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# The Varieties of Dissociative Experience

## A Transpersonal, Postmodern Model

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This article presents a model of dissociative experience that includes a transpersonal perspective. The first aspect of the model focuses on whether an experience represents controlled flow, uncontrolled flow, controlled dissociation, or uncontrolled dissociation. The second aspect asks whether there are alterations in one's identification with the ego-self or whether one transcends the ego-self, making contact with a hypothetical All-Self. The third aspect of the model asks whether the experience is life-affirming or life-denying. The model is postmodern in that it recognizes that these latter judgments are a matter of time, place, and power, as is the determination whether or not a dissociative experience is psychopathological.

OVER THE years, I have observed, heard about, and read about many events described as "dissociative." For example, in 1990 I was invited to attend a 6-hour *toque* ritual held by the Children of Saint Anthony at their Santería center on the outskirts of Havana, Cuba. The first liturgy paid tribute to Elegua, the *orisha* or deity held to be the keeper of roads and crossings. The center was filled with depictions of St. Anthony as well as such Santería *orishas* as Changó, the chief of dance and lightning, and Babalu-Aye, the lord of epidemics and healing. The major *orisha* honored on that occasion was the hermaphrodite Obatala, whose white robes symbolize purity, justice, peace, and wisdom.

In one room of the center, a magnificent shrine had been assembled in honor of Obatala. It blended white fabrics with strands of blue, the favored color of Obatala's consort, Yemaya, the queen of the oceans and the patroness of the entire center. In another room, musicians played three Santería *tambor bata* (drums) while dozens of participants sang and danced. One of the *babalawos* (male mediums) was "mounted" by

Yemaya and began to adopt stereotypic female gestures, attempting to perform healings for those in need by rubbing his hands over the afflicted body parts of the supplicants and embracing them.

As the final liturgy began to wind down in the early evening, to avoid violating the government's 7:00 p.m. curfew, the *orishas* left their human "instruments." A "eucharist," taken from the mammoth outlay of cakes and cookies, was served to each of the men and women, Marxists and Catholics, adults and children, and dark-skinned and light-skinned individuals who had come together to evoke healing, meaning, and ecstasy from an ancient spiritual tradition. This tradition had crossed the Atlantic along with the horrendous slave ships but, in a modified configuration, had firmly established itself in the Americas under the name "La Religión Lucumí," popularly known as "Santería," that is, "the way of the saints" (Krippner & Welch, 1992, pp. 138-139).

The term "dissociative" is appropriately applied to these phenomena in Cuba, but I heard a remarkably different example of "dissociation" in 1993 when the philosopher Jean Houston told me

about the time that her father, a comedy writer, took her with him when he delivered a script to Edgar Bergen, the famed ventriloquist (Figure 1). Houston recalled encountering Bergen, sitting with his back to them, talking with his dummy Charlie McCarthy, but this was no show business rehearsal. Bergen was asking Charlie existential questions: "What is the meaning of life?" "What does it mean to be truly good?" "Where is the human soul?" And the dummy seemed to answer with the wisdom of the millennia, his insight astounding Bergen as much as it impressed the Houstons.

Finally, Jack Houston announced their presence. Bergen turned around, embarrassed, and remarked, "Oh, hello, Jack and Jean. I see you caught us." Jack Houston asked what was happening. Bergen replied, "I'm talking with Charlie. He's the wisest person around." Jack Houston probed, "But Ed, that's your voice, your knowledge coming out of that dummy's mouth." Bergen answered, "Yes, Jack, I suppose it is. But, you see, when I ask him these questions and he answers, what he says is so much more than anything I know!" (Houston, 1996, p. 115).

