



Jekyll and Hyde

A Case Study

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Drawing from social and psychological theory, McKenzie Schooley reads Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as an extended case study in the hegemonic masculinity, homosexual repression, and psychological turmoil characteristic of the late nineteenth century. This essay was written for World Thought and Culture III with Drs. Stephen Weber and Shelley Rees.

THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. *Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, written by Robert Louis Stevenson, is a classic example of Victorian Gothic literature, bringing to life the darkest parts of humankind. Published in 1886, this novella quickly became a sensation. Although many read *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as simply a literary work, the text can also function as a case study for social scientists, providing pertinent examples of the manifestation of the oppressive and damaging enslavement to sociological and psychological norms for males in the late nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century was characterized by shifts in the relationships among gender, class, and nationality, from which rose the middle-class Englishman. By assigning significance to somatic and social differences, the English bourgeois were able to normalize the

effects of privilege and authority they accrued throughout the period. By taking the properties of what they deemed “normal” to develop a frame of reference for determining “abnormal” properties, the middle-class Englishman legitimized practices of devaluing and dehumanizing all “others” to bolster their social, political, and economic positions (Cohen 182).

Towards the end of the century, the English middle-class began to face many challenges. Most of the challenges stemmed from the fluctuations of the economy, labor organization among working classes, and emergent endeavors of middle-class women to distinguish themselves as political and economic entities. These antagonistic advances caused the “vexed relations between the middle-class Englishman and his many ‘others’ to reveal latent instabilities in masculine property and propriety that had remained obscured when unchallenged” (Cohen 183).

These “latent instabilities” emerge from social norms. Norms, or rules about behavior, are prevalent throughout both historical and contemporary societies (Grusky). From the universality of norms comes Durkheim’s idea of a “collective consciousness.” This is a set of shared ideas and beliefs held by all members of a society. These ideas and beliefs are put into place and policed by institutions, which are mechanisms of maintaining social order. Within the collective consciousness lie norms and social constructs.

The socialization of gender into categories, such as masculine and feminine, is a social construction (Grusky). A social construct is an idea or concept that appears to be natural, real, and obvious to those who accept it, but in reality is merely an invention of society. Although masculinity and femininity do not truly exist in any essential form, they have very real consequences in life. These social constructions can affect the social, political, ideological, and economic struggles among genders.

The prevailing and oppressive force affecting Dr. Jekyll stems from hegemonic masculinity. In order to better understand this concept, one must examine both hegemony and masculinity separately.

Masculinity refers to the “male norms” of society. Patricia Sexton suggests that male norms “stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure, and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body” (qtd. in Donaldson 644). Additionally, masculinity entails the rejection and objectification of feminine norms as well as females themselves.

Hegemony can be connected to Marxist ideas. It can be described as the “winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups in the process” (Donaldson 645). Most importantly, hegemony is about the ways in which the ruling class establishes and maintains dominance. It involves the persuasion of a large part of the population, which can be achieved through the media and social institutions (645). Hegemonic masculinity can be summed up by this quote from USAO professor Chris Garneau: “What’s good for women is good for women. What’s good for men is good for everyone.”

Emerging from this definition, some fundamental elements of hegemonic masculinity are heterosexuality and homophobia. There are three explanations for why male homosexuality is considered “counter-hegemonic.” First, hostility towards homosexuality is regarded as vital to male heterosexuality. Second, homosexuality is associated with the feminine rather than masculine. Finally, the form of homosexual pleasure, or gender of sexual partner, is considered noncompliant to male norms (Donaldson 648). From these criteria come the idea that, “women exist as potential sexual objects for men while men are negated as sexual objects for men” (645). Conforming to the demands of hegemonic masculinity “pushes heterosexual men to homophobia and rewards them for it, in the form of social support and reduced anxiety about their own manliness” (648).

Hegemonic masculinity can be described as a “lived experience, and an economic and cultural force, and dependent on social arrangements” (Donaldson 646). What can hegemonic masculinity do

to men? It can, “fascinate, undermine, appropriate some men’s bodies, organize, impose, pass itself off as natural, deform, harm, and deny” (646).

Dr. Jekyll is born into wealth, placing him in the upper-middle class or bourgeois by nineteenth-century standards. He has “every guarantee of an honorable and distinguished future” (Stevenson 42). Jekyll, however, has desires and pleasures that his peers and social norms deem wrong. He feels as though he cannot not freely express these desires due to his status in society. Jekyll explains this by saying, “many a man would have blazoned such irregularities as I was guilty of; but from the high views that I had set before me I regarded and hid them with an almost morbid sense of shame” (42).

This duality of self Jekyll experiences can be seen as a direct result of the oppressive societal force of hegemonic masculinity. The ideals of heteronormativity, imposed by nineteenth-century Victorian society, are problematic for Jekyll. As he had thinks about his desires and the dissonance they cause him, he draws “steadily nearer to that truth by whose partial discovery [he has] been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two.” (43). This two-ness is then physically embodied when Dr. Jekyll, through an undisclosed pharmaceutical concoction, becomes Hyde, the embodiment of the long-repressed desires.

