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ANALYSIS OF PRESCRIBED GENDER ROLES THROUGH THE USE OF DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER IN CONTEMPORARY FILM

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After studying the film technique and the literary elements (such as symbolism and allegory) within Primal Fear (1996), Fight Club (1999), Black Swan (2010), and Silent House (2011), I concluded that the use of double personalities, embodied through Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), reflects the conflict within the individual and that individual’s attempt to deal with the cultural expectations (specifically, gender roles) imposed upon him. These individuals were diagnosed with DID according to the criteria described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition, Text Revision. On the societal level, the individuals within films represent groups of people attempting to deal with the gender roles imposed upon them. For men, there is an increasing cultural call to act in accordance with the feminine traits of sensitivity and submission, which are contradictory to the masculine roles of machismo and independence. For women, there is a cultural call to continue to adhere to the traditional roles of submission (repression by men) and caretaking (of the family). While the men in these films struggle to reassert their traditional, masculine roles of machismo and independence in the wake of a feminizing society by creating masculine, alter identities, the women struggle to break away from their own traditional gender roles in order to create masculine, alter identities, which conflict with the submissive roles that they are forced to play. In the end, each character becomes beaten by the violence from which they suffer. Thus, these films advocate the rejection of traditional gender roles to prevent the violence and suffering associated with it.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER (DID)
- Criterion A: Presence of two or more distinct identities or personality states
- Criterion B: Identity switches are usually not under voluntary control
- Criterion C: Inability to recall important personal information
- Criterion D: Symptoms cannot be attributed to imaginary playmates or other fantasy play
- Usually a history of severe, physical, and sexual abuse

WHY USE “DID” IN FILM?
- Surprise endings and plot twists allow audiences to remain interested.
- Dramatic conflict and plot movement, especially resolved through violence, attract audiences through the externalization of internal conflict, particularly against gender role expectations, by fragmentation (splitting of the self).
- Multiple personalities highlight ideal, character opposites illustrated through key features of these persons and their interpersonal relations.
- The concept of multiple personalities emphasizes conflict and resolution between desire and cultural expectations imposed upon individuals.

DIAGNOSIS OF NAOMI WITH DID IN PRIMAL FEAR
- Criterion A: Naomi has a kind self and an aggressive Aly identity.
- Criterion B: Naomi's switch times.
- Criterion C: Naomi blackens and is unable to remember the murder.
- Criterion D: Naomi exists previous conditions.

DIAGNOSIS OF JACK WITH DID IN FIGHT CLUB
- Jack, an insomniac, starts a male-only fighting club with Tyler Durden (his masculine, alter identity, both physically and mentally) to cure (initially through support groups) his insomnia.
- Jack submits to the consumerist infrastructure (by living in a condominum full of IKEA products) and displays his sensitivity by bonding with support groups. In contrast, Tyler Durden is insubmissive (by living in a dilapidated house) and insensitive.
- Tyler’s independence and aggression is seen through his leadership of Project Mayhem, aimed at destroying the feminine, consumerist infrastructure, and his teaching Jack to confront pain like a man.

DIAGNOSIS OF SARAH WITH DID IN BLACK SWAN
- Criterion A: Sarah’s identities include herself, Beth, and Lily
- Criterion B: Sarah's previous conditions
- Criterion C: Sarah’s identity includes herself, past “neighbor” Sophia, little girl, and murderer.
- Criterion D: Sarah exists previous conditions.

DIAGNOSIS OF AARON WITH DID IN BLACK SWAN
- Criterion A: Aaron has a kind self and an aggressive Roy identity.
- Criterion B: Personalities switch four times.
- Criterion C: Aaron blacks out and is unable to remember the murder.
- Criterion D: Nonexistent previous conditions.

DIAGNOSIS OF JACOB WITH DID IN SILENT HOUSE
- Criterion A: Jacob has a feminine self and an masculine Roy identity.
- Criterion B: Personalities switch multiple times.
- Criterion C: Inability to recall having many jobs and dilapidated house.
- Criterion D: Nonexistent previous conditions.

DIAGNOSIS OF JUDE WITH DID IN SILENT HOUSE
- Criterion A: Jude’s identities include herself, past “neighbor” Sophia, and murderer.
- Criterion B: Jude’s previous conditions.
- Criterion C: Jude’s identity includes herself, past “neighbor” Sophia, little girl, and murderer.
- Criterion D: Jude exists previous conditions.

Note: Although the diagnoses of the individuals within each film with DID may not be entirely accurate (and some individuals may exhibit comorbidity with schizophrenia, for example), the argument of this work rests on the concept of multiple personalities, of which DID is the appropriate term. Also, these individuals seem to exhibit all the symptoms of DID as described by the DSM-IV-TR.

References


Note: The above references are for illustrative purposes only and do not constitute a comprehensive list of all relevant sources.