The Shadow Self: Dr. Jekyll's Professional Outlet

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“Unfortunately there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. If an inferiority is conscious, one always has a chance to correct it. Furthermore, it is constantly in contact with other interests, so that it is continually subjected to modifications. But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected.” – Carl Jung

Robert Lewis Stevenson’s novella, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* can be read as a criticism of professionalism during the Victorian era. It is a story about the tragic outcome of an individual who is required to repress his emotional needs and desires due to his position in life. Since its publication in 1886, there have been a vast number of interpretations and debate surrounding the nature of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. According to Irving S. Saposnik Stevenson’s story has “become the victim of its own success, allowing subsequent generations to take the translation for the original, to see Jekyll or Hyde where one should see Jekyll-Hyde” (751). Some critics, such as Daniel L. Wright and the author of an article in *The Science News*, have viewed the portrayal of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as a case of addiction. Other critics, such as Mary Rosner, view the relationship of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde a moral insanity, an idea that suggests “the moral faculty could be subject to disease” (27). However plausible these interpretations may be, I view Mr. Hyde as a manifestation of the shadow, the part of the self that is universally within us all. In this paper I will argue that in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Robert Lewis Stevenson portrays professionalism during the Victorian era as restrictive, repressing human emotions and desires. Consequently, this repression that is caused by societal pressure is principally responsible for Dr. Jekyll’s shadow consuming his consciousness. While the other professionals within the story are satisfied by their role within
society, Henry Jekyll is the prime example of an individual who desires more than what his profession offers him and struggles to fill that void. Dr. Jekyll lacks an emotional outlet to escape the confines of his professional career. As an outlet from his professional duties he pursues the alias of Mr. Hyde, a tangible representation of the shadow and the embodiment of all of his repressed emotions. Mr. Hyde can be seen as the only means of filling the void Dr. Jekyll has amidst his full emersion in his professional career.

According to Carl Jung in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, the shadow is a representation of the collective unconscious; it is “a tight passage, a narrow door, whose painful constriction no one is spared who does down to the deep well” (21). It is composed of the dark elements of the personality, having an emotional and primitive nature that resists moral control. Jung further describes the shadow as “a living part of the personality, and therefore wants to live with it in some form [that] cannot be argued out of existence or rationalized into harmlessness” (20). This nature of the shadow can be seen by Stevenson’s portrayal of Hyde. Stevenson portrays Jekyll’s shadow as a tangible entity that formed out of the years of repression from being a professional within London society. In “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: A 'Men's Narrative' of Hysteria and Containment,” Jane Rago makes an interesting point about Hyde’s defiance of description that further connects Hyde as being Jekyll’s shadow. Rago notes that “scattered throughout the narrative is a Hyde who, while visibly described in detail, still defies description: ‘Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation’” (282). The fact that Hyde seems to continually evade description can be Stevenson’s way of portraying Jekyll’s shadow. The extent of Hyde’s primitive and dark nature is revealed in the “Carew Murder Case” when a maid witnesses the gruesome murder of a prominent gentleman in London’s society, Sir Danvers Carew:
[The maid’s] eye wandered to the other, and she was surprised to recognise in him a certain Mr. Hyde, who had once visited her master and for whom she had conceived a dislike. He had in his hand a heavy cane, with which he was trifling; but he answered never a word, and seemed to listen with an ill-contained impatience. And then all of a sudden he broke out in a great flame of anger, stamping with his foot, brandishing the cane, and carrying on (as the maid described it) like a madman. The old gentleman took a step back, with the air of one very much surprised and a trifle hurt; and at that Mr. Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway. (Stevenson 1688)

It is important to note that Hyde’s murderous activities are completely opposite of the very nature of a doctor. Jekyll heals patients in his professional life, while the manifestation of violence in Hyde is depicted by his desire to kill-- not just anyone but a prominent London professional, Sir Danvers Carew. This aspect of Hyde is tied with Jung’s description of the shadow. Jung states that the shadow is “is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real" (119). Stevenson does exactly that in his portrayal of Jekyll’s pursuit of Hyde. Jekyll needs an outlet from his repression, which stems from the social expectations of professionalism, and thus causes Jekyll to pursue and experiment with the idea of Hyde. In “A Total Subversion of Character: Dr. Jekyll's Moral Insanity,” Mary Rosner states “since the publication of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in 1886, Hyde has been associated with specific Victorian fears...identified
with the primitive, lower nature, which everyone should seek to bring into subjection, he represents a stage that Victorians believed they had evolved beyond” (30). Although Rosner’s interpretation of Hyde is a kind of moral insanity, it is similar to my interpretation of Hyde as the shadow of Jekyll. Rosner states, “as we have seen, moral insanity similarly described a condition in which this lower nature, associated with the animal sensibilities, predominated because it was not held in check by the intellect or by the moral disposition” (31). Even Jekyll acknowledged Hyde as a sort of deviant, but it was his only way to begin to find his freedom from repression due to his professional background:

