



'To Feel or Not to Feel: Dissociative Feminism and Modalities of Unfeeling in 21st-Century Literary Fiction'

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# To Feel or Not to Feel: Dissociative Feminism and Modalities of Unfeeling in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Literary Fiction

*Cleo Miki*

The term ‘dissociative feminism’ can be traced back to Emmeline Clein’s 2019 article for BuzzFeed News, ‘The Smartest Women I Know Are All Dissociating’.<sup>1</sup> In it, Clein describes a new affective tone which shifts from the declarative protestations of ‘girlboss feminists’ to detached, flat descriptions of ‘overtly horrifying facts’ which comprise the everyday existence of women today.<sup>2</sup> Abuse, depression, and burnout are all treated with a ‘so what?’ attitude. In addition to a generally marked dispassion, many argue that this emerging archetype ‘glamourizes her own destruction’ to the point that she knowingly engages in self-interested, fatalistic behaviours, only to scoff in the face of the subsequent fallout.<sup>3</sup> The dissociative feminist deems emotional reactivity trite; she is ‘aware that “woundedness” is overdone and overrated’.<sup>4</sup> Leslie Jamison writes about the shift in tonal representation to which Clein is referring in her essay ‘Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain’, in which Jamison acutely describes the behaviour of what Clein calls

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<sup>1</sup> Though Clein uses the phrase ‘dissociation feminism’, later commentators have more commonly opted for the term ‘dissociative feminism’, which I use throughout this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Emmeline Clein, ‘The Smartest Women I Know Are All Dissociating’, 20 November 2019, *BuzzFeed News*

<<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/emmelineclein/dissociation-feminism-women-flea-bag-twitter>> [accessed 04 February 2022].

<sup>3</sup> Emma Garland, ‘Enter the Fleabag era: What does it mean to be a “dissociative feminist”?’, 3 February 2022, *Dazed*,

<<https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/55375/1/fleabag-era-what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-dissociative-feminist>> [accessed 06 February 2022].

<sup>4</sup> Leslie Jamison, ‘Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain’, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 90.2 (2014), 114–28 (p. 120).

the ‘dissociative feminist’ as the performance of a ‘post-wounded’ affect: an affective treatment which neutralizes dramatic or otherwise anguished reactions to pain. Rather than indulge in melodrama, dissociative feminists lean into their own awareness of hurt and elect to ‘stay numb or clever instead’.<sup>5</sup>

The post-wounded dissociative feminist archetype has quickly populated contemporary media, finding itself in television shows such as *Fleabag*, which follows the quotidian escapades of a young, cynical woman attempting to navigate life and love, characterized by the show’s signature disruption of the fourth wall. In this disruption, the audience experiences an intimate depiction of the performance of the post-wounded affect as *Fleabag*’s protagonist pauses within an emotional or disturbing interaction to communicate directly with the viewer, prattling off amusing quips about her own emotional damage. The result is a separation of an intimate emotional experience and the performance of reaction to those around her. While the most common touchstone for commentary on dissociative feminism, *Fleabag* is only one of numerous instances of the dissociative feminist’s emergence in the pop-cultural sphere. This paper will examine uses of the post-wounded affect and portrayals of dissociative feminists in contemporary literary fiction as presented in Raven Leilani’s *Luster* (2020) and Otessa Moshfegh’s *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (2018).

Dissociation’s definition, per the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is ‘The action of [...] severance; division; disunion’. In the case of the dissociative feminist, dissociation refers to a state of divorce between event, emotion, and reaction. In the previous example, for instance, *Fleabag*’s fourth-wall break marks a clear emotional separation from her immediate situation, stripping her emotions down, neutralizing her feelings, returning to the event with the dispassionate demeanour characteristic

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<sup>5</sup> Jamison, p. 120.

of the dissociative feminist. A similar pathway of experience, emotion, and reaction is documented within Moshfegh and Leilani's novels, as will be seen below. Lauren Berlant offers insight valuable to discussions on the dissociation of emotion and affective performance regarding the larger social implications of an emerging 'affectlessness' in contemporary society, of which dissociative feminism might be seen as a more recent extension.<sup>6</sup> Berlant attributed the origins of modern affective judgement to a more general political depression, 'evidenced in affectlessness, apathy, coolness, cynicism, and so on – modes of what might be called detachment'. Despite appearances, Berlant notes, these affects are not detached at all, but rather comprise 'ongoing relations of sociality'.