Literature provides its readers with numerous accounts that could be regarded as "dissociative." Since childhood, I have read and reread Robert Louis Stevenson's (1886/1967) story *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* because he claimed it was partially inspired by a terrifying dream. Erik Woody and Kenneth Bowers (1994) note that "Stevenson described the process that led to some of his best writing as one in which the characters took on an independent life of their own and seemed to move about and speak for themselves completely unaided" (p. 52). Stevenson looked forward to dreaming, hoping that something would emerge that he could sell to magazines, and referred to the "little people" who adroitly unfolded plots while he watched their efforts as if from a stage box (Hennessey, 1974, p. 20). In this tale, Dr. Jekyll conjectures that people

are plural rather than singular: "I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens" (Stevenson, 1886/1967, p. 68). The potion conjured up in the physician's laboratory evokes potentials that were always

within him, appalling as they turn out to be when the loathsome Mr. Hyde assumes his identity.

The Jekyll-Hyde transformation, as well as the writing process in which characters took "on an independent life of their own," would be considered instances of "dissociation" by many Western social and behavioral scientists. They would affix the same label to the behavior of the Children of Saint Anthony at their Santería center in Havana, as well as to Edgar Bergen's reported philosophical conversations with Charlie McCarthy. I would like to describe other examples of "dissociation," showing their ubiquity, how they occur in many

times and places, and placing them within the framework of a model that can be used for cross-cultural comparison.

### ✧ Cross-Cultural Studies and Dissociation ✧

WESTERNERS ARE prone to take terms with which they are familiar and superimpose them on phenomena in other cultures with which they are unfamiliar. Like other hypothetical constructs in the social sciences, the term "dissociation" is an attempt by social groups to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). So-called "dissociative" phenomena have been given varied labels and interpretations in different eras and locations, as well as in diverse historically and geographically situated interchanges among people. An understanding of this situation should prevent the reification of such expressions as "dissociation" and "dissociative disorders," and the uncritical



Figure 1. Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy

acceptance of the Western constructions of these phenomena.

Etzel Cardeña (1994a) comments: "It is paradoxical that in this so-called postmodernist era, an era when modes of knowing are questioned or even rejected, theoretical constructs such as dissociation...are treated as things in themselves, instead of as theoretical constructs based on partial perspectives...Not only is there no pure scientific language, but experience (and our theoretical models of 'reality') cannot be construed without recourse to metaphors" (pp. 162-163). Thomas Kuhn (1970) remarked that scholars have now abandoned the hope of achieving the ideal of language constructed on the basis of unadulterated sensory data; scientific language inevitably eludes the phenomena that it seeks to explain or describe (p. 206).

The definition that I have used for this cross-cultural comparison is descriptive rather than philosophical, diagnostic, theoretical, or strictly operational. For me, "dissociative" is an English language adjective that attempts to describe reported experiences and observed behaviors that seem to exist apart from, or appear to have been disconnected from, the mainstream, or flow, of one's conscious awareness, behavioral repertoire, and/or self-identity. "Dissociation" is a noun that refers to a person's involvement in these reported "dissociative" experiences or observed "dissociative" behaviors. The term "dissociation" is used in contrast with "association," the binding or linking together of concepts and memories, a notion prominent in the writings of John Locke, Edward Hume, and other British empiricists of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. "Identity" has many meanings in psychology, but I use the term "self-identity" to describe a person's definition of himself or herself, encompassing his or her body, gender, social roles, values, and/or goals. The term "flow" is especially useful here in regard to the interruptions and disconnections associated with dissociative experience; it is described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as "the process of total involvement with life" (p. xi) and can be associated with any number of human activities from creativity (p. 108) to criminality (p. 69).

Individuals harbor several identities (see Ornstein, 1986) and a multiplicity of memories covering their behavior, affect, sensations, and

knowledge (see Braun, 1988). When these constellations become disconnected, the result can be described as "dissociation." One example of dissociation would be ruptures in concepts of self-identity; another would be gaps in memories about time and space. It is also possible that one or more bodily systems could become dissociated from an organism's "life flow" (Wickramasekera, 1995). Thus, my definition is congruent with Cardeña's (1994b) "domain of dissociation," and its focus on disconnections or disengagements regarding people and their interactions with their environment (p. 23).