This familiar that I called out of my own soul, and set forth alone to do his good pleasure, was a being inherently malign and villainous; his every act and thought centered on self; drinking pleasure with bestial avidity form any degree of torture to another; relentless like a man of stone. Henry Jekyll stood at time aghast before the acts of Edward Hyde; but the situation was apart from ordinary laws, and insidiously relaxed the grasp of conscience. (Stevenson 1712)

The difference between interpreting Hyde as a kind of moral insanity to Hyde being Jekyll’s shadow lies in the control that Jekyll had at the beginning of his emergence. The active pursuit of Hyde also is representation of Jekyll’s knowledge of his dark side. Although the shadow does outwardly manifest itself as a kind of ‘moral insanity’, it encompasses a larger aspect of self-awareness that Jekyll displays throughout story. Labeling Jekyll as “morally insane” neglects to acknowledge his inward struggle with Hyde and dismisses his emotional repression.

In conjunction with the shadow is the persona, a facade or the manner in which a person assumes in dealing with the world. Every calling or profession has its characteristic persona where “a certain kind of behavior is forced on them by the world, and professional people
endeavor to come up to these expectations” (Jung 123). Although Jekyll’s persona is that of a respectable and intelligent doctor, his inner-self is markedly different. In “The Anatomy of ‘Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde’,” Irving Saposnik states that “as rational and sensual being, as public and private man, as civilized and bestial creature, [Jekyll] found himself necessarily an actor, playing only that part of himself suitable to the occasion” (716). Stevenson describes Jekyll’s physical appearance in a favorable manner; Jekyll was “a large, well-made, smooth-faced man of fifty, with something of a stylish cast perhaps, but every mark of capacity and kindness” (1686). Towards the beginning of the story, Jekyll gives “one of his pleasant dinners to some five or six old cronies, all intelligent, reputable men and all judges of good wine” (1686). He is part of the upper-middle class of London society, born to a large fortune, spends his time mingling among the lawyers and doctors and had always been known for charities. Although Jekyll may not have been keen to keeping up appearances, he continues to repair his public persona, after all nine-tenths of his life was filled with “effort, virtue and control” (1711). It is revealed after the murder of Sir Danvers, and Hyde’s subsequent, but brief, disappearance that Jekyll “came out of his seclusion, renewed relations with his friends, became once more their familiar guest and entertainer” (1693). He succumbs to a certain kind of behavior that is forced upon him by his world. In regards to the persona, Carl Jung states that it “is that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others think one is. In any case the temptation to be what one seems to be is great, because the persona is usually rewarded” (123). In Jekyll’s case his persona is rewarded by praise and acceptance from his peers and, overall, within his society.

The 1886 article “Confessions of Doctors” published by the London Society makes a clear statement about the expectations that doctors faced during the Victorian era. The author states that “in going about the world it is not impossible to see that there is a kind of infallible pope set
up in many families, who is none other than the family doctor” (49). The author continues to claim that doctors “see a great deal of the worst of life; its meanness, selfishness, irritability and cowardice. [A doctor] complained that the public treated him very unfairly. ‘They expected him, sir, to be omnipotent. They send for him in illness, and expect that a medical man will immediately be able to do everything’” (51). To regard a physician as being as an “infallible pope” who is “omnipotent” is quite a large responsibility to place upon another human being. There is a large sense of moral duty that the public places on doctors. Because of this idea that people have placed upon doctors, being an all-knowing healer, it is important to understand that a doctor’s professional persona did not just end when clocking in and out of work— it remained when even among social occasions as it is described in the story. But unlike Dr. Lanyon, Jekyll does not embrace his professional persona as his actual one. In fact, Jekyll regards it as “the self-denying toils of [his] professional life” (Stevenson 1715). According to Stephen Arata in "The Sedulous Ape: Atavism, Professionalism, and Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde", Jekyll, though the means of Mr. Hyde, “seeks to slough off these same burdens of respectability, reticence, decorum, self-censorship—of gentlemanliness—and spring headlong into the sea of liberty” (242). In Stevenson's view, to be professional was to “be bourgeois, and to be bourgeois was to embrace the very blindesses, evasion, and immoralities delineated in Jekyll and Hyde” (242). The freedom from Jekyll’s repression was found in the existence of Hyde; although Jekyll could not commit to either side, he toyed with the idea of living out his innermost repressed desires.

