STRATEGIC MANIPULATION AND THE USE OF DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER IN THE MOVIE *WHO AM I* (2014)

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini mengkaji film "Who Am I" tahun 2014, yang berkonsentrasi pada Benjamin, tokoh utama, dan pengalamannya tumbuh di komunitas peretasan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif untuk mengkaji data yang dikumpulkan secara cermat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjawab dua pertanyaan utama: bagaimana Benjamin memanipulasi orang lain menggunakan *Truth Default Theory* dan bagaimana perkembangan moral Benjamin mempengaruhi pilihannya untuk membantu teman-temannya menghindari masalah. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana penggunaan manipulasi psikologis, penipuan, dan keahlian teknologi oleh Benjamin memajukan plot dan memupuk hubungan dan ketegangan karakter di sepanjang film. Penelitian ini juga mengamati perkembangan moral Benjamin, menunjukkan bagaimana pergeseran posisi etisnya memengaruhi pilihan dan perilakunya, yang pada gilirannya memengaruhi hasil akhir. Penelitian lebih lanjut mungkin meneliti kemajuan etis dan konsekuensi dari penggunaan manipulasi psikologis untuk tujuan yang menguntungkan dan merugikan.

Kata kunci: *dissociative identity disorder*; film; manipulasi; *truth default theory*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the 2014 movie "Who Am I," concentrating on Benjamin, the lead character, and his experiences growing up in the hacking community. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the meticulously gathered data. The research intends to answer two main questions: how Benjamin manipulates others using the Truth Default Theory and how Benjamin's moral development affects his choices to assist his friends avoid trouble. The research demonstrates how Benjamin's use of psychological manipulation, deceit, and technological expertise advances the plot and fosters character relationships and tension throughout the movie. The research also looks at Benjamin's moral development, showing how his shifting ethical position influences his choices and behaviors, which in turn affects the eventual outcome. Further research may examine the ethical progression and consequences of employing psychological manipulation for both advantageous and disadvantageous purposes.

Keywords: dissociative identity disorder; manipulation; movie; truth default theory

INTRODUCTION

Literature is not only the result of an individual's thoughts but also a form of expression within society. The relationship between literature and humans is profound. Many sources and experts have mentioned various definitions in the literature. Generally, literature is defined as the expression of several ideas, thoughts, and feelings about life. It aims to communicate its existence as a person with thoughts, messages, and beliefs that are influenced by sociocultural reality as a place for delivery.

To better understand literature, Rainsford described literature as a writing that presents events, people, and things from a specific individualistic perspective, as opposed to an objective perspective (Rainsford, 2014). People who work in the field of literature are creative people who pour their imagination into literary forms, which can be further divided into key forms, such as novels, short stories, poetry, dramas, and movies.

A movie is a medium of communication that is formed by combining two senses, sight and hearing, which has a core or theme of a story that reveals many social realities. Movie is one of literature forms which contain story, play, history, culture, incidents, science, etc. that is recorded as video and shown in cinema, television, theaters, or other broadcast media which is as entertainment as the main purpose (Anggraeni et al., 2018).

A German techno thriller movie directed by Baran Bo Odar, *Who Am I*, explores the psychological details of its main character. The movie centers on a young hacker, Benjamin, who has difficulty adapting to his social environment,

examining issues related to identification and the digital era pursuit of recognition. He then joined a hacking group named CLAY that was created to undertake several missions, including hacking, online fraud, and other forms of online world manipulation.

The unique group consists of several members with different motivations, backgrounds, and skills. One of them is Max, a charismatic group leader, who can inspire each member as well as loyalty and admiration from his friends. The next character is Stephan, a technology expert in the group, who is in charge of providing the tools and expertise needed for cyber exploitation efforts. Paul, a newcomer who is full of enigma because he does not speak much or even laugh, whose arrival shakes up the dynamics in the group. And finally, there is Benjamin, a loner who seeks acceptance and belonging. As the main character, he undergoes a transformation, moving away from his introverted personality due to the growing bond and friendship with the group members. He is the protagonist struggling with questions about who he is, what his morality is, and the consequences of what he will and has done in the online world.

