

How to Cite:

Harindran, A. M., Adwaith, J., Sreekanth, H., & Krishnajamol, K. (2022). Bipolar dissociation of personality in Cruella. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S6), 7521–7528. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS6.11057>

Bipolar dissociation of personality in Cruella

Aparna Harindran M.

Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India

Adwaith J.

Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India

Sreekanth H.

Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India

Krishnajamol K.

Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India

Abstract--Human psyche is a source of wonder and mystery, and its exploration is a major concern of eminent thinkers from time immemorial. *Cruella* (2021), which tells the reimagined version of Cruella De Vil, a fictional villain in the book and film, *101 Dalmatians*, is directed by Craig Gillespie. Cruella's emotional volatility and eccentric nature are deviant to the point of evil. Current study explores how the mental state of the central character is portrayed in the film. With the rebellious soundtracks of '60s and '70s, the character can be seen relishing social attention through the alternate persona. The study also focuses how mental illnesses are portrayed in the film even as they cannot be pinpointed of its causes in reality is sought through the paper. Even with the constantly evolving, course-correcting and adapting research, television sets the reality for the nature of psychological illness. Disney, on the other hand, defies all of that. The real-world implications of the false knowledge on conditions like schizophrenia or depression are critical. Knowledge of pro social factors can help individual turn more pro social and the lack of the same can lead to downfall – of both the person and society. Cruella remembers herself despite her dissociative personality and this guides her compassion and compass of morality in quite an interesting manner; aftermath of this feature of the character is worth exploration.

Keywords--cruella, dissociation, freud, mental health issues, cognitive emotion, bipolar, mania, ego.

Introduction

Hatred is a complex affective-cognitive emotion and attitude mixed with aggression. Both neurobiological and environmental factors influence hatred and aggression. Hatred can be manifested as overt or covert, externalised or internalised and somatised. Persistent and recurring, painful and traumatic experiences breed and exacerbate hostility and aggression. The ambivalence of all self-and-object relationships and conscious and unconscious fantasy reveals a mixture of hate and love. There is a preference for love over hatred in the mature personality. Hatred of sociopathic individuals and groups may be justified in some cases.

The prequel to “101 Dalmatians,” “Cruella” strikes a good balance between depicting the evil and tragedy in Cruella de Vil’s (Emma Stone) life and how she developed into the villain we know today. “Cruella” chronicles the adventures of Estella Miller (Emma Stone), a rowdy and rebellious adolescent with a flair for fashion. Because of Estella’s scathing and blunt commentary, her mother, Catherine (Emily Beecham), gives her the nickname Cruella. It is amusing to watch Estella create havoc at her primary school by initiating fights and standing up for herself. It injected vitality into the film. Estella’s life spirals out of control when her mother is assassinated by an unknown woman’s dalmatian guard dogs. This scene appears more astonishing than heart-breaking for the audience. Estella is an orphan who lives a life of criminal alongside two others named Jasper (Joel Fry) and Horace (Paul Walter Houser). Estella escalades her way into the fashion world as an employee of the Baroness (Emma Thompson), a fashion titan, through luck, creativity and a little scheming. The scenes in which Cruella displays her eye-catching and daring fashion are the film’s highlights. It provides her with raw strength, honed by her burgeoning evil.

However, Estella’s foray into fashion reveals an ugly truth about her past, and she quickly adopts the persona of Cruella, moulding her into the villain in the other half of the film. It is necessary to find scopes to relate her backstory to justify her deeds – mania-driven acts of revenge. Fortunately, her tragic backstory does not negate her villainous nature. Even though the backstory does not absolve Cruella of all her transgressions, the film still lavishes Cruella with ample sympathy. Unfortunately, the way mental health is framed in this film does not quite work. The film attempts to humanise the dog-skin protagonist by defining her as someone slightly different. She is an eccentric who can’t help but cause trouble, leaving us with a portrayal of mental health that is far more harmful than edifying. It uses her “craziness” as a prop to create drama rather than reflecting on what having mental health issues means in a regressive era like the 1970s.

