

BOOK REVIEW:
MULTIPLE
PERSONALITY:
AN EXERCISE
IN DECEPTION

By
Ray Aldridge-Morris, Ph.D.

Reviewed by
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Multiple Personality: An Exercise in Deception, by Ray Aldridge-Morris, Ph.D., was published in 1989 by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, Hillsdale, New Jersey.

This monograph of 129 pages is a criticism of the current diagnostic conventions regarding MPD in the United States. Dr. Aldridge-Morris, a practicing clinical psychologist and lecturer in psychopathology at Middlesex Polytechnic School of Psychology in the United Kingdom, believes that MPD is overdiagnosed in the United States. Although he admits that he has never seen a bonafide case of MPD, he believes that MPD is characterized by role-playing and is largely an iatrogenic creation in highly hypnotizable individuals. Further he argues that MPD is a culture-bound variant of hysterical psychosis.

The major thesis of this book, that MPD is a mask for deception, is evident from the cover design of the book jacket, which contains a large face mask with four melodramatic-appearing female figures emerging from behind. The book is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter reviews the phenomenology of MPD and a number of famous cases of MPD including Christine Beauchamp, Eve, Sybil, and Billy Milligan. At the end of this chapter Dr. Aldridge-Morris muses whether "gullible psychiatrists" are "being taken for a ride by a group of manipulative patients who want license for their deviant behavior" or whether "gullible patients" are "being taken for a ride by psychiatrists seeking financial and/or personal aggrandizement." The entire second chapter is devoted to Kenneth Bianchi, the "Hillside Strangler." The next four chapters critically review the literature on MPD including symptomatology, psychophysiology, diagnosis, differential diagnosis, psychological testing, and etiology. The seventh chapter is largely devoted to a description of the Spanos, et al. (1985) study which concluded that MPD is merely a social role enactment. Finally, in the eighth chapter, Dr. Aldridge-Morris concludes that MPD is a culture-bound phenomenon, or a variant of the hysterical psychosis, found primarily in the United States.

Although the back of the book jacket advertises that "virtually every published work on multiple personality is reviewed," Dr. Aldridge-Morris reviewed only 350 of the approximately 700 scientific references on MPD (Coons, 1990). The book's bibliography contains only 125 references on MPD, none of which are more recent than 1986, a year for which only five references are mentioned. No mention is made of the DSM-III-R, the most recent diagnostic manual published in 1987. Although on a book jacket endorsement Tom Fahy states

that the "bulk of scientific literature on MPD is distinguished by its awfulness," this work ignores the rich, rapidly growing scientific literature on MPD during the last four to five years and concentrates instead on about 15 objective studies between 1954 and 1984 when research on MPD was in its infancy. This is an inadequate literature on which to base a book about MPD published in late 1989.

Allotting an entire chapter to the description of Kenneth Bianchi, a man whose use of MPD as a defense against murder was hotly contested, seems an inadequate centerpiece upon which to base any conclusions about the etiology of MPD. The use of Kenneth Bianchi, in fact, betrays the author's strong bias that MPD patients are deceptive and may be outright fakers. Although hardly any two clinicians can agree on what "personality" means, the definitions of "personality" and "personality states" as applied to MPD are roundly criticized. Regarding differential diagnosis, Dr. Aldridge-Morris argues for diagnosing somatization disorder, borderline personality disorder, temporal lobe epilepsy, etc., without diagnosing MPD, which he considers to be a symptom. He makes many critical comments, some deserved and some undeserved, about the scientific studies of MPD. Although Dr. Aldridge-Morris sees a connection between MPD and childhood trauma, namely child abuse, he ignores the defensive function of dissociation and concentrates instead on the role of suggestion, culture, role playing, and fabrication in the genesis of MPD. He believes that MPD is an atypical form of hysterical psychosis which has been heavily influenced by the books and movies about MPD which have become widely available in the United States.

One of the most lucid conclusions in this book occurs in the last sentence in which Dr. Aldridge-Morris suggests that the diagnosis of MPD be limited to a complex of alter egos which are separated by amnesic barriers. These phenomena must have existed prior to therapeutic intervention, especially any hypnosis. This is precisely what the voluminous literature on MPD suggests.

Sadly, this book cannot be recommended. Although some of the arguments by Dr. Aldridge-Morris might have been plausible in 1985, they don't hold water in 1990. It will be a great shame indeed if this book results in the continuing underdiagnosis of MPD in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. ■

REFERENCES

- Coons, P.M. (1990). More on multiple personality. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 156, 448-449.
- Spanos, N.P., Weekes, J.R., & Bertrand, L.D. (1985). Multiple personality: a social psychological perspective. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 94, 362-376.