THE DISSOCIATIVE MIND

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THE SELF IN CONTEXT
Unity and Multiplicity

*T*he "self" is plural, variegated, polyphonic, and multivoiced. We experience an illusion of unity as a result of the mind's capacity to fill in the blanks and to forge links.

Our intellectual heritage includes both unity and multiplicity. Often these two visions of the self seem to switch, like a Necker cube, as if one view repudiates the other. This is not necessary, however, for the self is characterized by a complex multiplicity of subunits and subselves, and is itself a part of larger systems (Erdelyi, 1994). The self can be a whole with reference to its constituent parts, and a part with reference to larger wholes.

From Multiplicity to Unity to Multiplicity Again

Psychoanalysis traces its origins to the study of dualism and multiplicity—in the observations of "double consciousness" of hysteria (Breuer and Freud, 1893–1895). Double consciousness implies dual centers of conscious and unconscious mental activity. But Freud soon abandoned belief in "double consciousness," adopting instead his construct of *the* (unitary) unconscious. However, the construct of subconscious subselves accommodates the same phenomena: lack of awareness of information held in another part of the self, and either dynamic clash or harmony between these subselves. Psychoanalysis, whose raison d'être depends so much on the existence of unconscious phenomena, may, according to Grotstein (1999a), "have suffered from Freud's failure to grasp the deeper significance of...dual consciousness or dual 'I'-ness, in which consciousness and unconsciousness, or ego and id (and superego) are each individual 'I's separately and compositely" (p. 36).

Some psychological writings at the beginning of the century, such as those of Janet, Jung, and James, emphasized dividedness of self-experience: Jung in his theories of complexes and archetypes, and

James (1890, 1902) in his interest in dissociation and altered states. However, with the rise of both behaviorism and psychoanalysis, the multiple self faded from public view (Hilgard, 1977; Kihlstrom, 1984). For most of the last century, psychoanalytic theory has tended to emphasize the "linear perspective on development and developmental arrests," as well as to assume that the infant "begins life with a whole, or integral, self, at least in potentiality" (Mitchell, 1993, p. 128). In psychology, traditions have tended to focus on traits (which are conceptualized as stable, enduring characteristics of the unitary individual, and which can differ among individuals) rather than on states (different organizations of the self within individuals) (Putnam, 1997).

In the late 20th century, Hilgard (1977, 1994) began to observe what he called the "hidden observer" in hypnosis demonstrations and experiments. The hidden observer is a hidden part of the self that appears to be aware of information that is unavailable to the hypnotized part. For instance, in a person who has been hypnotized to be anesthetized to pain, a dissociated, "hidden observer" may feel the pain, even though the normal consciousness is anesthetized. According to Watkins and Watkins (1997), most people have this capacity for inherent dividedness of the mind. Hilgard went on to develop the neodissociation model of the mind, which relies on multiple, parallel subsystems of information processing.

Due to a confluence of multiple trends, among which are the growth of relational theory, the resurgence of traumatology, and postmodernism, concepts of the multiple self have recently proliferated. Today we find an increasing emphasis on multiplicity and the plural psyche (Watkins, 1986; Bromberg, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996a, b, 1998, 2000, 2001a, b, 2003a, b; Davies and Frawley, 1991, 1994; Slavin and Kreigman, 1992; Mitchell, 1993; Schwartz, 1994, 2000; Davies, 1996, 1998a, b, 2004; Flax, 1996; Harris, 1996; Stern, 1997; Pizer, 1998).

The Illusion of Unity of the Self

Research in cognitive psychology, neurophysiology, and child development indicates that the brain, the mind, and the self are normally multiple and that the idea of the unity of self is an illusion (Gazzaniga, 1985; Dennett, 1991; Erdelyi, 1994; Kirmayer, 1994; Siegel, 1999; Le Doux, 2002). We fill in the gaps of experience; we imagine ourselves in control of our hearts and minds when we are not.