The performance of detachment, to borrow Berlant's phrasing, may be helpfully understood as a means of negotiating one's relation to a hostile world. In looking at the 'dissociation' of female literary figures, affective presentation might be understood as a distorted manifestation of 'true' emotion and pain, not a refutation of the characters' emotive and empathic capacities as a whole. Rather, the post-wounded affect appears to be a depiction of a lifestyle as well as an aesthetic choice in response to an injurious world which may offer a respite from a repeated confrontation with more painful reality. The post-wounded affect of the dissociative feminist may thus come to register as an emotional strategy resonant on the level of intuitive response. Berlant remarks on this, writing, 'Laws, norms, and events shape imaginaries, but in the middle of the reproduction of life people make up modes of being and responding to the world that altogether constitute what gets called "visceral response" and intuitive intelligence'.<sup>7</sup> Berlant's note here is critical in understanding the significance of the rise in popularity of the post-wounded affect.

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<sup>6</sup> Lauren Berlant, 'Cruel Optimism', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 93-117 (p. 97).

<sup>7</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 53.

Clein's dissociative feminists, armed with the post-wounded affect, can move about their intimate realities with a greater sense of control due to this affective strategy. It is 'intuitively intelligent', to borrow Berlant's phrasing, to detach from one's own pain. Detachment offers a potential avenue for individual autonomy—the dissociative feminist chooses who and what may affect her, not the inverse.

Importantly, this post-wounded affect, while aligned in aesthetic presentation, varies vastly in its iterations across race and class. To look at the nuances in the dissociative aesthetic, this article will compare the protagonists of Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* and Raven Leilani's *Luster*. Both novels feature a young twenty-something woman whose choices and behaviour deviate from the standard narrative of a 'good life', generally hallmarked by the pursuit of career, family, and stability. These women lie, cheat, and entertain masochistic relationships, doing so with a detachment that allows the cycle to repeat itself with minimal friction. At the same time, the novels illuminate a critical nuance in embodiment of the post-wounded affect relative to their origins in intersectional deviations.

The notion of unfeeling, embodied as the post-wounded affect, is a critical paradigm in both novels, however divergent in origin and utility they may be. Berlant analyses affect management in the framework of object attachment theory. More specifically, she proposes that affect is a calculable measure of one's relation to desirable objects within their own lives. Affect is the natural byproduct of a subject's attachment to a certain object, outcome, or future state. The details of circumstance, behavioural strategy, and affective treatment are indicative of the varying objects of attachment and the proximity to their fulfilment. In the context of the post-wounded affect, object attachment can be understood as the dissociative feminist's latent desire for a sense of unaffectedness, unfeeling, or otherwise imperviousness to their hostile environment. Dissociation, as it is articulated through the post-wounded

affect, serves as a strategy to attain this peace of mind. Further, affect allows us to understand more meaningfully what she described as ‘what fantasies of conventionality can do for and to women amid the project of surviving a world that can wear you out’.<sup>8</sup> The notion of ‘fantasy’ becomes paramount to understanding the motivations of Moshfegh’s protagonist specifically, as she builds an entire life-experiment around the dream of a dissociation so profound that it delivers a fantasy of rebirth. Unfeeling in Berlant’s object-attachment scheme is an agential tool, deployed in the pursuit of a desired psychological or emotional enlightenment. The post-wounded affect is the marker of the contemporary woman who employs her own emotional autonomy and pursues her desires.

Leilani’s novel presents a different vision of unfeeling, one which is closer to Xine Yao’s conception of unfeeling as a form of political and intersubjective resistance.<sup>9</sup> Yao presents unfeeling ‘not simply as negative feelings or the absence of feelings, but as that which cannot be recognized as feeling—the negation of feeling itself.’<sup>10</sup> By subverting the expectation of an emotional response, marginalised communities exercise a ‘form of resistance that enables [...] immediate safety’, denying ‘aggressors the satisfaction of seeing our affectability’.<sup>11</sup> On an intimate, subjective level, Yao writes that unfeeling can also serve as ‘a quotidian tactic of survival and a counterintuitive, and sometimes counteractive, mode of care’, echoing Berlant’s diagnosis of the emergence of ‘affectlessness’ as a result of political depression.<sup>12</sup> Yao’s ideas on unfeeling mark an important digression from Berlant’s, particularly relevant to Leilani’s novel: the role of minority identity in the

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<sup>8</sup> Berlant, ‘The Compulsion to Repeat Femininity: Landscape for a Good Woman and The Life and Loves of a She-Devil’, in *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 233.

