LINKING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THE SOCIAL: FEMINISM, POSTSTRUCTURALISM, AND MULTIPLE PERSONALITY

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Editor's note: Dr. Rivera has decided against using precise diagnostic terminology (e.g., multiple personality disorder) because she is addressing broader philosophic and social issues rather than clinical concerns alone.

ABSTRACT

In the past ten years incest and child abuse have been brought into public awareness as social problems. During the same time period there has been a significant increase in knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon of multiple personality. However, though multiple personality is almost invariably an outcome of severe childhood abuse, it has been thus far seen almost entirely in a psychological light, as a personal problem for suffering individuals. This article explores the issue of multiple personality from a feminist perspective, using basic concepts of poststructuralism to elucidate this viewpoint. Examining the social and political aspects of the issue of multiple personality expands our capacity to address the problem in the broadest possible way and to look at questions of prevention as well as assessment and treatment.

The issue of multiple personality is embedded in the issue of child abuse, particularly the sexual abuse of little girls. Two independent studies drawing their cohorts from individuals in treatment with a wide variety of mental health practitioners found that nine out of ten of the people with multiple personality seen in clinical settings are women (Putnam, Guroff, Silberman, Barban, & Post, 1986; Ross, Norton, & Wozney, 1989). 97% of individuals with multiple personality have a documented history of child abuse, usually severe and prolonged, and in the majority of the cases this included childhood sexual abuse, usually incest (Putnam et al., 1986).

There is a growing literature that explores various aspects of the etiology, phenomenology and treatment of multiple personality. Two landmark contributions have been edited volumes of essays by innovators in this field (Kluft, 1985; Braun, 1986). This literature addresses such questions as: How does multiple personality develop within an individual? In what ways is this internal organization different from and similar to psychological and physiological processes in individuals who are not divided in the same way? What methods are effective in treating individuals with multiple personality? This work has opened up an understanding of a phenomenon that had previously been ignored, distorted or sensationalized by clinicians and the general public alike. There is a growing awareness among the helping professions that multiple personality is not rare at all (Braun, 1984; Coons, 1986) and that it can be treated effectively (Kluft, 1984; 1986). Many individuals who are suffering from the effects of severe dissociation are now, for the first time, able to get help.

However, though there has been a significant increase in knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon of multiple personality, it has thus far been seen almost entirely in a psychological light. Multiple personality has been framed as a mental health issue, and its investigation remains largely the purview of the professions focused on the treatment of individual pathology, mainly psychiatry and psychology. Though multiple personality is intimately connected with the issue of incest, it has not been raised as a social and political issue in the way that the sexual abuse of children has been in the past ten years.

This paper explores the issue of multiple personality from a feminist perspective, using some basic concepts of poststructuralism to elucidate this viewpoint. A social as well as a cognitive and psychodynamic understanding of multiple personality is necessary in order to place it in its historical context (Rivera, 1988a). This broader conceptualization of the problem is important if we are to succeed, not only in helping suffering individuals deal with the consequences of their childhood abuse, but in pointing to the roots of the oppression these individuals experience, and therefore address the issue of prevention.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AS A FEMINIST ISSUE

The issues of incest and child sexual abuse were brought into public awareness by the women's movement of the 1970s and early 80s (Rush, 1974, 1977, 1980; Butler, 1978; Armstrong, 1978, 1983; Herman, 1977, 1981). Social action programs responding to the needs of rape victims uncovered childhood histories of sexual abuse in large numbers of victims (Butler, 1978). Some of the silence about the widespread sexual exploitation of children in our society began to be lifted, and some of the cultural myths that surrounded the issue—for example, that incest is rare (one case in a million in the general population according to the 1975 edition of the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* [Freedman, Kaplan & Sadock, 1974]) and that children frequently lie about being sexually abused by adults—began to be chal-

lenged.

