

Human Beings and State of Minds: Analysing Select Illness Narratives

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M A English (2021-23)

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Abstract

This paper aims to unravel the disparate aspects of human minds with illness narrative. *Fight Club* by David Fincher and *Split* by M. Night Shyamalan are movies that portray the lives of characters with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). These two movies disclose how trauma and societal stigma lead the characters in to violence. The complexities in the human mind trigger questioning one's own actual identity, without fitting into sanity. The mind can be complicated as a puzzle, which can be tangled forever if it is not treated well. The societal stigmatization on mental health issues frequently results in misunderstandings and lack of compassion for people who are experiencing mental illness. Both the movies expose how surroundings can influence a human in moulding one's psyche. Also, these movies advocate for a more compassionate approach to mental health, supporting open communication and the de-stigmatization of mental illnesses in order to promote a happier, healthier society.

Keywords : Illness Narrative, Dissociative Identity Disorder, Human Psyche, Mental health, Trauma, Violence, Misrepresentation of illness.

Illness can be experienced as a more or less external event that has intruded upon an ongoing life process. At first, the illness may seem to lack all connection with earlier events, and thus it ruptures our sense of temporal continuity and if the rupture is not mended, the fabric of our lives may be ripped to shreds. It is in this context that narratives become particularly interesting. Narratives offer an opportunity to knit together the split ends of time, to construct a new context and to fit the illness disruption into a temporal framework. Narratives can provide a context that encompasses both the illness event and surrounding life events and recreates a

state of interrelatedness. In other words, narratives recreate a temporal context that had been lost, and thereby takes on meaning as part of a life process.

Illness narratives involve perceptions, experiences, interpretations, and evaluations of patient's actions and the courses of their lives revolving around disease. It also constructs worlds of illness, provide some kind of coherence around contingent events of bodily or mental suffering by contextualizing them and situating them in biographical contexts, and are some of the most important culturally available forms whereby people reinterpret and reevaluate their lives in response to disease. But their functions and consequences go beyond individual patients.

Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) is a mental health condition. People with DID have two or more separate identities. These personalities control their behaviour at different times. Each identity has its own personal history, traits, likes and dislikes. DID can lead to gaps in memory and hallucinations. It is used to be called multiple personality disorder or split personality disorder. A person with DID has two or more distinct identities, the "core" identity is the person's usual personality. "Alters" are the person's alternate personalities. Alters tend to be very different from one another. The identities might have different genders, ethnicities, interests and ways of interacting with their environments. Other common signs and symptoms of DID can include anxiety, delusions, depression, disorientation, drug or alcohol abuse, memory loss and suicidal thoughts or self-harm.

The Narrator and Tyler Durden, are the two main characters of David Fincher's 1999 movie *Fight Club*, which is based on Chuck Palahniuk's book of the same name. The Narrator, the unnamed protagonist, played by Edward Norton who remains nameless throughout the movie, is a recall specialist for an automobile company. He is physically well but attends several support groups for people suffering from illnesses since he despises his job and experiences insomnia. These groups allow him to express his emotions which causes an addiction. During one of the narrator's business trips, Tyler Durden is first presented. The narrator's dream character is Tyler. He is everything the narrator wishes to be. Tyler is clever, personable and ambitious. He is a charismatic and eccentric soap salesman. And stands for the depressed masculinity that the narrator portrays throughout the movie. Tyler's wants the narrator to let go and accept the pain and danger of life. Tyler and the Narrator start a "Fight Club" which eventually leads to a large group that intends to destroy important financial institutions in order to restore the societies credit back to zero. They established the fighting

club as a means of resistance and escape from social norms. As the club grows in popularity, it draws dissatisfied males who share a common frustration with life. However, the narrator starts to wonder about Tyler's objectives and the effects of their activities as the club expands into a bigger anarchist group known as Project Mayhem. The character of Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt, serves as the narrator's alter ego and serves as his confidant. Through the formation of fight club, Tyler Durden leads the narrator into a realm of self-destruction and anarchy. Tyler is the epitome of manhood, defiance, and rejection of social norms. *Fight Club* examines issues such as masculinity, materialism, identity, and the negative implications of social conformity as it concentrates on the protagonist's struggle with his competing egos, his desire for self-awareness, and the consequences of his actions.

