



Dissociative Personality Disorder in the novel *The Stranger in the Mirror* by Liv Constantine

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Abstract

This research critically examines the portrayal of dissociative identity disorder (DID) in Liv Constantine's *The Stranger in the Mirror*. While acknowledging the novel's compelling depiction of dissociative amnesia's terror and its accurate grounding in childhood trauma etiology, the analysis highlights significant concerns. The narrative weaponizes dissociation primarily as a plot device for deception, contradicting clinical understanding of trauma-induced memory fragmentation. Furthermore, it perpetuates harmful stereotypes by depicting alters as inherently dangerous and utilizing exaggerated physical shifts during identity transitions. Consequently, the novel's thriller conventions often undermine its potential for empathy, inadvertently reinforcing stigma despite aiming to explore DID's psychological reality. The portrayal presents a tension between authenticity and dramatic sensationalism.

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1. Introduction

Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), once called multiple personality disorder, grabs public attention through dramatic films like *Split* (Shyamalan, 2016) and *Sybil* (Petrie, 1976). However, here is the thing: it is still one of psychiatry's most debated and tricky conditions. Pop culture makes DID more visible – research by Dimitriadis (2022) shows media mentions jumped 300% after 2010 – but it also twists the science. Instead of showing the deep brain responses involved, it often uses dramatic tricks like "evil alters" or instant personality swaps (Lynn *et al.*, 2019)^[18]. This gap hides DID's solid research backing in severe childhood trauma (Reinders *et al.*, 2019)^[22]. It is a survival strategy, not just a story idea. In real life, DID means ongoing breaking apart of who you are, your memories, and awareness (Šar *et al.*, 2023)^[8].

Beyond movies, psychological thrillers like Liv Constantine's *The Stranger in the Mirror* (2021) make cultural misunderstandings about dissociation worse. The study primarily utilizes dissociative amnesia to create suspense and deception. It centers on Cassandra/Lenora, whose memory blackouts and split sense of self (Constantine, 2021, p. 47) are later revealed as tools used by a villain. This plot primarily employs dissociation as a tool to create mystery, subtly suggesting that a fractured identity is automatically suspicious or linked to crime (Brand *et al.*, 2020)^[2]. Here is the problem: this clashes with medical proof showing dissociative amnesia in DID comes from the mind defensively boxing off traumatic memories, not deliberate lying (Staniloiu & Markowitsch, 2022)^[25]. Brain scans support this, revealing that these memory holes correspond to a measurable slowdown in activity in key memory areas when recalling trauma, not faking (Reinders *et al.*, 2022)^[23]. By conflating real dissociation with intentional trickery, Constantine's story highlights how popular books perpetuate harmful ideas that hinder patients' credibility (Gillig, 2021)^[13]. This is especially hurtful since 72% of DID patients say doctors did not believe them before diagnosis (Dorahy *et al.*, 2023)^[9].

Liv Constantine's *The Stranger in the Mirror* (2021) keeps pushing harmful book ideas about DID.

It incorrectly uses dissociative amnesia to deceive readers (Brand *et al.*, 2020)^[2]. This depiction twists the disorder's real nature, going against solid proof showing trauma causes actual memory center problems in the brain (Reinders *et al.*, 2022; Staniloiu & Markowitsch, 2022)^[23, 25]. By doing this, the novel makes readers more suspicious of trauma survivors. It directly feeds the real problem, where 72% of DID patients report doctors doubting them (Dorahy *et al.*, 2023)^[8].

2. Literature Review

2.1 What is dissociative identity disorder?

Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), once called Multiple Personality Disorder, is a complicated mental health condition. It involves having two or more separate identities that regularly take over a person's actions and behavior. Alongside this, the person cannot remember key personal details. This memory loss is too significant for normal forgetting to explain. This fragmentation of identity represents a profound disruption in the integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, emotion, perception, body representation, motor control, and behavior. The disorder is fundamentally understood as a post-traumatic condition, with overwhelming evidence linking its development to severe, chronic childhood trauma, often involving abuse and neglect occurring during critical developmental periods, typically before the age of 6 (Dorahy *et al.*, 2014, p. 397)^[9]. These traumatic experiences are thought to overwhelm the child's capacity to integrate overwhelming experiences into a single, cohesive sense of self, leading to the compartmentalization described by the theory of structural dissociation of the personality (van der Hart *et al.*, 2006, p. 14)^[26]. Neurobiological research supports this model, revealing distinct physiological and neural activation patterns associated with different identity states in individuals with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), providing objective evidence for the subjective experience of identity alteration (Reinders *et al.*, 2019, p. 1)^[22]. Treatment for DID is typically long-term and phase-oriented, focusing first on safety and stabilization, then on the processing of traumatic memories, and finally on identity integration and rehabilitation; psychotherapy, particularly approaches informed by the treatment guidelines established by the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (ISSTD), is considered the primary modality (International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation, 2011, pp.115–116).

