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PSYCHIC DISINTEGRATION IN *JOKER* (2019): A JUNGIAN ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The psychological complexity of cinematic character portrayals has encouraged interdisciplinary approaches that bridge film studies and depth psychology. Despite extensive discussions of mental illness in contemporary cinema, limited research specifically examines the failure of shadow integration as a mechanism of severe psychological fragmentation. This study investigates the psychological trajectory of the protagonist in Joker through the analytical psychology framework of Carl Gustav Jung. The study aims to explain how unresolved trauma, social marginalization, and identity fragmentation relate to the weakening of ego regulation and the difficulty of integrating shadow contents into conscious awareness. This study employed a qualitative method using the film Joker (2019) as the primary data source, analyzed through narrative events, symbolic imagery, and behavioral patterns related to Arthur Fleck's psychological transformation. The film was examined as a psychological text by analyzing narrative structure and character behavior. Findings indicate that repeated experiences of rejection weaken ego stability and contribute to the emergence of previously repressed shadow elements. The character's transformation is interpreted as a symbolic representation of psychic disintegration resulting from unresolved unconscious contents, weakened ego regulation, and the failure to integrate shadow elements into conscious awareness. Consequently, Arthur Fleck's psychological deterioration can be interpreted as a process involving unresolved unconscious contents, weakened ego regulation, and difficulty integrating shadow elements into conscious awareness. These conditions gradually intensify his psychic disintegration and contribute to the emergence of the Joker persona. This study concludes that Jungian analytical psychology provides a comprehensive interpretative framework for understanding Arthur Fleck's transformation as a progressive process of psychic disintegration resulting from the interaction between unconscious contents, weakened ego regulation, and persistent social adversity.

Keywords: *Jungian psychology; shadow integration; psychic disintegration*

INTRODUCTION

The representation of psychological distress in contemporary cinema has become an important subject in literary and cultural studies because films can construct meanings about identity, suffering, and human behavior through narrative and visual representation. Rather than functioning solely as entertainment, films may present psychological experiences through characterization, narrative development, and symbolic imagery. Such representations provide opportunities to examine how psychological conflict is constructed within fictional characters and how their identities develop in response to internal and external pressures.

Among contemporary films that portray psychological deterioration, Joker (2019), directed by Todd Phillips, offers a particularly significant representation of psychological fragmentation through the character of Arthur Fleck. Arthur experiences prolonged social rejection, emotional repression, interpersonal isolation, and traumatic experiences that progressively shape his sense of identity (Redmond, 2021; Nyfors, 2025; Dewi et al., 2025; Jamalullail & Ahzani, 2025). His transformation from a marginalized and emotionally vulnerable individual into the Joker presents a complex process of identity transformation that cannot be adequately understood only through a clinical description of mental illness (Zaid, 2023). Howell (2021) similarly interprets Arthur Fleck’s transformation as a process of performative identity construction shaped by his desire for recognition and affirmation. Instead, the character's development can also be examined as a symbolic representation of conflict between conscious identity and unconscious psychological contents (Skryabin, 2021). This interpretive approach is consistent with Segura San Miguel's (2021) argument that Joker can be examined through cultural, mythocritical, and psychoanalytical perspectives rather than being reduced to a clinical diagnosis.

Jungian analytical psychology provides a framework for examining the relationship between conscious and unconscious dimensions of the psyche. Previous psychoanalytic research on *Joker* has likewise examined Arthur Fleck's psychological transformation in relation to instability in his personality structure and traumatic experiences (Wirjayanti & Mustofa, 2021; Malinda et al., 2024). Within this framework, the ego represents the center of conscious awareness, while unconscious contents may influence thought, emotion, and behavior without being fully recognized by consciousness. (Jung, 1959a, 1959b). One of the important concepts in this psychological system is the shadow, which refers to aspects of the personality that are not sufficiently integrated into conscious awareness and may include traits, impulses, and tendencies that the conscious personality rejects or does not recognize as part of itself. From a Jungian perspective, psychological development involves a continuing process of recognizing and integrating unconscious contents rather than allowing them to remain completely dissociated from conscious awareness. This relationship between persona, shadow, and individuation has also been emphasized in recent Jungian literary analysis, where psychological wholeness is associated with the integration of previously neglected psychic contents (Moosavinia & Rezaeinejad, 2022).

Previous studies have examined Joker (2019) through psychological, Jungian, and sociocultural perspectives, including analyses of persona, shadow, political representation, psychological conflict, and Arthur's transformation (Tan, 2021).