It is important to note that Jekyll’s relationships are all with other professionals, which confines him to the certain professional persona that he feels obligated to maintain. At one point in his life, Jekyll has close personal relationships with Dr. Lanyon, a prominent and well-
respected doctor in London and with Mr. Utterson, a well-respected lawyer within the London community. Both Dr. Lanyon and Mr. Utterson seem to be content with their lifestyles and their Victorian gentleman qualities. When closely analyzing the characteristics of Jekyll’s peers, it is apparent that Jekyll is very much unlike them; he is more self-aware. Throughout the novella the character of Hastie Lanyon serves as a foil to Jekyll. Lanyon is a doctor as well, but he is free from fancy and is the epitome of rational thought. Jekyll, on the other hand, is discontent with the limits of rational thought and has other, more metaphysical and spiritual fancies. Their relationship eventually suffers because of Jekyll’s metaphysical endeavors, which Lanyon regards as “unscientific balderdash”; he later claims “Henry Jekyll became too fanciful for me” (Stevenson 1683). While Dr. Lanyon is portrayed as a completely rational Victorian gentleman, Stevenson portrays Mr. Utterson as being quite an uninteresting character; he is “never lighted by a smile,” he spoke very little, and he seems “lean, long, dusty, [and] dreary” (1678). At the same time, however, Utterson is also lovable due to his polite and gentlemanly qualities. Utterson, being a main character within the story, remains rational and does not indulge in fancy, but his struggle to understand the circumstances of Dr. Jekyll is apparent. Stevenson makes a distinct difference between the natures and personalities of the everyday bourgeois Victorian gentleman and the nature of Dr. Jekyll to illustrate the aspect of repression for those individuals who do not fit the norm of society.

Although Jekyll may have been a respected doctor at one point in his life, his discontentment with his professional persona is revealed to the reader in “Henry Jekyll’s Full Statement of the Case”. He was aware of the duality within him and experimented with the idea of freedom from his repressed lifestyle. He pondered at the fact that he “had not yet conquered [his] aversion to the dryness of a life of study” and we realize that Jekyll was, in fact, aware and
struggling with his shadow-self (Stevenson 1712). In regards to his duplicity of nature, Jekyll explains:

The worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many, but such as I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public. Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures; and that when I reached years of reflection, and began to look round me and take stock of my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of me. (1709)

By duplicity, Jekyll could be alluding to the shadow within him. Jekyll was very aware of the fact that he was not all good, that there was a deep blackness that was not allowed to be unleashed.

The cause for Jekyll’s loss of conscious state and his ultimate demise comes back to the aspect of repression that was present in Jekyll’s life. Jekyll does not reconcile with Hyde, which is an important factor in the uncontrollable nature of his shadow. Jekyll is brought up within a society that esteems only the good and that became part of the reason he succumbed to the powerful nature of his shadow. Initially, Jekyll regarded Hyde as a kind of freedom from the chains of professionalism and from society, but this freedom slowly transforms into a kind of slavery:

I would still be merrily disposed at times; and as my pleasures were (to say the least) undignified, and I was not only well known and highly considered, but growing towards the elderly man, this incoherency of my life was daily growing more
unwelcome. It was on this side that my new power tempted me until I fell in slavery.

(1712)

Just as much as the public hated the dark nature of Hyde, in the end, Jekyll questioned his “freedom” that he acquired through the means of Hyde. Jekyll states that he began to be “tortured with throes and longings, as of Hyde struggling after freedom; and at last, in an hour of moral weakness, I once again compounded and swallowed the transforming draught” (1715). Jekyll tries to stop becoming Hyde, and with that his shadow comes back with a vengeance. It can be referred to as the return of the repressed in Jekyll. The fact that Jekyll was struggling to contain his shadow, because of his guilt of indulging in pleasure that was considered immoral by society, causes it to come back stronger than before, and become uncontrollable, until it in itself becomes a source of slavery.

The aspect of the restrictive nature of professionalism is the driving source of tension in Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and causes the emergence of Jekyll’s shadow. The shadow is a form of oneself that can manifest from long-term repression of emotional needs and desires. In the case of Dr. Jekyll moral, societal expectations and the expectations that come with his professional career causes Dr. Jekyll to aspire for a release of this shadow, providing him an outlet for freedom. The emergence of Mr. Hyde is based upon Dr. Jekyll’s need to fill the void caused by his title. Stevenson’s portrayal of Hyde ties into his portrayal of the restrictive nature of being a professional, and his portrayal of Jekyll is a prime example of those individuals who cannot find contentment within that Victorian social structure.
Works Cited