This research examines the manipulation techniques and the evolving morality of the main character, Benjamin. This research uses a psychological approach using the theory of manipulation, the truth default theory (TDT), and the dissociative identity disorder (DID), also known as Multiple Identity Disorder.

The theory of manipulation refers to the skillful handling, control, or use of something or someone, often with the connotation of influencing or controlling others to one's advantage, sometimes unfairly or dishonestly. Arthur Horn defines

manipulation as the effort to affect the behavior or perception of others (Horn, 2018). Manipulation involves three methods, namely power, persuasion and deception; however, this research will primarily focus on the deception method. Timothy R. Levine in the Journal of Language and Social Psychology states that deception is defined as intentionally, knowingly, and/or purposely misleading another person (Levine, 2014).

Within the deception theory, there is the truth default theory (TDT) that will be employed in this research. Levine explains the TDT as a passive presumption of honesty due to a failure to actively consider the possibility of deceit at all or as a fall back cognitive state after a failure to obtain sufficient affirmative evidence for deception. Basically, TDT explains that in utterance, people tend to believe that what other people say is true unless there is evidence that says or shows otherwise.

This research will also employ dissociative identity disorder (DID), which is also known as Multiple Personality Disorder. Dissociative identity disorder (DID) is a severely debilitating disorder (Reinders & Veltman, 2021). Jack Drescher defines DID as follows: Dissociative identity disorder is associated with overwhelming experiences, traumatic events and/or abuse that occurred in childhood (Drescher, 2022).

Numerous writers have made research on manipulation theory. The first writer was Yuto Watanabe (2023). His research is entitled *Manipulation Direction: Evaluating Text-Guided Image Manipulation Based on Similarity between Changes in Image and Text Modalities*. This article discusses how images change before and after image manipulation, and whether these changes correspond to the text.

The second writer is González (2022), with her article *Evidence of Psychological Manipulation in the Process of Violent Radicalization: An Investigation of the 17-A Cell*. The article focuses on the psychological manipulation techniques used to radicalize the members of the cell. The object is a 17-A cell that carried out terrorist attacks in the Spanish cities of Barcelona and Cambrils on August 17, 2017. However, research using the truth default theory has never been done before.

The third writer is Susser, with his article entitled *Technology, Autonomy, and Manipulation* focusing on what exactly is the harm that results from influencing people and why we should be worried about technological mediation rendering us susceptible to manipulative influences. To analyze these problems, Daniel Susser used the manipulation theory of persuasion. The result is that information technology is actually a tool used to control things and even people, but that did not mean that manipulation cannot be avoided.

This research aims to answer the two key questions regarding the movie. The first one, what manipulation techniques does Benjamin employ in the film *Who Am I*, and how do these techniques influence the plot and character dynamics? And the second one: How does Benjamin's evolving morality influence his decisions to aid his friends in escaping the consequences of their actions in the film?

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this research, the writers used descriptive qualitative research. This method aims to describe the data in the form of utterances and actions of the

character. In addition, the data are descriptively described based on research problems. It involves discussing the sample for the study and the overall data collection and recording procedures (Creswell, 2018). This research intends to describe the abilities of manipulation impacting Max's morality reflected in the movie *Who Am I*.

The data of this research are texts that are obtained by using two types of data source; primary and secondary data. The primary data is the main data which consists of several sentences, paragraphs or dialog describing the methods of manipulation in the *Who Am I* movie. By watching the movie several times, the writers can make notes required to complete the analysis. The secondary data that the writers use in this research are taken from e-journals, official websites, several books or e-books, official articles, previous thesis, and other sources related to this research.