Neurobiologists increasingly understand the brain as a modular system, with each module characterized by a high degree of autonomy (Lancaster, 1999). Le Doux (2002) compares the brain to a parallel computer that can perform various computations simultaneously. Like the parallel computer, the brain is organized into neural systems that to some degree function independently of one another. Le Doux marvels at "how fragile a patch job (the self) is" (p. 304). Gazzaniga (1985), who was Le Doux's mentor, also views consciousness as modularistic, and says that the notion of "linear unified conscious experience is dead wrong" (p. 4). Parallel and multitrack processing may help to explain dissociative experiences on a neurological level. With regard to parallel processing in the brain, Dennett (1991) remarks that the incomprehension and disbelief that many people exhibit about the existence of multiple personality may be due to a "simple arithmetical mistake: they have failed to notice that two or three or seventeen selves per body is really not more metaphysically extravagant than one self per body" (p. 419).

Norretranders (1998), who compares the brain to the computer, writes of the "user illusion" we have about the unity of consciousness. We have the illusion that what we see on the screen and what we have in consciousness represents everything that is potentially available even though it is only a minuscule fraction of the information processed. Putnam's (1997) DBS model outlines how, starting in infancy, behavior is organized as a set of discrete behavioral states, which become optimally linked over time. The ultimate seamless transitions between these states lead to the illusion that most of us have of a unitary self. Because trauma and neglect impede this linkage, and because trauma may create more unlinked states, some severely traumatized individuals, such as those with dissociative identity disorder, do not have this comforting illusion.

According to Siegel (1999), "studies in child development suggest, in fact, that the idea of a unitary, continuous 'self' is actually an illusion our minds attempt to create. . . . We have multiple and varied 'selves,' which are needed to carry out the many and diverse activities of our lives" (p. 231). Each of these selves has a state of mind or mental state as a building block. Siegel defines a state of mind as the "total pattern of activations in the brain at a particular moment in time" (p. 208). "These basic states of mind are clustered into specialized subselves, that have an enduring pattern of activity across time. . . . When a state of mind is repeatedly activated, it may become a 'self-state' or specialized

self" (p. 231). These repeatedly activated self-states then gain a sense of continuity that creates the "experience of mind" (p. 231).

Postmodernism and Multiplicity

Postmodernism addresses the inseparability of context from what we "know," and thereby implies the inherent unavoidable multiplicity of the self. Postmodernism is characterized by the abandonment of the belief in positivism, the scientific faith of the Enlightenment, which itself replaced religious dogma as truth. According to positivism, "objective" knowledge is obtainable and scientific theory can adequately represent reality so as to render it accurately knowable. Postmodernism disputes the representation paradigm, including the idea that there is a single empirical pregiven world and that knowledge consists in mirroring or mapping it. Postmodernism, then, instead of asking what are the facts, asks how we construct our knowledge. Postmodernism argues that we cannot know the nature of reality for certain—we only have differing constructions of reality, which are themselves based on the context of the knower. More and more it has been demonstrated that scientific knowledge depends on context. For instance, in the 1920s Heisenberg articulated his uncertainty principle, according to which one cannot know the location and velocity of an electron simultaneously because the process of measurement affects what is to be measured. Thus, the result of an observation cannot be separated from the process. "Subject and object are inextricably linked" (Gergen, 1991, p. 89).

People actively construct their perceptions of the world, and they do so in accordance with personal context and culture (Gergen, 1991). Our understanding of the world is based on consensually agreed on social constructions. Postmodernism shifts the focus of analysis away from attempts to reveal "essences" and the assumed coherent internality to interpersonal and social contexts. Power relationships and language construct our subjectivities and our identities. Thus, postmodernism also involves the deconstruction of language and the elucidation of hidden contexts. Postmodernism is characterized by simultaneous pluralism, rather than serial pluralism (Rappoport, Baumgardner, and Boone, 1999). For instance, developmental theories have tended to describe a vertical, hierarchically organized transition through set developmental states. Postmodern developmental

theory more often calls on concepts of "both/and." Hence, the postmodern emphasis on diversity, the plural self, and multiplicity.

Consistent with the emphasis on context rather than isolated objective facts, the therapist no longer functions as a monologic dispenser of "truth" to the patient, as was the ideal for Freud. In the postmodern approach to psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, meaning is mutually coconstructed by patient and therapist (Mitchell, 1993).

