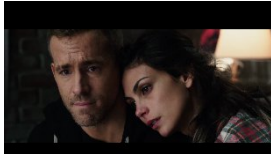
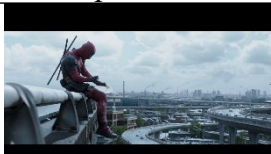
was, because Wade wanted to take revenge on Ajax

New Equilibrium



Scene: 01:38:26
After Ajax died, Wade took off his mask in front of Vanessa, revealing his disfigured face, but Vanessa still accepted him.

3.	Con- flict	Internal Conflict  Scene: 00:57:48 Wade struggled with his own shame and fear regarding his disfigured appearance, which was the result of the experiment. External Conflict  Scene: 01:34:57 Colossus repeatedly urged Wade to join the X-Men and asked him not to kill Ajax even though he had already been defeated. Wade refused, then shot Ajax right in front of Colossus.	Story	Charis ma / Positio ning / Motivat ion	Emotional conflict (cancer diagnosis, 00:31:41) = motivation. Internal conflict (shame over disfigurement, 00:57:48) = charisma. External conflict (refusal to spare Ajax, 01:34:57) = positioning within liminal hero–villain zone.
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Emotional Conflict  Scene: 00:31:41 The scene where Wade receives a cancer diagnosis alongside Vanessa after a health checkup.				
4. Narration:		Dis-course	Positioning / Charisma	First-person voice-over grants Wade control over self-framing: survival motives are recast as ironic heroism ("Isn't that what superheroes do?", 36:04–36:26); suffering is filtered through dark humor, making transgressions sympathetic before judgment can form.
5. Point of View:		Dis-course	Positioning	Wade functions simultaneously as Chatman's filter (events are perceptually centred on him) and slant (his attitude frames them), while metaleptic address positions the audience as implicit partisans from the opening scene; non-linear sequencing ensures viewers identify with his charisma before being asked to sympathise with his vulnerability.

The five narrative aspects in Table 2 are not parallel or independent entries but interlocking components of a single meaning-making system. Taken together, they demonstrate that Chatman's story/discourse distinction is not merely an analytical grid imposed on the film from outside; it is the structural logic through which the film actually constructs Wade Wilson's antihero identity.

At the story level, character, plot, and conflict supply the raw material: Ajax's cruelty gives motivation a causal anchor; Todorov's five stages distribute that motivation across time; and the three conflict layers emotional, internal, and external ensure each of Prusa's mechanisms (motivation, charisma, and positioning, respectively) is activated at

a distinct narrative moment rather than all at once. The mechanisms are therefore temporally sequenced by the story structure, not merely thematically present.

At the discourse level, narration and point of view determine how story-level material reaches the audience. First-person voice-over allows Wade to frame his own motivation in ironic, sympathetic terms before any external evaluation is possible; the hybrid third-person/fourth-wall perspective locks in audience alignment (positioning) from the very first scene. Crucially, discourse operates as a filter: it ensures that when motivation (a story-level element) is encountered, it has already been prepared by positioning (a discourse-level operation). This sequencing discourse establishing alignment before story asks for sympathy is what makes antihero acceptance possible.

The three Prusa mechanisms thus do not map onto the Chatman levels in a one-to-one fashion. Motivation is primarily anchored at story level (plot and emotional conflict), but it is delivered and softened at discourse level (voice-over irony). Positioning operates mainly at discourse level (point of view, non-linear sequencing) but is reinforced at story level through Colossus as a structural foil. Charisma spans both levels: its internal dimension (dark humor as coping) emerges from story-level conflict, while its external dimension (tonal dissonance, metalepsis) is achieved through discourse-level editing and performance choices. This cross-level distribution is what makes the frameworks genuinely complementary rather than merely co-present: Prusa's mechanisms describe what the film achieves psychologically with the audience, while Chatman's story/discourse distinction explains how those effects are architecturally produced.

DISCUSSION

These research findings directly respond to all three research questions and show that Wade Wilson's antihero identity in *Deadpool* (2016) is not a characterological accident, but rather a structured narrative result produced through specific decisions at the story level and discourse level. This puts this study in productive tension with previous studies: linguistic analysis such as Zagoto et al. (2025), Khoirunnisa (2017) showed the distinctiveness of Wade's verbal register but did not explain why it generated sympathy; ideological readings such as Zamani et al. (2021) identifies the potential counter-heg of the film but does not theorize the audience recruitment mechanism. This analysis provided this mechanism: the coordinated application of positioning, motivation, and charisma across story levels and Chatman (1978) discourse converted Wade's moral transactions into culturally sanctioned heroism.