In collecting the data, the writers undertook several steps. First, the writers watched the *Who Am I* movie and found the ways of manipulation in the movie. Next, the writers gathered the data through an in-depth analysis of the movie. After that, the writer selected the data specified on ways to answer the research questions. And finally, the writers read some related references to observe the approach, theory, data, and information. The data in this research is then analyzed using the psychological approach.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

CLAY is an abbreviation for Clowns Laughing at You and the members often carry out several attacks on cyberspace to gain attention, respect and prove

their hacking skills by using elements of humor and vulgarity in every hacking action they carry out. The first evidence of the TDT being applied was when the group hacked the NBD, a newly emerged party as a forum for government members, in a meeting. Before Benjamin and Stephan got in, they stopped by a security guard that asked for the invitation. Since they didn't have the invitation, Stephan applied to TDT to manipulate the security guard using fake invitation card. He used fake invitations as his delivery method of manipulation. Delivery method is the way of the manipulator choosing the best way to deliver the message of manipulation, and it refer to the TDT since the theory mentions that people usually tend to believe what others say or show is true unless there is no evidence that proves otherwise. The security guard believed that was the invitation card because it has the NBD logo. As Benjamin explained in the monolog; The ID card was just a little paper card, 5 minutes Photoshop, 2 minutes printing. By using TDT Benjamin and Stephan got the entry access, they could easily get what they wanted because people tended to believe what others say or show that was true, in this case because there is no evidence that the ID card was fake.

The second evidence showed Benjamin demonstrated his ability to manipulate other people to get the entry access so he could sneak Paul tools to make a trap to support them to hack people's devices. The way Benjamin manipulates security guards can be observed in this dialog. Benjamin went back to the BND office and tried to use TDT to deceive the security:

Benjamin: *And I lost my wallet in the canteen.*
Security: (looked at Benjamin suspiciously)

This dialog between Benjamin and the security guard showed that he tried to craft a message. By saying I lost my wallet in the canteen, Benjamin wanted to convince the security guard that he had been there before, and that meant the guard had let him in before. He wanted to get to the canteen to plant the tool. Next, Benjamin tried to get sympathy from the guard by telling fake information. The following dialog acted as the supporting evidence.

> Benjamin: *If you could only imagine what it means to a dad like mine.*
> Security: (showing his expression of empathy)

This supporting evidence showed the way Benjamin controls the flow of information still using TDT. The phrase served as a message to the guard that he had a fierce father who would get so mad if he knew Benjamin lost his wallet. The TDT that Benjamin used was completely successful because the security believed him since there was no evidence that showed Benjamin had lied to him. It relates to the TDT hypothesis, which says that until there is clear proof to the contrary, individuals often have a tendency to accept what other people say to be true.

The security eventually showed his empathy and Benjamin could get in the BND canteen. The security said two minutes to Benjamin. The phrase two minutes indicated that the security personnel had faith in Benjamin due to the believability of his statement, which compelled him to lift his emotional flag and let Benjamin entered the building. This further demonstrated that TDT was a very successful method of achieving the manipulator's desired outcome. Benjamin could then use Paul's hacking tool to accomplish his goals. It also demonstrated how easy he could achieve what he wanted just with TDT.

The third evidence of TDT used by Benjamin was when he made a bargain with the detective who arrested him in order to capture MRX, the most skilled hacker in town, and despite several police attempts, no one was able to locate him, let alone apprehended him. As a result, Benjamin made a deal with the detective to utilized TDT manipulation to catch MRX. He engaged in a discussion in the dark web, the internet underground where hackers or even police spy cyber security interacted with each other. Benjamin posed as MRX by donning a mask with the letter X on it and speaking like MRX.

Benjamin: *I sold identities, I spied on hacker, I co-worked with law enforcement.*
Other hackers: (surprised)

This evidence not only demonstrated the TDT but also how Benjamin manipulated the message to deceive others. The statement *I sold identities* meant that MRX harmed the other hackers by selling their identities. The manner he created the message made other hackers felt uneasy and terrified. This indicated that Benjamin attempts to manipulate people's emotions and perspectives in order to make them despise MRX was successful.

