

SWITCHING:
PART I
AN INVESTIGATION
USING EXPERIMENTAL
PHENOMENOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Seven descriptions of externally precipitated switching from one personality to another were analyzed using experimental phenomenology. The results, cross-checked with nine other descriptions, indicate that switching occurs when reality events are proceeding toward a possible outcome of significance to a non-executive alter. As the outcome becomes more realizable, the non-executive alter becomes more energized and might influence the executive alter covertly to increase the likelihood of the outcome. When the outcome might really occur, intensity exceeds a threshold for the current executive alter and the non-executive alter takes control of the body. The process appears to be a loss of control for the prior alter and an assumption of control by the second. The results suggest that identity is a more significant factor in switching than state or emotion. Switching seems not solely a defense nor a mechanism to cope with intolerably negative states.

A unique feature of dissociative identity disorder (DID) is switching from one personality or identity to another. (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). "Switching is the process of changing from one alter personality to another and is a core behavioral phenomenon in MPD" (Putnam, 1989, p. 117). Consequently, switching is a most crucial experience to understand in DID theory, research, and treatment.

Given its core role, "[o]ne might expect that there would be a large introspective literature on switching. What does it feel like to switch? Yet very little has been written. Researchers of altered states of consciousness, in particular, have tried to study the subjective state-change experience with little success" (Putnam, 1988, p.27). Despite its core role, only a couple of articles on switching have been published

(Putnam, 1988; Lowenstein et al, 1987). The present paper will focus exclusively on the methods and results of the present study on switching from one personality to another. A second (Beere, 1996, in press) will explore theoretical implications.

Experimental Phenomenology

Switching is an elusive and subjective experience. Since experimental phenomenology researches experience using a precise methodology, it is ideally suited to research switching. Experimental phenomenology (Giorgi, 1985) applies the methods of philosophical phenomenology to psychological "questions." It attempts to educe (that is, to draw out, elicit or deduce from the experience) the meaning of an experience for the experiencer as opposed to measuring objectifiable particulars whose meaning is for and defined by the experimenter. Consequently, experimental phenomenology rigorously attempts to understand experience from the "inside" while letting experience "tell its own story."

Phenomenological analysis grants that experience is inherently subjective and from a point of view. First person descriptions of a specific kind of experience (for this research, descriptions of switching) are obtained from a sample of subjects. The phenomenological analysis educes what is common or similar across those experiences: what cuts across all of the experiences captures the essential meaning of that experience.

Experimental phenomenology is qualitative research which follows the philosophical foundation of the method. The interested reader may consult Spiegelberg (1972), or Valle and Halling (1989). Phenomenological philosophy advocates "going to the experience" as the primary principle. Its methodology examines experience systematically so as to reduce it to its essential meanings; consequently, the method is called "phenomenological reduction" – a reducing of the experience to its essentials. Giorgi (1985) and others (Shapiro, 1985; von Eckartsberg, 1986) have developed this methodology explicitly for psychological research. To apply the research method to switching one must "go to the experience" of switching. The only way to "go to those experiences" is to have DID individuals describe their experiences. Once obtained, those descriptions are analyzed using the methods of experimental phenomenology.

FOOTNOTE: The author thanks the College of Graduate Studies at Central Michigan University for the release time provided through a Research Professor Award. Without this help, it would have been impossible to complete this research.

METHOD

Instruments

A questionnaire was sent to each participating person having DID. Attached were two stamped envelopes addressed to the author. To maintain confidentiality, the DID subject mailed a release and the written description separately. Instructions for the description were:

Please describe as specifically and as completely as possible a specific experience of switching from one personality to another. Please describe this experience so concretely and so comprehensively that someone else could understand it.

An introductory letter added the following:

Please notice that I am asking you to describe a specific incident or experience that captures . . . switching from one alter personality to another. Please make the description as detailed as you can . . . so that someone else could understand it. . . Please do not use your real name, other people's real names, or the actual names of locations such as streets or cities unless this is significant for your experience. Initials are fine. . . Take as many pages as needed for the description.

Five of the descriptions which were used for the phenomenological reduction and for which there were releases are included in this paper. Two were omitted for reasons of space.

The Subjects

Difficulty in gathering the data was expected. After distributing approximately 80 questionnaires to therapists of DID clients in a variety of settings, only one response was obtained. DID clients who were currently in treatment at two facilities were contacted indirectly through their therapist and asked if they would be willing to complete a questionnaire about their experience. Two DID individuals responded. In the Spring of 1989 the author met the editor of *Many Voices*, at that time a newsletter by and for DID individuals. She validated the author to her readership as a trustworthy researcher and urged readers to contact him should they be interested in being subjects for his research. Over the next year and a half, people with DID wrote the author asking for the questionnaire, which was then sent them.