As a young girl, Estella (Tipper Seifert-Cleveland) gets into all kinds of mischiefs she grows up outside of London. No matter how much she tries and cares for her mother, Estella keeps getting bad grades in her classes. Estella neglects the other kids’ mocking about her hair, which is part black and half white, lying down. She’s known as ‘Cruella’ for her tendency to lash out at people; she was no stranger to the head nurse’s office as part of ‘correction.’ Estella is dismissed and tasked with finding a new school at the end of the school year. She and her mother had hoped to make a fresh start in the metropolis, but disaster struck

when they stopped at a posh party on the way. The sight of Baroness' hounds pushing her mother off into the sea was too much for her to bear. Jasper and Horace are little Estella's new acquaintances, and their orphaned status opens a layer of pleasant feelings and familial dynamics. As a stranger and petty rogue, she needs the two street urchins' support to acclimatise to her new situation. They're a formidable trio of criminals, but a fraction of Estella wonders what it's like to work in a society where women can be successful without being labelled as "evil." Estella, at least, thought so when she obtained a dream career at the Baroness fashion house. For as long as she can remember, Estella has been enamoured with haute couture. She's enthralled when she encounters the empress of the cut, the much-lauded Baroness.

After becoming a valued apprentice, the Baroness takes Estella's designs as her own. No matter how much Estella attempts to be virtuous and do right by her, the worse her employer's behaviour turns out to be. Baroness is a narcissist who goes out of her way to debase and belittle Estella, pushing the young apprentice to hatch her form of vengeance. This is the node where Estella resorted to unleash Cruella. She receives some aid from the makeup department and a red wig that looks like her natural hair. Her new identity and existential crisis are mixed in an agreeable proportion to earn a living. This has been Cruella's life, and she often gapes why she was even born in the first place. Rather than allowing herself to succumb to the pain, she fights back. Even if Cruella turns out to be a villain, her acts can be considered noble because she is fearless and truthful. This is because she builds a new pattern of feminine behaviour that opposes victimisation and empty babble. As a result, she doesn't just defy the Disney princess cliché; she gives it a whole new meaning that exposes the complexities of the female experience.

A significant feature of bipolar disorder is the development of two distinct personalities (referred to as "dissociated parts" or "alters"), which we see in the film in the form of Estella and Cruella. A person may experience passive influence, in which one part exerts indirect authority (for example, alien thoughts, emotions, feelings, preferences, and so on), or a total dissociated intrusion, in which one party takes control of the body at the expense of another part. There is no cure for dissociative identity disorder, and treatments and diagnoses are still debatable. In general, psychotherapy is used to integrate various components so that dissociation is unnecessary or to achieve harmony between the multiple identities to work together.

In contradiction to the condition of sadness (melancholia), the manic phase of bipolar conditions has retained a difficult and sometimes ambiguous issue in Freud's description of affective illness. Freud addressed 'mania' in two writings, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) and *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1927). He contends in the first that insanity is founded on the same material as melancholia but in the direction opposite. Rather than being overpowered by the loss of the object, "the ego should have gotten over the absence of the object" or to put it another way, "the manic subject vividly exhibits his emancipation from the thing which was the source of his misery" (p. 255). For Cruella, her full-fledged transformation into the alter-ego is the route taken to achieve the state of liberation. When it comes to discussing mental health, the film is conflicted. On

the one hand, it wishes for the viewer to believe that something is wrong with Estella. We see her refer to herself as “as a little bit mad,” and we are aware that she has a long history of behaving in this manner. Cruella attempts to recruit an old friend, Anita Darling (Kirby Howell-Baptiste), to report on her antics in a scene halfway through the film. The way she presents herself to Anita reintroduces old patterns to the friend. “You know that glint in your eye,” Anita says calmly, “...I’m starting to remember that you have a bit of an extreme side” (Andrew Gunn Marc, Platt Kristin Burr, 2021).

