

Representation of the Male Protagonist Insecurity in the *A Different Man* Film

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ABSTRACT

Insecurity is a feeling of unease, if ignored, can lead to severe depressive conditions. Indonesia is certainly not immune to this internal problem. Film as a mass medium can represent this complex psychological issue, as seen in the film *A Different Man* (2024). This research aims to study and understand the representation of insecurity in the film's male protagonist. A descriptive qualitative approach is used with the semiotic analysis method conceived by Roland Barthes. The analysis focuses on the denotation, connotation, and myths that appear in the film's key scenes.

The research results show three main findings regarding the representation of insecurity in the film's protagonist. First, external transformation is not an effective solution for internal fragility, as a new persona fails to cover a wounded shadow. Second, insecure individuals have a comparative obsession and negative projections onto an "other" figure around them. Third, irrational and destructive behavior is depicted as an outlet for suppressed feelings of insecurity. Furthermore, this portrayal also interrogates the ideology of toxic masculinity present in the main character. This film effectively demonstrates masculinity myths regarding men. This shows the tragic consequences when a fragile man unleashes his insecurity in a very destructive and harmful manner.

Keywords: *film; insecurity; representation; Roland Barthes; semiotics*

INTRODUCTION

Effective social relationships constitute the fundamental bedrock of individual and societal well-being, fostering a sense of belonging and emotional stability. As inherently social beings, humans consistently strive to fulfill their emotional needs and obtain crucial support through positive, meaningful interactions. However, the pervasive psychological state of insecurity can severely disrupt an individual's capacity to build and maintain these healthy connections. This feeling of inadequacy introduces a significant barrier, preventing the formation of bonds that are essential for a flourishing life.

The feeling of insecurity is a universal psychological phenomenon that significantly affects individuals across the globe. It is broadly defined as a pervasive sense of unease or

inadequacy that can trigger feelings of anxiety, shame, and a profound lack of self-confidence (Rahmawati, Rahmasari & Azhar, 2022). While these emotions are inherently human, unmanaged insecurity can exert control over an individual's life, leading to severe personal and social complications. This issue often remains under-addressed in public discourse, as noted in contexts like Indonesia (Sabil & Karnita, 2022), reflecting a global tendency to overlook the severe consequences of psychological distress on individual well-being. Within this context, popular media, particularly film, function as a crucial arena for cultural negotiation, reflecting and shaping societal understanding of such complex mental health issues. The analysis of film content is therefore highly relevant to examining how these issues are packaged, presented, and engaged with by audiences.

In the field of communication studies, film is understood not merely as a form of entertainment but as a complex text that represents social reality (Danesi, 2010). According to Stuart Hall (1997), representation is not a passive reflection but an active process of constructing meaning through intricate visual and narrative languages. The film *A Different Man* serves as a compelling case study because its narrative explicitly confronts the struggles of its male protagonist, Edward, whose severe insecurity is intertwined with his physical condition of neurofibromatosis. This internal turmoil catastrophically manifests in his external world, systematically eroding his ability to forge and sustain meaningful social bonds. The film's plot vividly demonstrates how this profound sense of inadequacy leads to destructive behaviors, making it a rich text for analyzing how media portrays sensitive and multifaceted psychological themes.

The primary research problem of this study is to investigate how the representation of male insecurity is constructed within the cinematic narrative of *A Different Man*. Consequently, the objective is to systematically deconstruct the layers of meaning embedded within the film, moving beyond a surface-level interpretation of its plot. This inquiry seeks to understand the specific codes and conventions used to portray the protagonist's internal state and its devastating impact on his social interactions. The research aims to identify the cinematic techniques and narrative choices that collectively build a complex and often troubling portrait of male vulnerability, isolation, and aggression stemming from deep-seated insecurity.

This investigation is situated within a landscape of prior Indonesian research on media and insecurity. Previous studies include work by Millatina (2023) and by Patricia and Utami (2024) on music videos. Other analyses examined the film *Imperfect* (Rahmawati et al., 2022) and the drama *True Beauty* (Punusingon et al., 2021). Upon review, a clear pattern emerged: these studies predominantly focused on a distinctly female-oriented perspective. A common theme in these works was the strong connection between insecurity and female beauty standards. A noticeable scarcity of scholarly literature was found regarding the representation of insecurity from a male viewpoint. This specific scholarly opening provided the primary justification and standpoint for the current research project. This study therefore analyzes insecurity through the male protagonist's perspective in the film *A Different Man*.