Sixteen subjects eventually provided descriptions of switching. All respondents were women. Their average age was 39.8 (S.D.=10.56, N=9). This is a unique group in having been willing and able to write the description. DID respondents as well as therapists informed the author that writing a description was difficult. The main difficulty was feeling

that they were getting pulled into the experience being described. It was likely, as a result, that the obtained descriptions are about situations for which these respondents had some distance. In addition, given the confusion and complexity of the experience, it is simply difficult to put into words the experience of switching. I am moved by the effort and care my respondents showed in their writing. At least half expressed gratitude in having the opportunity to share their experience in the hopes of making their own and other people's dissociative experiences more understandable and treatable. Furthermore, since DID is a disorder of hiddenness and trust is a core issue, my respondents must have been afraid to reveal their experience, especially to a stranger and through the mail, potentially to be published. Note that, despite confidentiality and the freedom to mask the description, seven of the 16 (43.8%) choose not to report their sex and age.

The Phenomenological Method

The analysis performed in this study followed Giorgi's (1985, 1987) methodology for experimental phenomenology. It begins with a person's description of an experience. The method takes the whole description as expressing the meaning of this particular experience for this specific individual. After an overview, each description is divided into meaning units. Each meaning unit is then individually "reduced" to its "essential elements." This process involves 1) epoche, suspending judgement and assumptions; and 2) eidetic reduction, varying each element in fantasy to establish its essential character. After each meaning unit of a description is reduced to its essential meaning, all are re-integrated into a whole which captures the essential meaning of the described experience of switching for that subject. After the phenomenological reduction is completed for each subject's description, all of the reductions are considered together to establish commonalities across all descriptions. These commonalities are integrated to yield the final result: the essence of the experience of switching.

An uncomplicated example might clarify the process of eidetic reduction and epoche. As any aspect of the experience is varied in fantasy (eidetic reduction), a change occurs when the experience is no longer what it was. The experience of this change pinpoints an unarticulated yet essential meaning of some aspect of the experience. It reveals an essence (an essential meaning) of the experience. Epoche (suspension of assumptions) involves, first, acknowledging assumptions and, then, bracketing them in order to suspend them. Literally [square brackets] are placed around assumptions. Often to change something in fantasy requires suspending assumptions.

Consider a few aspects of the experience of "cup." The phenomenological method requires going to the actual experience of "cup." I begin with the orange coffee mug on my desk. I notice first the handle. In fantasy, I remove it. It is

still a cup. I conclude that a handle is not critical for a cup. I make the handle-less cup smaller and smaller. The imagined experience remains a cup from the size of a Japanese tea cup to a sake cup. I reduce it to thimble size. In the transition from sake cup to thimble, the imagined cup is no longer a "cup." I understand immediately that one of the essences of "cup" is its containing liquid to drink; a thimble does not contain enough liquid. I next imagine changes in heaviness. The imagined cup weighs more and more until I begin to strain to lift it. Immediately, I have the insight that for me a cup is easily lifted by a single hand. If it is too heavy to lift easily, it can not be used to drink. I can continue exploring the essence of the experience of "cup" to reveal different aspects of its essential meaning for me and discover, in part, that a cup is a container for drinkable liquid which can be comfortably lifted by one hand.

Returning to the methodology applied to the descriptions, by changing the details in imagination (eidetic reduction) and suspending assumptions (epoche) as those details change, the essential meaning of each meaning unit is educed. This requires several steps. The initial step is to begin to reduce the meaning unit to its essential meaning using the subject's language. The second step is to transform that reduction into psychological language, remaining true to the description as a whole. In other words, the specific details of the description must be derivable from the reduction.

Giorgi (1975; personal communication, May 1987; 1988) has concluded, based on his and others' research, that descriptions from seven subjects are sufficient to yield an adequate analysis. Consequently, seven reductions were completed; then the essential meaning across these seven sets of experience was distilled, yielding a final reduction, a general description of the essence of the experience of switching from one personality to another. As an additional step for this study, since the author was concerned that switching might be such a complex and varied experience not fully captured by seven descriptions (despite Giorgi's conclusions), the remaining descriptions were read to validate the accuracy of the conclusions drawn and to search for what might have been missing from the prior analysis. Minor changes finalized the results, the general structure of the experience of externally precipitated switching.

Consider the first meaning unit of the example discussed in the next section. The description reads:

"Do you fool around – know what I mean?' then he winks at me, deals me another card and calls the waitress for another round of drinks. 'I get off at two, bet you got a jack under there!' he smiles again."

In terms more directly revelatory of switching (the second step of the analysis) the meaning unit reads, "S becomes conscious as a man makes sexual overtures and sets a time to

rendezvous." The next step of the analysis transforms the subject's language into psychological language. This process continues the reduction. Thus, is sex the critical issue in terms of switching in general? Although sex might be critical for the person writing the description, sex in general, is clearly not the only motive involved in switching. Consider, for example, two imaginative variations: that the dealer makes plans with her to murder someone when he gets off at two; or that the dealer makes plans to show her where to cash in her chips when he gets off at two. Another alter, considering another variation, might find plans to murder someone appealing. Once again, sex is not the issue. These variations clarify that the sexual rendezvous is discrepant from acceptable behavior for the alter who switches in. The prior alter acted as if sex with him was desirable, at least prior to its becoming a possible reality; in contrast, the writer of the description would not have sex with the dealer. After considering various imaginative changes and all of the descriptions, the first meaning unit transforms into the following psychological language, "S regains consciousness while making wholly identity-discrepant plans."