However, these studies primarily focus on identifying or interpreting Jungian archetypes and the emergence of Arthur's shadow rather than examining the process through which difficulties in integrating shadow contents may be associated with the progressive fragmentation of his conscious identity. This study therefore focuses on the process through which Arthur's unresolved psychological experiences are interpreted within a Jungian framework, particularly in relation to the difficulty of integrating shadow contents into conscious awareness. The study conceptualizes this process as a failure of shadow integration and examines its relationship to what this study terms psychic disintegration.

Based on this research gap, the present study addresses the following research question: How does the failure of shadow integration contribute to Arthur Fleck's psychic disintegration in Joker (2019) from the perspective of Jungian analytical psychology? To address this question, the study analyzes narrative events, symbolic imagery, and behavioral patterns that represent Arthur's psychological transformation. The analysis does not attempt to clinically diagnose the fictional character; rather, it interprets the character's psychological development as a symbolic construction within the narrative. Through this approach, the study seeks to contribute to Jungian literary and film criticism by explaining how psychological fragmentation can be represented through the interaction between conscious identity and unconscious contents.

For clarity, the terms “failure of shadow integration” and “psychic disintegration” are used in this study as interpretative constructs rather than as formal terms established by Jung. “Failure of shadow integration” refers to the persistent difficulty of incorporating rejected or unrecognized shadow contents into conscious awareness, while “psychic disintegration” refers to the progressive disruption of psychological coherence that is interpreted in this study through the weakening of conscious self-regulation and the increasing dominance of unresolved unconscious contents. These terms therefore function as analytical categories developed to organize the interpretation of Arthur Fleck's psychological transformation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Structure of the Psyche in Analytical Psychology

Carl Gustav Jung conceptualizes the psyche as the totality of personality, integrating conscious awareness and unconscious processes into a unified psychological system. Unlike approaches that focus primarily on observable behavior or biological mechanisms, Jungian analytical psychology emphasizes the dynamic interaction between conscious and unconscious dimensions of the psyche. Within this framework, psychological functioning depends on continuous interaction between conscious identity and unconscious contents.

The ego occupies a central position within this system as the organizing principle of conscious experience. It structures perception, thought, and memory into a coherent sense of identity that allows individuals to function effectively in daily life. Jung emphasized that the ego constitutes only a limited portion of the psyche rather than its entirety, highlighting the importance of unconscious processes.

In this study, the concept of the ego provides a basis for interpreting how Arthur Fleck's conscious identity responds to increasingly disruptive unconscious contents. The personal unconscious consists of experiences that have been forgotten, suppressed, or never fully processed but continue to influence behavior. These experiences frequently include emotionally significant memories and unresolved conflicts that shape responses without conscious awareness. Jung argued that the personal unconscious reflects the individual's unique life history and psychological development. The interaction between the ego and the personal unconscious can foster adaptation or create tension depending on the degree of awareness. When repressed content accumulates without integration, it may disrupt cognitive and emotional regulation. This concept provides a theoretical basis for interpreting Arthur Fleck's repressed experiences and unresolved emotional conflicts as psychological contents that remain outside full conscious awareness.

In addition to the personal unconscious, Jung proposed the collective unconscious as a universal dimension shared across humanity. This level contains archetypes, which are inherited patterns that shape perception, symbolism, and meaning-making across cultures (Sun & Kim, 2024). Recent Jungian scholarship continues to examine archetypes as dynamic patterns that interact with complexes and processes of psychological organization (Skar, 2025). Jones (2023) further highlights the relevance of archetypes to embodied subjectivity and narrativity, emphasizing that archetypal concepts can be understood through the interaction between psychological experience and cultural meaning. Although the present study primarily focuses on the shadow rather than the collective unconscious as a whole, the concept of the collective unconscious provides an essential theoretical context for understanding archetypal structures within Jungian analytical psychology. Since the shadow is regarded as one of the fundamental archetypal dimensions of the psyche, discussion of the collective unconscious serves as the conceptual foundation for the analysis presented in this study.Therefore, the structural model of the psyche remains a foundational component for understanding the dynamics explored in this study.

The Concept of the Shadow

The shadow is a central concept in Jungian analytical psychology and refers to aspects of the personality that are not sufficiently integrated into conscious awareness. These aspects may include traits, impulses, emotions, and tendencies that the conscious personality rejects, represses, or fails to recognize as part of itself (Jung, 1959a). Because these contents remain outside the conscious self-image, they may nevertheless influence psychological experience and behavior without being fully recognized by the individual (Jung, 1959a). Although commonly associated with negative tendencies, scholars note that the shadow also contains undeveloped capacities and latent strengths.

