



The Myth of Sanity: Divided Consciousness and the Promise of Awareness

Martha Stout

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"When we say a friend was 'like a different person,' we may be more right than we know."

-The Boston Globe

Why does a gifted psychiatrist suddenly begin to torment his own beloved wife?

How can a ninety-pound woman carry a massive air conditioner to the second floor of her home, install it in a window unassisted, and then not remember how it got there?

Why would a brilliant feminist law student ask her fiancé to treat her like a helpless little girl?

How can an ordinary, violence-fearing businessman once have been a gun-packing vigilante prowling the crime districts for a fight?

A startling new study in human consciousness, **The Myth of Sanity** is a landmark book about forgotten trauma, dissociated mental states, and multiple personality in everyday life.

In its groundbreaking analysis of childhood trauma and dissociation and their far-reaching implications in adult life, it reveals that moderate dissociation is a normal mental reaction to pain and that even the most extreme dissociative reaction-multiple personality-is more common than we think. Through astonishing stories of people whose lives have been shattered by trauma and then remade, **The Myth of Sanity** shows us how to recognize these altered mental states in friends and family, even in ourselves.

"We only think we're sane, says this Harvard psychologist... The befuddled, normally sane masses can learn a lot from the victims of grave psychological abuse."

-Dallas Morning Star

The Myth of Sanity: Divided Consciousness and the Promise of Awareness Details

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Awareness Martha Stout**

From Reader Review The Myth of Sanity: Divided Consciousness and the Promise of Awareness for online ebook

Caroline says

A very easy to understand book written about dissociative identity disorder (previously known as multiple personality disorder). I didn't like the writer's style, which I found rather twee and cloying, but she gets full marks for clarity and for giving a first rate explanation of this syndrome.

The basic thread that runs throughout the book is that this condition is experienced by people across a broad spectrum. The sort of drama and disruptive switches in personality states that we associate with films like *Sybil* are extremely rare. Much more common are people who suddenly go into rages, or into other mood states. It is usually observed as a change of *mood* rather than a change of *personality*. And then afterwards they often forget the time spent in these mood states. This can go as far as causing amnesia for hours or even days. Another frequent hallmark of this condition is that people cannot remember large chunks of time when the initial trauma took place. Often this means they remember very little about their childhoods.

What suffers of DID do experience in the here and now are things like depression, nightmares, or chaotic flashbacks.

As children, when suffering trauma, they will have put themselves into different personality states in order to cope with the stress of the situation. If something in the present day causes them stress, these earlier personality states can once again be triggered. These changes are usually quite subtle though, in terms of outward appearance - both in childhood and when triggered again in adulthood. Too subtle for friends and relatives to notice that a drastic change in personality has taken place. The victim may well be oblivious to the change too, and afterwards just blank it out.

The author writes very interestingly about hypnosis, which she uses with many of her patients. She mentions the difficulties of false memory syndrome, but says that for people with DID, dredging up hidden memories is absolutely essential, and hypnosis is a very good way of doing this. It just has to be done very carefully, by an ethical practitioner who knows what they are doing.

Symptoms of Dissociative Identity Disorder from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV. (view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)]

Other symptoms (often but not universally observed) (view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)]

The author says that therapy with these people aims to help them retrieve a basic framework of memories of their childhoods. That enables them to make sense of what has happened to them, and in turn this enables people to move forward with their present day lives. She feels it is crucial that people have an understanding of what they have been through. Not so they can apportion blame (she is adamant that this is not helpful), but so they can stop having traumatic responses to hidden memories.

I think I would have had a more enthusiastic response to the book if I'd been able to identify more with the issues being described, or even if I felt I knew one person who had these experiences; but there were no eureka moments. It all seemed very distant and removed from anything familiar to me.

Nomy says

a new friend got this book for me after we had a couple conversations where i mentioned dissociation and parts. i feel really grateful. this is a good read, well-written and compassionate, from the perspective of a therapist who works with trauma survivors. i really appreciate her approach, she's not trying make these clear definitions, she's showing ways that dissociation affects all of our lives, and lots of different ways it can show up ranging from spacing out in the middle of a conversation, to having "alters" who have different names and identities and do stuff in the world without you knowing. it all felt really relatable and didn't traumatize me with grizzly details. it was also cool because she is a hypnotherapist and described what she does, and i read it right before i was about to start working with a hypnotherapist so i had more of an idea of what to expect.

Doreen Petersen says

Interesting book on mental health but it only focused on one aspect. Wish it had focused on more. Still a very good book though.