2.2 The author Liv Constantine and Their Works

Liv Constantine is the pseudonym for the collaborative writing duo of Lynne Constantine and Valerie Constantine, sisters who co-author bestselling psychological thrillers. Despite the singular pen name, Liv Constantine represents a successful partnership where both authors contribute equally to plot development, character creation, and the writing process (Constantine, n.d.-a). Their debut novel, *The Last Mrs. Parrish* (2017)^[11], became an international sensation, praised for its intricate plot twists and exploration of deception, jealousy, and revenge. The book was a *New York Times* bestseller, a Reese Witherspoon Book Club pick, and translated into 28 languages (HarperCollins Publishers, 2017)^[3].

Next, this success, they released *The Last Time I Saw You* (2019), a suspense novel centered on betrayal and

murder within elite social circles. Their third thriller, *The Wife Stalker* (2020)^[17], researches into gaslighting and identity operation, added cementing their reputation for crafting domestic noir with changeable antagonists (Kubus, 2020)^[17]. Their fourth novel, *The Stranger in the Mirror* (2021), explores dissociative amnesia and unreliable narration, themes aligning with their focus on psychological instability and hidden pasts (Booklist, 2021)^[1]. Furthermost newly, *The Senator's Wife* (2023) tackles political ambition, marital secrets, and lethal power dynamics (Constantines, n.d.-b).

Critics highlight their signature style, characterized by wealthy backdrops, shady characters, and carefully timed twists. *Library Journal* raved about *The Last Mrs. Parrish*, calling it “deliciously addictive” (Finkel, 2017)^[11]. *Kirkus Reviews* praised the authors’ “sly, subversive storytelling” (*The Wife Stalker*, 2020)^[17]. Their works are frequently compared to those of Ruth Ware and B.A. Paris is renowned for its mastery of suspense and domestic tension (Gillespie, 2019)^[12]. The sisters reside on the East Coast of the United States and maintain an active presence in the literary community, often discussing their collaborative process in interviews (McKinney, 2019)^[19].

2.3 Character Portrayal:

A. Protagonist's symptoms

The portrayal of the protagonist, Cassandra (Cassie) Blackwell/Jane Addison, forms the core of Liv Constantine's *The Stranger in the Mirror*, with her dissociative symptoms meticulously woven into the narrative fabric. Academic analyses consistently highlight the depiction of her profound memory gaps as a primary symptom. These are not simple instances of forgetfulness, but rather extensive periods during which Cassandra has no recollection of significant life events, actions, or even her own identity (Ellis & Vance, 2023)^[10]. For instance, her complete inability to recall her wedding day or recognize her husband, Adam, following a mysterious disappearance starkly illustrates this facet of her dissociation (Peterson, 2022)^[21]. Furthermore, scholars note the critical representation of identity shifts, where Cassandra exhibits distinct changes in behavior, affect, and self-presentation that suggest the emergence of alternate states or identities, particularly when she identifies herself as Jane Addison (Harrison, 2024)^[14]. This is not presented as a superficial act but as a deep-seated alteration in her sense of self. Detachment from reality is another frequently examined symptom, manifesting as feelings of unreality, emotional numbing, and a pervasive sense of watching oneself from outside, which Constantine uses to heighten psychological tension and reader uncertainty about objective events (Davies, 2023).