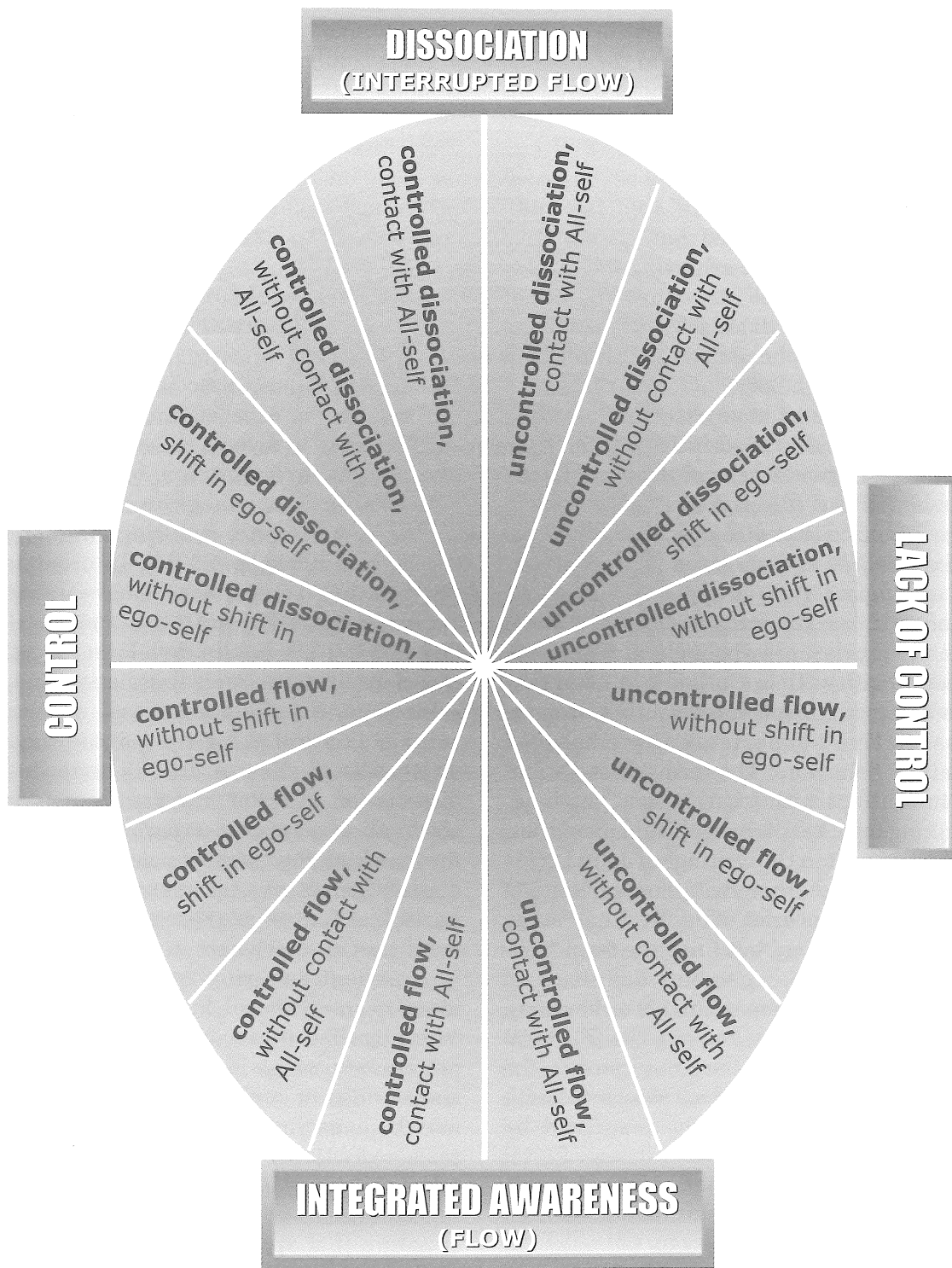
### ❧ A Model for Cross-Cultural Comparisons ❧