To achieve this objective, the research employs a qualitative analysis grounded in semiotics, the science of signs (Sobur, 2009). Specifically, it utilizes the methodological framework developed by Roland Barthes, which dissects textual meaning into three distinct orders of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal, descriptive meaning of a sign, while connotation encompasses the associated cultural meanings and values it evokes. The third level, myth, represents the broader ideological belief systems that these connotations reinforce, effectively naturalizing dominant cultural ideas. This Barthesian approach is exceptionally suited for this study as it facilitates a deep analysis of how visual cues, dialogue, and narrative elements work together to produce and circulate specific ideologies about masculinity, mental health, and social acceptance.

This research holds significant importance for advancing our understanding within communication science, particularly in the areas of media representation and cultural studies. Its primary contribution lies in its focused analysis of male insecurity, a nuanced topic that is frequently simplified or overlooked in mainstream media portrayals. By applying Barthesian semiotics, this study not only offers new insights into the myths surrounding male emotional vulnerability but also provides a robust methodological template for future research at the intersection of media, gender, and psychology. Ultimately, this investigation advances the field by illuminating the process by which abstract psychological concepts are encoded into tangible media texts, thereby revealing how these texts participate in, challenge, or reinforce the broader social discourse surrounding mental health and identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Film

Film is considered a form of mass communication because its messages are delivered massively to audiences. Marcel Danesi (2010) semiotically defines film on two levels: as a text representing reality's activities. At a deeper level, it serves as a metaphorical mirror reflecting the complexities of human life. As an art form, film conveys information and ideas, expanding insights on different places and lifestyles (Bordwell et al., 2020). It creates profound emotional experiences by inviting viewers on a journey with characters they care about. Alex Sobur (2006, as cited in Dea Angga Maulana Prima, 2022) asserts that film documents developing realities that are constantly growing within a society. The medium is constructed using various synergistic signs, with images and sound being central components (Sobur, 2002). Consequently, social issues are often presented by filmmakers as a direct reflection of their surrounding environment (McQuail, 2010).

Insecurity

Abraham Maslow (1942) provides a foundational view of insecurity in his comprehensive book on the subject. He defines insecurity as an individual perceiving the world as a consistently threatening and hostile place. These individuals often view other people as dangerous, exclusively self-serving, and fundamentally selfish in nature. Insecure

people frequently feel isolated and rejected by their peers, while also experiencing constant anxiety. In general, they tend to maintain a pessimistic outlook on life and report being unhappy. They show visible signs of tension and internal conflict, which causes them to withdraw socially. Furthermore, they struggle with feelings of guilt and significant self-esteem issues that can become neurotic. They also exhibit egocentric traits, driven by a deep ambition to regain a sense of security.

Supported by other concepts, insecurity is an unsafe feeling causing fear, shame, and restlessness (Rahmawati et al., 2022). The emotions arising from insecurity are considered a normal and understandable part of the human experience. However, if these negative feelings are not handled properly, they can completely control an individual's life path. Insecurity is also defined as a state where an individual feels persistently anxious or worried (Abidah & Maryam, 2024). Living with prolonged insecurity is like being under a constant shadow of overwhelming fear and anxiety. Insecurity itself is a universal experience that has been felt by nearly every single human being. The unique aspect is that individuals experience this challenging feeling at vastly different levels of intensity. This feeling of insecurity therefore seems to be an inseparable component of the human condition.

Representation

Representation is the fundamental way of describing, interpreting, and ultimately understanding the world around us. This is a crucial process where symbols, language, or images are used to stand for ideas. Simplified, representation is the essential method of translating reality into a form that can be communicated. It can be theoretically defined as the production of meaning through language, sound, and visual images. Stuart Hall (1997) defines representation as the process of producing meaning through the specific utilization of language. This act involves symbolizing, exemplifying, substituting, or providing a detailed description of an object. It creates a likeness or an imaginative picture of something within the human mind or senses. Hall emphasizes its vital role in fulfilling the basic communication needs required for social interaction.

Semiotic

According to John Fiske (2007, as cited in Ariani, 2019), semiotics is the study of signs and their various cultural meanings. In simpler terms, semiotics is the science or analytical method used to meticulously examine various signs (Sobur, 2009). These prevalent signs can encompass a wide range of things, from words and images to symbols. Roland Barthes' semiotic model divides the entire process of signification into two distinct levels: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the most fundamental and objective meaning that is directly associated with a given sign. It provides a simple, direct description of what that particular sign literally represents to most audiences. Conversely, connotation involves cultural meanings that extend far beyond the sign's literal, dictionary definition. This

connotative meaning is deeply influenced by a person's social context and their unique life experiences.