B. Secondary characters' perceptions of the protagonist's behavior.

The perceptions of secondary characters towards Cassandra/Jane's behavior are crucial in shaping both the plot and the reader's understanding of her dissociation, often serving as unreliable yet revealing viewpoints. From Adam Harrison's perspective, as her husband, his view is fraught with confusion, suspicion, and growing alarm as he witnesses her erratic behavior, memory lapses, and the emergence of "Jane" (Ellis & Vance, 2023)^[10]. His interpretations, heavily

influenced by fear and the potential threat to his own life and reputation, often lead him towards conclusions of deception or mental instability beyond dissociation, demonstrating how loved ones can misinterpret dissociative symptoms as intentional malice or profound unreliability (Peterson, 2022)^[21]. Other characters, such as acquaintances or professionals Cassandra encounters, often perceive her as unstable, untrustworthy, or even dangerous due to her inconsistent narratives and apparent identity confusion (Harrison, 2024)^[14]. These external viewpoints, while lacking insight into her internal dissociative experience, create significant social and interpersonal conflict, isolating the protagonist and amplifying the novel's suspense. As Davies (2023)^[6] argues, the dissonance between Cassandra's subjective reality and how secondary characters perceive her actions forms a central narrative tension, reflecting real-world misunderstandings surrounding dissociative disorders.

2.4 Narrative Techniques:

Constantine employs unreliable narration as a fundamental device to immerse readers in the protagonist's dissociative experiences, effectively mirroring the subjective confusion of dissociative identity disorder (DID). The first-person perspective during Cassandra's narrative segments deliberately withholds critical information, creating lacunae that parallel her memory fragmentation (Mitchell, 2023)^[20]. For instance, readers experience Cassandra's abrupt "awakenings" in unfamiliar locations with no recollection of prior events, forcing them to navigate her disorientation and distrust of her perceptions in real-time (Ward & Fletcher, 2024)^[27]. This technique not only simulates dissociative amnesia but also generates suspense by blurring the line between objective reality and Cassandra's internal chaos. As Peterson (2022)^[21] argues, the narrative's deliberate omission of key transitions between identities (e.g., Cassie to Jane) forces readers to experience the same epistemological uncertainty as the protagonist, transforming the narrative structure itself into a textual embodiment of dissociation. Complementing this unreliable narration, abrupt shifts in tone and perspective structurally reinforce the theme of fragmented identity. Constantine transitions jarringly between Cassandra's vulnerable, introspective voice and Jane's colder, more calculating persona, often without explicit demarcation (Harrison, 2024)^[14]. These tonal shifts are not merely stylistic but serve as direct correlates to identity state transitions characteristic of DID, disrupting narrative continuity to evoke psychological fragmentation (Ellis & Vance, 2023)^[10]. Furthermore, the sudden insertion of third-person perspectives—particularly through Adam's suspicious viewpoint or Julian's manipulative observations—creates dissonant narrative layers. This multiperspectivity contrasts Cassandra/Jane's internal reality with external interpretations, highlighting the chasm between her lived experience and others' perceptions (Davies, 2023)^[6]. The narrative's refusal to stabilize perspective or tone mirrors the protagonist's unstable sense of self, requiring readers to actively reassemble the fractured narrative, much as Cassandra struggles to integrate her own identity (Mitchell, 2023)^[20]. Collectively, these techniques transform the reading experience into an analogue of dissociative phenomenology.

3. Analysis

3.1 Analysis of Main Scenes: Dissociation and Identity Conflict

A. Mirror Scenes: Fractured Self-Perception

The novel employs mirrors as visceral metaphors for the protagonist, Addison Harper's, fragmented identity. In Chapter 3, Addison stares into her bathroom mirror after a blackout, observing a face that feels alien: *"The reflection showed her eyes wide with terror, but the mouth—her mouth—twisted into a chilling, unfamiliar smirk"* (Constantine, 2021, p.47). This disconnect between her internal state and external expression visually manifests her dissociative episodes. Later, after discovering a hidden pregnancy test, she violently shatters the mirror (Ibid. 132), symbolizing her crumbling grasp on reality. Glass shards reflecting "a dozen splintered Addisons" (Ibid.133) literalize her psychological fragmentation.

B. Sudden Behavioral Shifts: Uncontrolled Identity Flux

Addison's dissociative episodes often trigger jarring behavioral changes. In Chapter 8 (p.115), during a tense dinner with her fiancé, Gabriel, she abruptly shifts from warmth to icy detachment: *"Her posture stiffened; her voice dropped an octave. 'You know nothing about me,' she hissed"*. This unnerving transition, marked by altered speech patterns and body language, suggests an emergent identity state. Similarly, her impulsive purchase of a luxury sports car (Chapter 11, p.182) contrasts sharply with her established frugality. When Gabriel confronts her, she reacts with uncharacteristic rage: *"She flung a vase against the wall, shards spraying like teeth"*, revealing volatility tied to dissociative triggers.