The shadow develops in relation to aspects of personality that become excluded from the conscious self-image. Experiences involving fear, shame, rejection, or social disapproval may contribute to the repression or exclusion of psychological contents from consciousness. From a Jungian perspective, such unconscious contents may subsequently influence conscious experience indirectly, including through projection and other psychological processes (Jung, 1959a). The significance of the shadow therefore lies not

simply in the negative quality of its contents, but in their separation from conscious awareness.

Within Jungian analytical psychology, integration involves developing a conscious relationship with previously unconscious aspects of the personality. Shadow integration therefore refers in this study to the process of recognizing and relating consciously to shadow contents rather than simply repressing or excluding them. Integration does not mean eliminating undesirable characteristics; rather, it involves acknowledging previously disowned aspects of the personality and incorporating greater awareness of them into the conscious self (Jung, 1959a).

Failure of Integration and Psychic Disintegration

Although Carl Gustav Jung did not explicitly formulate the term *psychic disintegration* as an independent theoretical construct, several of his discussions concerning ego collapse, unconscious domination, and failed individuation provide a conceptual basis for interpreting severe psychological fragmentation (Jones, 2020). Accordingly, this study employs the term *psychic disintegration* as an interpretative concept rather than as an official Jungian doctrine.

Within the analytical framework used in this study, integration refers to the ego's capacity to maintain a conscious relationship with unconscious contents rather than remaining completely separated from them (Jung, 1959a). From this perspective, psychological imbalance may be interpreted as emerging when unconscious contents increasingly interfere with the ego's capacity to maintain conscious coherence (Jung, 1959a).

In the present study, psychic disintegration refers to a progressive disruption of psychological coherence that is interpreted through the increasingly conflictual relationship between conscious identity and unresolved unconscious contents. The concept does not imply a formal clinical diagnosis; rather, it describes the fragmentation of the character's psychological coherence as represented within the film narrative.

METHOD

Research design

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in Jungian analytical psychology because it enables an in-depth interpretation of symbolic meanings, character psychology, and narrative structures represented in film. Within this framework, the film text is treated as a cultural and symbolic artifact that reflects inner psychological dynamics. The approach emphasizes interpretative depth and contextual understanding of character development. This approach also enables Jungian theoretical concepts to be systematically applied in interpreting narrative events, character behavior, and symbolic imagery. Therefore, this research design provides an appropriate methodological framework for interpreting Arthur Fleck's psychological transformation through Jungian analytical psychology.

Data sources

The primary data sources consist of Todd Phillips' Joker (2019), directed by Todd Phillips and written by Todd Phillips and Scott Silver. The film is treated as a narrative text containing visual, verbal, and symbolic material relevant to psychological interpretation. Secondary data consist of scholarly literature on analytical psychology, particularly the theories of Carl Gustav Jung, including Jung's original writings, contemporary Jungian scholarship, and previous studies related to Joker, analytical psychology, and cinematic representations of mental illness. These sources provide conceptual clarification and theoretical grounding for the analysis. Consequently, the study integrates textual observation with established psychological scholarship. The analysis focuses exclusively on Arthur Fleck because he is the central character through whom the film's psychological transformation is represented, allowing the study to trace the progression of psychic disintegration in relation to the research question.

Data collection procedures

Data were collected through repeated viewing of the film and systematic observation of relevant scenes and dialogues related to Arthur Fleck's psychological transformation. Scenes were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research objectives, particularly those depicting trauma, ego instability, shadow activation, identity conflict, and psychological transformation. The researcher identified sequences depicting emotional conflict, behavioral change, identity conflict, and symbolic imagery relevant to the Jungian concepts examined in this study. Dialogue, character expressions, body language, and narrative interactions related to psychological conflict were carefully noted. Field notes were compiled during each viewing session to document preliminary interpretations before they were refined through subsequent analyses. Each selected scene was documented and classified according to its relevance to the analytical categories of ego, shadow, shadow integration, and psychic disintegration. The process involved repeated viewing of relevant sequences to refine the interpretation and maintain consistency in data classification.

Analytical framework

The data were analyzed using concepts derived from Jungian analytical psychology. The primary interpretative categories included ego structure, shadow formation, shadow integration, and psychic disintegration. Each dialogue and narrative sequence was examined to determine how these concepts manifested through character behavior and narrative progression. Interpretative coding was conducted deductively using Jungian theoretical constructs as analytical categories rather than generating themes inductively from the data. This framework enabled the systematic interpretation of Arthur Fleck's psychological transformation using Jungian analytical psychology. Finally, the interpreted data were synthesized to explain the relationship between shadow integration, psychic disintegration, and Arthur Fleck's psychological transformation in relation to the research question.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an interpretative analysis of Arthur Fleck's psychological transformation through the framework of Jungian analytical psychology. The findings suggest that Arthur's psychological transformation can be interpreted not as the result of a single traumatic event, but as a cumulative process involving unresolved trauma, chronic social marginalization, weakened ego regulation, and increasing difficulty in integrating unconscious contents into conscious awareness.