<sup>9</sup> Xine Yao, *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2021), pp. 1-5.

<sup>10</sup> Yao, pp. 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> Yao, p. 208.

<sup>12</sup> Yao, p. 6.

performance and embodiment of what Yao terms ‘unfeeling’ but which is similarly denoted in the concept of post-woundedness and the dissociative feminist archetype. *Luster* examines a racial and class dimension absent in Moshfegh’s novel, interrogating the differing origins and functionalities of the post-wounded affect and what an ‘unfeeling’ sensibility may truly constitute. Both novels, importantly, address the intricate coupling of reactivity, desire, and subjectivity which is integral to the emerging dissociative feminist archetype. This paper will additionally explore how these conceptions of unfeeling present themselves within the narratives of the novels’ protagonists, including their origins and objects.

### **Give Me A Break**

Moshfegh’s 2018 novel *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* follows an unnamed narrator as she, with the aid of an assortment of prescription drugs, attempts to sleep away the entirety of a year to reset her consciousness. The unnamed narrator has frequently been cited as the prime example of the dissociative feminist: a disaffected twenty-something with an overstated disdain for worldly conventions and obligations, such as marriage and career.<sup>13</sup> She entertains activities and relationships which could be considered masochistic, sadistic, or destructive. Notably, she possesses the requisite privilege to enable this behaviour with few serious consequences to her material security. Moshfegh’s narrator writes that she ‘looked like a model, had money [she] hadn’t earned, wore real designer clothing, and had

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Clein; Garland; Monica Greep, ‘Forget chick lit! The “gross woman” is taking over literature’, *Daily Mail Online*, 25 January 2022 <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-10436361/New-trend-celebrates-unfeminine-characters-literature.html>> [accessed 21 August 2022].

majored in art history so [she] was “cultured”.<sup>14</sup> While frivolous, the narrator’s privileged status within society is foundational to her characterization and dissociative tendencies. The narrator’s capacity to vanish from her own life without fear of extreme social retribution or financial precarity provides the infrastructure for her primary dissociation: her year of sleep. Further, the social privileges which she retains situate her in a position from which her actions—particularly those pertaining to her dissociative tendencies—occur with the intention of exerting autonomy over her environment. The novel begins with the narrator’s self-diagnosis, followed swiftly by her self-prescription: a year of intermittent hibernation. Her ‘year of rest and relaxation’ is an enactment of desire. The narrator’s object of Berlantian optimistic attachment is rebirth: ‘a whole new person’ who could ‘start over without regrets, bolstered by the bliss and serenity I would have accumulated’, she states.<sup>15</sup>

Unfeeling in Moshfegh’s novel materialises in two forms. First, a primary psychological state, in which the narrator feels intensely disaffected by the relationships and activities of her current life. Second, a medically induced state of unfeeling, a proactive dissociation of the narrator’s present and past emotions, achieved through her excessive sleeping patterns. In reaction to a subjecthood defined by a reactive post-woundedness, the narrator manufactures a different form of unfeeling (sleep), attached to the object of a better life in which feeling is psychologically sustainable.

The primary medium through which Moshfegh explores dissociation and detachment in the novel is the act of sleep itself. Sleep in the novel is distorted from its natural state. Rather than being an inert occurrence of routine or material fatigue, sleep is an active effort on the part of the narrator. Sleep is an activity which is meant

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<sup>14</sup> Ottessa Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (New York, N.Y.: Random House Large Print Publishing, 2018), p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, pp. 23-24; Moshfegh, p. 51.



to produce a desired effect within her life, and an activity which warps her presence and personality in waking moments as well. ‘Sleep felt productive. Something was getting sorted out. I knew in my heart [...] that when I’d slept enough, I’d be okay’, she explains.<sup>16</sup> For the narrator, sleep—and in her sleep, the ability to dissociate from herself and her emotions—is the ultimate therapeutic act. The deliberate nature of the narrator’s coercive sleep, as well as its remedial intent, is doubly reinforced through the role of prescription drugs in her slumber, obtained through her relationship with her psychiatrist, Dr. Tuttle. The narrator is calculated in every interaction with Dr. Tuttle, greatly exaggerating dreams, symptoms, and insomnia with the aim of securing increasingly sedating drugs.