TO SOME extent, dissociative phenomena are the outcome of beliefs and practices that differ substantially in diverse times and places. These phenomena are complex socially canalized performances that change over time; they rarely consist of a discrete, enduring state or process (Kirmayer, 1994, pp. 93-94). In order to make cross-cultural comparisons, I have utilized a set of terms proposed by Ruth-Inge Heinze (1993, pp. 202-203) to study the development of either conscious awareness or dissociation and, at the same time, observe the increase or decrease of volitional control at a given point in time. Other writers (e.g., Braun, 1988) have described dissociation in terms of a continuum, and that observation is easily incorporated into this model inasmuch as the extreme poles of awareness vs. dissociation, flow vs. interrupted flow, and control vs. lack of control are reached less often than a point that is somewhere in between (Figure 2).

A patient suffering from fugue and loss of identity in a mental hospital may experience "uncontrolled dissociation," whereas a tribal practitioner, whose identity supposedly has been transformed or replaced by discarnate "spirits," may be engaging in "controlled dissociation." A seasoned camper might awaken to a morning sunrise, reporting a spontaneous onrush of "uncontrolled flow," that is, an intense appreciation of nature that appears to have occurred with no apparent volitional control. A mathematician may spend hours in a condition of highly "controlled flow," concentrating on a perplexing problem.

Figure 2

Model of Dissociative Experiences:  
Control and Lack of Control, Flow and Interrupted Flow



Note. Shading indicates that experiences are on a continuum rather than discrete.

However, the descriptor of an individual's experience may shift, sometimes within minutes. A patient being treated for post-traumatic stress disorder in group therapy may exert controlled flow, paying close attention to the ongoing process. Suddenly, he may deliberately "tune out" of the session because he has become aware of an oncoming "flashback." But if he cannot control this dissociative "tuning out," he may fully experience the "flashback" in which he imagines himself in a different location. Within a short period of time, the experience has changed from one of (1) controlled flow to (2) controlled dissociation to (3) uncontrolled dissociation. A very different oscillation could occur when a dreamer becomes aware that he or she is dreaming and begins to exert control—ascending, flying, soaring, and gliding. Abruptly, the dreamer may lose lucidity as well as identity, imagining that he or she has changed into a flaming ball of fire heading for the ocean. Controlled flow within the dream has become an uncontrolled dissociative experience. This model also recognizes that control and its absence may fluctuate during the same event, and that the two descriptors may even complement each other, for example, the wild but disciplined frenzy of some shamanic rituals or the Taoist "effort of no effort" practices. Western dualities, such as control vs. lack of control, are obscured in many collectively oriented cultures and their spiritual practices.

Because my definition of dissociation stresses ruptures in conscious flow, behavioral repertoire, and/or self-identity, I have combined Heinze's descriptors with those of Rhea White (1997) who uses the term "ego-self," which resembles the concept of "ego-syntonic," and the term "All-Self," which resembles Cardena's (1989) description of the "transcendent" dimension reached by some ritual practitioners, when discussing what White calls "exceptional human experiences." A glimpse of the All-Self, or "oneness" with all things, can occur in any of Heinze's four varieties of experience. An experient (1) may become aware of this "oneness" in ritual prayer or any other procedure in which the ego-self gradually merges with the All-Self, that is, controlled flow. Another experient (2) may contact the All-Self while dissociating from the ego-self, as when "channelling" messages

from a source of "universal knowledge," (i.e., controlled dissociation). A third experient (3) may momentarily feel a "oneness" with nature, with an infant, or with one's lover, that is, uncontrolled flow. Finally, an experient (4) may ingest a powerful drug and enter a "void" in which self-identity is lost, that is, uncontrolled dissociation, yielding unmitigated terror, transcendent bliss, or something in between (Krippner, 1997).