Social and Relational Contexts and Multiplicity

Much of memory is state-dependent. As contexts change, so do our views of ourselves and others. Contexts often provide cues for the evocation of "states." Certain memories are recalled more easily or evoked by certain states that are linked to specific contexts, such as when a person is in the same mental state as that in which the learning or the first event occurred.

The self is contextually and relationally embedded. Slavin and Kriegman (1992) have developed an evolutionary hypothesis according to which they believe that humans are likely to have evolved a psychic structure fostering multiplicity—in particular, an adaptive design that provides the capacity for shifting multiple versions of the self in relation to the social environment. Multiplicity, the encoding of our inner divisions "in the form of semicohesive 'alternate selves' . . . may serve as a crucial adaptive capacity or vehicle for knowing enough about the other." The capacity for multiplicity is adaptive to the "inherent inconsistencies, biases, and contradictions found in every parental environment" (Slavin, 1996, p. 623). As Mitchell (1993) notes, "if the self is always embedded in relational contexts, either actual or internal, then all important motives have appeared and taken on life and form in the presence and through the reactions of significant others" (p. 134).

The Dialogical Self and Polypsychism

The self-contained Cartesian mind is a single container that becomes filled with knowledge and is unresponsive to others. It is necessarily monological (Shotter, 1999). In contrast, the post-Cartesian self is dialogical and understood as constructed by context and by language. Bakhtin (1981) developed the idea that everything we say is relationally responsive. Language, he said,

for the individual consciousness, is on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention. . . . Prior to the moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language . . . but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that we must take the word and make it our own [pp. 293–294].

In addition, the style in which we speak is based on how we imagine the other person will receive what we say (Bakhtin, 1986). The *dialogical self,* a term used by Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon (1992), in contrast to the notion of the individualistic self, "is based on the assumption that there are many 'I' positions that can be occupied by the same person. The dialogical self is conceived of as social . . . in the sense that other people occupy positions in the multivoiced self" (p. 29).

Implications of Internalized Object Relationships for Polypsychism

Several theorists' descriptions of the divided self—such as Freud's, Jung's, Klein's, and Winnicott's—have suggested polypsychism. But I think that Ogden's (1983) development of the implications of Fairbairn's endopsychic model, described in the previous chapter, has most decidedly set the stage for polypsychism as considered from the perspective of internalized object relationships.

Ogden (1986) observed that the idea of an internalized object must include the assumption of an internalized object relationship. In each of these internalized object relationships, both the self component and the object component have subjectivity. Once we take this step, the stage for polypsychism is set. Object relationships become the basic units, which can be linked to each other—with varying degrees of success, in a now, by definition, multiple self. There is an important difference between conceptualizing internalization as involving a single self internalizing an object (or objects), and conceptualizing a multiple self as internalizing relationships.

This conclusion has some similarity to Ryle's (2002) view (discussed in chapter 5) of internalized reciprocal role relationships. It is not a person or a quality that is internalized, but a role relationship. We

all live out multiple role relationships, and these populate our experiences of ourselves.

From Segregated States to Coherent Linkages

As mentioned earlier, Putnam's (1997) DBS model deals with behavioral states, which were discrete in infancy and become linked over time, contributing to the later smooth transitions between states. Following Wolff (1987), Putnam describes how in infancy, various behavioral states, such as sleep and waking, eating and digestive elimination, are initially discrete, but in time become linked in sequences. There are orderly transitions, or "switches," which involve discontinuous jumps from one state to another, for example from fussiness to crying. Early on, these discrete "state/acts" are clearly biological states, involving such biological activity as eating and elimination. As states begin to succeed each other in orderly sequences, the transitions between them become regularly linked. As these linkages become more complex, the child gains the ability for self-modulation and recovery from disruptions.

The learning of state modulation is a highly social process. Sharing of states is an aspect of bonding. As children acquire control over their behavioral states with maturation, their different "selves" can be volitionally activated. Aiding in this is the development of what Putnam (1997) has called the "authorial self," appearing at about two to four years of age, which is independent of context or state and which can select and emphasize aspects of self. This capacity is clearly expressed in fantasy play, in which children pretend to be different selves, thereby unlinking sense of self from a given context.