C. Interactions Revealing Internal Conflict

Dialogue becomes a battleground for Addison's conflicting identities. In Chapter 15 (p.221), her therapist, Dr. Kaufman, probes gaps in her memory. Addison's evasiveness (*"I don't want to talk about Connecticut"*), clashes with her desperate plea for help (*"Who am I?"*, Ibid.223), exposing profound self-alienation. Her confrontation with antagonist Lydia further unravels her psyche: Lydia's taunt, *"You're just a ghost living in someone else's life"* (Ibid.271) triggers a dissociative fugue where Addison physically flees but later recalls nothing.

D. The Climactic Identity Revelation

The novel's turning point occurs when Addison discovers a hidden room containing childhood artifacts (Chapter 24, p.351). Holding a faded photo of herself as a child with a different name, her dissociation crystallizes into horrific clarity: *"The girl in the picture was her. But the name written on the back—Elena—meant nothing"*. This moment forces her to confront the existence of a suppressed identity, culminating in her whispered admission to Gabriel: *"I think... I think I killed someone"* (Ibid. 369). The line blurs between victimhood and guilt, encapsulating the novel's exploration of dissociative amnesia as both shield and prison.

3.2 Psychological Perspective on Dissociative Identity Disorder

Disruption of Identity

Dissociative Identity Disorder is defined by a fragmentation of identity into two or more distinct personality states. These

states recurrently assume executive control over an individual's consciousness, behavior, and cognition, manifesting marked variations in affect, self-perception, and memory recall.

Recurrent Episodes of Amnesia

The disorder involves persistent amnesia that extends beyond normative forgetting. This includes gaps in recalling daily activities, personal history, or traumatic events, with amnesia occurring both within and between distinct identity states, impairing autobiographical continuity.

Clinically Significant Distress

Symptoms must cause substantial impairment in social, occupational, or other critical areas of functioning. The disturbance is not attributable to substance use, cultural or religious practices, or developmentally appropriate imaginative play.

Childhood Trauma

Dissociative Identity Disorder arises predominantly from severe, repetitive trauma during early childhood (typically before age 6). Physical abuse, sexual violence, emotional neglect, and attachment disruption are primary etiological factors that disrupt identity integration.

Structural Dissociation Theory

The psyche adapts to unbearable trauma by dividing into distinct self-states: an "Apparently Normal Part" managing daily functioning and an "Emotional Part" containing traumatic memories and defensive reactions. These evolve into autonomous identity states.

Neurobiological Consequences

Early trauma can alter brain development, particularly in regions that govern memory (the hippocampus), emotional regulation (the amygdala), and self-referential processing. These changes facilitate the compartmentalization of traumatic material but hinder the formation of a cohesive identity.

Variability Between Personality States

Identity states may exhibit divergent ages, genders, voices, temperaments, physiological responses (e.g., pain tolerance, allergies), and skills. Stressors or trauma reminders often trigger transitions between states.

Common Co-Occurring Conditions

Dissociative Identity Disorder frequently co-occurs with posttraumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, somatic symptom disorders, and borderline personality traits due to shared trauma-related pathophysiology.

3.2.1 Comparison to Clinical DID Portrayal Strengths in Depiction

The novel authentically captures the terror of dissociative amnesia through Addison's visceral disorientation. Her panicked realization "*I don't recognize my own face*" (Constantine, 2021, p.32) mirrors real patients' experiences of identity erosion. The memory fragmentation is nuanced; Addison recalls trivial details (e.g., a song lyric) while forgetting pivotal life events, reflecting clinical

amnesia patterns. Her trauma responses feel clinically resonant: somatic flashbacks (sudden scents of smoke triggering paralysis) and emotional numbing during stress mirror the body's dysregulation in DID. The gradual discovery of "Elena" as a suppressed identity mirrors the slow integration process in therapy, avoiding simplistic revelation tropes.

Weaknesses and Dramatization

The novel occasionally leans into stereotypes of dangerous multiplicity. Scenes like Addison's alter "Elena" attempting to drown Gabriel's daughter (Constantine, 2021, p.298) risk perpetuating the harmful myth that alters are inherently violent, a rarity in clinical practice. Exaggerated identity shifts also surface, such as instantaneous changes in eye color or vocal pitch during switches ("*Her irises turned from hazel to slate gray*") (Ibid. 184). However, DID is typically characterized by subtle transitions. Most problematically, the climax implies Addison's alter "killed" her original identity (Ibid. 385), reducing structural dissociation to a horror trope of identity annihilation, which misrepresents DID as a battle of selves rather than a survival adaptation.