As the months of her rest go on, the narrator slips further and further away from what feeling she began with. In the initial stages of her medicated sleep, she recalls many ‘upsetting’ dreams about her parents, though she omits this from Dr. Tuttle in favour of tall tales more likely to result in a stronger sedation. Each time she encounters one of such upsetting moments, she treats the unwelcome appearance with a few pills. Moshfegh’s narrator describes this gradual withdrawal from senses of social and emotional attachment a few months into her experiment, reflecting:

Outside of the occasional irritation, I had no nightmares, no passions, no desires, no great pains [...]. Nothing seemed really real. Sleeping, waking, it all collided into one gray, monotonous plane ride through the clouds [...] this was how I knew the sleep was having an effect: I was growing less and less attached to life. If I kept going, I thought, I’d disappear completely, then reappear in some new form. This was my hope. This was the dream.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Moshfegh, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Moshfegh, p. 84.

The narrator increasingly detaches from the emotions of her past and present, finding little emotional agitation at the once-painful memories of the death of her parents and the constant irritations of her best friend Reva. The narrator's hypermedication of her every affective state culminates in an emotional crisis akin to a near-death experience—an affective overload of emotionally-charged memories and unresolved desires, which ends with the solemn words: 'there was no need for reassurance or directionality because I was nowhere, doing nothing. I was nothing. I was gone'.<sup>18</sup> In the following months, the narrator emerges from her sleep to find that her dissociative exercise has been a success. In her act of dissociation, the narrator can exert agency over her subjectivity to a successful end; even the previously hostile, if not sadomasochistic, relationship between her and Reva changes form. For most of the novel, the narrator describes Reva in cruel terms, as overly impassioned and 'unpleasant' company, telling her often that they shouldn't be friends. After her year of slumber, however, the narrator takes on a calm, observant affection toward Reva. The last time the narrator sees Reva, she tells her that she loves her, the word '*love*' italicised by Moshfegh to mirror Reva's declaration of love at the start of the novel.<sup>19</sup>

Moshfegh's novel demonstrates two salient points regarding use of the post-wounded affect. First, that the post-wounded affect palpable here, as well as the narrator's perpetual yearning for a state of dissociation, is motivated by the narrator's desire to suppress her own emotions as an act of autonomy. Second, that her deliberate dissociative act—a year of hibernation—is a prescriptive, elective activity meant to achieve the object of her desire. The privileged agency to affect dissociation in her world as a means of psychic betterment, as opposed to psychic survival, is enabled largely by the narrator's racial and class privilege within

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<sup>18</sup> Moshfegh, p. 276.

<sup>19</sup> Moshfegh, pp. 59, 283.

American society, a critical point to be considered when comparing her to the narrator of Leilani's novel.

### **(Un)feeling Minds, Bodies**

Raven Leilani's literary debut *Luster* (2020) follows Edie, a 23-year-old publishing assistant who has an affair with a married man and later moves into his New Jersey home with his wife and adoptive daughter. Edie, while maintaining the chaotic and otherwise 'unfeeling' attributes commonly ascribed to the post-wounded, dissociative feminist archetype, is more meaningfully characterized by a tension between the performance of acceptable emotions and a continuous undercurrent of immediate, often overwhelming feeling. Edie's dissociative tendencies are episodic, recurring, discrete. This is due to a fundamental difference in subjectivity from Moshfegh's narrator: that of a precarious black woman in America. Furthermore, Edie's character does not have a clear object of attachment. Rather, the novel's narrative is overwhelmingly quotidian, emphasising the existential nature of unfeeling native to Edie's subjectivity relative to Moshfegh's unnamed narrator.

Edie is a deeply emotional character who is perpetually tasked with the psychic labour of behavioural modification to assuage her predominantly white surroundings. This presents itself numerous times throughout the course of the novel. As she reacts to allegations of sexual misconduct levelled against her in her workplace, for instance, she recounts a detailed cycle of affect, emotion, mediation, and nullification:

When I try to explain, there is a tremor in my voice. I try to regain my composure, but I am sensitive to the power even of authority figures I despise. I close my eyes and

will myself not to cry... I stand up, knowing I only have so much time before the tears, and I go to the bathroom, lock myself in a stall, and puke.