Feminist theorists and clinicians who address the issue view violence against women and children, not simply as a manifestation of the sickness of individual abusers or pathological family systems, but as an inevitable consequence of the inferior social and economic status of women and children and social structures in which male power over women and children is institutionally integrated (Rush, 1980). In response to the findings of her large, random sample, retrospective study of adult women in the general population, Russell (1986) found that 38% of them had experienced sexual abuse before they were 18 years old, and 16% of them were victims of incestuous abuse. 95% of the perpetrators were male, and only 5% of the incidents were ever reported to the police. As a result of her data, Russell concluded that two of the major—and most neglected—causal factors in the occurrence of extrafamilial and intrafamilial child sexual abuse are the way males are socialized to behave sexually and the power structure within which they act out this sexuality.

It was in 1980, when I began to work almost exclusively with children who were victims of sexual abuse and their families, that I had my first solid realization about sexual politics. The families I worked with had many differences, differences in racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, different levels of education, different economic status. What they had in common was that the physical and sexual abuse of children by adults and of women and children by men were central issues in almost all of these families, in their past and in their present. As part of trying to understand what I was seeing, I began to read everything I could find about sexual abuse and violence against women and children. The feminist literature in this area made the most sense to me, and I started to frame the suffering I was seeing in broader terms than individual and psychological circumstances. It was also in this context that I met the first woman I had recognized as having developed multiple personality as a result of long-term, sadistic abuse in childhood.

The multiple personality literature (though there was not very much to read on this subject as of yet) helped me put a clinical framework around what I was experiencing with this woman and others whom I began to work with. Consequently, after a volatile beginning, I was able to work more deliberately and planfully.

My experiences with the women I was seeing who had multiple and highly dissociated personality states were also giving new meaning to the feminist literature I was reading, and to my growing feminist perspective. It became increasingly clear to me that multiple personality and the abuse that precipitates it is not only a personal problem for the women who suffer from it, but is also a manifestation of the oppressive power relations between adults/children and men/women and that are endemic in a patriarchal culture. I began to see multiple personality, one of the most severe personal consequences of child sexual abuse, as a feminist issue as well as a psychiatric concern.

Much of both the multiple personality and the feminist literature made sense to me, reflected accurately my own perceptions and, what is more, it was pragmatically helpful in my encounters with my clients. The only trouble was that everything I was learning from one type of literature seemed to contradict everything else I was learning from other literatures. The multiple personality literature, mostly written up to this point by a few doctors, with one notable exception all men, never addressed politics or social oppression at all, and the feminist literature about violence against women declaimed the medical model of understanding women's abuse as one of the foremost ongoing oppressors of women. I learned a great deal from both of these sources that helped me offer the individuals with multiple personality compassionate and informed help. But they did not fit with each other at all.

I found that the struggle that the women with multiple personality were going through in therapy, I was encountering in trying to put my thoughts together about multiple personality. A plethora of voices—inside my head and outside—were talking to me about this issue. Both feminist theory and the scientific literature about multiple personality seemed to illuminate certain aspects of the condition, and each seemed to me to be crucial to a full understanding of multiple personality as it is lived out in a western patriarchal culture. But the medical profession talked in the language of disorder and pathology; popular literature labeled the experience exotic, weird and wonderful; and feminists would sometimes discount the specificity of the experience, protesting, "But aren't we all multiples after all?"

Because such a large percentage of individuals with multiple personality are women and because the issues I address in this article relate most obviously to the experience of women in our society, I shall use the female generic (she/her) in this paper. This does not indicate any denial on my part of the experience of the many men who suffer from multiple personality. A social analysis of multiple personality as it is manifested in men in a patriarchal society would be likely to have many similarities and some significant differences from one that relates largely to women. But that is a project for the future.

POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND MULTIPLICITY

In order to make some links between these two perspectives, the social emphasis of feminist theory and the psychological perspective of the scientific literature, it is useful to look at a third perspective about multiplicity, that of poststructuralism. The literature of poststructuralism does not directly address the issue of multiple personality. Rather, it questions the very existence of non-multiple unitary identity.

Many influences have helped constitute current poststructuralist theory. One of the most fundamental, though often unacknowledged of these was the development of quantum theory by physicists in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Quantum theory (Bohr, 1958; Heisenberg, 1971) replaced the determinism of classical Newtonian physics (with its basic principle that material creation moves in a way that can be predicted with absolute accuracy and is independent of human will and purpose) with the notion of randomness at the foundation of natural

processes. This does not mean that knowledge is impossible but that it is relative, a matter of probability distributions, the correlating of random sequences. The symbol of the universe evolved from that of Newton's clock to one of a game of dice or a pinball machine (Pagels, 1982). From the point of view of quantum theory, Bohr (1958) declares that the task of physics is not to find out how Nature is, but rather to discover what we can say about Nature.