The interface of Heinze's and White's dimensions is also apparent in experiences concerning the ego-self. Everyday embeddedness in the ego-self marks Heinze's uncontrolled flow (1), while an ego-self's focused problem-solving task characterizes controlled flow (2). Controlled dissociation (3) frequently involves a deliberate move away from one's ordinary ego-self to the incorporation of a "spirit guide" or similar entity. Uncontrolled dissociation (4) is frequently marked by involuntary estrangement from the ego-self, and would fail to meet most of the criteria White gives for "exceptional human experiences," at least in the West. For example, many healthcare practitioners are familiar with psychiatric patients who have lost their own identity and are embroiled in a delusional thought pattern of union with an All-Self. Other examples of uncontrolled dissociation where a type of "oneness" is experienced would include comatose accident victims or people in an alcoholic stupor; these experients would be unlikely to engage in self-awareness, self-reflection, self-control, or self-fulfillment. Kluft (1998) correctly referred to this model as heuristic, "transcultural, transpersonal, and rejecting of modernism and abstract rational thought. It looks to postmodernity with its narrative foundations...and hermeneutic approach" (p. 88).

According to this framework, the *babalawos* I witnessed in Cuba engaged in controlled dissociation, and assumed other identities after shifting away from their habitual "ego-selves." On the other hand, Edgar Bergen could be said to have made contact with the All-Self, an ostensibly transcendental source of wisdom. The draught of the hapless Dr. Jekyll was originally a deliberately contrived controlled dissociation but later engulfed him in uncontrolled dissociation, as his customary identity became overpowered. Thus,



the third aspect of my model is evaluative in nature; the personal, social, or professional adjudication of a dissociative event may brand it as positive or negative, life-affirming or life-denying, functional or dysfunctional, ego-syntonic or ego-dystonic, or any number of other descriptive pairings that, of course, are neither static nor synonymous (Figure 3).

There is considerable dissociation, both controlled and uncontrolled, that does not involve major shifts in the ego-self or encounters with the All-Self. Nevertheless, these instances are still dissociative because they comprise reported experiences and observed behaviors that seem to exist apart from, or seem to have been disconnected from, the mainstream of one's conscious awareness or behavioral repertoire. Examples would be "derealization," in which one's identity is intact but time and space are judged "unreal"; "depersonalization," in which the challenge to one's own reality centers not around identity but on feeling detached from one's body or behaving like an automaton; and those types of "fugue" in which identity is maintained but chunks of one's past cannot be recalled. Each of these instances affects personal concepts or memories, further delineating my definition of dissociation (e.g., Kluft, 1985).

#### Uncontrolled Dissociation and Major Shifts in the Ego-Self

PERHAPS THE 20<sup>th</sup> century's most celebrated story of dissociative identity disorder (DID) is that told by Chris Costner Sizemore. Her condition, and its denouement, were chronicled in several books, numerous magazine articles, and an award-winning movie, *The Three Faces of Eve*. Eventually, Sizemore experienced a total of 22 different identities. These "alters" had their own wardrobes, were of varied ages, obtained different scores on personality and intelligence tests, and even had different physical characteristics. Her story exemplifies uncontrolled dissociation accompanied by major shifts in the ego-self.

