

EDITORIAL:
DISSOCIATIVE
DISORDERS IN
CHILDHOOD AND
ADOLESCENCE:
NEW FRONTIERS

Richard P. Kluft, M.D.

This issue of *DISSOCIATION* includes two long articles that discuss the diagnosis of dissociative disorders in children and adolescents. Although there are many important and compelling concerns in the dissociative disorders field, the recognition and treatment of youngsters with dissociative disorders deserves to be among its highest priorities. The adult with a complex chronic dissociative psychopathology, such as multiple personality disorder (MPD) and allied forms of dissociative disorder not otherwise specified (DDNOS), usually has endured decades of inner pain and compromised function before receiving an accurate diagnosis and beginning appropriate treatment. Even then, such an individual can anticipate a long and difficult psychotherapy before achieving a satisfactory resolution to his or her difficulties. It would be a major public health victory to identify this group of patients in childhood and effect a resolution of their dissociative disorder prior to adolescence. My own limited series of childhood MPD patients grown up, which remains to be confirmed by other scientific and clinical investigators, indicates that when youngsters are treated prior to adolescence, their treatments are relatively brief and their stability rather impressive on follow-ups of a decade or more.

There are lives to be saved, suffering and morbidity to be reduced, and futures to be safeguarded by screening children and adolescents for dissociative disorders and offering them appropriate treatment. Although subsequent contributors have taken issue with the optimistic treatment results that I and some others (especially the late David Caul, M.D.) have demonstrated, those contributors were unable to safeguard their young patients in the way that I had indicated was necessary in order to achieve optimal results (Kluft, 1986).

It is fortunate that the field has experienced a "second wave" of contributions to the understanding of youngsters with dissociative disorders. Within the last few years, Dell and Eisenhower (1989) have characterized contemporary adolescent MPD, and Peterson (1990, 1991) has demonstrated and discussed dissociative phenomena in children, defining what he terms "dissociation identity disorder." Putnam (1991, in press) has taken steps to define the development and phenomenology of dissociative psychopathology in children and adolescents, and has circulated a Child Dissociative Checklist (unpublished) that has considerable potential. Hornstein and Tyson (1992) have published the first account of the treatment of a group of dissociative disorder children and their families. In this issue, Reagor, Kasten, and Morelli (1992) introduce their Child/Adolescent Dissociation Checklist, and Tyson (1992) discusses his efforts in using previously available checklists in a clinical population.

Additional contributions can be anticipated both from these clinicians and investigators, and from others beginning to study this important population.

It is crucial that the diagnostic approaches that have been discussed in recent articles be studied and tested by other workers in the field, and that the treatment approaches that are being advised be applied and assessed by additional groups of clinicians. The more powerful the documentation of the existence, diagnosability, and treatability of children and adolescents with dissociative disorders, the sooner mainstream child and adolescent psychiatry and psychology will embrace the identification and psychotherapeutic resolution of these disorders. We cannot expect the diagnostic and screening instruments or the therapeutic protocols currently in the literature or on the verge of publication to be definitive, but we can anticipate their playing important roles in our increasing understanding of this group of conditions.

On another note completely, this first issue of Volume Five of *DISSOCIATION* includes the contents of Volumes One through Four, the abstracts of all articles published in *DISSOCIATION* to date, and the addresses of the first authors of each contribution. This has been done in recognition of the many requests we receive to make the contents of the first few volumes available to newer subscribers and to those attempting to do comprehensive literature searches. As a new and untried journal documenting progress in a field thought by many to be peripheral rather than central to the main concerns of the mental health professions, the contents of the first volumes of *DISSOCIATION* were not entered into many major data banks, and relatively few institutional subscriptions were received. The tremendous growth of interest in the dissociative disorders field was anticipated by *DISSOCIATION*, but it was not possible to print and stockpile large numbers of the early issues. At this point, the interested reader cannot purchase past issues, and often must request reprints directly from the authors of the early contributions. This compilation will assist scholars and clinicians who are interested in obtaining articles published early in *DISSOCIATION*'s history.

Richard P. Kluft, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief

REFERENCES

- Dell, P.F., & Eisenhower, J.W. (1989). Adolescent multiple personality disorder. *Journal of the Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 29, 359-366.
- Hornstein, N.L., & Tyson, S. (1991). Inpatient treatment of children with multiple personality/dissociative disorders and their families. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 14, 631-648.
- Kluft, R.P. (1986). Treating children who have multiple personality disorder. In B.G. Braun (Ed.), *Treatment of multiple personality disorder* (pp. 81-105). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.
- Peterson, G. (1990). Diagnosis of childhood multiple personality disorder. *DISSOCIATION*, III, 3-9.
- Peterson, G. (1991). Children coping with trauma: Diagnosis of "dissociation identity disorder." *DISSOCIATION*, IV, 152-164.
- Putnam, F.W. (1991). Dissociative disorders in children and adolescents. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 14, 519-531.
- Putnam, F.W. (in press). Dissociative disorders in children: Behavioral profiles and problems. *Child Abuse and Neglect*.
- Reagor, P.A., Kasten, J.D., & Morelli, N. (1992). A checklist for screening dissociative disorders in children and adolescents. *DISSOCIATION*, V, 4-19.
- Tyson, G.M. (1992). Childhood multiple personality disorder/dissociation identity disorder: Applying and extending certain diagnostic checklists. *DISSOCIATION*, V, 20-27.