Presentation of the Method: Example Number One

Since qualitative analysis is unusual, an example follows. The subject is a 38-year-old woman. She is describing her experience of finding herself in an out-of-character situation with a man trying to pick her up, and subsequent events. Double slashes ("//") mark the separation between the meaning units selected for analysis. The units are numbered for reference.

Example of a General Description of a Situated Structure of Externally Precipitated Switching from One Personality to Another. The author read the previous transformation of the description into psychological language with the intention of synthesizing the elements into a general description of switching from one personality to another. The general description attempts to integrate the separate meaning units into a whole which reflects the experience of the subject.

S becomes suddenly conscious in a confusing and unknown situation where she has been planning to engage in actions wholly identity-discrepant. Continuing to behave unobtrusively, S leaves the situation, preparing to return to safety.

S again becomes suddenly conscious in a confusing and unknown situation far from safety. S attempts to understand this confusing experience of losing time. S can just fulfill a personally meaningful commitment. There S is embarrassed and helpless when confronted with her switching. Emotional expressions and comfort were all that could be done about it.

TABLE 1

Phenomenological Reduction of Example Number One: A Description of Switching by a 38-Year-Old Woman

Description of Externally Precipitated Switching from One Personality to Another	Constituents of Externally Precipitated Switching Expressed More Directly in Terms Revelatory of Switching From One Personality to Another	Transformation of the Description into Psychological Language With Emphasis on Externally Precipitated Switching
	The description begins just after a switch. S has no memory of what preceded.	S switches and is amnesic for prior events.
1. 'Do you fool around – know what I mean?' then he winks at me, deals me another card and calls the waitress for another round of drinks. 'I get off at two, bet you go a jack under there!' he smiles again.'//	1. S becomes conscious as a man makes sexual overtures and sets a time to rendezvous.	1. S regains consciousness while making wholly identity-discrepant plans.
2. I'm smiling back but I'm confused. 'Fool around? A jack? More drinks? A waitress?' Still smiling, I look down. I'm wearing skin-tight pants and a sweater cut so low my nipples almost show.'//	2. S acts as if nothing were wrong but feels confused about the man, the environment, and her provocative clothing.	2. Although S continues to behave in the situation as if the situation were familiar, S is confused about the whole situation.
3. 'Two?' I say, then I wink and add 'I'll be here.' As I get up from the casino table he says 'Later, babe.'//	3. & 4. S agrees to the rendezvous, continuing to act as if things are fine, and prepares to drive home. S switches and has no memory.	3. & 4. Planning to escape, S continues to act as expected in the situation and prepares to leave for safety.
4. I walk to the parking lot, fumble through God knows how many chips and grab my keys.'//		Another alter switches "in" and S has no awareness of that alter's experience.
5. Two hours down the road towards home – the home I was in last night, I suddenly look up and find traffic all around me. 'Funny – this is an awful lot of traffic for a desert road! Where the hell am I?!!' Then the sign appears – San Diego. 300 miles from where I was trying to get.'//	5. S becomes conscious again, and discovers she is in a strange place and discovers a long time has passed though it seems a moment ago. She discovers she is a long way from her intended destination.	5. S regains consciousness in an unknown environment far from her destination and is amnesic.

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TABLE 1 – Continued

Phenomenological Reduction of Example Number One: A Description of Switching by a 38 Year-Old Woman

6. Who was driving? I don't know. Who went to Vegas – judging by my clothing, I knew.//	6. She attempts to understand who did these things.	6. Confronted by these confusing experiences about which S knows little, S tries to understand.
7. According to my watch, if I step on it, I can make my doctor's appointment in time.//	7. She concludes she can get to her therapy appointment if she drives quickly.	7. If S exerts special effort, S can achieve the original goal that was personally important to her.
8. I get there and his face reflects how brazen I must look.//	8. Her therapist's expression reflects how sexually provocative she looks.	8. - 12. S is embarrassed and helpless when confronted with her switching. Laughing, crying, and being held is all that could be done about it.
9. I ask for a blanket. He provides it.//	9. She asks for and he provides a blanket/cover.	
10. Then I tell him what happened. We laugh. Sometimes laughing is the only thing that can be done.//	10. S tells him what happened and they laugh since that is the only thing that can be done.	
11. Then he asks how and I begin to cry. I don't know how!//	11. He asks "How" and S cries. S doesn't know how.	
12. So he holds me while I cry and sometimes holding is all you can do.//	12. The therapist holds S while she cries since holding was all he could do.	

Discussion of the Example. Reading all the descriptions provides a context for understanding an individual description. This description, for example, erroneously suggests that all switches involve amnesia for prior events and a sudden coming to consciousness in an unknown situation. By itself this example implies that amnesic switches involve a confusing and helpless "thrown-ness" in which the new alter finds him or herself confronting a complex, unknown yet ongoing experience. This does not characterize all the amnesic switches described.