The combination of denotation and connotation is commonly known as the Two Orders of Signification. Another critical aspect, myth, is constructed upon the second level of meaning, which is connotation. In *Mythologies* (1972), Roland Barthes explains myth is not an object but a communication system. A myth fundamentally functions as a message, a form of speech that can be anything with meaning. Therefore, myth operates as a message whose material has been processed for widespread social communication. This clearly shows that the concept of myth operates within the broader scientific realm of semiology. The nature of myth itself is dynamic, transforming through constant societal reinterpretation (Divyadharshini & Thamayanthi, 2022). Its embedded values are not static but rather adapt to ever-changing social and cultural conditions.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to obtain a truly in-depth understanding. The qualitative approach was chosen for its capacity to inductively explore the meaning of a given phenomenon. The analytical method employed in this particular research is the semiotics of Roland Barthes, focusing on signs. The primary subject of this comprehensive study is the entire narrative and visuals within the film *A Different Man*. Its unit of analysis consists of selected scenes from the 141-minute film that represent insecurity issues. Observation is focused on various elements such as dialogue, costumes, character behaviors, and other cinematic cues. The data sources for this research are comprised of primary data, the film itself, and secondary data. Secondary data includes a wide range of relevant literature that supports the analysis of insecurity's representation.

The data collection technique utilized in this research is a systematic and meticulous method of documentation. The documentation process was conducted by taking screen captures of various relevant scenes and film fragments. These specific scene fragments were selected because they visually or narratively represent the main character's insecurity. The collected visual data was then analyzed using the two-stage significance model from Roland Barthes. The first stage involves a denotative analysis, which describes all visual elements literally and very objectively. The researcher then conducts a connotative analysis to uncover hidden associative and also cultural meanings. The culmination of this is the identification of myths, the dominant ideologies normalized through the signs. This entire process aims to deconstruct how the film constructs complex meanings around the issue of insecurity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research uses Roland Barthes' semiotic method called Two Orders of Signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. This specific method reveals both the explicit and implicit meanings presented within the film *A Different Man*. Semiotic analysis is employed to interpret every single sign that is carefully displayed in the film. It then

describes the male protagonist's insecurity through Barthes's method within the audiovisual presentation.

Chronic Discontent or Unhappy and Constant Threat or Danger

Employing Roland Barthes' semiotic framework of denotation, connotation, and myth, this research delves into the film *A Different Man*. It closely examines the film's audiovisual signs to reveal both explicit and implicit meanings, ultimately depicting the male protagonist's insecurity. To ground the analysis, scenes were systematically linked to Abraham Maslow's established indicators of insecurity. The primary finding reveals that the protagonist's insecurity is characterized by chronic unhappiness and a persistent feeling of being under threat.



Figure 1 Scene of Edward and Ingrid Are Arguing About a Character Named “Edward” and Suddenly Oswald Comes to Them

Source : A Different Man (Movie, 2025)



Figure 2 Scene of Edward and Oswald Talking Together in a Bar

Source : A Different Man (Movie, 2025)

Denotatively, the scene in Figure 1 captures Edward and Ingrid engaged in a discussion about a character from Ingrid's theatrical play, who also happens to be named "Edward." Their conversation is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of Oswald. In response, the group's demeanor becomes open and welcoming, offering genuine smiles. Edward is the sole exception. In stark contrast, his brow furrows, a look of clear displeasure clouds his features, and his hand tightens into a tense fist, signaling his immediate negative reaction.

Meanwhile, Figure 2 depicts Edward and Oswald engaged in what appears to be a casual chat in a bar, though Edward is visibly disinterested. His brow remains furrowed, and his expression is devoid of any positive engagement. This continues until the pivotal moment when Oswald is called up to the stage to sing. Left alone at the table, Edward can only watch, his gaze flickering repeatedly between Oswald's performance and the reactions of the captivated audience, all while his own stony expression remains completely unchanged.

Connotatively, Edward's palpable discomfort in Figure 1 is a clear indicator of his underlying insecurity, rooted in a direct social comparison with Oswald. The effortless warmth and acceptance that Oswald receives—especially from Ingrid—acts as a powerful trigger for Edward's own feelings of inadequacy, making him feel intensely outcompeted. His downcast expression and clenched fist are physical manifestations of the internal anxiety and resentment sparked by this moment, a principle established by Ekman & Friesen (2003) regarding nonverbal emotional cues. This situation acutely magnifies Edward's insecurities about his social standing, particularly within his relationship with Ingrid.