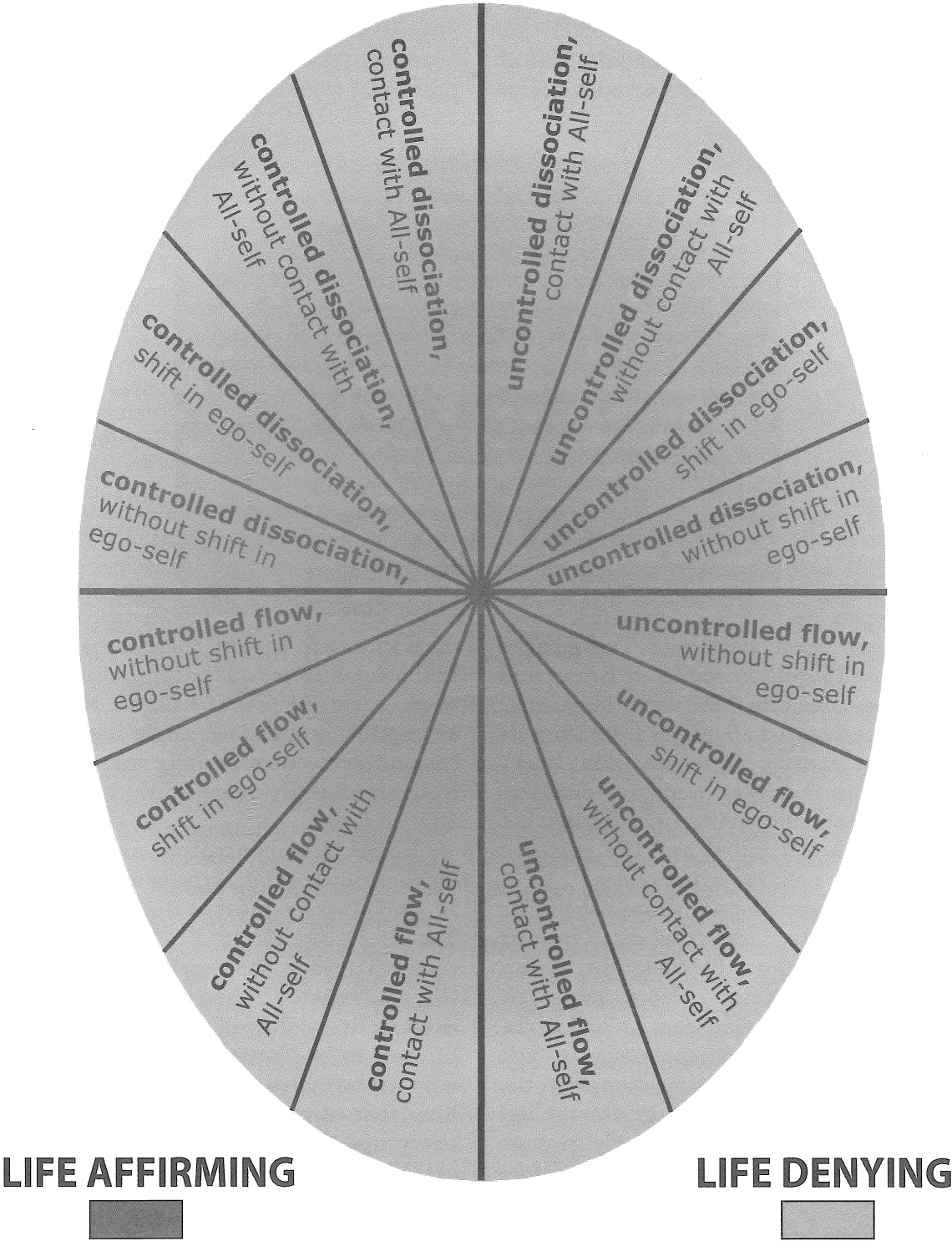
In 1994, Sizemore and I discussed her autobiographies (Sizemore, 1989; Sizemore & Pittillo, 1977). In these books the observation was made that often it was impossible to know where "she" was. For example, the "Turtle Lady"

managed a dress store but the "Purple Lady" resigned that position. Her alters contradicted themselves in various diaries and notes, sometimes writing on blackboards and napkins. Sizemore's alters emerged in threes: one set of three alters contained one who was allergic to nylons, one who was allergic to feathers, and one who was allergic to furs.