At the same time that these revolutions in physics were taking place, the science of structural linguistics was evolving, and poststructuralist theory is derived more immediately and consciously from this new field, that came to be called semiotics. Semiotics is a metaphysics of symbols that is based on the premise that reality is not knowable except through its representations in language, its signs. The basic insight of poststructuralism was first taken from the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (1974) in which he challenged the modernist assumption that knowledge (which is always framed in language) reflects a reality that is outside itself, that is, that we can study objects. Saussurean structural linguistics posits a pre-given fixed structuring of language, prior to its actualization in speech or writing. Language, for Saussure, is a chain of signs, an abstract system. This structure, far from reflecting some sort of natural world outside its domain, itself constitutes social reality for human beings (Weedon, 1987).

This notion of universal structures that construct our social reality was taken up in a number of different areas. The psychoanalyst Lacan (1975) applied the principles of structuralist semiotics to the work of Freud, pointing to universal social structures that guarantee psycho-sexual development along certain lines. The anthropologist Levi-Strauss (1963) developed a structuralist theory of human society in which the incest taboo and the exchange (as property) of women by men are the universal principles that underlie the functioning of all societies. These notions of fixed and universal meanings were central to the structuralism that poststructuralism grew out of and transformed.

The term poststructuralism is applied to a range of philosophical positions, some very different from others. Foucault's (1972; 1981; 1982) theory of discourse and power, Derrida's (1976) critique of the notion that language is a tool for expressing something beyond itself, and the French feminist challenge to white male definitions of identity and self (Cixous, 1986; Irigaray, 1985, 1985a; Kristeva, 1986) all represent streams of poststructuralism. What they all have in common is a radical critique of the humanist notion of the coherent, essentially rational individual who is the author of her own meanings and the agent of her own productions. They also profess an abandonment of the belief in an essential unique individual identity. Poststructuralism deconstructs the object that psychology takes as pre-given, the human subject. It insists that forms of subjectivity are produced historically in a field of power relations. The notion of the individual has no meaning outside the socially and historically specific practices which constitute her (Henriques et al., 1984).

A modernist philosophy of science views the human being as the center and agent of all social production, including knowledge. This humanist perspective defines the self as essentially coherent and rational. Mistakes in socialization, conflicting and confusing stimuli, sometimes cause glitches in the smooth and predictable running of the machinery, and these need to be set right through appropriate intervention. We are all imbued to a large extent with this view of the world and ourselves as orderly and knowable entities.

However, though this is a comforting view, we live in a time when the modernist faith in a science that claims to study objects and claims the knowledge derived as an object is under attack and indeed has been effectively undermined. A poststructuralist philosophy, rather than attempting to map the contours of nature and to grasp the object of study, attempts to study constructions of knowledge, using a language of verbs rather than nouns. Within the field of psychology this contemporary movement to challenge the nature of knowledge has been called the social constructionist movement. Social constructionism views the role of psychology as exploring the processes by which people come to account for their lives in the world, rather than describing and explaining those people and that world (Gergen, 1985).

Poststructuralism posits language as the place where our identities and our social organizations are constructed, defined and contested. The basic insight that poststructuralism draws from semiotics is that language, far from reflecting the "natural" world or social reality, constitutes these realities for us. Different discourses are competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and practices, offering the individual a range of modes of subjectivity (Weedon, 1987).

