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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 by creating 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.

Introduction:

CHARACTERISTICS OF DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER (DID)

- Criterion A: Presence of two or more distinct identities or personality states
- Criterion B: Identities or personality states recurrently take control of main identity's behavior
- Criterion C: Inability to recall important personal information, the extent of which is too great to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness
- Criterion D: Not due to direct physiological effects of a substance or general medical condition
- 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 resulting in 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 personas and their interpersonal relations.
- **The concept of multiple personalities emphasizes conflict and resolution between desire and cultural expectations imposed upon individuals.**



(Sources: Deanna; Fowdrey)

DIAGNOSIS OF AARON WITH DID IN PRIMAL FEAR

- 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
- History of abuse/trauma by father and Archbishop

DIAGNOSIS OF JACK WITH DID IN FIGHT CLUB

- Criterion A: Jack has a feminine self and a 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
- History of trauma by feminizing consumerism

"DID" IN PRIMAL FEAR

- Altar boy Aaron Stampler feigns DID by dissociating into Roy to evade a life sentence for murdering Archbishop Rushman in retaliation for forcing Aaron, Aaron's girlfriend Linda, and another altar boy to engage in sexual acts in front of him.
- As an altar boy, religion has feminized Aaron by forcing him from **machismo** (aggression) into **sensitivity** through peacefulness.
- Two male figures (his father and the Archbishop) have feminized Aaron by forcing Aaron from **independence** into **submission** through their demand for obedience.
- Therefore, Aaron dissociates into the masculine Roy to reassert his masculinity through murder.



(Source: Wilson)

"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 condominium 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.



(Source: Astrid)

DIAGNOSIS OF NINA WITH DID IN BLACK SWAN

- Criterion A: Nina's identities include herself, Beth, and Lily
- Criterion B: Personalities switch multiple times.
- Criterion C: Nina does not remember self-mutilation with the nail filer.
- Criterion D: nonexistent previous conditions
- History of abuse/trauma by mother

DIAGNOSIS OF SARAH WITH DID IN SILENT HOUSE

- Criterion A: Sarah's identities include herself, past "neighbor" Sophia, little girl, and murderer.
- Criterion B: Personalities switch multiple times.
- Criterion C: Cannot remember past
- Criterion D: nonexistent previous conditions
- History of abuse/trauma by John and Peter

"DID" IN BLACK SWAN

- Nina attempts to cope with the pressure of the lead role in *Swan Lake* but loses her mind in the end.
- The **aggressive** characters wear black clothing, symbolizing masculinity. These include Thomas the ballet studio director, Erica the mother, and Lily (Nina's competition).
- Nina's dissociation, which climaxes during the sex scene, helps her aggressively and perfectly play the lead role because she is too weak and feminine to do so. Her dissociation also helps her become **independent** from her aggressive mother. In addition, the hallucinated sex scene between Nina and "Lily" represents Nina's rejection of the **caretaker** role.



"DID" IN SILENT HOUSE

- Sarah struggles to escape from a murderer in her house who attempts to kill her father John and injure her uncle Peter, only to discover that she herself did so by dissociating into a masculine identity.
- The mold behind the walls of the house symbolizes the decaying (fragmented) condition of Sarah's mind due to her trauma and thus reminds her to overthrow her traditional gender roles.
- The house symbolizes her mind forcing her to deal with her trauma to overthrow her traditional gender roles by dissociating into an **macho**, masculine identity who can help the **sensitive (nonaggressive)** Sarah assert her **independence** through violence.

Note: Although the diagnoses of the individuals within each film with DID may not be entirely accurate (and some individuals may express 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.

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