Sizemore's alters were characterized by various habits and abilities. There were drivers and nondrivers, smokers and nonsmokers, drinkers and nondrinkers, churchgoers and nonchurchgoers. There were 7 painters and 10 poets. Moving from one identity's consciousness into another one is called "switching," and some "multiples" or cases of DID switch simply by blinking their eyes or repeating a sound. For Sizemore, switching was never this easy; moving from one identity to another was involuntary. Sizemore had engaged in switching behavior as a child but was never taken to a specialist. As an adolescent, the "switching" began to be accompanied by headaches followed by weakness and inertia. As a child, young Chris had the propensity for playacting "everybody under the sun" and so her parents did not believe her stories until Corbett Thigpen, one of Sizemore's initial psychiatrists, took her seriously. Sizemore's first medical diagnosis had been schizophrenia, and electroconvulsive therapy was prescribed for her condition. One of her alters, the redoubtable "Eve Black," adamantly rejected this recourse, and Sizemore found her way to Dr. Thigpen's office. Sizemore's eighth psychiatrist was fully accepting of her story and guided her to her final "resolution" at the age of 46. It would seem that Sizemore's preresolution condition could be fairly described as one of uncontrolled dissociation where the ego-self fell under control of various alters. On three occasions, her torment was so severe that it resulted in suicide attempts. When a particular alter took over, there were bodily changes as well as changes in other aspects of the identity. Further, these alterations were judged negatively or as life-denying by the experient in contrast to the Cuban practitioners' shifts in the ego-self that were examples of controlled dissociation and evaluated positively by the mediums.

Figure 3

Model of Dissociative Experiences:  
Life Affirming and Life Denying





### Controlled Dissociation and Major Shifts in the Ego-Self

TO CONTRAST the preceding example of uncontrolled dissociation, I will present an example of controlled dissociation accompanied by major shifts in the ego-self. During a 1971 visit to Brazil, I heard of Francisco Candido "Chico" Xavier. Born in 1910, Xavier reported his first experience with automatic writing in 1927, and completed his first "channeled" book in 1932, *Collections of Poems from Beyond the Grave*. This was followed by over 300 other books purportedly "written" by several hundred "spirits" with Xavier serving as their "medium" or "control." Besides poetry, the "dictated" material consists of historical romances, fiction, essays, plays, and moral teachings. These books have sold over 18 million copies in Brazil and have been translated into three dozen languages, and Xavier has donated all money from the sale of his books to charity (Severino, 1990/1994). In these instances, there were numerous displacements of Xavier's customary ego-self, but the dissociation was controlled and the episodes were regarded as positive experiences.

All spiritistic practitioners share a belief in discarnate entities (e.g., departed relatives and friends, saints, folkloric deities, "intranquil spirits," and "low spirits"). Most spiritistic practitioners believe in reincarnation and in the role that one's past life activities can play in one's current life situation. Communication with the "spirit world" sometimes occurs in dreams but more often these entities speak directly through mediums who are endowed with special *facultades* (faculties) such as "telepathy," "clairvoyance," "precognition," and the ability to "incorporate" their "allies." These mediums exemplify controlled dissociation in which one's ego-self is temporarily

displaced by the incoming "spirit," an experience regarded as positive.

My 1980 visit to Haiti provided an example of this type of controlled dissociation (Figure 4). One evening, I was invited to visit a *peristyle* (vodou temple) to attend a *dessounin* (funeral ritual). The *mambos* (female mediums) and *houngans* (male mediums) and their *hounsies* (apprentices) were all costumed in white garments.



Figure 4

Painting by E. J. Pierre (Author's collection)

After a period of drumming and dancing, they announced they were ready to be mounted by the *loa* (deities and spirits). In this way, the mediums paid their respects to the *espirit* (soul) of the departed member of their community. I was allowed to tape record the songs, chants, and drumming of the *dessounin* up to the point when a special drum beat called

upon the *loa* to "mount" their human "horses." At that point, I turned off the tape recorder; my hosts were concerned that if I played the music to a susceptible group, a *loa* might hear the call and "mount" someone especially vulnerable to spirit incorporation (Krippner & Welch, 1992, pp. 131-133).

Sometimes controlled and uncontrolled dissociation coexist in the same time and place. In 1995, I was a guest at the Tupyara Spiritual Temple in São Paulo, Brazil, a major healing center. Tupyara, the "spirit guide" who protects this center, is an Indian entity who purportedly lived in Brazil during colonial times; he allows himself to be "incorporated" by the mediums who serve, without pay, as healers for the hundreds of individuals who visit the temple every night. These mediums could be said to exhibit "controlled dissociation" that is felt to be life-affirming in nature, but many of their clients claim to suffer from life-denying "possession," an example of "uncontrolled dissociation."