Poststructuralist theory offers an explanation of why changing conceptualizations in psychiatry and psychology often have more to do with shifting relations of power than they do with scientific advance. The decline of interest in the concept of dissociation and in hypnosis as a treatment technique in the early twentieth century, for example, reflects patterns of social history that kept multiple personality almost entirely unacknowledged and untreated for the better part of a century after Pierre Janet (1889) and Morton Prince (1906) both offered ground-breaking explanations and treatment paradigms for dealing with the phenomenon. Freud discounted this important work, and with the growing ascendance of psychoanalysis as the theory and technique of prestige, both the concept of dissociation and the diagnosis of multiple personality fell into disrepute. There were two significant contributions to the decline in professional interest in hypnosis and multiple personality (Ellenberger, 1970): Freud's positing of *repression* rather than Janet's notion of dissociation as identifying the mechanism by which information becomes inaccessible to conscious recollection, and Bleuler's introduction of the term schizophrenia (and stating that multiple personality is a form of schizophrenia).

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, when the discourse of religion was the most powerful force in Western culture, women who displayed multiple personality would have been considered under the power of the devil, and they would have been punished, usually burned for their sinfulness. Twentieth century ideology frames that practice as

ignorant and barbaric. We call *multiple personality disorder* a *mental health problem.* Within the contemporary western discourse of psychiatry, the notion of multiple personality disorder refers to a mental abnormality that demands psychiatric intervention. It contains, therefore, all the conceptualizations and social practices that relate to the framing of the phenomenon in this way. In other cultures and at other times, *speaking in tongues* was interpreted as a sign of spiritual insight and giftedness. The individual who can take on different voices and personae at different times was considered an adept, and she experienced herself and played a particular role in society concomitant with that definition. Isadore (1986) explores some of the varying discourses that exist around dissociation in different cultures and the roles and functions they play in the maintenance of societal norms and functions within those cultures.

Poststructuralist theory addresses an individual's experience by showing where it comes from and how it relates to material social practices and the power relations that structure them. It addresses issues such as desire, meaning, the relationship of socially and historically constructed desires and meanings to the development of identity and social practices (Henriques et al., 1984). Poststructuralists do not deny the complexity of the often unconscious forces that contribute to the construction of the individual—indeed, one important stream of the poststructuralist movement emerged from within psychoanalysis in France (Lacan, 1975; Kristeva, 1986; Irigaray, 1985, 1985a)—but they emphasize the reconstruction of our culture in the life history of every new member of the human race (Mitchell, 1974).

POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND MULTIPLE PERSONALITY

The phenomenon of multiple personality is a vivid illustration of poststructuralism in action. Following the poststructuralist emphasis on the production of forms of subjectivity through social apparatus, we can look at the construction of the alter personalities of an individual with multiple personality as an example of the continual production and reproduction of specific social positionings and practices. Each personality state identifies with a particular position according to the role that that personality state learned to play as part of the individual's overall survival strategy. We can learn a great deal about both the individual and the culture by watching the interplay among personalities.

In my experience working with women who experience multiple personality, it is very common for their vulnerable child personalities and their seductive and/or compliant personalities to be female and their aggressive protector personalities to be male, and other therapists have also found this to be the case, though there has been no research so far on the subject (Kluft, personal communication, 1987). The experience of these alter personalities as they fight with each other for status, power and influence over the individual and her behavior is powerfully illustrative of the social construction of masculinity and femininity in our society.

Also, the range of positions offered to the states in which the individual perceives herself as female are illuminative. Within one woman, for example, a particular alter often identifies with the position of woman as sexual object for the use of men, another identifies with the position of woman as emotionally vulnerable and invested in creating and nurturing personal relationships with others, and yet another with the position of woman as self-sacrificing and masochistic. Each of these roles enables her to respond adaptively as a child in a situation of threat and sexual assault. These roles, as they are incorporated into the increasingly consolidated identities of the alter personalities as the little girl grows into womanhood, are developed in an idiosyncratic way in response to her particular circumstances. They also represent the extremes of stereotypical self-identification which are central to the constitution of femininity as it is lived by all women in a patriarchal society.

The interactions of these personalities are a play in which social processes can be viewed with more clarity than is usually possible. For every personality who identifies with one position (the compliant little girl, for example) there is often another personality who ferociously resists that position (the anti-social boy). Thus, both social control and resistance to that control can be clearly seen in the life of the individual with multiple personality. The dynamic of power and powerlessness inheres in the differences between personalities and in the shifts from one to another depending on the circumstances and their responses to those circumstances at any given moment. Each alter personality also illustrates within itself aspects of both social regulation and resistance to that regulation (for example, the woman who sees her duty as servicing men sexually may keep a razor blade handy, and she may occasionally use it on an unsuspecting customer), and they all influence each other. Thus, in the life of a woman with multiple personality at the florid stage of her condition, we have an unusual opportunity to watch personal identity as it continues to be constructed and reconstructed with the social context of the individual and within the larger social order.