The prior example describes three switches: 1) the beginning of the description which starts immediately after a switch, 2) after grabbing her keys, and 3) before driving to therapy. Considering the first and third switches, the prospect of having sex with a stranger and the possibility of missing her therapy appointment probably evoked emotional reactions (anxiety, dread, fear, loss, or anticipated pain) from certain alters. The first switch occurs as she accepts the dealer's

proposition; the third switch occurs when she can just make her therapy appointment. These switches, therefore, occur at moments of action, when events are flowing toward a realizable outcome of significance to an alter's identity and about which an alter probably has strong emotional responses. The second switch occurs as she grabs her keys, another moment of action. The significance of either the leaving itself or the return home would be relevant to understanding the switch. Her intention to leave or to find safety is subverted and another alter travels to a different place. The author assumes that the alter had strong reactions to leaving and took over; but the description provides no information.

The phenomenological reduction of a description can be made from various points of view and to accomplish different purposes, all of which capture different aspects of the experience itself. The prior paragraph, for example, focuses on the experience at the moment of the switch. One could explore how a switch impacts the individual. The descrip-

tion, for example, shows the confusion, embarrassment, and helplessness this person experiences when thrown unpredictably into strange situations with which she must cope.

RESULTS

Fifteen switches are described in the seven descriptions. Most descriptions (four of those analyzed phenomenologically) contain two switches – the writer's experience prior to its switch and the writer's experience after she switches back. Two descriptions contain three switches and one description contains one switch.

Only the number of described externally precipitated switches (nine) is sufficient for a phenomenological analysis. Consequently, the following analysis pertains to externally precipitated switches.

Several terms require clarification. "Self-constitution" reflects the phenomenological concept "constituted in consciousness." A "self" or "identity" is created in the "mind" and, thus, "constituted" in consciousness. Self-constitution, however, is a general concept which includes all aspects of self, such as self-esteem, self-concept, identity, and so on. Although one might read "identity" or "personality" or "self" in the place of "self-constitution," the term is broader than these terms since some conscious process has constituted them as this identity, this personality, or this self. This is a particularly useful concept when considering alters or alternate self-constitutions.

The General Structure of the Experience of Externally Precipitated Switching

Externally precipitated switching from one identity to another has three contexts. First, within this person's experienced-totality, there are at least two identities characterized by coherent and self-referential thoughts, memories, traits, emotions, and behaviors, who can assume control of the body. Second, the lived-world presents an energizing lived-situation for an alter not currently in control of the body and this lived-situation can lead to the enactment of the energized need, impulse or emotion. If the person has been energized/activated (for example, emotional, needy or in pain) prior to entering the lived-situation, this prior energizing predisposes the DID person to react even more strongly in the lived-situation. Third, the executive alter constitutes itself so as to exclude the energized need, impulse or emotion evoked for the second alter in the lived-situation. While the self-constitution of the executive alter excludes the experience or expression of these specific needs, impulses or actions, the self-constitution of the alter currently not in control both includes the expression of these specific needs, impulses or actions and they possess significance for this second alter's being-in-the-world. The lived-world presents situations which unfold toward a livable-future and, in the process of that unfolding, elicit increasingly intense responses in the non-

controlling alter as lived-possibilities crystallize into realizable experience, expression or action. Switching seems predicated on the experienced belief that events will proceed toward a specific outcome, often, but not necessarily fearful or painful, to which an alter reacts in characteristic ways. The alter for whom these possibilities are energizing and livable possibilities engages in psychological activities designed to actualize them as lived-realities. When the intensity escalates, the non-controlling alter, whose self-constitution includes accepting, expressing or enacting these particular, energized needs, impulses or emotions, assume control of the body after the intensity overwhelms the executive alter and the second alter takes over. That a lived-possibility could, in fact, become a reality evokes the switch to the second alter. To phrase this differently, as the experience intensifies and becomes less distant, the executive alter's ability to maintain control lessens until the energized alter takes over. The new alter's being-in-the-world represents itself as a unique lived-body in a unique lived-world. Afterwards, when the prior executive alter has resumed control, that alter frequently has negative emotional reactions to having switched.

Example Number Two:

Age: Not reported; Gender: F

I walk along the sidewalk, looking into the store windows and feel giddy as I become aware that one of the children is awake and watching. I feel no sense of uneasiness. We are alone, she and I. She is four and totally spontaneous. I enjoy her constant chatter today, as she notices things only four-year-olds notice; our breath making "smoke," the snowflakes melting on our cheeks; the wonderful crunch of the snow. All at once, she sees "Santa" in his splendid red suit. She is unrestrainable.

I continue to walk toward Santa's house and stand next to it, watching several other little ones take their turn in his lap.

The line goes down. It's nearing closing hours. Santa sees me, watching. K's eyes light up, through my own, as he says:

"How about you, young lady?"

K responds "Me?"

"Of course, what would you like for Christmas?"

It's no use –

She's out.