The first theoretical implications concern the internal logic of Prusa (2019). Prusa presents the three mechanisms as co-present features. The present analysis suggests a stronger possibility, but it is important to be precise about what kind of order this is. The sequence is not a story-chronological one (the film's fabula is deliberately reordered); it is a reception order produced by discourse-level sequencing. Within the limits of one film we therefore propose, rather than prove, that the ordering is difficult to reverse: motivation encountered without prior positioning would tend to read as rationalization, and charisma without prior motivation as entertainment alone. Establishing whether this ordering is genuinely necessary would require the counterfactual and reception evidence outlined in the concluding section.

Positioning operates first and at the discursive level: the opening sequence overpass and the first fourth wall breakthrough (06:31–06:52) put the audience in Wade's subjective perspective before any story event introduces its identity. This was a pre-emptive move by the time the story-level event began, the audience had already become Wade's implicit partisans. Motivation follows as a story-level dimension: the disruption

stage of Todorov & Weinstein (1969) terminal cancer (00:26:55) and the recognition stage torture at Weapon X (00:42:26) supplies causal justification that is rooted in viewer-recognized vulnerabilities from life experience. As positioning had secured sympathy at the discursive level, motivation did not need to make Wade morally admired; it was enough to make him humanly understandable. Charisma consolidated both: at the story level, dark humor under torture (44:23–44:39) and domestic comedy with Blind Al (1:00:44–1:00:52) reveal the coping mechanism as an internal psychological reality; at the discursive level, tonal dissonance transforming the coping into an external affective attraction. This sequence cannot be reversed: motivation without prior positioning will read as rationalization; charisma without prior motivation will read as entertainment alone.

The second theoretical implication concerns why Chatman (1978) story/discourse is not just an analytical tool, but a conceptual key to understanding antihero construction. Typological studies such as Sanchez & Vidal-Mestre (2022) and Comerford (2016), as well as ideological studies such as Zamani et al. (2021), sharing the same limitations: the two treat the narrative as a transparent vehicle for content without regard to formal operations that present the content to the audience. Antihero problems are essentially form problems, not content. In "Deadpool" (2016), Discourse-level architecture systematically prevents negative moral judgment at any critical narrative moment: non-linear opening ensures Wade is charismatic before it can be explained; first-person voice-overs ensure his motivation is framed sympathetically before it can be judged; the ironic deflation of Colossus' moral rhetoric on Ajax's murder scene. (1:35:18) ensure that the least ethical action is processed as a satisfactory punctuation. Antiheroes, in this framework, are not character types defined by moral perversion, but narrative-structural achievements defined by formal operations that make moral perversion acceptable to the audience.

CONCLUSION

This study suggests that antihero construction in contemporary mainstream cinema may be less a function of character psychology or ideology than a matter of narrative technique: the systematic application of discourse-level strategies (point of view, narrative sequencing, and tonal modulation) with first-person narration guiding the audience's affect before moral judgment becomes possible. Analyzing *Deadpool* (2016) through Chatman (1978) and Prusa (2019) indicates that Wade Wilson's liminal heroism is produced not by the psychological depth of his character but by specific formal operations that structure the audience's access to him. Positioning secures the audience's partiality at the discourse level before the story makes any moral demands; motivation supplies story-level causal anchors to an audience whose partiality has already been secured; and charisma consolidates both, converting suffering into spectacle and moral ambiguity into affective attraction. We advance this ordering as a hypothesis rather than a proven law: within one film the three mechanisms are encountered in a fixed reception order that appears difficult to reverse, since motivation without prior positioning would tend to read as rationalization and charisma without prior motivation as entertainment alone.

Whether the ordered sequence identified here recurs across other antihero films remains an empirical question for the corpus study proposed below, which would extend the analysis to morally darker figures such as Walter White in *Breaking Bad* or Tony Soprano in *The Sopranos*, apply the Chatman–Prusa framework to other media, and use

cognitive film-theory protocols to test empirically whether positioning-generated pre-emptive alignment genuinely suppresses negative moral judgment.

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