

Our Divided Selves

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www.aplacetogrow.com - info@aplacetogrow.com

I often think that if we all understood that our inner realities are many, and multifaceted, rather than unitary and consistent, we could all be happier, both as individuals and as a people. We tend to expect the people in our lives to be *consistent*, and we are angry and disappointed with them when they do not behave according to our expectations. ("I thought you were more sensitive and considerate than that.", "You wouldn't speak to me like that if you really loved me.", "Since when are you afraid of heights?", "You've always been strong in the past.") We could improve our relationships, live with less judgment of ourselves and others, and begin to resolve many of society's ills when we understand the phenomena of divided consciousness and the process of moving toward integrity.

The fact is that we are each full of "*inner selves*" which contain only part of the vast information that comprises an individual's consciousness. The information contained in a person's total consciousness is compartmentalized, or pigeonholed. This information is comprised mainly of memories, thoughts and feelings. To have all of your experiences available at once would be overwhelming, so the mind has created a "filing system" so to speak, much as a computer does. Information (in particular, beliefs) in one "file", or inner self may contradict the information in another inner self.

As a child is growing up, events will inevitably occur which he or she is too young to understand, or which are otherwise far outside of the child's existing frame of reference. Alcoholism or mental illness of a parent, sexual or other abuse to the child, and unpleasant medical procedures are examples of experiences that a young child is not likely to be able to integrate into his or her understanding of life at the time. To protect the child, and allow the child to continue developing mentally and emotionally, the mind may split off all or part of the information contained in those traumatic events. The memories, thoughts and feelings associated with the event become separated, or "*encapsulated*" from the main stream of consciousness. Some of these encapsulations will not come back into play in the person's life until he or she is an adult and thereby able to understand and integrate the information.

It is very important to understand that when such encapsulation takes place, the perceptions, reasoning ability, thoughts and feelings are frozen in time. So for example, if a child of 4 experiences sexual abuse, he or she may encapsulate all or part of the memory of the event, the very subjective interpretation of the event, and the decisions, beliefs, thoughts and feelings experienced at the time. In essence, this part of the consciousness is still 4 years old. This 4 year old *inner child* may believe that he or she is bad, deserved it, is damaged now, and may associate love with pain, may feel abandoned by God for letting this happen, or see the event as proof that he or she is not worthy of God's love.

The entire issue of childhood sexual abuse may be unknown to the adult self until it is triggered by some event which in some way is reminiscent of the memories, thoughts or feelings of the original trauma. When triggered, the adult may find him- or herself feeling, acting or reasoning as a 4 year old. We all have many encapsulated aspects of our consciousness. Many are seen as children, but other inner selves may be seen as symbolic, archetypal forms, emotional states, roles we play in life, or multidimensional aspects of the soul. As adults, we have the opportunity to heal and release these time capsules through a natural healing process. The process begins with awareness, progresses to allowing the misconceptions of the inner selves to be corrected, which in turn releases the attached emotions, and ends with integration of the higher truths learned, along with the special gifts

created by the inner selves.

Gifts are the creative resources or coping skills developed by the encapsulated consciousnesses. As we continue to become aware of, heal, and integrate the numerous aspects of ourselves, we grow in integrity. What keeps inner selves separate are their *misconceptions* or limited beliefs. When a part of you believes you can accomplish anything you set your mind to, and a 5 year old part of you thinks he or she is stupid, you have an inner conflict which will probably lead to procrastination, in this example. If the 5 year old inner child is brought up to date and releases the limiting belief, the adult will be more integrated, which results in a clearer sense of purpose and right action.

Let's look briefly at a sample of conditions that plague us as individuals and as a society. **All behavior, no matter how aberrant, is sourced in a part of self and makes sense within the limited scope of logic and reasoning of that part.** The inner self that is the source of the behavior may be so strongly encapsulated that the person may not consciously be aware of having done it.

Domestic Violence:

Women living in a violent relationship often describe the man as having a "Jekyll and Hyde" personality. He becomes angry, acts out violently, and is later profusely apologetic and loving. It is not that he is *either* a violent person *or* a loving person, but that he is *both*. The part of him that is genuinely apologetic is not the part of him that became enraged and acted out. He needs to find and heal the angry inner self. The woman needs to understand that even when he is loving, the angry self exists within him, and step out of her own confusion, in addition, of course, to physically safeguarding herself. Her inner children are likely to get triggered by his, and she has her own healing work to do.

Sexual Abuse:

Sexual abuse does not occur in a vacuum. Adults who molest children have been victims themselves, usually of some abuse in childhood that left them feeling powerless. The impulse to engage in sexual activity with a child may arise from the encapsulated self that was similarly treated. This inner self may be seeking to understand what happened to him or her by playing the other role. Sexual abuse is often perpetrated in an altered state where the perpetrator is not completely conscious of *what* he or she is doing, or *to whom* he or she is doing it. There are many other possible misconceptions of the abused inner self that lead to perpetrating abuse on others.

Bulimia:

The teenage or adult bulimic often does not consciously understand why she vomits, and desires to stop. When it is understood that the vomiting behavior makes sense to some part of oneself, identifying and correcting the misconceptions of that inner self will result in cessation of the impulse to vomit. This is true of any subconsciously motivated compulsive behavior. Bulimia often has to do with the perception that something bad has gone in the mouth and was swallowed, and that purging (by vomiting or laxatives) will reverse the effect and "get the bad out".

These examples may be too brief to do the issues justice, but are presented to stimulate an understanding of the significance of encapsulated consciousness.

Summary:

Understanding the significance of encapsulated consciousness has major implications not only for self-awareness and improving interpersonal relationships, but for finding meaningful psychotherapeutic techniques to address the inner turmoil of those who victimize others, and for integrating these into the criminal justice system. What if we actually *cured* sex offenders, rather than merely incarcerating them for a time and releasing them in an even more disturbed mental state? What if we really understood the roots of violence and could offer healing to those ready for change? Incarceration may be necessary to protect the public, but does “time served” really “serve” or “pay a debt” to society? I would like to see penal institutions become places of healing.

The Inner Healing which brings each of us to a more harmonious and purposeful life, also increases the likelihood that we will find creative ways to solve our personal, relationship and societal “problems”.