But the impulse to cry is gone.<sup>20</sup>

This scene includes two critical points of affective engagement. The first occurs at the point of cognition, in which Edie recognizes her emotions and attempts to modify them, performing a cool demeanour for the benefit of her colleagues. As she leaves for the bathroom, she retains the original emotion triggered, but at some unspoken point that emotion dissipates, along with the impulse to cry. This cycle reiterates itself within the plot, demonstrating the psychological reality of Edie within the constructs of her world. Affective events are not followed by a continuous affective experience. Rather, a dissociation akin to a traumatic rupture occurs, wherein the triggered emotion is interrupted and displaced with a more neutral state. Edie, as the novel's narrator, thus presents a post-wounded affect in her recollection, reflecting the rough moment of emotional disruption. Edie later acknowledges this sequential, discrete method of emotional processing and affective performance during a tense confrontation with Eric's wife Rebecca. As in the previous passage, Edie is aware of the immediate emotion produced by the encounter ('humiliation being such that it sometimes requires a private performance, which I give myself'), and once she counters herself within her consciousness, sublimates the affected emotion and continues into what is identifiable as a post-wounded affect or state of unfeeling ('and emerge from the shower in the next stage of hurt feelings. For me, this is denial').<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the post-wounded affect portrayed within the text, Leilani explores unfeeling as a social phenomenon extensively in a fictional examination of

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<sup>20</sup> Raven Leilani, *Luster* (London: Picador, 2020), p. 74.

<sup>21</sup> Leilani, p. 121.

intra- and interracial intersubjectivity, carefully illustrating the subtle manner in which the post-wounded affect and dissociative mindset characterize real relationships. This is first presented in the character of Aria, Edie's co-worker, who is the only other black person in her department and immediately noted to be far more successful in navigating the social dynamics of the office. Aria, unlike Edie, successfully adopts a performance amenable to their white co-workers, easily gaining the favour of company executives. She comports herself warmly, charmingly, with a well-balanced element of measured expression, something that is both immediately identifiable and inherently individuating to Edie. After an awkward exchange in which Edie attempts to reach across into the realm of solidarity, she reflects: 'and then I miscalculated, too much anger shared too soon [...]. She still rearranges herself, waiting to be chosen. And she will be. Because it is an art—to be black and dogged and inoffensive. She is all these things and she is embarrassed that I am not'.<sup>22</sup> Later, Aria acknowledges their marked differences and challenges Edie's office demeanour: 'You think because you slack and express no impulse control that you're like, black power. Sticking it to the white man or whatever. But you're just exactly what they expect [...] they can be mediocre. We can't'.<sup>23</sup> Here, Aria gestures toward a different form of the unfeeling sensibility, which is close to Edie's own, but not precisely the same. While Edie's behaviour is more rash and seemingly less concerned with the perceptions of those around her, Aria adopts Yao's conception of unfeeling as a matter of subtle resistance against those who wield more power. Yao writes, for instance, from her own experience that 'the performance of being unaffected is the form of resistance that enables the immediate safety of people like me and denies aggressors the satisfaction of seeing our affectability'.<sup>24</sup> Edie

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<sup>22</sup> Leilani, pp. 22-23.

<sup>23</sup> Leilani, p. 80.

<sup>24</sup> Yao, p. 208.

acknowledges that her careless demeanour is not the type of unfeeling which will advance her career and recognizes the resistant, advantageous unfeeling in Aria. Aria and Edie seem to stand at the nexus of a black subjectivity, wherein the decision of action and affective embodiment delineate the self from the other. Thus, the reader comes to know Edie's unique alienation through the contrast of Aria's participatory performativity and Edie's disaffected post-woundedness because of their putatively proximate sociological experience.