In witnessing and participating in the therapeutic journey of a woman with multiple personalty, the notion of identity undergoes a shift. The search for identity does not appear to be a digging for an essential self, the *true self* of the object relations psychoanalysts (Winnicott, 1965) that is hidden beneath protective layers of socialization. What emerges is a multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of personal experiences of gender, race, class, religion and culture (deLauretis, 1986).

I have found many powerful and telling insights in this work on the deconstruction of identity that are useful for understanding the phenomenon of multiple personality. It opens up for study the complex relations of power and domination—such as the widespread devaluation and oppression of children and women—that structure our world as an area of exploration when looking for the causes of multiple personality, rather than simply focusing on the immediate causal factors of child abuse, seen as a consequence of individual or family pathology. It emphasizes the reality that individuals construct their identities in relation to their social positionings that are intimately related to variables

such as race, class, gender and religion, rather than responding to oppression by developing symptoms that can be seen and addressed in an ahistorical and universal way. It points to the important similarities between the contradictory personalities and positionings within the individual who uses her dissociative capacities to create an array of clearly distinguishable personalities and the rest of us who are capable of pretending to a unified, non-contradictory identity and denying our complex locations amid different positions of power and desire. It challenges simple notions of *fusion* and *integration* as a togetherness that dissolves all contradictions, and it problematizes our psychological and cultural construction of categories such as gender, sexual identity and sexual orientation. Each of these areas merits exploration, but for the purposes of this paper, let me address just one of the issues in a little more detail: notions of fusion and integration.

COMING TOGETHER: FUSION AND INTEGRATION

Notions of *fusion* and *integration* are pivotal in the literature about multiple personality. They are often juxtaposed to concepts such as identity problems and fragmentation, the latter being the problems and the former the solution, the goal of the therapeutic process. Multiple personality is, above all, a severe and chronic phenomenon of dissociation, of dividedness. There has been a great deal of discussion about the relative merits of integration as a goal of the clinical treatment of multiple personality, with some practitioners and some individuals with multiple personality opting for functional dividedness with negotiated cooperation among alters. However, most experienced therapists have found, empirically, that those individuals who did not move toward integration and continued, throughout treatment, to guard their separations jealously were much more likely to lapse into their earlier state of dysfunctional dividedness and acute suffering (Kluft, 1986). Consequently, moving in the direction of replacing dividedness with unity and learning other ways of coping with stress than dissociating, are usually among the long-term goals of therapy.

In the lexicon of poststructuralism, concepts such as a unified self and a well-defined individual identity are not only not viewed as ideals but are considered to be dangerous ideological fictions used to erase the awareness of differences within and between human beings. The notion of a self constructed throughout a lifetime of multiple positionings and practices elaborated by poststructuralism is used to undermine the concept of a non-problematic individual identity. It poses a challenge to both the epistemological basis of mainstream psychology and psychiatry and the practices of social control that often emerge from them (Henriques et al., 1984).

Is there any way to combine clinical notions of integration as a therapeutic goal with the poststructuralist challenge? At first glance, these perspectives, as they relate to the notion of integration appear polarized, perhaps even irreconcilable. Placing them side by side raises important questions for therapists working with people who have multiple personality. What are we suggesting when we talk about integration as the goal of therapy? Are we fostering the creation of someone who will fit in better, who will not always be torn by conflicting voices and desires? Someone who is complacent in the knowledge that she has constructed about who she is and her place in the world? Someone who can suppress the awareness of the terrible contradictions we live with every day in a racist, sexist, classist society? Whether these notions are inherently contradictory depend on what it is that we mean when we use terms like integration. Given the challenge to the notion of a unified, non-contradictory individual identity or self that conforms with social expectations that poststructuralism properly raises, is there any way of talking about integration, fusion or unification as regards the phenomenon of multiple personality without falling into a trap of creating the illusion of a stable, non-problematic notion of identity that lends itself to manipulation and social control? Is the concept of integration a useful one at all?