The narrator's dissociation is shown in the movie as a result of his discontent with his existence and desire for rebellion against social conventions. The alter ego of the narrator, Tyler Durden, is an expression of his suppressed urges and wants. The narrator first thinks of Tyler as a different person because he isn't aware of his own split personality. The spectator finds out that Tyler is a reflection of the narrator's subconscious thoughts as the movie goes on. The existence of two distinct identities in the protagonist's psyche is the most prominent aspect of DID in the movie. Tyler Durden and the nameless narrator are two different selves that coexist within him. Narrator, presents himself as a well-mannered, responsible corporate employee who is not overly aggressive even when he wants to be. He is cautious, well-organized, and does not display any outward signs of unhappiness, but he has lost his passion for living. Tyler exudes charisma, and represents the qualities that the narrator aspires to. The narrator's remarks in the film are primarily internal monologues, and he doesn't speak to the other characters nearly as much as he thinks to himself, which is the first thing we notice about him. This is consistent with the introverted personality attribute. The fact that we can hear the narrator's internal dialogue also made it clear that he is more than just a cognitive machine and that he has a thorough understanding of both his position in his own company and that of his company in the larger, impersonal system of capitalism: "Everything is a copy of a copy of the copy...when deep space exploration ramps up it'll be the corporations that name everything..."(04:06-04:17).

He develops a worldview that is informed by his points of view of his professional life as well as by his own history of emotional maltreatment. The narrator has a lively imagination and is constantly daydreaming about tragedy, confrontation, and relationships, in contrast to his button-down facade. The last of which is evidently crucial to him. He is a highly sensitive

individual who longs for true emotional connection and belonging. In order to acquire the emotional connection, he didn't have as a youngster, he is even willing to lie about having testicular cancer.

Tyler Durden enters the scene with a boisterous excitement and what seems to be zero regard for anything. He seems to be the narrator's complete opposite. While the narrator is self-effacing, Tyler is self-assured. The narrator is reserved, whereas Tyler is impulsive. Tyler employs his broish live in the moment image to get people to down their guard before employing a tidal wave of magnetism to sweep them into his world of great plans and big ideas, whilst the narrator uses silence and politeness to hide his depressed psychological patterns. Tyler is able to see straight through others to identify their wants, needs, and vulnerabilities. He then uses his viewpoint and weaponized emotional intelligence to shape them into the person he wants. Also, he has contempt for the corporate machinery, which is expressed as though the narrator has a radical plan for putting his contempt into action. He rarely displays emotion that is unrelated to a specific goal he is working toward and appears to be acceptable with emotionlessness. He is surrounded by people, but he has no relationship with any of them. Although the two individuals take distinct paths toward achieving their objectives, they essentially share the same goals and vision. Both Tyler and the narrator employ emotional dishonesty to establish a sense of community; both think that companies are emasculating and demeaning people.

The idea that they are two different individuals is internalized by the patient, which results in DID. According to studies, people with DID frequently exhibit high levels of suggestibility, stress and imagination. Suggestibility is the tendency to internalize other people's beliefs, and it is clear from the movie's introduction that the narrator has done a lot of this. So where did others get the idea that the narrator was two people? It started in society. The narrator struggles with his place in the world throughout the film. He accepted the false dichotomy that conformity is morality, believing that in order to be good, he must follow the career and educational path set out for him by others. Organizations that are hierarchical have a tendency to discourage independent thought and self-assertion. Because of this, conformity is portrayed to others as morality, and the narrator desperately desires to be moral. Any aspect of his personality that deviates from the fictitious boundary he has set around his psyche is therefore transferred onto the alter ego he gave himself. All of the narrator's independence, bravery, and daring are suppressed until a powder keg of restlessness, isolation, and sexual frustration explodes. However, this is only an illusion. Tyler is part of his personality and he

needs him, without Tyler the narrator will passively go along with a depersonalized system that he hates. And Tyler also needs a narrator because without him he is a dangerous emotionally manipulative cult leader who gets people killed for no reason.