When Oswald receives the spotlight and a positive audience reaction in Figure 2, Edward's solitary presence and unhappy face—combined with his obsessive monitoring of others—blatantly exposes his profound sense of envy. His insecurity crystallizes into a feeling of being incapable or less worthy, leading him to covet the recognition Oswald acquires so effortlessly. This resonates with Robert Greene's (2018) observation that insecurity "eats away" at a person's core, fostering a constant desire for external validation. The scene powerfully highlights how Edward's insecurity ignites this jealous obsession.

Figure 2 is a potent illustration of Leon Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. Festinger's theory posits that humans have an innate drive to evaluate their abilities through comparison with others, particularly when objective standards are unavailable. Continuous unfavorable comparisons, like Edward's with Oswald, can trigger feelings of hostility, inferiority, envy, or profound dissatisfaction, severely disrupting one's psychological well-being.

Connecting to a broader cultural interpretation, or "myth," a clenched fist during a greeting signals visceral dislike for the newcomer like in Figure 1. While it may be termed a "myth," there is significant psychological truth to this. The act of clenching one's hands is a well-documented physiological indicator of a person experiencing negative emotions like internal tension, frustration, or suppressed anger. Therefore, this general principle strongly validates the reading of Edward's gesture as an involuntary expression of his deep-seated feelings of inferiority and resentment.

Scene in Figure 2 also challenges the pervasive myth that insecurity is always tied to physical appearance. In reality, insecurity is a far broader psychological condition. An individual can feel insecure for a multitude of other reasons, such as perceived inadequacies in academic or professional spheres, financial instability, past rejections, social anxiety, and the relentless pressure of social comparison. Often, these non-physical factors are the primary

triggers for a debilitating lack of self-worth that impacts every facet of a person's life, extending far beyond their external appearance.

Distrust and Hostility

Continuing with the established methodology, same as before again correlated scenes from *A Different Man* with Abraham Maslow's specific indicators of insecurity. This process yielded a second key finding: the film's portrayal of a male protagonist grappling with insecurity is characterized by a pervasive sense of mistrust and a clear tendency towards hostility. This conclusion is specifically supported by moments in the film that align with the indicators of a 'belief that others are bad,' 'suspicion and mistrust,' and 'hostility.'



Figure 3 Compilation Scene of Edward Spying on Oswald and Telling Ingrid What He Saw
 Source : *A Different Man* (Movie, 2025)

Figure 3 denotatively shows Edward secretly spying on Oswald from afar. There is one moment where Edward later sees Oswald playfully interacting with a woman and a young child, blowing up balloons. Afterward, Edward confronts Ingrid to report what he has seen regarding Oswald's suspicious activities. He tells Ingrid that Oswald is secretly living a complete and separate double life. However, Ingrid quickly corrects his false assumption, clarifying the woman is Oswald's ex-wife. She explains that the two of them have simply remained on very good friendly terms. Furthermore, Ingrid reveals that Oswald will be moving in next door, into Edward's old apartment. After this difficult conversation with Ingrid, Edward enters his former room, which is under renovation. He stares at the ceiling for a moment before deliberately creating a hole.

Edward's clandestine act of spying on Oswald manifests from his deep-seated insecurity and growing obsession. This behavior is most likely triggered by his intense jealousy and feelings of being utterly replaced. His dedicated effort to find negative information, even accusing Oswald of having a double life, reveals his desperate desire to tarnish Oswald's image in Ingrid's eyes. This is probably because Edward feels deeply threatened by their closeness and refuses to cultivate any trust.

Ingrid's explanation, which dismantles his misunderstanding, only deepens his already profound sense of insecurity. The news of Oswald occupying his former apartment further intensifies his feelings of total displacement. He likely feels he has now lost his place in

Ingrid's life, both physically and emotionally. Edward's act of damaging the ceiling can be seen as his first step toward genuine hostility. It can be interpreted as a symbol of his venomous envy and a dark wish for Oswald. This destructive behavior is a direct response to his overwhelming feelings of loss and profound inadequacy. It represents the darker side of insecurity, which can ultimately trigger destructive and hateful actions.

Edward's behavior shows a strong correlation with the attachment theory by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). The preoccupied style in attachment theory is defined by a negative self-model but a positive other-model. These individuals desperately crave closeness from others to validate their own sense of self-worth. Edward exemplifies the preoccupied attachment style; his insecurity peaks when he observes Oswald with Ingrid. He desperately fears losing his connection with Ingrid, who is his primary source of personal validation. His obsessive spying and false accusations are desperate attempts to maintain this vital emotional connection. Losing his place both physically and emotionally triggers a deep rage, which he then unleashes. This destructive behavior perfectly mirrors the desperation of a preoccupied person terrified of ultimate rejection.