In the statement *I co-worked with law enforcement*, it was made clear how he was utilizing TDT to build a false message in order to accomplish what he wanted. He tried to lead others to believe that he was helping the authorities uncover many hacker identities on the dark web. MRX was then regarded as a member of the police cyber security team, and it would give other hackers even more reason not to trust him.

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Benjamin employed all of the TDT strategy in an attempt to agitate, and manipulate MRX into making foolish decisions. MRX was upset since such rumors were untrue and he would lose society's support as well as all of his supporters. Benjamin wanted to influence MRX into doing what he wanted; therefore, his objective was to get MRX to do something without giving it any thought. In this instance, Benjamin wants MRX to use a gadget he previously made to reveal MARX's position so that Benjamin may be taken into custody by the authorities.

This supporting evidence demonstrated the outcome of TDT. MRX used the tool, the hammer that was designed as a bait to reveal MRX location.

> Benjamin: *You shouldn't have used the hammer.*
> MRX: (confused)

The TDT that he employed was successful in inflating MRX's ego to the point where he acted carelessly, utilizing Benjamin's invented hammer to obtain the IP address and determine MRX's whereabouts. *You shouldn't have used his* way of saying that he has already succeeded in his manipulation technique because MRX thought that the hammer was a real tool to open the program since there wasn't any indication that the hammer was actually an IP tracker.

As the plot developed, the movie placed increasing emphasis on Benjamin's moral evolution. Having been well-received and accepted by his group, he was increasingly devoted and worried about the security of the group members. Determined to protect all the members, he chose to take the blame of their past actions himself. In the end, he came up with a plan to pretend that he alone was responsible for their actions by claiming he has multiple personalities.

One of the causes of Multiple Identity Disorder or Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) is traumatic events or experiences that usually happen in the family. Because of this trauma, people's minds create a different identity or personality as a way to cope or even protect themselves.

Benjamin grew up in a broken family. His father left and disappeared to France without fulfilling any parental responsibilities. This was revealed in Benjamin's monologue at the police station, during his interrogation by the male detective. He said that *my father ran away when I was born*. So, he lived with his mother and grandmother since he was little. When Benjamin was 8 years old, his mother committed suicide in front of him. He mentioned this in his narration. *My mom took her own life when I was 8.*

The movie then portrayed the moment that triggered Benjamin's Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). He was arrested in the campus server room while hacking, and the scene shifts to the courtroom where he faced legal consequences. This showed how a traumatic moment could trigger severe psychological disorders. This was also confirmed by the psychiatrist who had treated Benjamin since childhood. We could see this evidence in the scene where the detective met a psychiatrist who once treated Benjamin's mother who apparently had the same identity disorder.

Detective: *Is it hereditary?*
Psychiatrist: *Possibly.*

Because of traumatic events in his childhood, Benjamin always imagined to be someone else, leading to a gradual separation of his personality. His desire for being looked after and shielded drove him to retreat into a world of imagination. As

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soon as he became a member of CLAY, he got a feeling of identity, acceptance and a surrogate family that he never had. Therefore, when the group was threatened and endangered, Benjamin sacrificed himself by telling the investigator that he worked alone and that the others were only in his imagination. He basically gave himself and his friends' new lives and complete anonymity by erasing all digital records of them. Then he fabricates the story that he killed himself. In the end, he offered himself and his friends the opportunity to start afresh.

CONCLUSION

The movie *Who Am I* explores the complexities of manipulation and offers psychological perspectives on the life of a hacker. It highlights how perception is susceptible to dishonesty that is skillfully planned, demonstrating how reality can be distorted to fit one's interests through the lens of Truth Default Theory. The story illustrates how the protagonist, a gifted but morally ambiguous hacker, makes his way through a world where individuals with the ability to manipulate people's minds and control information are continuously reshaping reality.

This manipulative strategy can also have advantageous results, as the movie finale shows. The representation of multiple personality disorder in conjunction with the protagonist's use of deceptive techniques finally leads to a form of liberation for other characters. Further research could explore the moral development and the implications of using psychological manipulation for both positive and negative ends.

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