Anita says

The book talks about the implications of trauma in childhood on the psychology of adults. The "myth" of sanity is that we all have moments where we "dissociate" based on childhood experiences that can be fear inducing to traumatic.

To the extreme... Dr. Stout, with as much as intellect and clarity as her explanation of sociopathology in the Sociopath Next Door, talks about Dissociative Identity Disorder (Mutliple Personality Disorder) and the symptoms, experiences, and approaches to healing.

The book is fascinating and provides alot of clarity on behavioral psychology-- however it is also sad... as we recognize the scope of abuse world-wide and the profound mystery of the mind and its ability to cope with those memories.

Shaun says

It is by no means certain that our individual personality is the single inhabitant of these our corporeal frames... We all do things both awake and asleep which surprise us. Perhaps we have co-tenants in this house we live in. - Oliver Wendell Holmes

I really enjoyed Stout's well-written and engaging narrative describing her years treating dissociative disorders including DID, Dissociative Identity Disorder formerly referred to as Multiple Personality Disorder.

The workings of the human brain are so complex and only marginally understood, and disorders like DID seem to suggest that our sense of self is considerably more illusive and elusive than most of us would like to believe.

Would recommend to those interested in brain science and personality as it relates to behavior and memory. Fascinating stuff.

Hawkin47 says

I have too many friends who really need to read this book. Anyone who's ever experienced a higher level of trauma really needs to read this book. It's amazing.

Susan says

We are all capable of disassociating and often do without knowing it ... from daydreaming to being on "autopilot" to being totally absorbed in a book or project. This is a mild form. The premise of this book is that Disassociative Identity Disorder (DID, formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder) is a protective mechanism of the human ego that occurs when one is faced with terror and abuse literally too great to bear. DID does not equal "crazy". DID does equal traumatized. This is a fascinating book about the human mind and its ability to cope with the unthinkable. If you are interested in how the mind works and human behavior, I'd highly recommend it.

Zoe says

I love the quote at the beginning of this book: "With our thoughts, we make the world."

11/27/11 - I really liked the first two thirds of this book because I found them so readable and informative. The last third, entitled "switchers," about people who switch back and forth between different personalities, didn't interest me as much, for some reason.

Dayne Myers says

Martha Stout's writings read amazingly well, she structures the concepts such that anyone should grasp them with ease.

Ryan Johnson says

Good read...

A bit annoyed with Pro-Feminist writing style but, well, the author is a women, LOL.

DID is real, and Dehabilitating, yet at the same time amazing in its presentation and protective manner.

Darice says

A well-narrated account of her experience with dissociation, from the extreme dissociative identity disorder to the common driving-trance, Stout explains dissociation as an adaptive skill for survival in the face of trauma. Despite the seemingly clinical context, many of her insights into childhood and personality are applicable to everybody on some level or another.

Chad says

Do you dissociate? This book by a Harvard clinician explores the range of dissociative phenomena, from momentary spacing out to dissociated ego states to dissociative identity disorder (formerly known as multiple personality disorder). The bad news: you'll probably recognize somebody you know, if not yourself. The good news: with the right approach, they can all be treated.

Fascinating.

Theodora says

This book was incredible to read. It has been one of the most accessible books I've read on trauma. it also talks about how disassociation affects everyone -- and also the little traumas people go through that cause disassociation. I read this at the right time.

Allison says

3.5 stars, but I'm rounding up because it really clarified the process/existence/functioning of Dissociative

Identity Disorder for me. I was originally annoyed that all of her case studies were amalgamations (and thus her own creations). However, she used these patchwork case studies well to describe and explain an occurrence that is controversial even in the question of its very validity or existence, and is very often exoticized and dramatized in the accounts of it that do exist. After reading Martha Stout's book, I feel like I know what DID is, and also what it is not - for example, that like autism spectrum disorder, it is a range of associated symptoms of varying severity instead of a specific highly life-impactful disorder. Also, you can't really call anything that originates from severe personal trauma mundane, that it can be much more common and even mundane than books like *The Three Faces Of Eve* or *When Rabbit Howls* would lead you to believe. This book really clarifies why people denounce the disease as described in the aforementioned books/movies, and even hints at the detrimental-ness of a certain kind of therapist participation in "exploring alters," but also explains what the real disorder actually is.

Topolub says

I learned that we all play different roles in life, and depending on the growth of our psychological makeup those roles may come to struggle for power inside of us. It is a beautiful book and I would recommend it to everyone.