The Structure of Arthur Fleck's Psyche

Arthur Fleck's psychological condition illustrates a progressive disruption of the dynamic relationship between conscious awareness and unconscious processes. From the Jungian framework adopted in this study, Arthur's psychological trajectory can be interpreted in terms of the changing relationship between conscious awareness and unconscious contents (Jung, 1959). Throughout the narrative, Arthur is increasingly portrayed as struggling to maintain a coherent conscious identity while previously excluded psychological contents become more prominent in his thoughts, emotions, and behavior. This increasing tension between conscious identity and unresolved psychological contents marks an important stage in Arthur's psychological transformation. In *Joker*, these tensions are represented through Arthur's emotional distress, social alienation, and difficulty maintaining a stable sense of self.

Arthur's fragile ego is reflected in his interaction with the social worker, where he quietly states, *"I just don't want to feel so bad anymore"* (Joker, 2019, 01:01:45). This statement illustrates his persistent emotional suffering and his growing inability to regulate psychological distress. Within the Jungian framework adopted in this study, the scene can be interpreted as indicating the fragility of Arthur's conscious psychological organization and his difficulty in managing persistent emotional distress.

Arthur's unsuccessful stand-up comedy performance demonstrates his fragile self-concept and strong dependence on social acceptance. Rather than receiving recognition, he becomes the object of public ridicule after Murray Franklin broadcasts his performance on television. The public ridicule reinforces Arthur's feelings of inadequacy and can be interpreted as further intensifying the tension surrounding his conscious self-image.

Previously unrecognized psychological contents become increasingly visible throughout the narrative, particularly as Arthur encounters memories that challenge his established understanding of himself. These revelations coincide with increasing emotional instability and disruption of his previously constructed self-image. Repressed memories related to childhood abuse gradually surface, disrupting Arthur's perception of reality. These memories function as latent psychological material that destabilizes the ego.

Penny's written request, "Your son and I need help," reflects more than financial hardship; it symbolizes the prolonged absence of emotional security and social support within Arthur's family environment.

Penny's statement, "You're a little, unwanted bastard," represents one of the earliest psychological foundations of Arthur's fragmented identity. Within the interpretative

framework of this study, repeated experiences of rejection can be understood as contributing to psychological contents that remain excluded from Arthur's conscious self-image. Rather than treating these experiences as evidence of an immediate emergence of the shadow, this study interprets them as part of the gradual development of psychological contents that Arthur struggles to acknowledge consciously. From a Jungian perspective, this process provides a basis for interpreting how previously excluded aspects of Arthur's personality may become increasingly influential as his conscious self-image becomes more unstable. (Jung, 1968).

Formation and Reinforcement of the Shadow

Arthur's increasing difficulty in regulating previously excluded aggressive impulses becomes particularly visible after the subway shooting. Prior to this incident, Arthur repeatedly experiences humiliation, social rejection, and emotional distress, while his aggressive responses remain largely suppressed. During the confrontation, three Wayne Enterprises employees physically assault Arthur after mocking him on the subway. Arthur responds by shooting two of them immediately before pursuing and killing the third as he attempts to escape (Joker 2019). This violent episode can be interpreted as an explicit behavioral expression of aggression that had previously remained largely suppressed in Arthur's conscious self-presentation.

From a Jungian perspective, this scene does not signify the sudden emergence of the shadow; rather, it illustrates the progressive weakening of ego regulation, allowing unconscious contents that had accumulated through prolonged humiliation and marginalization to emerge into conscious behavior.

The scene can therefore be interpreted as part of a gradual development of shadow-related contents in the narrative, in which repeated humiliation, marginalization, and emotional repression become increasingly associated with Arthur's aggressive behavior. From a Jungian perspective, this psychological progression reflects not the sudden appearance of the shadow, but the gradual failure of the ego to regulate and integrate unconscious contents into conscious awareness (Jung, 1959).

