

Student

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Divided Mind

“You’re a victim of your own mind.” While many see this quote and believe it contains deep meaning, 0.01% of the population lives a reality with a condition that forces them to become victims to their own mind, this condition is called Dissociative Identity Disorder, referred to as DID. It was previously known as Multiple Personality Disorder but changed to better reflect the condition (Mordecai). In the book, [A Mango-Shaped Space](#), by Wendy Mass, Mia has synesthesia, a condition where people see and associate colors with numbers or words - such as the letter “k” being blue and the number three being pink. Although both conditions have to do with the brain, Smitha Bhandari MD, on WebMD, stated, "Dissociative identity disorder... is a complex psychological condition." Psychological disorders are developed by certain environmental factors while synesthesia has been discovered to be neurological which means it is congenital and not provoked by the environment around the patient (Psych2Go). Synesthesia and dissociative identity disorder are two different concepts that share many similarities, but also have their own sets of differences.

While both Dissociative Identity Disorder and synesthesia share similarities, they are also different in many ways. To start with, different parts of the brain are affected in both conditions. DID affects the hippocampus, amygdala and parietal structures (Better Health Channel) and, contrastively, synesthesia affects the sensory and motor regions (Healthline). In

addition, both conditions are more common in women and can be developed (National Alliance on Mental Illness). Furthermore, "There are over 80 different types of synesthesia," as Caitlin McColl stated in her article *6 Fun Facts About Synesthesia* on Psych2Go. There are no different types of DID. The symptoms of Dissociative Identity Disorder and synesthesia are similar, but their effects on life differ greatly.

Dissociative Identity Disorder and synesthesia patients can be affected by their conditions in contrastive and comparative ways. Foremost, victims of both disorders can often have anxiety and depression and patients can also feel isolated (Better Health Channel & Healthline). Some people with DID feel isolated and suicidal because they believe the world is fake or that no one understands them (American Psychological Association). However, synesthetes can experience feelings of isolation due to being made special by their condition; as Mia's brother Zach said, "She has a gift," (Mass 259). Moreover, patients with DID also have significant memory lapses, such as forgetting important personal information (Better Health Channel). Both condition's victims lead alike and different lives, patients are also treated by others in distinct and identical methods.

Synesthetes and Dissociative Identity Disorder patients can be treated by each other in different but similar methods. To begin, in the movie *Emmanuel's Gift*, upon Emmanuel going to school and living his daily life with a deformed leg, discrimination from others was rampant against him just as it is for people who have synesthesia or DID. Consequently, both patients are also seen as outsiders, DID patients can be seen as aggressive which is why many have developed a fear of them (BHC). On the other hand, "Anecdotally, many [synesthetes] seem to enjoy perceiving the world in a different way than the general population," as Healthline's

Kathryn Watson reported. Patients can also seem slow or lazy because their disabilities impact how they do in the classroom environment. The International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation commented on the impact of DID on a student, “[Dissociative Identity Disorder] will interfere with his overall learning and development, particularly if it happens often... He may block out other senses too, like hearing, tasting, and seeing, which can affect his ability to learn.” Synesthetes can also have similar problems such as the problems Mia faced in her academic life. “Normally an x is a shiny maroon color... But [in math] an x has to stand for an unknown number. But I can’t make myself assign the x any other color than maroon...” (Mass 51). People with Dissociative Identity Disorder and synesthetes are treated by others in distinct and identical ways; although those nearby also experience similar but contrasting effects.

The people around those suffering from dissociative identity disorder or synesthesia are also affected in alike and different ways. Patients can be mentally difficult to understand because of how others do not know what they are experiencing or what they have experienced. Mia found how her best friend had difficulty understanding her. “Well, I don’t understand.” (Mass 78). Although, family members and loved ones of DID victims can feel disconnected from the patient, meaning that they find the patient a stranger in a way (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy). It’s important to note that the disconnection from the patient usually happens during the time of an identity switch because, as seen in the television series *Breathe: Into The Shadows*, family members usually do not know the other identity. Comparatively, the families of the patients can be worried about the patient’s future. In addition, DID is a financial burden because of the expensive therapy required. In fact,

Marianne Hayes of Northwestern Mutual reported in her article *How Much Does Therapy Cost, and How Do You Pay For It?*, “An initial visit with a psychiatrist can set you back about \$300 to \$500, with additional sessions around \$100 to \$200.” This cost can increase if patients don’t have insurance or live in large metro cities, such as New York (Northwestern Mutual). Furthermore, DID patients also have unpredictable aggression that can make those around them unsafe (BHC). The people around the patients can also be affected in alike and unlike ways.

Synesthesia is similar to Dissociative Identity Disorder in many ways, although there are many differences between the two. The descriptions of these two conditions are contrastive and comparative, with one being psychological while another is neurological (WebMD). Furthermore, patients’ lives can be affected by many similar and different factors as well as how they are treated by others. At times, DID patients may seem scary or dangerous (Breathe: Into The Shadows) while synesthesia patients might be seen as having superpowers (Healthline). In addition, others can also be affected in many identical and different ways. At the same time, family members around DID patients can feel disconnected from the patient (AAMFT), those around synesthetes can feel confused and misunderstand in the way that Mia’s mother was when Mia revealed what was happening to her. She said, “Is this some sort of joke to justify your difficulty with math?” (Mass 58). However, all of those around DID patients and synesthetes have difficulty understanding the patient. In both of these conditions, the mind plays a large part in everything about the patient’s life. Regardless, it is important to remember that these patients and victims had no say in how their mental health turned out. This is why we need to go past our prejudices and find sympathy and empathy in our hearts for

these fellow human beings. This project has taught me that it is true what they say, the mind can be a beautiful servant but a dangerous master.

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