Figure 4 Scene of Edward Acting Weird While Wearing His Neurofibromatosis Mask
Source : A Different Man (Movie, 2025)

Figure 4 perfectly shows Edward's hostility to others. Denotatively it depicts Edward acting strangely while wearing his neurofibromatosis mask. As a property agent, Edward shows an apartment to a small family. With an unsettling facial expression, the family looks wary of Edward. This makes their child feel scared. The scene jumps to Edward at his office clearing his desk. He knows that he has already been fired. His office mates feel confused and are also wary of Edward. About to leave, Edward sees a life-sized picture of himself. He then draws a small mustache below its nose.

Still wearing the mask, Edward suddenly interrupts Ingrid and Oswald's ongoing theater performance. Edward is angry and protests, feeling it is unfair. He tells Oswald that he stole everything from him. The people in the theater stop and try to calm Edward down. However, they fail in their attempt. Edward runs and attacks Oswald, telling him to remove the mask he is wearing. However, Oswald is not wearing any mask. Oswald is forced to

protect himself, which causes Edward to fall. Edward then tries to stand up, although he is stumbling. He tries to look up, and a prop ceiling falls on him.

Edward acting cheerful and overly enthusiastic is a manifestation of his insecurity. He sees Oswald as a dangerous enemy because everything was taken from Edward. So, Edward tries to act like the enthusiastic Oswald with the neurofibromatosis face. He tries to become someone who is the opposite of himself. The people who see Edward realize that something is wrong with him. When Edward sees the replica picture of himself, he draws a small mustache. This means Edward is trying to make himself look like the Nazi leader. Adolf Hitler is a vile historical figure, a hostile person. This has a negative connotation, like a form of insult and mockery. It is an expression of hatred and anger.

Meanwhile, Edward's angry interruption and his aggressive attitude towards Oswald reflects his insecurity. It shows him becoming more and more mentally fragile. He projects his own insecurity and discomfort onto Oswald. He sees him as a threat or a fraud. This likely refers to the attention or acceptance that Oswald might have received. Edward feels that this is unfair. The physical attack on Oswald shows how his insecurity has eroded his relationship with reality. It pushes him toward irrational acts of violence or hostility. Edward's aggressiveness can also be included in the level two defense mechanism. More precisely, he is acting out. This means expressing unacceptable thoughts or feelings through bad actions. In essence, defense mechanisms can modify unpleasant or unacceptable behavior, emotions, and thoughts. It will all depend on the maturity of each individual's mind in acting.

Edward acting like Oswald has traits from a defense mechanism level. According to Vaillant (2000, as cited in Roxana Bejan-Mureşan & Adrian Cîmpeanu, 2019), that level consists of four different categories. Edward pretending to be Oswald is a level two defense mechanism, specifically fantasy and acting out. He fantasizes as a temporary escape to avoid his own unpleasant reality and starts acting out. The second level consists of immaturity, acting out, fantasy, idealisation, passive aggression, and somatization.



Figure 5 Scene of Edward Kills His Therapist While Undergoing Physiotherapy at Oswald and Ingrid's Residence

Source : A Different Man (Movie, 2025)

This is the climax, Figure 5 shows a scene after time has passed since Edward's accident. He now lives with Ingrid, who is pregnant with Oswald's child. Ingrid and Oswald plan to go out for some errands. Meanwhile, Edward is with his therapist. The therapist openly speaks badly about Oswald and Ingrid. He does this in front of Edward, who still looks gloomy. Subsequently, the therapist plans to go to the toilet. He also wants to get a drink. Suddenly, he is stabbed by Edward. The therapist tries to fight back but is unlucky. He ultimately dies from his wounds. Not long after, Oswald arrives at the crime scene. Edward just stares at the outside world through the window.

Edward's presence with Ingrid and Oswald places him in a difficult position. It may make him feel more isolated and insecure. This is especially true if Edward still has old feelings. When the therapist openly criticizes Ingrid and Oswald, it may have unintentionally reinforced Edward's own feelings. These feelings include insecurity, jealousy, hostility, or hatred. Edward sees them as a representation of a life he does not have. Edward's gloomy expression shows his poor internal state has not changed. This leads to an unexpected action. Edward suddenly stabbing the therapist is an extreme manifestation of his pent-up insecurity.