[The writing changes and looks like a first or sec-

ond grader's.] A baby that has a bottle, and two records with songs I can sing like Winnie Pooh and Rudolph. Also new markers. Our markers are old. And ribbons for are [sic] hair. We like pink the best.

He talked to me He really did K got to talk to Santa Claus and no one stopped me. [The "e" in "really" was reversed.]

I like the snow

I like Chrsmas [sic]

I love Santa.

This is fun!

Example Number Three:

Age: 37; Gender: F

In October, I became fully aware that I am a multiple personality. On Halloween, I attended a stressful meeting in the central part of the large city where I live. Afterwards I had made a commitment to visit a friend in a part of town I don't know well. I had great difficulty when I set out from center city toward my friend's house. Many alters were "out," and driving became almost impossible. It was dark, rainy, and trick-or-treaters were running into the streets. One alter wanted to watch all the costumed kids. Another was afraid of getting lost, and her vision blurred so we couldn't read the map or street signs. This made concentrating on driving quite hard. Finally I pulled over to the side and had a conversation with everyone. Collectively we decided which alter was best equipped to drive the car and get us where we need to go. As a group we selected The Coper. She then told all the others to sit in the back seat and be quiet, and this is how we got to our friend's house.

Observations on The Examples

These examples, selected to show two extremes of switching, demonstrate the phenomena described in the general structure of switching. Descriptions of the additional switches studied will not be included. First note that the world presents situations which evoke responses from alters other than the one currently in control and that those responses can only be labeled "charged," "intense," or "energized." These responses are not necessarily emotional per se but can be of interest or need. As the situation continues to unfold, intensity increases as does the possibility for action or expression to bring about a meaningful event in the world. In the situation with Santa, the four-year-old takes over when the real possibility for expression arises. In the situation on

Halloween, the alter in control is buffeted by the switching of the other alters. Each alter switches in response to lived-possibilities that are energizing ("watching the costumed kids" and "afraid of getting lost"). This third example also describes a consciously chosen switch. In the first example (which presents the methodology), the prospect of sex with a stranger, missing the therapy appointment, and leaving/going home precede a switch. It is reasonable to conclude that each evoked strong emotions, which, in conjunction with events moving toward certain outcomes, precipitated the switch and, thus, action to bring about those outcomes.

DISCUSSION

Overall Observations

This section will consider the following: 1) the generalizability of the results; 2) the role of negative emotions, such as fear or pain, in switching; 3) intensity and rigid self-constitution; and 4) bodily control.

1) Generalizability of the Results

Therapists and DID individuals contacted me about the difficulty of writing descriptions since that might "pull" the person into the experience. This happens in Example Number Two, when the writing switches to that of a child. In general, however, the writers of the other descriptions are able to maintain sufficient distance (and, thus, control) so as not to switch during the writing. Some of the descriptions, however, are of times when the writer could not keep that kind of distance or when chaotic switching occurred. The descriptions, therefore, cover what could be considered the full range of externally precipitated switching. Furthermore, it is unlikely one could get an adequate description of the experience were the DID person unable to maintain distance. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that these results accurately reflect the structure of the experience of externally precipitated switching. Despite the unique characteristics of the respondents, the results are generalizable to other DID individuals.

2) Negative Emotions

Since negative affects are assumed to be directly involved in forming alters (Braude, 1991; Ross, 1989), the author assumed that they would evoke switching. This was not the case as neutral or positive emotion was involved in some switching. Therefore, *switching was not always triggered by fear, pain or stress*. In addition, the descriptions provide no clue about the initial formation of alters and, consequently, no indication of whether pain, fear or stress were involved in their initial creation, as assumed.

3) Intensity and Rigidity of Self-Constitution

Intensity of state, not fear, pain or stress, was a necessary precondition for externally precipitated switching. Furthermore, switching required that the alter currently in control had a rigid self-constitution which excluded that particular, intense state. The more rigid or exclusive the self-constitution, the more abrupt and wrenching the switch. To state this differently: the more rigid the boundary, the more abrupt the switch; or phrased in another way, the more restricted the range of an alter's allowable experience, the greater the likelihood of switching to another alter. Thus, an alter whose only affect/behavior is rageful murder will probably not stay in control long since other affects and needs are also components of the person's totality.

4) Bodily Control

Switching always involved taking control of the body. Although this now appears tautological, it was not obvious prior to this study. One of the author's preliminary assumptions posited a psychological switch in which another alter took over the mind from a prior alter. In contrast, every description was about a switch in bodily control. This, however, does not capture the subtle complexity of the experience which, paradoxically, is a loss of control for the preceding alter, and yet, for the new alter, is the gaining of control of the body in order to enact the energized state so as to bring something about in the world. Enactment can mean verbal expression or physical behavior. Bodily control makes action in the world possible.