Stevenson is never entirely transparent about these repressed desires, but the characters and reader can infer homosexuality. Jekyll admits that the reason for the creation of Hyde is for the feelings of freedom that accompany embodying this alter-ego, saying he feels “like a schoolboy, stripping off these lendings and springing headlong into the sea of liberty” (46). Jekyll also feels “younger, lighter, happier in body” when he embodies Hyde (44). These confessions not only symbolize Jekyll’s craving to be free of the societal expectations thrust upon him, but the allusion to an adolescent “schoolboy” seems to suggest homosexuality (Laubender). Jekyll writes, “the pleasures which I made haste to seek in my disguise were, as I have said, undignified” (Stevenson 46). These references to a forbidden

and emasculating sense of pleasure further emphasize the idea that Hyde is the embodiment of Jekyll's latent homosexual impulses.

The lack of female characters or love interests can also be a sign of homosexuality. Neither Jekyll nor Hyde ever mention or interact with women. Dr. Jekyll, the upright, refined Englishman, has no wife and no inkling of an interest in having one. Mr. Hyde, who is the embodiment of Jekyll's innermost desires, has no interest in women, either, even during his nightly trysts. The only female interaction occurs when Hyde tramples a female child at the beginning of the text. The violent encounter with the singular female in the text could represent the repercussions of the repression of his homosexual desires, attacking the socially "appropriate," but personally undesirable, object of his affections.

Charles Horton Cooley offers a theory of self that can help to enhance our understanding of Dr. Jekyll. The theory of the "looking-glass self" asserts that our self-concept, or view of self, is not merely an individualistic process, but also involves others in our society. Cooley ascertains that self-feeling and social feelings are not two separate entities, but rather different aspects of the same phenomenon. Both self and social feeling must be harmonious in order for the individual to be at peace. In other words, the way you see yourself must coexist and be congruent with the way others see you.

This theory focuses on society and how it shapes our identity. Cooley states that an individual's self develops as a result of the individual's interactions with and within society. The views of ourselves, therefore, stem from the consideration of personal attributes and impressions of how others may perceive us. Individuals' self-feelings largely depend on the societies in which they reside. For Dr. Jekyll, this society is oppressive and harsh. As stated previously, nineteenth-century Englishmen faced political and economic challenges and contended with ideas of masculinity.

In the case of Dr. Jekyll, self-feeling and social feelings are incongruent. Jekyll experiences irreconcilable dissonance between his self-feeling, which Hyde embodies, and his social feeling, which he

himself embodies. Jekyll feels as though he cannot reveal his self-feeling without ruining his social embodiment. These two feelings, Jekyll affirms, both uniquely belong to him: “though so profound a double-dealer, I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were dead in earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I labored in the eye of the day, at the furtherance of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering” (Stevenson 42). Because these two feelings, according to Cooley, are the same entity, Jekyll splits the two feelings into separate bodies to prevent the disturbing dissonance.

Very soon after Stevenson published his novella, one of the most influential men in psychological history began formulating his theories. Sigmund Freud’s theory of personality involved three structures, the id, superego, and ego (Peters). The id, according to Freud, is where our drives and instincts reside. The id operates on the pleasure principle, demanding immediate gratification, and resides in the unconscious. The superego is responsible for providing moral standards. It operates on the morality principle, motivating us to behave in a socially acceptable, and responsible, manner. Finally, the ego’s goal is to satisfy the demands of the id in a safe, socially accepted way. The ego operates on the reality principle, dealing with daily life and demands from both the id and superego, and resides in both the conscious and unconscious.

The rudimentary dilemma of human existence is the balancing act between all three structures. Fundamentally, these three structures cannot coexist because each negates the others. Different types of anxiety result from this constant power struggle. Moral anxiety occurs when the superego is in control. It features feelings such as guilt and shame. Neurotic anxiety occurs when the id and ego are in a power struggle. The ego fears it may lose control over the id and its socially unacceptable desires. If the ego becomes overwhelmed with conflicts between the id and superego, it can deploy defense mechanisms to prevent becoming overwhelmed by anxiety (Peters).

The defense mechanisms central to this analysis are repression and sublimation. Repression is an unconscious defense mechanism employed by the ego to keep disturbing thoughts or actions from becoming consciously executed. Sublimation is the satisfaction of an impulse with a substitute object in a socially acceptable way (Peters).

Viewing Dr. Jekyll through a Freudian lens provides another perspective on the behavior and outcome of Jekyll and Hyde. For so long, Jekyll experiences neurotic anxiety, fearing the Hyde within will rear its ugly head. He simultaneously experiences moral anxiety, feeling guilt and shame about his inmost desires. As a result, he employs repression as a defense mechanism. As time goes on, the neurotic anxiety becomes too much, forcing him to use sublimation. Jekyll's form of sublimation manifests as the literal splitting of his id from his ego and superego. Hyde represents the id, containing all of Jekyll's drives, urges, and socially unacceptable thoughts and feelings. Jekyll describes Hyde in this way, saying, "all human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil: and Edward Hyde alone, in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil" (Stevenson 45). By this sublimation, Jekyll is rid of the socially unacceptable parts of himself and able to live free of anxiety.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde can be read as merely a traditional Gothic novella featuring a dark and mystical transformation. This novella, however, is much more than that. Dr. Jekyll's plight gives readers a glimpse into the world and experiences of a late nineteenth-century Englishman. Within the text one can see the oppressive nature of hegemonic masculinity at work. The novella can also illustrate sociological and psychological theories and their impact on an individual. This text can function not only as a literary piece, but also as a social-scientific case study and commentary that illuminates the oppressive nature of late nineteenth-century societal and psychological norms that shackled and enslaved men. ►►

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