

EDITORIAL:

READING NOTES

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In any field, progress occurs in small increments, and periodically requires consolidation. Journals like *DISSOCIATION* chronicle the step by step advances made by scientific investigators, scholars, and clinicians in their efforts to comprehend the dissociative disorders and alleviate the suffering of those afflicted by them. At certain points in time, it becomes possible to write books that synthesize and unify those advances, creating valuable resources that make the collective knowledge in the field accessible to a wider readership, offer an excellent introduction to those new to the field, and serve as a useful reference for those who need to know about a field but have no reason to embark on an extensive review of the literature. Putnam's 1989 *Diagnosis and Treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder* was such a contribution.

The dissociative disorders field is unique in that those who suffer multiple personality disorder (MPD) and allied forms of dissociative disorder not otherwise specified (DDNOS) have begun to elaborate a literature of their own. It consists of autobiographical accounts (e.g., *I'm Eve; Katherine, It's Time*) and a series of newsletters (e.g., *S40S, Many Voices*) in which they express their personal perspectives. Interestingly, a newly-published book, *Multiple Personality Disorder from the Inside Out* (Cohen, Giller, & W., 1991), supported by the Sidran Foundation, in many ways serves as a consolidation of what has been shared by MPD patients in their first-person accounts over the last several years. It is a powerful testament to the endurance, resilience, and courage of the human spirit, and a valuable resource for anyone who works in the dissociative disorders field.

Multiple Personality Disorder from the Inside Out is an edited collection of writings contributed by MPD patients and those close to them. It is organized into sections based on topics that are critical concerns for MPD patients, such as their feelings about the diagnosis, pain, therapy disappointments, and integrations. There is no lack of articulate and remarkably diverse voices here. There is no pressure toward consensus, only toward clarity of expression. One is exposed to a variety of often conflicting points of view, many of which will be responded to and interpreted quite differently by those who read the book from different perspectives. This book definitely dispels any remaining stereotypical expectations that all MPD patients are alike or monolithically similar, except in their wish to be understood and accepted.

I am confident that most readers and reviewers will respond to this book primarily in terms of the human dimensions of the intensity and depth of the suffering that has

been endured, and the strong determination to survive and prevail that is portrayed. Many others will see it as empowering for MPD patients and other victim/survivor populations. A good number of readers will use this book to better understand their MPD or the condition of a loved one or friend. Others may react primarily to the several stinging indictments of mental health care professionals by whom some of the contributors felt misunderstood, and at times mistreated. Still others may be fascinated by the material, and the unusual world into which they are offered a window. Not a few readers with MPD/DDNOS will come away with a sense of being validated, and/or with an appreciation of the value of their own unique adaptation, realizing that they do not have to resemble famous cases in the literature to have these conditions, and to recover from them.

However, the aspect of *Multiple Personality from the Inside Out* that impels me to discuss it in an editorial is its immense potential value for the therapist beginning to work with MPD and DDNOS patients. It is hard to acquire a personal encyclopedia of experience with MPD except in the school of hard knocks. It is wrenching to enter the portals of the MPD patient's tormented internal world. This book does not eliminate the inevitability of this type of apprenticeship, but it has the potential to contribute to a considerable smoothing of the way and a possible reduction of its duration.

Reading and pondering the contributions to this book constitutes a remarkable crash-course in the issues and attitudes that one will encounter in working with MPD patients. I am tempted to encourage the reader to read the book at two levels at once: as if each contribution is by a separate individual, and as if they all were written by the same person. The first perspective underlines the diversity of MPD patients, the second introduces the experience of contending with simultaneous alternate perceptions of reality within the same human being. Its vivid expression of the diversity of deeply valued outlooks is good anticipatory socialization for the experience of contending with alters whose attitudes toward a given subject may span all the degrees of the compass, and will be defended with vigor. Monitoring one's responses to these pieces, especially those with which one takes strong issue, is good anticipatory socialization for one's countertransference experiences in working with MPD. It is an invaluable opportunity to study one's capacity to empathize with the authors' various observations, and to anticipate which issues one will have difficulty responding to in the therapy. Although the contributors to this book may take exception to the following remark, the perceptive therapist-reader will

discern many illustrations of the types of commonplace and profound resistances that are encountered in the treatment of MPD, and will have the opportunity to ponder how they might be approached before confronting them in the intense and exacting crucible of the therapeutic situation.

Multiple Personality Disorder from the Inside Out is not great literature. It is not a definitive treatise. It is, however, a treasure-trove of powerful and evocative images and accounts that can provide an educational immersion in the affective and attitudinal worlds of MPD patients. It is a competent guidebook to these terrains. It can take the reader to places that scientific articles and authoritative texts, however sensitive and eloquent, cannot. Because of its immense potential importance in helping therapists to understand MPD patients, and "walk a mile in their moccasins," its publication is an important event in the dissociative disorders field.

REFERENCES

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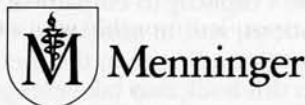
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