There is, furthermore, a clear distinction in the descriptions between internal processes of different alters (conscious or "inner" talk, thought, emotion, memory, and perception) of which the executive alter might be aware and control of the body which was always assumed by a single alter. This issue will be discussed further in the following section. In other words, an alter can be aware of the conscious activity of other alters who can debate, urge, and react to anything whatsoever but, according to these descriptions, control of the body is assumed by only one alter at a time. *Conscious activity and bodily control by alters are distinctly different; only one alter controls the body at a given time.*

The assumption of bodily control is associated with bringing to fruition some possibility in the lived-world, a possibility that has significance for that alter's being-in-the-world. The world presents a situation which is meaningful to a non-executive alter and evokes an intense response. As the situation unfolds, action could, in fact, bring about a future outcome, and, as that outcome becomes more possible, the intensity increases, until a switch occurs. *Switching intends to make actual a potential and significant lived-possibility for the "new" alter. Following is an example.*

Example Number Four:

Age: 35; Gender: F

Like today, I had an appointment with my therapist. I had a couple of different things to discuss with her. It's the first time I had seen her in two weeks. (She had been on vacation.) I am calm, quiet, controlled. I try to keep things sane. T., on the other hand, is near hysteria. There's been a lot going on and her rising hysteria is scaring me. Anyway, in the middle of the session, I came out quite suddenly, without having known I had ever "gone in." After I came out I realized T. had been out. I wasn't aware of when she came but I was aware when she left. I had no idea of what had been said, where I was or why I had come out so quickly. It's very disorienting and confusing. The last thing I had remembered was that I was home, preparing to take the bus to therapy. It's illegal for me to drive right now. Then, very abruptly, I find myself in her office, having driven myself there. I was left to have to drive home afraid of getting pulled over.

The switch, the assumption of bodily control, follows first intensification (rising hysteria) and, second, the actual opportunity to bring about something significant for the new alter – in this case, getting to talk to the therapist. These circumstances were similar for the four-year-old who talked to Santa, for the person trying to drive to her friend's house and for the person "coming to" at the Casino. The assumption of bodily control follows intensification associated with a realizable possibility.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

The phenomenological analysis yielded additional conclusions not apparent in the general structure of the experience of switching. These relate to the following issues: 1) loss of self-control; 2) dimensions of self; 3) limitations pursuant to self-constitution; 4) activity of alters in consciousness; and 5) emergence of alters in consciousness.

1) Loss of Self-Control

Subjective distance. A subjective sense of distance seems related to control. As propounded in earlier papers (Beere, 1995, in press), an experienced sense of distance or "normal" dissociation provides freedom and control, for example, as in normal as opposed to abreactive memory. Loss of control is desirable to achieve orgasm, go to sleep or enjoy oneself. As subjective distance lessens, the capacity to control erodes, eventually leading to loss of control. Consider the experience of impulsively expressed anger, which at first might simply be experienced as irritation, yet grows stronger, until, at some moment, the anger "takes over." Afterwards

one might say, "I lost control." Such loss of control need not lead to physical violence or verbal extremes. Though appropriate and rational, the anger "took over." The loss of control seems to require a loss of subjective distance.

A similar process seems to occur in externally precipitated switching. The energized state, while it belongs to "someone else," is indirectly experienced. When intensity passes a critical level, the executive alter loses control to the alter experiencing the intense state.

Self-Constitution. When a new alter "comes out," the energized state is not out of control for that new alter. Frequently, the new alter plans for and modulates the expression of that energized state. The alter might make plans to murder an abuser with a knife, to seduce a blackjack dealer, or to injure the body severely. In other words, the second has control. Why did the prior alter lose control? It seems that this particular energized state is not part of the prior alter's self-constitution, and, as a result, the first alter might be incapable of knowing about the experience, let alone controlling it. This analysis yields the following conclusion: *Self control is bounded by how identity is constituted in consciousness; a self can only control experiences that occur within its boundaries.*

Body-Consciousness in the Here and Now. Many descriptions refer to inner spatial and temporal experiences associated with control. The descriptions of switching recount moving out of the body, moving down inside the mind, being pulled down a tunnel inside or away from a location in the mind. In addition, parts "come out" or "present" or "go in." Many described experiences of switching relate the writer's frustration at not being able to get the body back while observing the actions of the other alter. These were not metaphors but descriptions of the actual experience of switching.

It seems that in order to control the body, the self must manifest in a specific location in consciousness. There is, as it were, a location within the body-mind that one can say is "consciousness in, of, and for the body" or a center of body-consciousness and, when self-conscious identity is at that location, it controls the body. When self-conscious identity is not at that place in the body-mind, it cannot control the body. Is it possible that physiological changes associated with an alter only occur when that alter is "in the center of body-consciousness" or in control of the body?

A second issue pertains to temporal locatedness. A first-person commentary might clarify. I might not be "present" if my consciousness is in some other time. Thus, as I listen,

TABLE 2
Facets of the Self: Comparison of the Present Phenomenological Results With Fink's (1988)

Phenomenologically Derived	Fink's Core Characteristics
Source/owner of experience	Ownership of own emotions
Initiator of intentions and actions	Coherent/distinct body with control over actions
Self-referent in memory	Sense of continuity
	Others as distinct and separate interactants

I might be anticipating what will happen in an hour or recall events that happened earlier today and realize that I did not hear what was said. My mind was in the future or the past, not in the present, and, thus, I was not "here in the now." Thus, we expect that the four year-old who talks to Santa experiences the world as it was twenty years ago.