The Effect of Trauma on Linking

Pizer (1998) sees the "universal structure of the human psyche" as like a "virtually infinite multiplicity of nuclei, or islands" (p. 72). Pizer observes that the problem is not the multiplicity, but that at times different parts, perspectives, or individuals proceed as if the other were not there: "At severe levels of shock and discrepancy . . . paradox becomes unbridgeable, and one deploys the default mechanism of dissociation. Here we recognize the essence of trauma: the disruption of the continuity of being (the 'illusion of being one self')" (pp. 141–142).

Dissociative identity disorder (DID) illustrates one extreme of trauma-interrupted linking and trauma-created multiple states. Dissociative identities often represent adaptations to certain contexts that contained so much terror and pain that they could not be linked. In severe dissociation, switches in identity state are often accompanied by somatic changes. Characteristic facial expressions can markedly change; physiological allergic reactivity can change; visual acuity can change; voice quality can change (Putnam, 1997); and even PET scans can demonstrate changes in the brain in different identity states (Nijenhuis, 2003).

Animal Identities

Even more markedly than human dissociative identities, animal identity states illustrate the powerful effect of unlinked structuring of self-identity according to context. Various circumstances can contribute to the adoption of an animal identity. As Goodwin and Attias (1999) note, the child may have been treated like an animal, or may have witnessed a beloved pet murdered in order to enforce their own silence, such that there is an identification through loss. The child may have been involved in sexual experiences with animals, leading to self-labeling as *bestial*. Animals may have been experienced as protectors, peers, or both in an environment where there was no protection and animals were among the only friends. While in animal identity states, people may feel like that animal and exhibit animal-like behaviors, such as running on all fours, scratching, growling, crawling, licking, or eating like an animal (Putnam, 1989; Goodwin and Attias, 1999). Also, animal calls heard inside the head (Goodwin and Attias, 1999), or visual flashbacks involving animal identities, may intrude into consciousness.

As Goodwin and Attias (1999) say, "these animal representations and internalizations provide a coherent set of metaphors for expressing unspeakable cruelty" (p. 262). They cogently observe that these images convey how the children perceived the "abuse as a violation at the level of a transgression of natural law, which calls into question not only their status as member of the family and as a 'good' member of the community, but also their status as a member of the human race" (p. 262).

My patient Janice experiences herself at times as a fish and as different kinds of snakes. She grew up on a coastal city where living fish

were plentiful. At times she wakes up from sleep, unable to use her arms or legs, and feeling that she is wriggling like a fish. Perhaps the brutal way she was treated, often with her arms and legs pinned down, made her feel like a "beast of prey," and she understood this feeling in terms of something with which she was more familiar—as if she were one of the fish that were so much a part of her home environment. But the context of ruthless domination is built into her dyadic animal identity constructions: Sometimes she is afraid to go into the bathroom because she sees in there a big fish and a little fish. The little fish is no longer flapping around, but is now half-dead. At the times she had these experiences, she also felt half-dead, with no strength or energy. However, she also switches into snake identities. And snakes were not so plentiful where she grew up. Clearly, some of these represent identification with her abuser, specifically with the penis. Indeed, she has at times hallucinated her abuser as a six-foot-long snake in bed with her. She also has a cobra identity that she experiences as a protector. Sometimes in the sessions, when she switches to this identity, her face and chest puff up, almost as one would imagine a cobra. During the time of Janice's abuse when she was held as a household and sexual slave in a strange land far away from her home, there was no human being—other than another little girl at school, when she was allowed to go—to whom she could turn for empathetic understanding or help.

Most of our time in treatment is in my listening to her story; at times being on the other end of the phone line when she leaves a message about another flashback about a time in which she was treated in a subhuman fashion, and then left alone in unendurable pain, perhaps to die. She is not focally interested in the metaphorical meaning of her animal identities. She just wants the continual pain in the constant reminders of the flashbacks and other intrusions to go away. However, her animal identities are an important way of *telling*. In cases like this, words cannot completely convey the extremity of indescribable pain that Janice experienced. Only metaphors can approach this. But these metaphors also contain within them a truth about herself that is self-differentiating: In contrast to her captors, who were cold-blooded and reptilian, she is warm-blooded, despite everything that happened to her. Even though sometimes she feels that she is a reptile, she is not; her abusers were reptilian.