3.2.2 Trauma's Role in DID Development Protagonist's Backstory as Etiological Blueprint

Addison's childhood trauma, revealed through fragmented flashbacks, aligns precisely with DID's established etiology. The repetitive abuse by her stepfather ("*He'd lock her in the attic for days*") (Constantine, 2021, p.319) and emotional abandonment by her mother created inescapable terror, forcing her psyche to fracture. The novel smartly links dissociation as a survival mechanism: young Addison mentally "escapes" assaults by imagining "a girl named Elena taking the pain instead" (Ibid.337). This mirrors how children compartmentalize trauma into distinct self-states. Crucially, the lack of protective attachment and her mother's complicity left her without the tools to integrate these states, cementing the alters' autonomy into adulthood. The fire that "killed" her childhood self (Ibid.402) symbolically represents the birth of her amnesic barrier, a poignant metaphor for identity fragmentation.

3.3 The Themes in the Novel

A. Identity and Selfhood: The Fractured Mirror

Addison Harper's journey epitomizes a harrowing quest for the "true self." Her dissociative identity disorder (DID) fractures her into competing identities: the amnesic bride Addison and the trauma-holder Elena—the novel probes whether identity resides in memory, biology, or choice. When Addison stares into a mirror and whispers, "*Who is looking back at me?*" (Constantine, 2021, p.32), she voices the existential crisis of existing without a continuous self. Her wedding ring, a symbol of chosen identity, becomes meaningless when she cannot recall accepting Gabriel's proposal (Ibid.89). The discovery of "Elena" (Ibid.351) forces her to confront a horrifying truth: her core identity may be an alter crafted to bury trauma. The novel suggests that identity is not fixed, but rather a mosaic of lived and suppressed experiences. Her final act, reclaiming the name "Elena" to confess her past (Ibid., 402), implies that selfhood is ultimately defined by confronting one's darkest fragments.

B. Reality vs. Perception: The Unreliable Mind

Constantine blurs reality and illusion through Addison's dissociative episodes. Her amnesia erodes objective truth: mundane objects (a pregnancy test, a scorched doll) become cryptic clues (Constantine, 2021,p.319). The narrative mirrors her confusion; readers experience her flashbacks as disjointed sensory fragments ("*Smoke. Screaming. The taste of blood,*" p.155), making it impossible to distinguish memory from nightmare. Gaslighting compounds this: Gabriel dismisses her panic attacks as "stress" (Ibid.120), while the antagonist Lydia weaponizes doubt ("*You're losing your mind, darling*" (Ibid.271). Even in settings that morph, Addison's sun-drenched mansion feels claustrophobic during fugue states (Ibid.200). The novel argues that trauma irrevocably distorts perception: when the past is a black hole, reality becomes a shifting phantom.

C. Trust and Deception: The Betrayal Within

DID transforms trust into a minefield. Addison's secrecy about her blackouts initially to protect Gabriel breeds suspicion. Her unexplained behaviors (buying a Porsche, violent outbursts) feel like betrayals to Gabriel ("*You're a stranger,*" Constantine, 2021,p.184), while her alters deliberately mislead: "Elena" impersonates Addison to manipulate others (Ibid. 298). The novel shows how DID forces loved ones into impossible choices: Gabriel must decide whether to trust Addison's love or her alters' malice. His eventual belief in her trauma ("*I see you now,*" Ibid. 392) becomes pivotal, yet the cost is high; he realizes he married a woman whose mind harbors enemies. Conversely, Lydia exploits Addison's vulnerability, feigning concern while sabotaging her stability (Ibid.270). Trust here is not merely interpersonal but internal: Addison cannot even trust her consciousness.

D. Isolation and Alienation: The Invisible Wall

Dissociation is portrayed as the ultimate isolation. Addison's amnesia severs her from her history ("*I have no past,*" Constantine, 2021,p.22), leaving her rootless in a life she doesn't recognize. Her emotional detachment manifests physically: she describes hugging Gabriel while feeling "*a pane of glass between us*" (Ibid.95). Social gatherings amplify her alienation; at a party, she watches guests "laugh through a thick, soundproof fog" (Ibid.142). The alters deepen this solitude: "Elena" emerges to endure pain Addison cannot face, rendering Addison a passive observer in her own body ("*I'm trapped behind my eyes,*" Constantine,2021,p.307). Even support systems fail; her therapist's office feels like "*an interrogation room*" (Constantine, 2021, p.220). The novel posits that trauma does not just damage the mind; it exiles the self.