The social worker states, “They don't give a shit about people like you, Arthur. And they really don't give a shit about people like me either.” This dialogue reflects Arthur's persistent experience of social rejection and institutional neglect. Rather than representing a single traumatic event, it illustrates the accumulation of external pressures that reinforce resentment, alienation, and emotional isolation. Rather than being interpreted as direct causes of violent behavior, these experiences are understood in this study as contextual conditions associated with Arthur's increasing resentment, alienation, and difficulty maintaining a stable conscious self-image. Within the framework of this study, these experiences contribute to the context in which shadow-related contents become increasingly visible in Arthur's subsequent behavior, providing a basis for examining his later psychological fragmentation.

Arthur's repeated exposure to bullying, emotional neglect, and chronic social rejection accompanies the gradual emergence of the Joker persona in the narrative. From the Jungian perspective adopted in this study, these external experiences do not themselves constitute the shadow; rather, they form part of the narrative context in which previously

excluded aspects of Arthur's personality become increasingly expressed through his behavior.

Failure of Shadow Integration

Arthur's increasing difficulty in relating previously excluded psychological contents to his conscious self-image constitutes the central interpretative process examined in this study. Three major narrative events progressively intensify Arthur Fleck's failure of shadow integration. The first turning point occurs when Arthur obtains confidential hospital records revealing that he was adopted and repeatedly subjected to severe physical abuse during childhood by his adoptive mother and her partner. This discovery challenges Arthur's previously constructed understanding of his identity by exposing traumatic experiences that had remained outside his conscious understanding. Rather than being followed by an apparent reconciliation of these experiences, the revelation is followed by further emotional instability and disruption of Arthur's established self-understanding.

The second turning point emerges when Arthur's psychiatric support is abruptly terminated because of government funding cuts. During his final counseling session, the social worker informs him, *"They're cutting our funding. They don't give a shit about people like you, Arthur. And they really don't give a shit about people like me either."* The termination of his therapeutic support and medication removes an important source of external assistance that had been present earlier in the narrative.

The third turning point occurs when Arthur becomes the object of public humiliation after Murray Franklin broadcasts his failed comedy performance on national television. Instead of receiving recognition, Arthur is publicly ridiculed, reinforcing his resentment, social alienation, and emotional isolation. Collectively, these narrative events are interpreted as marking an increasing disruption in Arthur's conscious self-regulation and a growing prominence of previously excluded psychological contents. Rather than confronting and integrating these unconscious contents into conscious awareness, Arthur increasingly identifies with them. From the Jungian framework adopted in this study, this progression is interpreted as a failure of shadow integration, in which previously excluded contents become increasingly difficult for Arthur to relate to through conscious self-regulation.

The social worker's statement further reinforces the symbolic significance of institutional abandonment within Arthur's psychological development. Rather than merely indicating the loss of clinical treatment, the funding cuts symbolize the disappearance of external structures that had previously supported Arthur's already fragile ego. Within the interpretative framework of this study, the withdrawal of institutional support contributes to the narrative context in which Arthur's psychological fragmentation becomes increasingly pronounced.

Psychic Disintegration and Transformation into Joker

Arthur's transformation into the Joker can be interpreted as the culmination of a prolonged process of psychological fragmentation rather than as a sudden transformation. From the Jungian framework adopted in this study, this transformation can be interpreted as reflecting increasing difficulty in maintaining conscious self-regulation as previously

excluded psychological contents become more prominent in Arthur's behavior (Jung, 1959).

During the live television sequence, Arthur openly rejects the social expectations that had previously shaped his public identity. His statements and actions reveal a substantial change in how he understands and presents himself, marking an important stage in the fragmentation of his former conscious identity.

After escaping from the crashed police vehicle, Arthur climbs onto the hood of the police car while members of the crowd gather around him, cheer, and imitate his movements. He slowly rises, smiles, and paints a smile on his face using the blood from his mouth.

This scene visually represents the culmination of Arthur's transformation throughout the film. Rather than being interpreted simply as personal liberation, the emergence of the Joker persona can be understood as a symbolic representation of Arthur's increasing identification with previously excluded aspects of himself. In the interpretative framework of this study, Arthur's increasing identification with previously excluded contents rather than their conscious integration represents the final stage of the process conceptualized here as psychic disintegration.