Cruella’s manic condition indicates a rejection of external reality since it nullifies the emotional effect of her losses and regrets. As a result, the ego slides back and forth along the processes of its construction, but in inverse, reverting back to the pleasure-ego period. This enables Estella to flurry through her dreams at an astonishing pace in the movie; whether such a state functions in reality is of question though. In mania, the ego merges with the nurturing breast, effectively nullifying all of the functions of the superego, which serves as the internal representation of the reality principle within the individual. Indeed, the film frequently conflates Estella/possible Cruella’s mental health issues with her brilliance. It frames her confrontations with authority figures as systemic abuses due to specific authority figures’ inability to appreciate her exceptionality. “And might I say,” Estella’s mother (Emily Beecham) observes in response to her child’s expulsion, “your school seems to turn out horrible children with no creativity or compassion.” “...or genius,” Estella merrily adds. “Being a genius is one thing; raising a genius does come with its challenges,” Emma Stone narrates several scenes later (Andrew Gunn Marc, Platt Kristin Burr, 2021).

“The ego hates, abhors and pursues with intent to destroy all objects which are a source of unpleasurable feeling for it,” Freud proposed in his *Developmental and Dynamic Dimensions of Hate, Rage, and Violence* (1915) (p. 103). According to Freud’s parallel concept of a purified pleasure principle, noxious stimuli were projected outside the ego. According to contemporary theory, Cruella’s hatred is a complex affective-cognitive emotion and attitude laced with aggression. Aggression, as an instinctual drive, differs from hatred, which has additional structural components. Hatred and aggression, on the other hand, overlap, interpenetrate and easily merge. On both the clinical and neurobiological levels, the relationship between hate and love appears to be enigmatic. Aggression is never observed without libidinal drives. This is evident when Cruella grips to reality towards the climax and ameliorates with Estella; the two becomes somewhat similar shortly.

Estella’s need for Cruella: Dissociation of Personality

In the movie, Cruella’s transformation into “bad and a little bit insane” isn’t reasonable. The kind Jasper had arranged a job for her at Liberty of London, and sweet Estella in comely make-up and an auburn hairdo was overjoyed. Estella appeared to wonder why he would do such a lovely thing for her. And suddenly, out of nowhere, she transforms into Cruella de Vil, with thick make-up covering her face, a cane in her palm, and an all-leather outfit. When did she begin to put her own needs ahead of those of others? Even when Jasper realises this and calls it out, no one responds to his pleas. This is almost as if Cruella is saying,

“Darling, none cares.” According to Freud, a parent who has the most beneficial intentions can find themselves in a relationship riddled with ambiguity, which often leads to feelings of anger and hatred with their child. Cruella’s persona assumes that emotions are inherited in one way or the other. In the light of the experience of symbolic-imaginary envelope of the trauma she once experienced, a raw and unfiltered look of the division of the ego can be traced. Reitske Meganck’s “Beyond the Impasse – Reflections on Dissociative Identity Disorder from a Freudian – Lacanian Perspective” states:

Conflict between identificatory layers leads to suppression and symptom production in a more or less stable system; in a less stable system, it sets the stage for a possibly more drastic collapse of self-experience. We may locate the link between trauma and dissociation in respect to the relationship with the Other here. It appears that among DID individuals, where the trauma appears to be most concentrated in childhood interpersonal connections (Schimmenti and Caretti, 125).

Hate is capable of becoming adaptive. Attitudes and imaginations of love and hatred may function in opposition to one another and combine into symptom and character compromise formations. Is hate ever warranted or appropriate? There may be “a healthy hatred of scoundrels and terrible individuals and organisations” (Carlyle, 1850). Hate may serve as a defence mechanism against connection to abusive items or excessively dependent, gay, or incestuous love; homophobia and misogyny act as a bulwark against femininity, preserving the dominant masculine identity. For Cruella, the revenge climbs the ladder through an effort to establish her identity over her cruel birthmother. In adapting to separation and object loss, hate may screen grief and facilitate gradual mourning (Searles, 1962). This stood as a hindrance for Estella to mourn for her caring mother Catherine. Emily Beecham’s Catherine is a complex character in the film. She begins as Estella/dedicated Cruella’s mother, who wants the best for her daughter. This often results in her freezing Estella and her distinct personality to keep her safe. Subsequently, the viewers discover that Catherine merely did this because Estella would grow up to be like her biological mother if she hadn’t interfered. While Catherine is unquestionably concerned about her child, her lying casts doubt on her integrity. Perchance, one may allude to the unpredictability of bipolar disorder to validate her choices.