Bodily control, therefore, need not occur in "present time." Bodily control, however, does seem to require being at a specific inner location in the mind, here defined as the center of body-consciousness.

2) Dimensions of Self

The facets of self which emerge from these descriptions are: self as source or owner of mental experience (mental experience being *my* choice, *my* intention, *my* emotions, *my* thoughts, *my* needs, or *my* impulses); self as initiator of intentions and actions; self as the consistent self-referent in memory or self-as-continuity since there is a sense of continuity in memory by having memory. Continuity of awareness and, thus, sense of self requires memory – namely, that I have a sense of continuous memory.

Fink (1988) discusses the core self in relation to alter formation and describes four distinct domains around which alter-selves can be understood. Once the core self is integrated, it possesses a distinct and coherent body with control over actions, ownership of own emotions, a sense of continuity, and the sense of others as distinct and separate interactants. As can be seen from Table 2, three characteristics of Fink's (1988) model of the core self also emerged from the present phenomenological analysis of switching. The present research focused on self-related issues and, thus, Fink's "others as distinct and separate interactants" was not actively considered. On the other hand, what distinguishes one alter from another is *not* being the source/owner of an experience, *not* initiating an action or *not* having the memory of an experience. Thus, the three phenomenologically

derived characteristics of the self define how an alter might assert that another alter had an experience; in other words, these are criteria for defining a "distinct and separate interactant."

These criteria can be seen in the examples. In Example Number One, for example, the woman becomes aware that she is dressed provocatively. She has no memory of dressing this way, and writes, "Who went to Vegas? Judging by my clothing, I knew." The clothing is hers since she is now wearing them, but she does not recall dressing this way and, thus, did not dress herself. Furthermore, she would not dress in this fashion. Given these actions (dressing in this way), a specific alter went to Vegas. Thus, the reader might conclude, the writer would not act sexually seductive and had no memory of either experiencing or acting this other way. The other alter is a "distinct and separate interactant."

3) Limitations Resulting From Self-Constitution

The phenomenological results point out that the way an alter perceives itself, its self-constitution, significantly influences how switches occur, what can be experienced, what can be recalled, and what can be done. Although the following tends to focus on limitations that derive from self-constitution, it seems reasonable to assume that the rigid or exclusive self-constitution of alters was necessary at the time of their creation.

Switching and Co-Consciousness. The more rigid or exclusive the alter's self-constitution, the more discontinuous the switch, with less co-consciousness, memory or awareness of precipitants. Switching without choice and without continuity of awareness ruptures the alter's sense of locatedness in the world and in time. The alter is thrown out of and back into existence without choice or awareness. This is not just loss of control but a profound existential rupture, a complete loss of being, both of self and of world.

Acceptable Experience and Retrievable Memory. Memory seems to be retrieved according to self-constitution. Consider that alters are organized around certain intensities and quality of state with their unique qualities of thought, need, interest, emotion, goals, expectations, and so on. Experience which is not included as part of that self-constitution is not recalled. As self-constitution broadens as a result of therapy, another alter's experience can be recalled so long as it is consistent with that self-constitution. It is first experienced as having happened to that other alter. When the other alter can be included as part of this self, then the memories can begin to be experienced as "mine." Memory is retrieved (but not necessarily filed) according to self-constitution and that which is not consistent with self-constitution is excluded from recall.

4) Activity of Alters in Consciousness

The descriptions reveal that non-executive alters can respond to the possibilities presented by the world even

though the executive alter might be unaware of that response. Thus, an alter (Description Number Seven) who intends to die reacts to reality precautions by the executive alter which make suicide difficult and changes its efforts from suicide to self-harm while the executive alter is unaware of these reactions or plans. In Description Number Five, Mr. B influences the executive alter to buy a knife and activate homicidal emotions. Other descriptions (Number Five, possibly Six and Seven) depict alters perceiving what is happening yet not being able to take control of the body. Importantly, however, *non-executive alters can, without the awareness or choice of the executive alter, perceive worldly events, anticipate possibilities, and plan future actions. In addition, non-executive alters can influence executive alters.* Note, however, that a non-executive alter cannot directly take control but must influence the executive alter indirectly. An unanswered question remains: How do non-executive alters "influence" executive alters? These considerations lead to yet a further question: How do non-executive alters become activated in consciousness?

5) Emergence of Alters in Consciousness

In the descriptions, alters appear and disappear in consciousness, and alters become aware in the background as an executive alter acts in certain ways or world events unfold. Non-executive alters are not continuously aware; they come and go. This becomes a significant and knotty theoretical problem: When alters are not conscious, what brings them to consciousness? Example Number Five shows "a jarring reality" which is perceived by an alter who was "switched out" and that "wakes her up."