Table 1. Summary of Arthur Fleck's Psychological Transformation of Arthur Fleck

Dimension	Narrative Evidence	Psychological Meaning	Outcome
Ego Weakness	Social anxiety, dependency on approval	Fragile identity formation	Reduced coping ability
Trauma History	Childhood abuse and neglect	Persistent unconscious contents	Emotional instability
Shadow Activation	Subway violence and fantasies	Release of repressed aggression	Behavioral escalation
Failure of Shadow Integration	Increasing identification with the Joker persona	Difficulty relating excluded contents to conscious identity	Fragmentation of conscious self-image
Reality Distortion	Imagined relationships	Impaired perception	Identity fragmentation
Psychic Disintegration	Public violence and adoption of the Joker identity	Progressive fragmentation of conscious identity	Transformation into the Joker persona

Discussion

The findings indicate that Arthur Fleck's transformation is represented as a cumulative process involving social rejection, emotional neglect, unresolved childhood experiences, and increasing difficulty in maintaining a coherent conscious identity (Sudarwanto et al., 2021). During a counseling session with his social worker, Arthur expresses his emotional exhaustion by stating: “I just don’t want to feel so bad anymore” (Joker, 2019, 01:01:45). From a Jungian perspective, Arthur's statement reflects profound psychological exhaustion resulting from the progressive weakening of ego regulation. As conscious

regulation deteriorates, unresolved unconscious contents increasingly influence his thoughts, emotions, and behavior, preparing the psychological conditions for the emergence of the Joker persona (Jung, 1968). Consequently, Arthur's transformation into the Joker persona should be understood as the culmination of a prolonged psychological process in which unresolved trauma, chronic social alienation, and the progressive failure of shadow integration collectively reshape his conscious identity.

The findings support Jung's proposition that psychological stability depends upon the ego's capacity to regulate unconscious contents. Contemporary Jungian scholarship similarly emphasizes individuation and shadow work as processes through which unconscious psychological contents are confronted and integrated (Osterhold, 2021). Chorna (2025) similarly describes individuation as a gradual integration of the ego, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious toward psychological wholeness. Throughout Arthur's psychological development, repeated trauma and persistent social rejection progressively weaken this regulatory function, allowing unconscious contents to exert increasing influence over conscious behavior (Jung, 1968; DeArmond, 2021). In the subway sequence, three Wayne Enterprises employees physically assault Arthur after he begins laughing uncontrollably. The screenplay describes that the men repeatedly beat him before Arthur retrieves a revolver and shoots two of them, while pursuing the third passenger and shooting him again as he attempts to escape (Phillips, 2019).

This scene illustrates the progressive collapse of Arthur's ego regulation. Rather than processing humiliation through conscious reflection, Arthur externalizes accumulated unconscious aggression through violence, demonstrating the increasing dominance of the shadow over conscious identity.

Arthur's first act of lethal violence demonstrates that prolonged experiences of humiliation and victimization have exceeded the ego's capacity for psychological regulation. This interpretation is consistent with Jung's discussion of unconscious contents that remain outside conscious awareness and may influence psychological experience and behavior when they are not adequately integrated (Jung, 1959a). This scene illustrates the externalization of Arthur's repressed shadow after prolonged humiliation and victimization. Rather than depicting aggression as spontaneous, the screenplay presents violence as emerging after accumulated experiences of ridicule, rejection, and victimization. Jung's concept of the shadow indicates this moment symbolizes the externalization of previously repressed shadow impulses that have exceeded the ego's regulatory capacity.

The findings further demonstrate that Arthur's repeated experiences of humiliation, emotional neglect, and social exclusion progressively transform the shadow from a latent psychological potential into the dominant organizing force of his personality. Over time, his shadow evolves from a latent psychological structure into a governing force that redefines his sense of self. This finding aligns with Jung’s assertion that unconscious material that remains unintegrated manifests through compulsive, destructive, or antisocial behaviors when excluded from conscious recognition (Osterhold, 2021). The film portrays Arthur’s transformation through both psychological and social dimensions, illustrating how social inequality, alienation, and emotional repression contribute to the emergence of the Joker persona (Tan, 2021). Sreepada and Domínguez Partida (2022)

similarly examine Joker as a representation of social repression, identity negotiation, and the political agency attributed to marginalized groups. This interpretation is also consistent with contemporary analytical psychology, which recognizes the relationship between experiences of abandonment, destructive unconscious dynamics, and difficulties in psychological integration (Bovensiepen, 2022).

Scholarly interpretations of Jungian theory further clarify this mechanism. DeArmond (2021) emphasizes the dynamic relationship between conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche within Jung's model of individuation, highlighting how separation and dissociation can affect psychological transformation. Winborn (2025) further conceptualizes defences as unconscious processes that can resist psychological change and obstruct the movement toward individuation. Rohde-Brown (2023) emphasizes the importance of integrating shadow aspects as part of psychological growth and transformation (Tousignant, 2024; Charura (2023). similarly examines the relationship between archetypal processes and the shadow at a cultural level, emphasizing how confronting shadow material can contribute to psychological transformation. During the Murray Franklin television broadcast, Arthur openly confesses to the subway killings, expresses indifference toward social judgment, and fatally shoots Murray in front of a live audience (Joker, 2019, 01:49:00-01:50:20These observable actions can be interpreted as evidence of a substantial disruption in Arthur's former conscious self-regulation. Rather than demonstrating an objectively measurable dominance of the shadow, the scene represents the extent to which the Joker identity has become increasingly incompatible with Arthur's earlier self-conception. In Joker, Arthur's inability to reconcile conflicting aspects of identity exemplifies the breakdown of this integrative process, resulting in the emergence of maladaptive psychological patterns.

