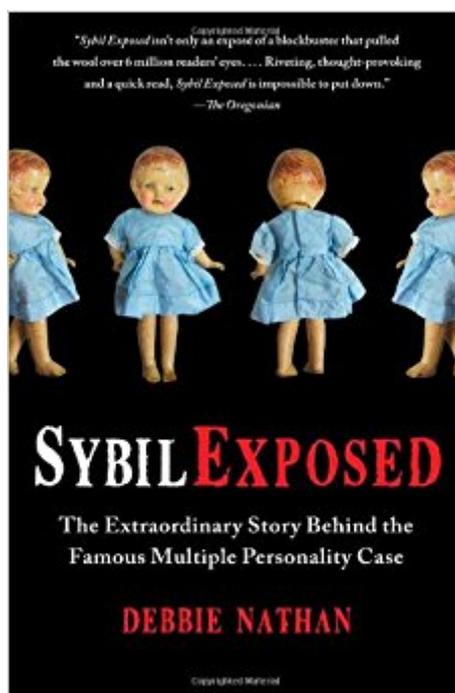


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# Sybil Exposed: The Extraordinary Story Behind The Famous Multiple Personality Case



## Synopsis

Now available in paperback, *Sybil Exposed* is the New York Times bestselling book that offers a new perspective on the smash hit book and film, *Sybil*, and on multiple personality disorder itself. *Sybil*: a name that resonates with legions of obsessed fans who followed the nonfiction blockbuster from 1973. The book rocketed multiple personality disorder into public consciousness and played a major role in having the diagnosis added to the psychiatric bible, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. But what do we really know about how *Sybil* came to be? In her news-breaking book *Sybil Exposed*, journalist Debbie Nathan gives proof that the allegedly true story outlined in the megabestseller was largely fabricated. The actual identity of *Sybil* (Shirley Mason) has been available for some years, as has the idea that the book might have been exaggerated. But Nathan reveals the trio of women behind the legend: the willing patient, her ambitious shrink, and the imaginative journalist who spun their story into bestseller gold. *Sybil Exposed* draws from an enormous trail of papers, records, photos, and tapes to unearth the lives and passions of these three women whose story exploded into an epic movement with consequences beyond their wildest dreams. Set across the twentieth century and rooted in a time when few professional roles were available to women, this is a story of corrosive sexism, bold but unchecked ambition, runaway greed, utter human vulnerability, duplicity and shared delusion, shaky theories of psychoanalysis exuberantly and drastically practiced, and how one modest young woman's life turned psychiatry on its head and radically changed the course of therapy—and our culture, as well.

## Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Free Press; 1 edition (June 12, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1439168288

ISBN-13: 978-1439168288

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars 192 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #277,760 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #31 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Mental Health > Dissociative Disorders](#) #114 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Psychology & Counseling > Mental Illness](#) #151 in [Books > Medical Books > Psychology > History](#)

## Customer Reviews

"In this startling expose...Nathan serves up a tale just as shocking as the famed original."--"Publisher's Weekly", starred review"Debbie Nathan's fine, insistent mind will stop at nothing to get to the truth behind Sybil, no how many walls are put up-- Her research is beyond compare"." --Susie Bright, author of "Big Sex Little Death""I've long considered Debbie Nathan to be the most important and unsung writer working in America today. "Sybil Exposed" affirms her brilliance. Using a fierce blend of investigative journalism and cultural criticism, she exposes multiple personality disorder as yet another lurid myth cooked up by the collective unconscious of our popular culture. The book is an astonishing achievement." -- Steve Almond, author of "Candyfreak" and "God Bless America""Debbie Nathan's "Sybil Exposed" is a first-rate historical detective story recreating the lives of the three protagonists of one of the most popular accounts of a psychiatric patient in American history. The sixteen personalities ascribed to "Sybil" set the medical and legal tone for discussions of the 'epidemic' of child abuse at the end of the 20th century as well as the psychological damage done to its survivors. Nathan shows how the subject of the study, her psychiatrist, as well as the author of the book invented a biography to explain something that never existed: the multiple personalities of the patient as well as their cause. Any reader captivated by our contemporary "first-hand" accounts of mental illness, should read this account that illustrates how the demands of the readers at any historical moment shape such accounts and make them seem truer than true." --Sander L. Gilman, author of SEEING THE INSANE Distinguished Professor of the Liberal Arts and Sciences; Professor of"A compelling account of the creation, packaging, and selling of this case of medical and journalistic malpractice." --"Science""A massive undertaking of research that teases apart fact from fiction to reveal an even more interesting and educational account..."Sybil" remains a good book and movie, but perhaps Nathan's version of the story is the one worth telling in classrooms. " --"New Scientist""What forces cause a diagnosis like Multiple Personality Disorder to rise and fall within less than a generation? Debbie Nathan broke the story 20 years ago and now, in "Sybil Exposed", she's finally putting all the puzzle pieces together. Unless we learn the lessons in this journalistic masterwork, we are doomed to fall victim to the next fad and the next caring healer who claims to have our best interest at heart." -Ethan Watters, author of "Crazy Like Us""In this dazzling expose of a manipulative psychiatrist, an author who'd do anything for fame and a vulnerable girl caught in the middle, journalist Nathan reveals how these three women changed the psychiatric landscape by raising questions of identity that resonated with a generation. The result is a cautionary tale about the ways in which science, in the wrong hands, can capitalize on our collective fears. " --"More" magazine"Throughout "Sybil Exposed", Nathan traces