I think so. Effective therapy demands that the person with multiple personality attempt to hold different and sometimes contradictory emotional states and points of view that have been encapsulated in the alter personality states in one central consciousness. We can talk about the erosion of dissociative barriers to a central consciousness that can handle the contradictions of the different voices and different desires within one person in a way that offers a functional and useful definition of integration, and I think we need this kind of vocabulary when we are talking about the therapeutic process. This definition of integration prescribes—not the silencing of different voices with different points of view—but the growing ability to call all those voices "I," to disidentify with any one of them as the whole story, and to recognize that the construction of personal identity is a complex continuing affair in which we are inscribed in culture in a myriad of contradictory ways.

Within this framework, the goal of treatment is not to stop this continuous process of the construction of identity but to open it up to examination, so that, in eroding the dissociative barriers between the personality states with their often contradictory positions, the individual who has had relatively little control over her personalities can reflect upon the power relations which constitute her and the society in which she must live and work. This opening up of previously hidden, disguised or inaccessible areas offers her—not unlimited freedom—but an opportunity to choose from a wider range of options and to produce new meanings for herself that are less rigidly constrained by the power relations of her past. It offers her more manoeuverability among the power structures that frame all our lives.

For example, a woman who develops an array of personality states some of whom she subjectively experiences as male and others of whom she experiences as female does not necessarily, through the process of integration, relax into a comfortably and stereotypically feminine sense of her identity as a woman as our society defines woman. The claims of the different personalities to be different genders offers us a unique opportunity to explore an area that is often taken for granted, the social construction of the notion of gender in our society and the way in which it shapes our lives (Rivera,

1988b).

A poststructuralist perspective expands the notion of gender beyond its concrete manifestation in the different physical reproductive organs of women and men and points to the reality that the notion of "natural" sexual difference functions in our culture to mask, on the grounds of incontrovertible facts of nature, the social opposition of men and women (Wittig, 1982). By examining the various ways different cultures, subcultural groups and individuals in different contexts within the same culture understand gender, the referents for the terms woman and man are obscured (Gergen, 1985). Possibilities are opened up that destabilize and reframe the question of gender differences.

The polarization of man and woman that is a result of differential socialization in a patriarchal culture is not a natural process. The relationship of human beings to their sexed bodies is not a simple instinctual one, as it is in most mammals. Men and women must struggle to fit themselves into the proper gender positionings that the laws of society demand, and the outcome of this struggle is never secure. The notion of a pre-existent sexual difference that secures sexual identity for both sexes is a myth (Mitchell & Rose, 1982), and the position that there is a natural, essential sexuality that pre-dates the child's insertion into the process of her or his socialization blinds us to the more complex and problematic nature of sexuality and gender difference that is central to the individual's difficult insertion into culture.

Opening up an awareness of the social construction of categories such as male and female, as they are applied to human beings, offers a wider scope for the integrated individual with multiple personality so that integration need not involve a simple solution to her conflicts regarding gender identity. The failure to slip easily into cultural roles and relationships lies at the heart of a rich psychic life, and a woman who has integrated dissociated personality states into one central consciousness need not pretend that this is not so. Her state of struggling consciously with what it means to be a woman in our society can be an example of what Freud declared to be the situation of all women—they do not assume their femininity without a struggle and only at great cost (Freud, 1924; 1931). The range of healthy and happy outcomes of this struggle is wider for a woman who has acknowledged a variety of contradictory impulses and desires in terms of her gender identity than Freud might have dreamed possible.