At the same time M Night Shyamalan's 2017 psychological thriller movie *Split* portrays a character named Kevin suffering with DID, who has 24 multiple personalities. Kevin kidnaps three teenage girls and holds them captive in an undisclosed location. Throughout the movie, Kevin's various personalities begin to show themselves and engage with the girls and with one another. Kevin Wendell Crumb, portrayed by James McAvoy, is a complex individual who possesses multiple distinct identities or alters, each with their own unique characteristics, mannerisms, and behaviours. Throughout the movie, Kevin displays a variety of personas, emphasizing the disorganized state of his mind. Viewers will see several alters taking control of Kevin's body as the film goes on. Among the well-known alters are Dennis, Patricia and Hedwig. Each alter has unique drives, aspirations, and reactions to the outside environment. The alters may exhibit a variety of characteristics, such as being violent, maternal, compulsive, or protective. He has internal tensions and an air of unpredictability as a result of the presence of various alters. Dennis, one of Kevin's alters, is portrayed as being rigid, exacting, and compulsive. He takes over Kevin's body and frequently serves as the leader of the other alters. Patricia, another alter, is shown as being maternal, strong, and affluent. She has a distinctive accent and frequently wears feminine clothing. Hedwig, a nine-year-old alter, is portrayed as innocent, mischievous, and childlike. He exhibits behaviours typical of a young boy and communicates with a lisp. Beast, the 24th personality of Kevin depicted as a dangerous and superhuman being, for whom he prepares sacred food – the three girls. Surprisingly, one of the victims survive from being consumed by the Beast. Casey escapes from the tragedy of Kevin's alters. The alters are created as his defence mechanism. They connect, converse, and materialize with others, giving glimpses into the complexities of DID. Each of Kevin's unconscious desires is reflected in them.

The film explores Kevin's struggle with DID. The existence of Kevin's alters causes him to have severe memory gaps and amnesia. It's possible that when one alter is in charge, they are unable to access memories of past events that took place when another alter was in charge. For instance, when Dennis assumes charge, he is aware of the other alters and what they are doing, whereas other alters might not be as conscious. This break in memory continuity is a typical trait of DID. Throughout the film, several alters concurrently reveal their presence at various periods. Each change has unique traits, behaviours, and even accents, and they all

happen suddenly. The abrupt alterations in Kevin's appearance and behaviour point to the presence of DID. They can speak or argue with one another, highlighting the coexistence of various identities in Kevin's consciousness. In one scene where Kevin meets with his therapist, Dr. Karen Fletcher (Betty Buckley), after claiming the identity of Barry, one of his alters, Kevin switches between his alters in the middle of the talk, changing from Barry to Patricia. The abrupt shift in Kevin's mannerisms, speech, and demeanour shows the existence of multiple personas within him. In the hideout, Dennis and Patricia, Kevin's alters, invite the captive girls to a celebration. The two alters are shown interacting with the girls while flipping between them throughout the scene. Later when Casey comes across Kevin in front of a mirror, she watches him switching quickly between various identities. His appearance and behaviour alter with each shift, illuminating the disintegration of his identity. The visual impact of this scenes highlights Kevin's numerous personas.