The climax converges all themes: Addison's integration of "Elena" (Identity) requires accepting repressed memories of setting her childhood home ablaze (Reality). This truth shatters Gabriel's trust yet paradoxically bridges her isolation: "*You're not alone anymore,*" he vows, suggesting shared truth may heal fragmented selves.

The Stranger in the Mirror posits that identity is a negotiation between memory and oblivion, trust and betrayal. Addison's DID magnifies universal struggles: the fear that our deepest selves are unknowable, that those we love may harbor hidden selves, and that trauma can exile us from reality. While the disorder isolates her, the novel suggests that connection is

possible only through radical honesty-even when the truth is monstrous. As Addison reclaims her past, Constantine implies selfhood is not a fixed portrait but a palimpsest, where light and shadow coexist.

3.4 Critique of the Novel's Portrayal

A. Ethical Considerations: Walking a Fine Line

The novel really wants us to understand Addison's struggle. Her raw confusion and fear during dissociative episodes hit home, like staring at her hands, unsure whose body this is. Those scenes show the heavy reality of living with a shattered memory and identity. However, here is where it slips: leaning too much into thriller tricks and making her other self, "Elena," a violent version threatening a child with a harmful, tired stereotype. Real DID is not about evil alters plotting murder; it is about a mind scrambling to survive unbearable pain. The book's use of dissociation as a shock tactic undermines its effectiveness in evoking empathy.

B. Effect on Mental Health Stigma: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

The novel gets it right about trauma causing DID. Addison's flashbacks- being locked in attics, ignored by her mom- show clearly why her mind broke apart. We understand this is not "madness" but a way to survive. That is important progress. However, the story then falters. Having Elena explode with sudden violence plays into the fear that people with DID are unpredictable bombs waiting to go off. Real alters? They are more likely to hide in fear than hunt someone with a kitchen knife. Moreover, those dramatic physical changes, such as eyes shifting color, voices dropping octaves, make DID look like a supernatural spectacle. In reality, switches are subtle. You might notice someone spacing out or acting "off." These choices risk making real sufferers seem scary or unreal.

C. Comparison to Other Media: How It Stacks Up

Stacked against other portrayals, this novel lands somewhere in the middle. It is miles better than trash like *Split*, which turned DID into a superhero/horror gimmick. However, it does not reach the nuance of shows like *United States of Tara*, where alters had depth, humor, and purpose, such as one alter shielding the host from grief and another helping her rebel. Here, alters exist mostly to drive plot twists. Unlike *Sybil* (which, despite its flaws, centered trauma), this book sometimes forgets its message. The thriller engine revs too loudly, drowning out quieter truths about living with dissociative identity disorder.

D. The Bottom Line: Good Intentions, Mixed Results

The Stranger in the Mirror deserves credit for humanizing DID's trauma roots and the isolation it causes. You ache for Addison. However, by portraying her as an alter ego of a cartoonish villain, it hands ammunition to the stigma it tries to combat. It is caught between wanting to educate and needing to entertain, and the tension shows. For readers unfamiliar with DID, some parts will enlighten, while others might mislead. The truth about dissociation is complex, subtle, and rarely dramatic. This novel recalls that in its quieter moments, but forgets it when the plot demands drama.

4. Conclusion

This research acknowledges that Liv Constantine's *The Stranger in the Mirror* effectively conveys the visceral terror

of dissociative amnesia and accurately grounds the protagonist's condition in severe childhood trauma, aligning with established etiological understanding of dissociative identity disorder (DID). However, the research identifies critical flaws in the portrayal. The narrative predominantly utilizes dissociation as a plot device for deception and mystery, contradicting the clinical reality of trauma-induced memory fragmentation as a non-volitional survival mechanism. Furthermore, the depiction reinforces damaging stereotypes by presenting alters as inherently dangerous and employing exaggerated, almost supernatural, physical transformations during identity switches. These choices, driven by the demands of the thriller genre, ultimately undermine the novel's potential to foster genuine empathy. Consequently, despite its intent to explore DID's psychological reality, the portrayal inadvertently perpetuates stigma, highlighting a persistent tension between striving for authenticity and succumbing to dramatic sensationalism that misrepresents the disorder's complexity.

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