On an interracial level, Edie is foiled by Rebecca, Eric's wife. After Edie loses her job, Rebecca invites her to live at their house in New Jersey where Edie begins to partake in some of the typical maternal occupations of the house, and thus mirrors the role of Rebecca in the domestic space. Akin to Edie, and opposed to Aria, Rebecca is characterised by a certain unfeeling sensibility. She speaks in a flat tone—even in her discovery of Edie and Eric's resumed relationship, she is calm. She speaks in the tongue of the post-wounded, like Edie. While Aria is contrasted to Edie in her behavioural performance, Rebecca's descriptions often take on a more bodily aspect. She has a 'nonchalance' about her naked body, a threatening casualness and assurance about her physical form that is often described in moments of tension between the two characters. 'Her body is like a dagger, like the body of a woman who is in the business of sending off the dead. And this is how she holds herself, like a person uninterested by her own anatomical drama, her bearing unselfconscious, indifferent', says Edie, as she begins to paint a portrait of Rebecca.<sup>25</sup> When discussing the differences between the most intimate parts of their bodies, Edie remarks at the vulgarity with which her body is viewed, relative to Rebecca. Edie thinks that Rebecca is 'indifferent' to her vagina, while Edie's 'was a cunt' after her first sexual

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<sup>25</sup> Leilani, p. 225.

experience.<sup>26</sup> While Edie occasionally perceives the subtle insecurity of Rebecca, the relationship between the two is not competitive, but existential. Rebecca retains propriety over every aspect of her life, even those of which Edie is a more active participant. Akila is Rebecca's daughter; Eric is Rebecca's husband; Edie lives in Rebecca's house. Rebecca's body is inalienable and autonomous, while Edie's desires are subordinate to her circumstances. In Rebecca, Leilani demonstrates the critical difference in white and black unfeeling.

Yet, Edie doesn't wholly embody the 'unfeeling' subject Yao describes. While occasionally her reactivity and incisive judgement of those around her are phrased with an indignance potentially 'resistant' in origin, more often she writes from a place of Jamison's woundedness. Edie expresses no desire toward a political imperative; her character is hardly ambitious in the sense of speaking 'truth to power', or even gaining leverage over Rebecca and Eric, the two white characters with whom she most often interacts in the novel. Rather, the post-wounded affect which she deploys, and her larger unfeeling sensibilities come from a place of intimate, personal grief. Between narrator and reader, there is a clear communication of the expectation thrust upon black women of a subdued affective tone. Edie's emotions are subject to the desires of her oppressors, but even so, they are present and overwhelming. As she seems to find no place to express the pain of her own emotions, she adopts a post-wounded affect, performing detachment for others largely at the expense of herself. Disaffection, in her case, is to no serviceable end, but rather functions as a perpetual mode of being necessitated by inequitable social norms.

### **What is Dissociation, Really?**

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<sup>26</sup> Leilani, p. 123.

Moshfegh and Leilani's work offers critical insight into the emerging 'dissociative feminist' archetype, as coined by Clein in 2019. While it is tempting to conglomerate the prevailing winds of feminine attitude and embodiment, to label the affect with no further investigation into its origins is a disservice to both cultural commentary and the feminist project writ large. The intersectional nuances of intimate subjective experience from which observations of mass disaffection originate are critical in organising meaningful change, though affective performances may appear uniform. Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* and Leilani's *Luster* both offer intricate insights into the intimate psychologies which have produced the umbrella concept of the 'dissociative feminist'. Both Edie and Moshfegh's narrator associate their emotions in limited capacities, often because they remain too uncomfortable to sit with alone. However, it is in the divergent origins of these sentiments that readers and the public can more meaningfully understand the injurious mechanisms which have facilitated a repressed psychology and, one hopes, address its causes.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that both Edie and Moshfegh's unnamed narrator use the concept of unfeeling as a means of control in the context of their lives. The 'dissociative feminist', as applied to the cultural products of recent years, isn't perpetrating an act of political resistance, but applying an affective treatment to real pain. Leslie Jamison concludes her essay,

The hard part is that underneath this obscene fascination with representations of women who hurt themselves and have bad sex and drink too much, there are actual women who hurt themselves and have bad sex and drink too much. Female pain is prior to its representation, even if its manifestations are shaped and bent by cultural models.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jamison, p. 126.



The post-wounded affect and dissociative feminist model are informative in identifying an emotional zeitgeist, but *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* and *Luster* remind us that women are individuals first, each with varying needs and motives. Most importantly, the novels remind readers that to effectively address social discontent requires thoughtful investigation beyond catchy taglines and superficial appearances.