Edward's insecurity has led to the absolute worst of hostility. It has also led to horrifying acts of violence. All of this is a result of his deep depression. It shows how dangerous his fragile and distorted mental state is. According to Lubis' (2016) book, *Depresi: Tinjauan Psikologi*, depression can cause destructive behaviors. One of them is aggressiveness and violence. When these two things continue to increase, they can lead to homicide. This is exactly what is shown in this scene.

There is a myth that men do not experience depression. This view is wrong and very dangerous. It is often rooted in gender stereotypes. These stereotypes suggest men must always be strong and tough. They must not show any emotional weakness. The inability to express emotions or to seek support can worsen their mental state. It is able to create a cycle where depression and insecurity reinforce one another. This can ultimately lead to highly destructive actions.

Self-Isolation and Feelings of Rejection

Still connecting scenes from the film *A Different Man* with indicators of insecurity. The researcher's final conclusion is that insecure men experience loneliness and feel rejected, as depicted through the main character in the film *A Different Man*. This can be seen through several scenes related to the insecurity indicators: 'experiences isolation or loneliness' and 'feels unloved or rejected'.





Figure 6 Scene of Edward After Filming Taking a Train to Going Home
Source : A Different Man (Movie, 2025)

Here, Figure 6 depicts Edward on a train returning from work. A group of youths is laughing while looking at Edward, who sits alone with a gloomy expression. Edward tries to observe the people around him: first, a woman who looks at him and then averts her gaze when he looks back. There is also a man sitting down, wearing dark sunglasses and seemingly smiling, but it is impossible to tell whether or not he is looking at Edward. Edward appears dejected and frequently looks down. From a distance, he hears the ramblings of a man in disheveled clothing, and as the man approaches, Edward visibly tries to avoid eye contact.

On a connotative level, Edward's gloomy face while sitting alone on the train indicates a poor mental state. It shows that he is unhappy, especially in that situation. The laughter and glances from the group of youths, the woman's reaction of looking away, and even his observation of others (including the vaguely smiling man in dark sunglasses) are all interpreted by Edward as potential ridicule. He perceives every glance and interaction as a form of judgment, causing him to become withdrawn and isolated, perhaps out of fear of what society thinks. Feeling different in a negative context, Edward believes that society genuinely rejects him.

His effort to avoid eye contact with the approaching man demonstrates a strong desire to disappear or to evade any social confrontation, no matter how minor. It is a manifestation of Edward's social insecurity, which makes him feel vulnerable in public spaces. According to Allan Pease and Barbara Pease (2004), avoiding eye contact is an innate signal of submission and a submissive behavior, used to pacify or avoid aggression for the sake of safety.



Figure 7 Scene of Edward Sitting Alone in a Bar, Watching Ingrid and Oswald and His Other Theater Friends Celebrating

Source : A Different Man (Movie, 2025)

Figure 7 literally shows the theater people, Ingrid, and Oswald toasting and celebrating. While Edward is sitting alone, and next to him is a stranger he just met. They are both discussing several things, and one of them is about Oswald. From afar, Edward watches the theater people, Ingrid, and Oswald. He watches them with an unhappy expression, frowning. This happens still even though they, especially Oswald, seem to be giving Edward a warm greeting.

Edward's insecurity is crystal clear. It is clear through his social isolation and his inability to respond positively. Despite being in the same celebratory environment, Edward chooses to be alone. He does not want to interact with them at all. Instead, he talks about Oswald with a complete stranger. This shows his attention and obsession are still fixed on Oswald. This is because Oswald is a threat to Edward. It is likely driven by his own insecurity, jealousy, or unresolved past rivalries.

Based on Daniel Goleman's (2005) theory, Edward has low emotional intelligence. The theory of emotional intelligence emphasizes the importance of certain abilities. These are the abilities to recognize, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and others. High emotional intelligence can improve a person's ability to interact. It helps them to build positive relationships with other people. Abilities of managing emotions and handling relationships, these are parts Edward does not manage well. Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence* (2005), states that individuals who manage emotions well experience less loneliness. Meanwhile, individuals skilled in handling relationships are better at solving their own problems.

Edward's frowning expression while watching them toast underscores the depth of his own insecurity. This happens even when Oswald seems to offer him a warm greeting. Perhaps the bitterness or rejection he feels has blocked him. It has blocked him from accepting warmth or feeling happiness in that environment. This scene depicts Edward's insecurity, which continues to separate him from other people. It ruins his ability to connect or feel comfortable, even when the opportunity is present.

Edward's nonverbal communication, body language or expression, tells much about how he feels. Joe Navarro and Marvin Karlins (2008) see nonverbal communication as "tells." These are clues that can reveal a person's true thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Sometimes this is more honest than verbal language.