Furthermore, Jung's discussion of archetypal dynamics provides additional explanatory power. The Joker persona may be interpreted as an archetypal configuration emerging when the shadow becomes dissociated from ego regulation (Jung, 2014; Sun & Kim, 2024). Sun and Kim (2024) examine archetypal symbols within Jungian psychology and provide a contemporary perspective for understanding the relationship between archetypal patterns and symbolic experience. In Arthur's case, the transformation into Joker demonstrates how archetypal forces, in combination with personal pathology, can lead to extreme behavioral manifestations.

During the live broadcast, Arthur states:

"I killed those guys because they were awful. Everybody is awful these days. It's enough to make anyone crazy." (*Joker*, 2019, 01:50:20-01:50:45).

He continues:

"What do you get when you cross a mentally ill loner with a society that abandons him and treats him like trash? I'll tell you what you get. You get what you fucking deserve." (*Joker*, 2019, 01:50:46-01:51:00).

Immediately after delivering these statements, Arthur shoots Murray Franklin on live television, demonstrating the complete collapse of his ego's regulatory function. From a Jungian perspective, this act reflects the culmination of a prolonged psychological process

in which unresolved unconscious contents progressively dominate conscious identity. Complementing this interpretation, Nietzschean philosophy views Arthur's rejection of conventional morality as evidence of the collapse of socially constructed systems of value.

Beyond Jungian analytical psychology, Nietzsche's concept of nihilism offers an additional philosophical perspective for understanding Arthur's rejection of moral and social values. Friedrich Nietzsche conceptualizes nihilism as a condition in which established value systems lose authority, resulting in existential disorientation (Nietzsche, 1989; Uysal, 2023). Durham and Wilkinson (2020) highlight how Joker connects Arthur's psychological deterioration with social abandonment, past abuse, and the withdrawal of mental-health support. Arthur's progressive rejection of social norms, moral obligations, and communal values parallels Nietzsche's description of nihilism, suggesting that his psychological disintegration is accompanied by the gradual collapse of existential meaning.

Following Murray Franklin's murder, Arthur exhibits complete emotional detachment and an absence of moral restraint, indicating that unconscious contents have become the dominant influence on his behavior. Nietzsche's concept of resentment provides an additional philosophical perspective for understanding Arthur's rejection of conventional morality after this psychological transformation. Nietzsche’s analysis in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1989) highlights the role of resentment and social exclusion in generating destructive reinterpretations of moral frameworks. This philosophical interpretation complements the Jungian analysis by explaining how Arthur transforms prolonged resentment and social exclusion into a personal justification for violence. While Jungian theory explains the internal psychological mechanism underlying this transformation, Nietzschean philosophy clarifies the accompanying collapse of moral values. Silva (2024) examines the relationship between Nietzschean philosophy and Jungian psychology, particularly the way Jung incorporated Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power into his psychological framework. Nevertheless, the present study employs Jungian analytical psychology as its primary interpretative framework, while Nietzschean nihilism serves only as a complementary philosophical perspective.

Arthur's increasing detachment from interpersonal relationships and normative social structures further illustrates the convergence of psychological fragmentation and nihilistic thought. Empirical research on nihilistic cognition reinforces this interpretation. Chavez and McCracken (2021) relate the Joker figure to pathological nihilism, emphasizing the relationship between existential frustration, social marginalization, and destructive behavior. Arthur’s disengagement from normative social structures and his embrace of chaos as an organizing principle reflect these characteristics, supporting the notion that his transformation involves both psychological and philosophical dimensions.

The withdrawal of Arthur's psychiatric support further reinforces the findings of this study. Rather than functioning solely as a social issue, the loss of institutional support accelerates the weakening of ego regulation by removing one of the few external structures capable of moderating Arthur's psychological instability.

She further tells Arthur:

“They don't give a shit about people like you, Arthur. And they really don't give a shit about people like me either." (*Joker*, 2019, 00:41:20-00:41:35).

