

## Editorial

### A New Voice for a New Frontier

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The last decade has witnessed an unprecedented expansion of interest in and knowledge about dissociation and the dissociative disorders. The dissociative disorders, designated a free-standing group of clinical conditions only since 1980 (American Psychiatric Association, 1980), are diagnosed and treated with increasing frequency. Growing numbers of clinicians are recognizing these conditions in their patients, and coming to grips with the challenges involved in their treatment.

The scientific investigation of these conditions, although hampered by financial constraints, is gaining momentum. Newer paradigms for the explanation and exploration of the phenomena and syndromes that fall under the rubric of dissociation and the dissociative disorders offer the promise of further advances that will cause reverberations throughout the mental health sciences. Frank W. Putnam, M.D. (1984), has written eloquently of the unique opportunities that the dissociative disorders afford to study the mechanisms of learning and memory and the complexity of mental structures and their psychophysiological expressions and underpinnings.

A burgeoning interest in multiple personality disorder has been the driving force impelling most of the recent clinical and research studies in the field. This condition, long regarded as rare, apocryphal, extinct, or an artifact has become recognized as a posttraumatic psychopathology, most commonly occurring in the aftermath of child abuse. A fascination with its dramatic manifestations has been replaced with a sadder but wiser appreciation of its function as an overwhelmed child's means of contending with a harsh and inhospitable environment. Although only between 200 and 300 cases of multiple personality disorder had been reported prior to 1980, many thousands of such patients were identified between 1980 and the present. This is one of the most explosive and compelling demonstrations of the power of education to impact upon and influence clinical practice in the entire history of the healing arts.

These advances have not occurred without considerable controversy and contention (Kluft, 1987). There remain large numbers of clinicians and scientific investigators who are skeptical and overtly disparaging of the events recounted with enthusiasm above. In time, the growth of knowledge, the spread of information, the cross-fertilization of ideas gained in the study of dissociation and the dissociative disorders with ideas that stem from very different areas of exploration, and the very passage of time itself will allow the possibility of a reconciliation of points of view that seem, for the moment, to be diametrically opposed. This felicitous outcome is not immediately upon the horizon.

**DISSOCIATION: PROGRESS IN THE DISSOCIATIVE DISORDERS** will be the official Journal of the International Society for the Study of Multiple Personality & Dissociation. Its objective is to provide a forum for the sharing of advances and the fruits of hard-won experience in the clinical and experimental understanding of dissociation and the dissociative disorders, to place its readership at the cutting edge of this new and rapidly developing field. In short, **DISSOCIATION** will provide a new voice for a new frontier.

There is pressing need for such a voice. In time Putnam's (1984, 1985) wise observations about the universal importance of work in this area will prevail, for indeed, the dissociative disorders in general and multiple personality disorder in particular offer remarkable opportunities for the exploration of the interface of psychiatry and the neurosciences and the impact of trauma upon the psyche. For the present, however, many of the issues that are most critical to the practitioner or researcher in this field are considered rather specialized in their focus, and of limited appeal to the readership of more general mental health journals.

Also, because the treatment of the dissociative disorders was not a major topic in the education of today's mental health practitioners, there is an urgent need to communicate the "clinical pearls" that are relevant to their therapy and have been known and shared primarily among the most experienced practitioners in the field, passed on in an informal oral tradition. It would be unfortunate to lose these hard-won insights because there is no forum in which they can be expressed and preserved. Writing in 1840, Antoine Despine warned against the discarding of his clinical observations, even if his ideas and explanations were forgotten or discredited, lest his scientific descendants be forced to repeat, unnecessarily, the very steps he had taken. Despine's warning proved ironically apt. His work was bypassed by generations of clinicians, and, when studied anew, indicates that many of the factors now appreciated to be most useful in the treatment of multiple personality disorder had already been noted in the work of this great pioneer (Fine, in press; Kluft, 1984).

**DISSOCIATION** will chronicle contemporary clinicians' and scientific investigators' discoveries about dissocia-

tion and the dissociative disorders. It will also witness the dissolution of what Boorstin (1983) has described as "the obstacles to discovery — the illusions of knowledge (p. xv)." In this dialectic it will eschew the premature closure of scholarly debate and encourage both a diversity of points of view and an informed pluralism. DISSOCIATION will be inclusive rather than exclusive.

It would be inappropriate to allow the reader to be unaware of the debt of gratitude that clinicians and researchers in the field who will benefit from DISSOCIATION owe to a number of individuals. The lion's share of the initial hard work of conceptualizing and organizing DISSOCIATION was done by Bennett G. Braun, M.D., who will serve as Associate Editor. At a time when the success of the project was precarious, Catherine G. Fine, Ph.D., was able to offer thoughtful solutions, encouragement, and a tremendous amount of hard work to resolve a number of difficulties. She will serve as Assistant Editor. When the logistic problems of launching DISSOCIATION appeared sufficient to delay the project considerably, David L. Fink, M.D., volunteered his help and made it possible to continue the endeavor with minimal delay.

A special debt of gratitude is due to George B. Greaves, Ph.D., President of the International Society for the Study of Multiple Personality & Dissociation during the year DISSOCIATION came into being, and the Director of the Multiple Personality Program at Ridgeview Institute. Dr. Greaves shepherded the official sanctioning of DISSOCIATION by the Society, and introduced news of DISSOCIATION's inception to Ridgeview Institute. He will serve on the Editorial Board. Sensing the importance of this journal to the mental health community and to the many patients who suffer dissociative disorders, Ridgeview Institute offered to sponsor DISSOCIATION and make its existence known within the mental health professions. The dedication of Ridgeview Institute to the care and well-being of this group of patients is both remarkable and commendable.

DISSOCIATION and its readers also are indebted to the journal's editorial board, a distinguished group of scientists and clinicians who serve in an invaluable advisory capacity. Their number is too extensive to allow appropriate individual recognition, but as Editor-in-Chief, I would like to acknowledge three individuals for the impact that they have had upon my being able to serve in my current position. John C. Nemiah, M.D., Editor of the AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY, has been an influence and role model for me since medical school. It was in the course of electives under his tutelage that I first became acquainted with the dissociative disorders and appreciated their importance in psychiatry. Thurman Mott, Jr., M.D., Editor of the AMERICAN JOURNAL OF CLINICAL HYPNOSIS, has been a generous mentor during my efforts to learn about scientific writing and the process of assembling a scientific journal. Layton McCurdy, M.D., Psychiatrist-in-Chief at the Institute of the Pennsylvania Hospital, has been a valuable source of encouragement and support in my efforts on behalf of DISSOCIATION.

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