There is a myth that handsome people, like Edward, will have an easier time socially. This is a common but not entirely accurate view. Although physical appearance can influence first impressions, a person's ability to interact well is influenced by other factors. These factors are mainly internal ones. Examples include personality, social skills, self-confidence, and personal experience. Handsome people might get more attention from other people. But this does not guarantee that they will feel comfortable or succeed socially. Therefore, although there are some initial advantages, social success is not solely determined by one's physical appearance.

Speaking of myth, there is a belief that insecurity is an experience exclusive to women. This notion is entirely mistaken and does not reflect human psychological reality. Insecurity is an unavoidable part of the human emotional experience (Forgas, Crano & Fiedler, 2023), meaning anyone can experience it regardless of gender. Men also experience insecurity that can stem from various aspects, including physical appearance, career and financial status, social interaction skills, and experiences of failure.

Data Interpretation

Based on the analysis, several conclusions emerge about insecurity's representation. First, external transformation fails to heal profound internal fragility. Edward's surgery did not resolve his complex and deep-seated insecurity. This finding demonstrates that insecurity is not a superficial issue. It is an ingrained psychological state requiring internal focus. True healing depends on changing one's internal world. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) offers a viable path toward this goal.

Aaron Beck's Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (as cited in Beck & Fleming, 2021) focuses on modifying cognitions; it could directly address Edward's deeply rooted problems. The theory assumes his insecurity stems from distorted thought patterns. His negative interpretations of events fueled his destructive behaviors. His automatic thoughts about Oswald were likely inaccurate and irrational. CBT would help Edward identify and challenge these maladaptive beliefs, by reframing these thoughts, Edward could begin to heal internally. The therapeutic process would help Edward re-evaluate his harmful thoughts so he could challenge his beliefs about his own inferiority.

As Edward changes his thinking, his destructive behaviors can also change. CBT also targets flawed core beliefs, like feeling worthless. Changing these core beliefs offers long-term, sustainable improvement. The goal is to help Edward develop adaptive, rational thinking. CBT thus offers an internal solution, unlike his external surgery.

The findings show Edward's surgery was a bid to "kill" his old self. He pursued the pervasive myth of body perfection. This myth is widespread in popular American culture. It

promises a new, privileged life through physical ideals. This includes happiness, social acceptance, and romantic success. Edward believed this radical change would grant him a clean slate.

After his operation, Edward did gain some superficial benefits, the handsome Edward secured a stable job as a property agent. He could now attract women and engage in intimate relationships. He also developed a new circle of friends, people approached him much more easily than before. These outcomes seemed to align with the body perfection myth. However, the myth's promise was only partially fulfilled. Although surgery changed his face, his internal world remained untouched. Edward's deep-seated insecurity tragically persisted. His hostile reactions toward Oswald prove this internal fragility, a perfect external appearance does not automatically resolve internal problems. This experience serves as a powerful critique of superficial solutions.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory (as cited in Minderop, 2010) helps explain this phenomenon. Edward's old identity and trauma were simply repressed into his unconscious mind. From Carl Jung's perspective (Stein, 1998), "Guy Moratz" was an artificial persona. It was a mask created to hide his true, suffering self. Meanwhile, the original Edward became a powerful, suppressed shadow. Jung argued that denying the shadow prevents psychic integration and wholeness. This attempt to "kill" a part of himself only created greater conflict. His internal wounds were carried into his new identity. Edward's experience demands authentic inner healing, not just physical change.

Second, the film shows how insecure individuals fixate on an "other." Edward displays a comparative obsession and projects negativity onto others. These figures are not seen objectively. They are filtered through his own feelings of inadequacy. Oswald and his therapist are primary examples of this process.

For Edward, Oswald became a constant, haunting presence because he represents an ideal version of himself he could never be. He was confident, socially accepted, and skilled in relationships. Ironically, Oswald had the same physical condition but handled it differently. This made Oswald a living symbol of Edward's own profound failure. Edward's envy and discomfort framed Oswald as a threat.

On the other hand, Edward's therapist symbolized a different kind of "other." He represented a reality Edward refused to confront. This projection represented a truth he chose to destroy by killing the therapist, it symbolized his complete rejection of his surroundings. This act highlights the dominance of Edward's id, his ego failing to control destructive impulses. His superego failed to provide a strong moral boundary, thus the id's drive for eliminating threats led to murder.