Trauma plays a huge role in Kelvin's mental state. The subject of physical abuse and its insidious psychic effects is at the heart of the movie. Kevin exhibits odd behaviour throughout the entire film, which documents his dissociative identity disorder- related mental illness. Kevin behaves violently, he kidnaps and kills individuals to further his own agenda. Even though Kevin's DID dominates the narrative, trauma might be seen as the root cause of his DID. Dennis, the character that dominates the most of the movie, makes references to Kevin's abuse in his conversations with their therapist, Dr. Fletcher, and eventually shows it in a flashback toward the conclusion. Kevin adores his father dearly and is so devastated when the latter dies in a train accident that his thoughts become tangled. In a flashback, his mother physically beats him and gives birth to Dennis, the first "alter," by doing so. Due to his knack for keeping things perfectly clean and pristine in particular, Kevin's stronger personality helps him deal with situations and prevent his mother's anger. Kevin manages by creating substitute personalities who have the many strengths he lacks. And with no adequate support system in place, a powerful yet monster identity emerges to defend Kevin. That is childhood maltreatment before the age of five is a common trigger for the disorder. The re-emergence of Kevin's genuine identity, which had only survived his mother's abuse because it had been meticulously shielded by his alternate identities, was caused by his clear recollection of that incident. He is not a villain since he is a victim, and neither is he responsible for his behavioural problems. One of the three abducted girl Casey is too a victim of physical abuse like him, as they both are two sides of a coin. When he notices Casey's body is scarred, which may be the consequence of torture or self- inflicted wounds, he decides against carrying out his disastrous

attack on her and stops himself, telling her, “You are different from the rest.” Recognizing another victim, he indignantly roars, “Rejoice! The broken are the more evolved! Rejoice!” (1:44:23-1:45:04).

Although it's a relatively common trope to link abuse to mental illness, the movie shows sympathy for him and acknowledges that he was abused. Kevin is set apart from the damaging notion that violent behaviour is a natural result of mental illness because to the way that Shyamalan develops empathy for him. In sequences involving another character, Kevin's therapist Fletcher, whom he frequently meets during the course of the action, Shyamalan lays out the essence of that crucial distinction between the broken and the rest. The main emphasis of the film is Dr. Karen Fletcher, Kevin's therapist, as she works to comprehend and support him through his condition. She is a kind therapist who converses with Kevin and his different identities in a cool, even fun manner, treating them all with respect as unique individuals. Although she acknowledges that Kevin is gravely ill and experiencing tremendous emotional suffering, she downplays or even ignores the prospect that he could endanger both others and her. She acts in a way that Shyamalan successfully portrays as naive because she is working for his welfare, not for the good of society as a whole. Karen says, “I've lost patients to the system,” and adds, “I want you to know, Dennis, I will never stop fighting for you...My patients have become my family” (1:13:36-1:13:48). Her oppositional perspective of "the system" as an enemy as opposed to a strategy for group defence suggests a form of countertransference, a connection with her patient's desires, which as a result of his illness may well turn out to be destructive. She believes him to be innocent because of his mental condition and consequent lack of responsibility, but in reality, he has the more in-depth information because of the abuse that caused his illness, making her the comparatively greater innocent. She totally ignores the thought that they could be using her because she is so desperate to preserve an emotional connection with him - with his multiple personas. Karen uses the word "family" in an unconditionally positive manner, which is even more telling than her simple but deeply felt attitude. She clearly intends to indicate deep concern and even love, but "family" evokes up images of danger, terror, and suffering for both Casey and Kevin. In the movie's conclusion part Kevin wants Casey to murder him after becoming aware of the horrific things his alters has done, such as kidnapping the girls, killing Dr. Fletcher and discovering her in his room. Kevin wants Casey to cease doing wrongdoing, so that he can stop harming people. He is unable to face reality. This shows Kevin is not aware of what is happening within himself and his alters, totally complicated state of minds.