It is not the multiplicity which the individual with multiple personality experiences that is problematic but the defensive dissociation and the consequent limited awareness and ability to act on that awareness. Jane Flax (1987), a feminist psychoanalytic psychotherapist, notes that—though she recognizes the contribution poststructuralist writers have made in deconstructing the artifacts of white male concepts of self—they are naive and unaware of their own privileged cohesion when they call for a decentered self. They tend to confuse all possible forms of self with the unitary, mentalist, deeroticized, masterful, and oppositional selves they rightfully criticize. In "Remembering the selves: Is the repressed gendered?" she argues that it is important for women to retrieve repressed aspects of the self and to hold them in our consciousness together, rather than abandoning any claim to agential identity and cohesiveness. She suggests that, though it is important to be skeptical towards the humanist myth of the rational unitary individual, it behooves us to be suspicious as well about voices that may be urging us to submit to our limitations as the essence of our nature. Flax (1987) asks the question, "Is our only choice a masculine, overly differentiated, unitary self or no self at all?" (p. 106). She answers the question with another question—"Without remembered selves, how can we act?" (pp. 106-107).

So, the vocabulary of *integration*, *fusion*, and *personality unification*, proves necessary. However, it is also important to recognize the dangers involved in any such discourse and to be aware of the pitfalls of taking for granted that we know just what integration is or to assume that it is more than it is. Integration—or consciousness-raising—does not accomplish itself by replacing old discourses with new unproblematic ones. It is accomplished as a result of the contradictions in our old positions, desires and practices mingling and dialoguing with the contradictions in our new ones (Hollway, 1984) with more flexible tools for constructing consciousness.

SUMMARY

Poststructuralist philosophy points to the similarities between individuals who elaborate multiple personality as an outcome of child abuse and others who, although they do not use the radical dissociative defenses individuals with multiple personality do, also construct their identities in a field of power relations, both personal and political, in multiple and contradictory ways. This perspective can aid us in seeing multiple personality more clearly and consistently, not as a strange and exotic phenomenon, a clinical oddity, but as one of the many manifestations of alternative forms of consciousness that are on the continuum of the personal human responses both to our immediate, intimate environment that effects our growth and development and also to the wider social and historical context which has a no less powerful, although often less obvious, impact on determining who we become as persons.

Integrating psychological understandings of multiple personality with social and political ones is helpful in a number of ways, philosophically, clinically, and practically. That maxim of feminist praxis, *the personal is political*, can be an effective principle in the therapy of individuals with multiple personality. Much of the rage and fear and confusion in the woman with multiple personality is a direct result of social oppression, both in her childhood and in her present-day life. One of the consequences of placing her experiences within a larger framework is that an individual can begin to take her history less personally at the same time as she is personally reclaiming that history. This can be a liberating answer to the perennial question of the abused child—why me? What is there about me that causes the people who are supposed to care for me to hate me and hurt me? In combination with recovering her own past, a woman can come to understand that it was *not* just her, that she

shares her oppression with other women, and to some extent, with all women. This then usually eases considerably the shame that pervades her sense of herself (Rivera, 1987).

Framing multiple personality as a social and political issue as well as a psychological problem for the individuals who suffer from it not only enhances the healing process for traumatized individuals, but also opens up a wider field for investigation and intervention beyond the treatment of those who have already suffered from severe abuse. The critical issue of prevention of the abuse of children must be linked to an accurate and full understanding of the multi-leveled causes of this crime. In order to effect change in the high prevalence rates, prevention strategies must be directed to as many levels of the problem as possible. So far, much of the emphasis in prevention programs has been on the individual child and family, and little work has been done on the relationship between social norms, structures and practices (such as child pornography and the sexualization of children in the media) and the prevalence of child abuse (Finkelhor, 1984). The cultural configuration of societies that have high levels of child abuse and sequellae such as multiple personality is an area that deserves further scholarly exploration similar to some of the research that has been carried out regarding rape (Sanday, 1981).

Multiple personality is a rich clinical phenomenon. It offers valuable potential for studying the psychophysiologic make-up of the human being (Putnam, 1984). Its exploration provides a unique learning experience for both researchers and clinicians. The depth, complexity and volatility of its treatment present a challenge to even the most experienced practitioner. But it is essential to remember that multiple personality is, above all, a vulnerable child's response to abuse and terrorization and the adult's ongoing incorporation of these defensive adaptations into her life in ways that often result in a great deal of suffering. Ultimately, taking into consideration the social and political aspects of the issue of multiple personality is important because it expands in our capacity to address this suffering on many levels, in the broadest and most effective way. ■

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