the winding path from truth to falsehood"--Salon"A gripping history of crackpot psychiatry" --"People" magazine"The true story of "Sybil" has found its ideal historian in Debbie Nathan...This is the book that should be a made-for-TV movie." --"The Wall Street Journal""Journalist Debbie Nathan -- whose investigative exposure of day care worker Kelly Michaels's wrongful conviction for child molestation did so much to unearth the witch hunts among us -- has found a delicious, hiding-in-plain-sight historical saga to tell: the making of the most famous "multiple personality" case and book. A troubled, impressionable young girl from a Sinclair Lewis-type small town; a brilliant, bullying, female neuropsychiatrist in 1950s Manhattan; and a glamorous, frustrated feminist magazine writer who'd had an affair with Eugene O'Neill Jr.: how these three disparate American women's fates, fantasies, and ambitions came together to create a fiction that rocked the culture and continues to affect us today makes compelling and sobering reading. Who knew this true story existed?! It's as compulsively readable as it is cautionary -- two traits rarely shared in one book."-- Sheila Weller, award winning magazine journalist and author of the "New York Times" bestseller "Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon--and the Journey of a Generation"

Debbie Nathan has been a journalist, editor, and translator for almost three decades.

Debbie's work has won numerous national and regional awards, including: The H.L. Mencken Award for Investigative Journalism, PEN West Award for Journalism, the Texas Institute of Letters Award for feature journalism, and the John Bartlow Martin Award for Public Service Journalism.

Very interesting book, the beginning is hard to get through.. very factual (resembling three chapters or so worth of a Wikipedia page) but necessary to understand the individuals discussed in the book.

I commend Debbie Nathan for the obviously extensive research that went into this book, but there is too much speculation and not enough hard evidence for some of her claims. She uses words like "probably"and "could have" a little too much for my taste. She also seems to write with an agenda, clearly showing bias to reach her conclusions, which I won't reveal to avoid playing spoiler. Overall, it's an entertaining read, but this exposé needs more facts and less opinion and speculation.

VERY interesting! This book exposes a lot that the original book and movie did not. The strange unhealthy relationship the Psychologist had with Shirley after treatment is just not done. It is NOT OK for a Psch Doc to become "close friends" after treatment. Close friends who live together?? Im

not even saying there was anything gay going on. But that is totally against treatment and a psychs protocol. That alone and with how involved the person who wrote the book....brings up many red flags that are completely valid. If you read Sybil, you really need to read this book to get BOTH sides to her story. Then it is up to you to decide what is truth and what was forced.

I read the original book Sybil when it was first published many, many years ago, I think in the 1970's, maybe earlier. At that time, it was a revelation because multiple personality disorder was a new mental illness, or so it was presented at that time. This book exposes the author of Sybil, and the actual woman whose pseudonym was Sybil, as a fraud, which I found very disappointing. I still struggle to accept Debbie Nathan's point of view, that the real Sybil deliberately portrayed herself as a person with multiple personality disorder for financial gain. Debbie Nathan maintained she researched this issue very carefully. I don't doubt that she did, however if this was a total fraud as depicted by Ms Nathan, then it is surprising it has only just been revealed and that she is the first person to investigate this issue. This book is a good read and I could not put it down. However, I was very familiar with the original book Sybil, which added to the intrigue.

It gets a bit scary. Yes, I am thanking for the author's careful study of the case of "Sybil," and her pointing out of tremendous problems in the therapy involved, and the probability that particular case was iatrogenic. However, she goes too far in discrediting DID as a legitimate diagnosis. Methinks thou doest protest too much.

Many have said that "Sybil Exposed" is well-documented. The book certainly appears to be well-documented, based on the lengthy Notes section (pp. 247-282). Others, like me, read this book and wonder about its accuracy. How does Nathan know why Shirley Mason, or Cornelia Wilbur or Flora Schreiber said or did certain things, or how they felt at certain times? I came across a footnote referring to a 1991 "People Magazine" cover story about Roseanne Barr. I decided to track down the article for fact-checking purposes. Was what Nathan said in her book (p. 222) actually mentioned in the magazine article? In this case, it wasn't. Others have found similar errors, suggesting that the publisher may not have fact-checked the book, the author may be careless, or the author has an agenda and may have misrepresented facts to support her agenda. Whatever the case, after nearly 40 years, "Sybil" continues to interest us.

In "Sybil Exposed," Debbie Nathan has written a fascinating and important expose of how the most

famous case of so-called multiple personality disorder (MPD) was essentially a hoax. Shirley Mason, aka "Sybil," was clearly a mentally disturbed woman, but she did not have MPD, a largely discredited condition today that psychiatrist Dr. Connie Wilbur built a career on in the 1950s and 60s. Dr. Wilbur was looking for evidence of MPD caused by childhood abuse and Shirley, needy and eager to please, delivered, dreaming up lurid tales of being tortured and traumatized by her mother. Thanks to Dr. Wilbur and Flora Schreiber's subsequent book "Sybil," thousands of other, almost all women, would be diagnosed with MPD in coming years and dream up similar stories. And so the damage caused by Wilbur's ambition spread outward like a wave, tearing families apart and hurting countless people and even sending some to prison, falsely accused. I found "Sybil" author Schreiber particularly interesting in this story, having just read Michael Finkel's book "True Story." In 2002, Finkel got fired from the New York Times and publicly humiliated for playing around with the facts in a magazine piece. Back in the 1960s, Schreiber got a half-million-dollar advance for a book (which she split, incidentally, with Wilbur and Mason) that was virtually a wholesale fabrication, and no one was the wiser. Until now. I did not find in "Sybil Exposed" any of the "bias" or "character assassination" that some detractors allege here in the one-star reviews. Her book is thoroughly researched and the facts fairly presented.

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