Example Number Five:

Age: 23 Sex: F

I received a package in the mail. It was a few days after Christmas so it must be a late present. I opened it and felt an angry alter start to come about. I blacked out, or rather stepped into the background. "A" was/had slammed our fist against a wall. The jarring reality that shook me throughout, made me wake up. "A," I know you are strong. I know you are angry." She was angry. She told me she was going to beat the wall. I called out a teenage alter to release and ease the tension because the little ones were crying. "A" stopped hitting and it was the first time I had felt her anger and we were bruised for over a week.

The angry alter in the above example was not conscious before the start of the description. After the writer opened the package, the angry alter "start[s] to come about." In other words, at time T [emergence minus 1], before receiving the package, the angry alter was not aware of the writer's experience and was not conscious. At time T [emergence plus

1], the angry alter is not only aware but influencing the writer who is aware of this inner "coming about." There is a time, T. [emergence], when the angry alter makes a transition from being unaware to being aware. How does this transition occur?

It would be convenient (but would not match the description) to claim that the angry alter is activated due to the emotionally angry state of the writer. In this description, the alter who is "out," the writer, is not angry at all. The writer becomes aware that the alter who comes about is angry. Another inner emergence occurs when the writer is awakened, brought to awareness, by a jarring reality that shook her throughout. Can we deduce how the alter shifts from being unaware to being conscious? Before the angry alter "comes about," it is NOT processing the writer's experience since it has not yet "come about." Consequently, some other aspect of consciousness, an aspect of consciousness which is not the executive alter, must be "aware" that events are transpiring which are portentous to the angry alter and the angry alter comes to awareness. A similar process seems to have occurred to bring the writer back.

It should be apparent, therefore, that while the executive alter is consciously active, other conscious activities also occur which are pertinent to appropriate alters. These activities are not necessarily state-specific. As observed earlier, alters respond to future possibilities and the meanings or implications of events, not simply to strong affect. Some aspect of consciousness which is "greater" or more inclusive than that of the executive alter is responding. The precise process is not discernible from the descriptions.

POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS ON THE APPLICATIONS OF THESE FINDINGS

The results are limited to externally elicited switching; thus, other kinds of switching need to be researched to clarify their relationship to the present results. There are, in addition, particular questions which arise about how alters function.

The outcome of this study might have been colored by the precise question asked. By asking DID individuals to describe switching from one personality to another personality, the respondents might have described switching which involved single personalities. This is consistent with the results of this study which demonstrates that only one alter controls the body at one time and that apparent simultaneity of control is actually sequentiality. In other words, alters battle for control, evenly matched, and take over and lose control in rapid succession. A follow-up study could request descriptions of two or more alters being simultaneously in control of the body.

By contrast, simultaneous alters were present in consciousness. If several alters were able to control the body at once, do they control different spheres of activity? One might

anticipate, in the context of recent research on implicit-explicit memory (Schachter, 1992), modality or body-part specific control by different alters.

Another possible artifact relates to volitional switching. The single "consciously decided" switch derived from an overwhelming intensification of competing responses that interfered with control by the executive alter. Once again, the particular question asked in this study might have invited descriptions of non-volitional switching. A follow-up study could analyze descriptions of conscious switching.

Three other kinds of switching are mentioned in the literature: internally (dynamically) activated switches, overt requests by an outside person such as a therapist, and stimulus-triggered switches. These also could be researched in future studies.

Lastly, there is a series of questions which this study brings to the fore. What is the experience of an inner boundary? How do non-executive alters arise and disappear in consciousness? How do non-executive alters influence executive alters? How do non-multiples shift states? What is the experience of loss of control in obsessions, compulsions, and phobias and how does it compare to loss of control in switching?

There is also a large number of questions about the functioning of alters. Are there alters who are only conscious and never assume control of the body? What is the difference between being conscious and being in control of the body? Was an alter initially created when it first took control of the body? Are alters always created via negative and overwhelming affect or are there ways in which, once learned, alter formation becomes a template for later patterns? Are some alters created during non-traumatic times?

Can we draw conclusions about the creation of alters? If the conclusion reached here is robust, then an alter is possibly generated to provide control otherwise unavailable to the prior alter. The possible error in this logic is confusing the current functioning of alters with their causation. If we consider the observations made about self-constitution, alters eventually become integrated "around" a unique identity. Did the precipitating factors (Braun & Sachs, 1985) occur before, during or after initial identity formation in childhood. Is a dissociative substrate which somehow separates experiences established prior to initial identity formation?

Although this research was completed to "let the experience of switching speak for itself," the results seem to echo aspects of Beere's (1995) perceptual theory of dissociation. The theory posits that dissociation during trauma occurs in an intense situation which is meaningfully related to the person's being in the world and perception narrows on the threat. Although the specifics of switching are not part of that theory, that switching occurs in an energizing lived-situation which is also meaningful coincides with the perceptual theory.

As is the case with much research, the current results

raise more questions than they answer. Nonetheless, a phenomenological approach, using qualitative research methods, has proved useful as a preliminary exploration of the inner world of DID individuals. A future article will discuss the implications of these results for current theories of switching. ■

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