Exploring illness narrative in the movies *Split* and *Fight Club* sheds light on the complex and intricate relationship between human beings and their state of mind. Both movies explore the subject of psychiatric problems and how they can affect a person's sense of reality and perception of who they are. We see how Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) is portrayed in the movie *Split*, where the main character's mind splits into many identities, each with distinctive characteristics and skills. This story highlights the devastating impacts of trauma and abuse on mental health while also casting doubt on our conceptions of the human mind's capacity for adaptability and resilience. However, *Fight Club* takes a different approach to the idea of two distinct identities. The protagonist's alter ego is a reflection of his suppressed feelings, dissatisfaction with society expectations, and desire for emancipation from the limitations of contemporary life. The film poses provocative concerns regarding the extent to which a person's psyche can fracture when faced with intense unhappiness and internal conflicts. Both films illustrate the significant impact of mental health on human behaviour and choices. They stress the significance of understanding and treating mental illness as well as the possible negative effects of not doing so. These films also highlight the stigmatization of mental health issues, which frequently results in misunderstandings and a lack of compassion for persons who are experiencing mental illness.

The movie *Fight Club* strongly emphasize the flaws in contemporary consumerism and maintains a "fight the system" attitude throughout, which aims to make a statement about how society's rules and "the system" affect a person's pursuit of happiness overall. One important similarity between the DID in *Fight Club* and the actual condition is the idea that the other identities exist as a form of coping for that individual. Often, a stronger, more self-assured personality will take control for the person's benefit. "I'll bring us through this. As always. I'll carry you – kicking and screaming – and in the end you'll thank me" (2:11:35-2:11:42), Tyler told the narrator. Since consumerism's hegemony is the main source of psychological abuse in the movie, Tyler Durden must stand in for the narrator's internal desire to rebel against the system. Dryden was aware of his role the entire time, while the narrator didn't realize it until the film's conclusion: "All the ways you wish you could be, that's me. I look like you wanna look, I fuck like you wanna fuck, I am smart, capable, and most importantly, I am free in all the ways that you are not" (1:53:19-1:53:35).

Split is reckless in its depiction of a very real condition, even if the mentally ill are, of course, not monsters. The movie blurs the distinction between fact and fiction by fusing the two. That the movie empathizes with Kevin and realizes that he is not always cruel but has

simply had a difficult life is not fair. Kevin is not considered responsible; instead, his illness is blamed. Kevin introduces a 24th ego at the conclusion part, a superhuman cannibalistic murdering machine known as “The Beast.” His DID transforms Kevin into a monster in real life. *Split*’s association of the mentally ill with the evil supernatural, further “othering” them, doesn’t help the widespread misunderstanding of mental illness, especially rare illnesses like this one. Both movies featured some form of stigmatizing behaviour or denigration upon the character who has DID, that is usually seen in the real life of patients with mental health issues. Relating to the DID patient or any of his or her alternative states, characters suffering DID were called “monstrous,” “unstable,” “crazy,” and “freak,” among other terms that are demeaning. In *Split*, Kevin was subjected to insults and some stigmatizing language. Additionally, stigmatization can lead to exclusion, discrimination, and patients whom put off getting help out of concern for rejection.

Both movies employed violence to depict the illness. This is the most frequent critique of the disorder in movies. Here, violence is employed to enhance the movie experience. Patients who truly have DID feel prejudiced against when they learn that most other people know about the illness from media and movies. Everyone has this suppressed discontent against the foundation of our consumerist society, even though few will go as far as to create a separate identity to combat it, hence the movie *Fight Club* utilizes DID as a hyperbole or metaphor. In this regard, DID wasn’t represented negatively in the movie; rather than being a disorder, it was seen as a blessing.