Arthur then responds:

"How am I supposed to get my medication?” (*Joker*, 2019, 00:41:35-00:41:40).

This exchange demonstrates the abrupt loss of psychological support and access to treatment. From a Jungian perspective, the absence of external psychological support intensifies Arthur's vulnerability to unresolved unconscious contents, thereby facilitating the progressive dominance of the shadow.

These observations further indicate that Arthur's psychological deterioration is reinforced by the cumulative effects of unresolved trauma, prolonged social exclusion, and the gradual erosion of conscious psychological regulation. Persistent social exclusion and institutional abandonment do not directly create psychological disintegration; rather, they progressively weaken ego regulation and increase the influence of unconscious contents. The withdrawal of social support systems removes stabilizing resources that might otherwise facilitate coping and integration (Jung, 1968). Arthur’s progressive marginalization, combined with chronic exposure to societal rejection, contributes to the erosion of ego regulation and the activation of shadow dynamics. Arroyo Paniagua (2022) likewise interprets the Joker’s violent persona in relation to traumatic experiences and broader social fears represented in the film.

Taken together, these findings suggest that Arthur Fleck's transformation into the Joker is not the result of a single traumatic event but rather a gradual psychological process characterized by unresolved unconscious conflict, weakened ego regulation, progressive failure of shadow integration, and the gradual fragmentation of a coherent identity. Rather than arising from a single traumatic incident, Arthur's psychological transformation develops gradually through. Consistent with Jung's analytical psychology, Arthur's transformation reflects the gradual dominance of the shadow over the persona and ego. This progression illustrates how unresolved unconscious contents progressively undermine psychological balance and culminate in psychic disintegration (Jung, 1968; Tan, 2021). The present findings support Jung's proposition that the failure to integrate unconscious contents into conscious awareness constitutes a primary pathway toward psychic imbalance (Jung, 1968). Furthermore, Nietzsche's concept of nihilism complements this interpretation by explaining how the collapse of moral and symbolic value systems intensifies Arthur's psychological disintegration (Nietzsche, 1989; Uysal, 2023)

Overall, the findings suggest that Arthur's transformation is best understood through the interaction between intrapsychic conflict and the social conditions represented in the film. Within the Jungian framework adopted here, these conditions form the narrative context in which previously excluded psychological contents become increasingly difficult for Arthur to integrate with his conscious self-image. The emergence of the Joker persona therefore represents not simply an increase in violent behavior, but a progressive disruption of the identity that Arthur had previously constructed.

The findings also demonstrate that Arthur Fleck's transformation involves the progressive fragmentation of a coherent identity. As unresolved unconscious contents increasingly dominate conscious awareness, Arthur gradually loses the capacity to maintain a stable and integrated sense of self. From a Jungian perspective, the emergence of the Joker persona does not simply represent the appearance of violent behavior but symbolizes the replacement of Arthur's former conscious identity by an identity organized around the shadow. Consequently, psychic disintegration in Joker is characterized not only by weakened ego regulation and failed shadow integration but also by the collapse of a coherent identity into a fragmented psychological structure.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Arthur Fleck's transformation into the Joker can be interpreted as a gradual process of psychological fragmentation within a Jungian framework. The analysis indicates that repeated experiences of rejection, emotional neglect, and unresolved childhood experiences increasingly disrupt Arthur's established conscious self-image. These experiences are interpreted as part of the narrative context in which previously excluded psychological contents become increasingly visible in his thoughts, emotions, and behavior.

The central finding is that Arthur's difficulty in integrating previously excluded aspects of himself becomes increasingly visible as his transformation progresses. The subway violence represents an early behavioral expression of this conflict, while the later adoption of the Joker identity represents a more extensive disruption of his former conscious identity. Thus, the concept of failure of shadow integration provides an interpretative framework for understanding the progression toward what this study terms psychic disintegration.

Overall, this study highlights the relevance of Jungian analytical psychology in explaining Arthur Fleck’s psychological deterioration while also demonstrating how Nietzschean perspectives complement this interpretation by illuminating the collapse of moral values and existential meaning. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of Arthur’s transformation into the Joker as both a psychological and philosophical process.

The present study also contributes to Jungian literary criticism by proposing an interpretative framework for understanding psychological fragmentation through the concepts of failure of shadow integration and psychic disintegration. Although these concepts are employed as interpretative constructs rather than formal Jungian terminology, they provide a systematic framework for explaining Arthur Fleck's gradual psychological transformation. Future studies may apply or further develop this interpretative framework in the analysis of other cinematic or literary narratives depicting identity transformation, psychological deterioration, or the dynamics of unconscious conflict.

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