An academic who studied for her PhD at the University of Sunderland has accused popular drama series Peaky Blinders of “unashamedly glorifying criminality”.

Dr George S Larke-Walsh examined the male brutality within the TV series as part of a paper published in the Journal of Popular Television.

The paper: ‘The King’s shilling: How Peaky Blinders uses the experience of war to justify and celebrate toxic masculinity’ argues that the programme legitimises destructive behavior by presenting the protagonists as romantic outlaws who only oppress others because of a desire to succeed in a corrupt world.

According to the paper, the drama effectively excuses the gang’s brutality by presenting them as damaged by The Great War.

Dr Larke-Walsh, who says she comes back to visit the North East every year from her current home in Texas, states: “It utilises nostalgia for nationalism, enacted within displays of extreme aggressions as well as promoting regressive masculine ideals, specifically British ‘lad-culture’.

“In the current socio-political environment, and associated concerns about the prevalence of toxic masculinity, such presentations no longer feel safely confined to fantasy.”

Dr Larke-Walsh, who obtained her PhD in Film Studies from Sunderland before moving to America, has also explored connections between The Godfather and The Sopranos in past research.

The academic, originally from Leicestershire, also accuses the show of eliciting homosexual desire with images of actor Cillian Murphy’s naked body, as well as clips of men at work, while at the same time rejecting this desire by asserting the heterosexuality of the characters.

Despite this Dr Larke-Walsh is a fan of the programme but says she wanted to highlight the complex nature of its depiction of violent masculinity.

The show won best drama at last year’s Bafta TV awards.

Speaking about her time at the University of Sunderland, Dr Larke-Walsh, who now works at the University of North Texas, said: “I still retain
friendly ties with the Media and Cultural Studies department through faculty.

“I studied and worked at the University when we were housed on Chester Road. I remember the department as a very vibrant group of researchers, who were very friendly and supportive.

“My early training at the University of Sunderland taught me to be an open-minded and supportive teacher. The principles of HE pedagogy I learned at Sunderland are ones I practice to this day.

“While I’m originally from Leicestershire, I lived for quite a while in the North East of England. I miss it very much and take time to visit every summer when I am in the UK.”

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