The media’s repeated misrepresentations and dismissals of DID are the cause of the controversy and opposition the movies have encountered. The fact that this disorder is misunderstood and that DID is not recognized in the public and medical worlds leads to inadequate training and research is a key point stated by many of the film critics. The distressing signs and symptoms of a mental disease must be resolved by all DID patients. The fact that society does not acknowledge their mental condition worsens this challenge. The depiction of DID as a real condition requiring proper care is therefore a more pertinent and important problem. The doubt surrounding the diagnostic validity of DID is a significant topic that the movie touches on and may help to relieve. The past and present of the illness have both generated controversies. Some researchers argue that the majority of diagnoses of DID are made after implicit hypnotic suggestions by a few psychiatrists (Frankel, 1990; Ganaway, 1995; McHugh, 1995). They argue and depict DID to the public as an iatrogenic disorder, an illness caused by medical examination, instead of a traumagenic disorder, an illness caused by

traumatic events. Others argue that DID is not a disorder at all. Contemporary researchers have concluded that the disorder is an epiphenomenon of borderline personality disorder (Lauer, Black, & Keen, 1993). These contradictory assertions about the disorder call into question whether DID is an actual medical condition. Because of this, practitioners are frequently hesitant to diagnose DID, and other professions lack adequate training in how to treat DID. Unfortunately, the way DID has been portrayed in the past in movies and other forms of media hasn't made this urgent problem disappear completely.

Furthermore, Dr. Karen Fletcher, Kevin's therapist in *Split*, takes on a much more clear role in promoting DID awareness. Despite playing the tired part of a deception in the serial killer's plan, Dr. Fletcher interacts with DID in a way that goes above and beyond what is required for a thriller to be suspenseful or profitable. This addition to the movie draws attention to DID's lack of widespread acceptance and diagnostic validity. Dr. Fletcher and her colleague's converse in the movie exemplifies the lack of knowledge and conviction among mental health specialists. The colleague questions DID's genuineness. However, Dr. Fletcher tells her colleague that DID is a unique disorder all on its own. Dr. Fletcher is committed to helping the DID community and ensuring that they may get her care. When she tells Kevin that some of her former patients were imprisoned rather than receiving further treatment, she encounters strong opposition from the industry and the government. Dr. Fletcher nevertheless sets out on a quest to speak for individuals who are afflicted by this condition and encourage further study. She is seen discussing the existence of the illness as well as the psychobiological variations in various identities in front of an audience of psychology professionals at a conference. Although the bodily disparities between identities that she describes that the movie portrays are somewhat overstated, the idea that many identities can display various biological traits deserves consideration something that is also desperately required in the world outside of *Split*.

Split acknowledges the controversy concerning DID while validating it. The need for validating the disease is essential since financing for evaluation and treatment of the disorder as well as for research is made possible by a formal diagnosis. A greater burden than the condition itself is dealing with the delegitimization of their symptoms and diagnosis on the social and medical spheres. The identification of DID gives those who have it a sense of validity for both their present experiences and their prior trauma. It encourages people to seek therapy for what might otherwise be disregarded, especially for those who are affected by the disorder but are ignorant of the true ailment. However, it is misleading to assert that the bad stereotypes

the movie can spread are insignificant in comparison to its success in creating awareness of DID. *Split* should be held to the accepted norm of not harming DID sufferers, despite the fact that it is a horror movie and a thriller intended to entertain rather than to document. Some DID sufferers could, and do, feel that their identities are inaccurately portrayed as a result of the violent portrayal of Kevin's identity. However, it is crucial for viewers to be able to assess a work's qualities and faults as informed observers. Through the character of Dr. Fletcher's work in the area, *Split* not only develops a wide portrayal of DID but also emphasizes how little is known about the disease.

By exploring illness narratives in *Split* and *Fight Club*, we are reminded of the importance of compassion, understanding, and support for individuals facing mental health challenges. The mind can be a dark and terrifying place. The only thing scarier than the paths our thoughts travel is the uncertainty of what could be going through someone else's head. These movies advocate for a more compassionate approach to mental health, supporting open communication and the de-stigmatization of mental illnesses in order to promote a happier, healthier society. These movies serve as a sad reminder that someone's mental condition can significantly affect how they perceive the world and behave. The human mind is still a complicated and intriguing puzzle, and they are a witness to this. We are able to make the world more accepting and supportive for people coping with the complexities of mental illness through empathy, education, and acceptance.

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