When an essential character in media gets diagnosed with a mental illness, the person is often transformed into a walking caricature. The entertainment industry highlights all that is wrong with individuals who have a mental disease, and they are seldom handled with the complexity they deserve. For instance, although bipolar disorder is one of the most prevalent and well-known mental diseases in the United States, it continues to be severely stigmatised. When a primary character suffers from this condition, authors depict them as having greatly exaggerated mood swings, exhibiting violent behaviour ranging from linguistic to physical, and a heightened mania level. This is all done to keep the audience entertained for the duration of the character’s plot, or until the character can be written into the backdrop without having to deal with the treatment element of having this mental illness, or until the character is killed off. As Cruella’s surfacing can never be wholly expressed psychically, Freud defined this process as structural trauma, the basis of repression. According to Freud, the drive was fundamentally traumatic. Estella’s separation from Cruella at the root of the ego

is the cause of friction and repression in neurosis. This includes the birth of the unconscious as well as the fundamental split in human cerebral operation. Given postulates of Freud on ego's transformation with respect to the environment can define Cruella rebellion that runs effortlessly with the rock-punk age:

Although it is a digression from our aim, we cannot avoid giving our attention for a moment longer to the ego's object identifications. If they obtain the upper hand and become too numerous, unduly powerful and incompatible with one another, a pathological outcome will not be far off. It may come to a disruption of the ego in consequence of the different identifications becoming cut off from one another by resistances; perhaps the secret of cases of what is described as 'multiple personality' is that the different identifications seize hold of consciousness in turn. Even if things do not get this far, there is still the issue of conflicts between distinct identifications into which the ego is divided, conflicts that cannot be defined as wholly diseased (pp. 30-31).

Based on the above observation, the central character in the movie cannot be considered ill. Aversion treatment, hypnosis, and electric shock therapy have all been used on Cruella De Vil in *102 Dalmations* by Dr Pavlov to help her overcome her inclination to skin puppies. After hearing the loud ringing of Big Ben, she reverts to her former habits and wants to be named Ella/ Estella since Cruella seems too vicious. Since the movie is based on Cruella De Vil, one can overlook it for not having anything to say about society's treatment of those who are mentally ailing. This progression to *101 Dalmations*, Cruella De Vil's magnificent Dalmatian suit with a fur hood, who is she if not an eccentric woman? It is via Cruella's genesis narrative that we get a glimpse into Cruella's childhood. As a baby, Estella had an insatiable curiosity and an outsized personality. For the sake of socialising with others, she and her mother agree to name her "Cruella" and keep her away from the public eye.

Estella's mother is killed by the Dalmatians after an evening out at a gathering. However, we subsequently find that the Dalmatians were directed to murder Estella's mother by the Baroness, also Estella's ancestor. In this film, Cruella de Vil goes through a manic phase that is well-illustrated. With her mother having died, Estella had no choice but to live in poverty with Jasper and Horace while using her ability for fashion design to conduct criminal acts. Estella's recollection of her mother's murder by the Baroness is seen at this point in the film. While she maintains her connection with the Baroness as "Estella" during business hours, Cruella creates and models her creations and emerges as a new up-and-coming fashion icon by night.

Cruella argues that identity formation is one thing, but a person's character at a particular point in time is wholly dependent on external competitions. Along with her inner mirror twin Cruella, Estella is aware that the inversion process occurs when one of the identities is threatened; Cruella undergoes a certain 'cooldown' after a fashionable feat is carried out against her adversary. According to Lacan, body image is the first layer of the Ego, hence there is a play of costumes that articulates visual blitzkrieg and shows of attitude. The rebellious fashion sense pierces the audience's viewers' screen and Cruella ultimately demands spotlight. With rich visual imagery, the competition is more than personal; the Ego earns recognition and to overwhelm the enemy at their own turf:

The child identifies with the (mirrored) picture, gaining control of its chaotic physical sensation and the disruption caused by the drives. Whereas animal evolution could be regarded entirely policed by the image (the Fictitious order), the sentient subject must be incorporated into the symbolic order, facilitated by the words of others, the signifiers tried to introduce; i.e., the other's sayings, behaviour patterns, and gestures that gradually inform the infant of its bodily cohesiveness and unity; the Symbolic order. This process, in which the kid is progressively involved, immerses the child in what Lacan refers to as the "treasure mine of signifiers" accessible in the larger (immediate and cultural) language environment in which it must exist (Lacan, 489).

Lacan suggests the possibility that Estella subsides to as the Other, satisfying the pathos and healing the trauma in the form of an unheard inner conversation. Identity may not be cleanly split into such primary and secondary personas in the real world, but the layers exist. Images and words from the outside muddle with audience's sense of self and can render them fundamentally alienated. The initial untainted self might earn to be the Other and enter the shell as a tortoise does. Audience understands how identity is ultimately fragile from this conceptual perspective. Suppose multiple levels of identification are always in conflict. In that situation, the topic is essentially segmented: there is no ultimate or authentic ego to seek, only a schism at the heart of human life.

Conclusion

The film alludes to a probable disease or bipolar personality disorder through Cruella's horrific background, never diagnosed or wholly analysed. Unlike Glenn Close's rendition, Emma Stone's portrayal of Cruella de Vil is more realistic and passionate than malevolent. On the other hand, Stone's version of Cruella is a new creation, which means she has the opportunity to go even further and delve into her more frightening qualities than Close's version. To portray Cruella's narrative from the perspective of the character, the genesis story is a great way to do so. As the movie progresses, she goes from the shy Estella to strong Cruella and realizes within her 'without feeling' rushed or pressured. Estella/Cruella can grow because of the all-too-common bad parenting narrative that is so prevalent. That doesn't mean that the characters don't experience highs and lows, but rather that the dark humour and strong camp visuals perfectly blend with the characters' highs and lows.

It is understandable that her school or community didn't acknowledge the disorder or try to ail her trauma; from bullying to witnessing murder, her psyche was tested by repeated events until her condition manifested. Genes alone can control human behaviour? Or circumstances redefine a person's character? At least, the movie leans towards a strong 'yes.' Cruella is the baroness's daughter, whose behaviour is similar to a psychopath. Cruella exudes light on various mental conditions in society – primarily unaddressed and unacknowledged. Unlike the 101 Dalmatians variant of the same character, it is noteworthy that the director sheds a blitz of light on the workings of the ego, thresholds of hate and trauma and their combined consequence of altering the conscience.

References

- Blum, Harold P. "Developmental and Dynamic Dimensions of Hate, Rage, and Violence." *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2020, pp. 87–95. *Crossref*, doi:10.1080/0803706x.2019.1694699.
- Bokanowski, Thierry. *On Freud's Mourning and Melancholia (The International Psychoanalytical Association Contemporary Freud Turning Points and Critical Issues Series)*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2009.
- Cruella*. Directed by Craig Gillespie, Walt Disney Pictures, Marc Platt Productions and Gunn Films, May 18, 2021.
- Freud, Sigmund, et al. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (Norton Library)*. Revised, W. W. Norton & Company, 1990.
- Meganck, Reitske. "Beyond the Impasse – Reflections on Dissociative Identity Disorder from a Freudian–Lacanian Perspective." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 8, 2017. *Crossref*, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00789.
- Sofija, G., & Ivan, T. (2018). Quality of life in children with disabilities placed in foster families. *International Journal of Health & Medical Sciences*, 1(1), 18-27. <https://doi.org/10.31295/ijhms.v1n1.35>
- Suryasa, I. W., Rodríguez-Gámez, M., & Koldoris, T. (2022). Post-pandemic health and its sustainability: Educational situation. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(1), i-v. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6n1.5949>
- Ventimiglia, Giancarlo. "A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Bipolar Disorder." *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2018, pp. 74–86.