Of course, mythology is filled with tales of people being transformed into animals, which may depend on similar psychological processes. The witch, Circe, in *The Odyssey*, transforms unsuspecting men into pigs; Pinocchio is changed into a donkey; children are turned into

toads or birds; and so on. These stories can be very frightening, but we, the readers, know that the story is a "pretend" one. Even Kafka's story of becoming a cockroach has an as-if, metaphorical intent, although, as Goodwin and Attias (1999) have so compellingly suggested, Kafka may have been close to experiencing himself as "as" rather than "as if." A person with dissociated animal identity states experiences the animal identity as singularly and strikingly real. No "as ifs" about it. These serial identities as animals have not been synthesized so that the metaphor "I was treated like an animal" could be fully comprehended and responded to.

The Healing Power of Narration and Listening

So how do mental states become linked? Mental states are linked to each other by links to other people, often by narration. Siegel (1999) notes that the sharing of a personal narrative with an intimate other fosters self-coherence. Breuer and Freud (1893–1895) found that Anna O got better when she "talked herself out," and she called that therapy the "talking cure." When a person's story is told to an accepting other, a link is made between the traumatic moment and the reality of the current relationship, rendering the traumatic event more "real."

But it is not only the narration. *Listening* is just as necessary for the creation of dialogical links. Parts of the self (self-states) need to be able to "hear" or be responsive to the affects of and wishes of other states. Bakhtin (1984) describes how Dostoyevsky's work can serve as a model for the vibrant, conflictual, but ultimately coherent multiple self. The characters of his multivoiced, "polyphonic novel" resonate with our own many different "I" positions. Even through their many moments of vehement discord, the characters authenticate the others' independent perspectives. Dostoyevsky's work is cohesive and vibrant because of the interaction and inviolable connection of the characters with each other.

As in Dostoyevsky's novels, the pivotal issue is not multiplicity versus unity, and not even the degree to which multiple parts are dissociated, but the degree to which a metaperspective can encompass conflict, and the degree to which an ultimate resolution of "negotiated" (Schwartz, 1994) harmony among variously contexted self-states can be achieved. Unity as a concept is differentiated from that of coherence and (ideal) harmony among constituent parts. What problematic dissociation does is to disrupt this ideally "harmonious functioning of

the multiplicity that makes up human consciousness" (Rivera, 1996, p. 32). The self is characterized by a complex multiplicity of subunits and subselves (Erdelyi, 1994), and even the multiple parts themselves have parts, but the important issue is not how many parts there are, but how they hang together.

3

PIONEERS OF PSYCHODYNAMIC THINKING ABOUT DISSOCIATION.
Janet, Freud, Ferenczi, and Fairbairn

> Man, all too proud, figures that he is the master of his movements, his words, his ideas and Himself. It is perhaps of ourselves that we have the least command. There are crowds of things which operate within ourselves without our will.
>
> —Pierre Janet

*T*his chapter takes us into the psychodynamic thinking of the pioneers of dissociation theory: Janet, Freud, Ferenczi, and Fairbairn. Janet was the first to link dissociation with psychological trauma and to articulate a theory of subconscious psychic determinism. He developed a psychodynamic theory premised on multiple centers of consciousness. Although Freud's early writing reflects the influence of Janet, his own thinking focused on defense from the start. Freud was thinking in terms of dissociation, but he pursued different forms of dissociationism than Janet (Erdelyi, 1994). Four types of Freudian dissociationism are outlined: splitting of consciousness, splits between conscious and unconscious, splits between the ego and the superego, and splits within the ego itself.

Ferenczi, whose early work adopted Freudian premises, later broke with Freud. In his better known later work he presented a radically different view of the etiology and structure of the traumatized psyche, eloquently describing the fragmentation of the mind in response to trauma. As had the early Freud, Ferenczi (1949) became aware of the frequency of child abuse, and he wrote about the profoundly dissociative outcomes: "There is neither shock nor fright without some splitting of the personality" (p. 229). Especially in his now famous "Confusion of Tongues" paper, he cogently articulated how the experience of the

remaining references not included here (ref. section is very long) — please refer to Howell's book for the full ref. section

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