As explained, these figures also served as points of comparison. Leon Festinger's social comparison theory is highly relevant here. Individuals evaluate themselves by making comparisons with others. Edward constantly engaged in upward social comparison with Oswald. This process directly triggered intense envy and feelings of inadequacy. His envy

evolved into a powerful and destructive impulse. This became the main driver of his aggressive actions.

Oswald unwittingly became the target of Edward's negative feelings. He was blamed for Edward's own sense of inferiority. For instance, Edward spied on Oswald and accused him of living a fake life. This negative projection was an attempt to destroy a rival figure. Edward's perception of Oswald became completely distorted by hatred. The climax was his public accusation that Oswald "stole everything." This confrontation was the result of intense social comparison. Edward's inability to manage this process led to destructive actions.

Finally, deep insecurity leads to dangerously irrational behavior. Edward's destructive journey began with small internal turmoil. It grew into tangible and frightening acts of aggression. The frustration-aggression hypothesis by Dollard et al. (1939) is applicable. It shows aggression emerges from the frustration of a blocked goal.

Edward's repressed insecurity eventually became uncontrollable and violent. He first expressed it through verbal outbursts and minor vandalism. This failure to manage pressure laid the foundation for his decline. His behavior then escalated to self-sabotage and public aggression. The loss of his job and the theater confrontation show this progression.

The most horrific outcome was the murder of his therapist, it represented the total collapse of Edward's rational mind. It was driven by an insecurity left to fester for years, and eventually it functioned as his hamartia, or tragic flaw. It guided him toward fatal decisions and his ultimate downfall. This could lead to a state of anomie, as defined by Émile Durkheim (as cited in Raho, 2021). It could also lead to nihilism, a rejection of life's meaning. General strain theory by Jang and Agnew (2015) further explains his criminality, the theory states that strain leads to negative emotions. These feelings, like anger and frustration, create pressure for action. This pressure can manifest as criminal behavior to correct the strain.

Ultimately, Edward's character embodies the ideology of toxic masculinity. This concept refers to harmful norms associated with manhood. It involves the need to aggressively compete and dominate others (Kupers, 2005). Edward consistently displays these traits. He aligns with masculine stereotypes of being inexpressive and aggressive (Moynihan, 1998). According to the American Psychological Association (2018, as cited in Benjamin Harris, 2021), Edward suppresses vulnerable emotions, fitting the norm of emotional detachment. This suppression is a core aspect of toxic masculinity.

Edward's repressed emotions transformed into aggression and dominance. His aggressive behaviors were a way to assert a power he lacked. His competitiveness became a toxic obsession with his rival, Oswald. His conflict over Ingrid was a fight for dominance over a woman. When insecurity meets these masculine norms, a destructive cycle begins. Edward's story tragically shows that compliance with these myths, born from fragility, never leads to true strength.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Edward concludes that deep-seated insecurity cannot be cured through external transformation alone. Edward's attempt to become Guy Moratz, driven by perfection myths, ultimately failed to heal his inner wounds. Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytic theories explain how past trauma remains active beneath his brand-new persona. His former identity and its associated insecurities continue to haunt him, proving physical change is wholly insufficient. Conversely, internal solutions like cognitive therapy can alter the maladaptive thought patterns causing the core problem. This affirms that true healing for insecurity demands complete and total self-acceptance from the individual. Superficial changes ultimately only delay the confrontation with one's deep internal fragility and profound personal pain.

Edward's unresolved insecurity also manifests as a comparative obsession and negative projection onto other people. Social comparison theory explains how his constant comparison to Oswald triggers envy and feelings of inadequacy. Oswald becomes a living symbol of Edward's failure, while the therapist represents the truth he rejects. The therapist's murder shows the dominance of Edward's *id*, with a failed *ego* and *superego* function. Frustration-aggression theory can explain his escalating behavior as a form of entirely misguided corrective action. The potential for *anomie* and nihilism underscores the severe moral and psychological disintegration Edward tragically experiences. His distorted perception transforms those around him into targets for his unresolved and misplaced deadly aggression.

Edward's insecure relationship with masculinity reveals a complex interaction between prevailing ideology and harmful gender stereotypes. He does not subvert masculine stereotypes, but rather embodies their most toxic and destructive possible form. He performs a key norm of toxic masculinity by consistently suppressing all of his vulnerable emotions. These suppressed emotions subsequently explode into aggressive behaviors that he can no longer control or fully contain. His aggressive and competitive attitudes are not true strength, but a manifestation of his severe insecurity. His ambition to achieve great success transforms into a destructive and uncontrollable personal drive. His journey illustrates how insecurity clashing with rigid masculine ideology can create a deep personal tragedy.

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