Occasionally uncontrolled dissociation may give way to controlled dissociation. In 1913, in Missouri (USA), Pearl Curran was using a Ouija board when the planchette spelled out the message, "Many moons ago I lived. Again I come. Patience Worth my name" (Hintze & Pratt, 1975; Litvag, 1972). Eventually, Curran "channeled" the messages from Worth (by means of a typewriter) into a series of historical novels, some of which were acclaimed by literary critics. She also produced (and published) numerous poems such as the following:

I have heard the moon's beams  
Sweeping the waters, making a sound  
Like threads of silver, wept upon.  
I have heard the scratch of the  
Pulsing stars, and the purring sound  
Of the slow moon as she rolled across  
The Night. I have heard the shadows  
Slapping the waters, and the licking  
Sound of the wave's edge as it sinks  
Into the sand upon the shore...  
(Hintze & Pratt, 1975, pp. 181-182)

A unique example of controlled dissociation with a major shift in the ego-self is the case of J. Z. Knight who experienced her first encounter with the alleged entity "Ramtha" following a 1977 demonstration of so-called "pyramid power" in her kitchen. After placing a paper pyramid over her head she recalls noticing a "glimmer of a bright light" and seeing "a giant man...aglow" who announced himself as "Ramtha, the Enlightened One" (Knight, 1987, pp. 11-12). Later, Ramtha (1986) described himself as part of "an unseen brotherhood" who loves humanity, telling Knight that she was to be a "channel" for his messages. As Knight began to "channel" Ramtha's words for audiences, he explained that "to prevent you from worshiping me, I have not come to you in my own embodiment. Instead, I have chosen to speak to you through an entity who was my beloved daughter when I lived upon this plane...When I speak to you, she is no longer within her body, for her soul and spirit have left it completely" (p. 2).

My colleagues and I (Krippner, Wickramasekera, Wickramasekera, & Winstead, 1998) have published an account of our work with Knight and six of her associates at the Ramtha School of Enlightenment. Their scores on the Dissociative Experiences Scale (Bernstein & Putnam, 1986) averaged 31.1. A score of 30 is regarded as the

cutoff point for those who are "clearly dissociative," but only 17% of individuals making these scores are later diagnosed as clinical cases of dissociative identity disorder. Because the seven individuals we tested were functioning well in society, we suggested that social support, coping skills, and self-regulation enabled them to engage in their studies at the Ramtha School without obvious adverse side effects.

### **Controlled Dissociation and Encounters With the All-Self**

IN NONE of the above examples was there contact with anything that could be considered the All-Self; one's ego-self was displaced by specific "deities," "spirits," or "allies" but not by "God," the "Divine," or a "Ground of Being." However, encounters with the All-Self have been reported by some individuals claiming to have control over dissociative events. For example, controlled "out-of-body" experiences sometimes are described as "transcendent," although they are often regarded as examples of "depersonalization" when seen in a clinical setting. They take a variety of forms, for example, viewing one's body from a distant point of the room, rising above the body but remaining attached by a slender cord, leaving the body and traveling outside of the room.

Contact with the All-Self is claimed by practitioners of glossolalia, or "speaking in tongues." My first observation of this phenomenon occurred in 1956 when the actress Adrian Booth conducted a private session for interested persons in Durham, North Carolina (USA). Soon after Booth relaxed and took several deep breaths, she began to utter rhythmic monosyllables that were unintelligible but marked by phrasing, affect, and dramatic facial expressions—all in the service of encountering the Divine. Although not related to any current or past language, similar phenomena occur in charismatic prayer meetings where they are canalized by the set and setting. Fraser (1994, pp. 134-135) categorizes glossolalia as a dissociative phenomenon, but admits his studies of church members who "speak in tongues" did not indicate that they were suffering from dissociative disorders. In my opinion, this finding demonstrates that the context of what is called dissociative is critical; what is life-denying in one context may, in another context, be life-affirming,

sometimes producing experiences labeled “transcendent,” “transpersonal,” or “mystical.”

Glimpses of the All-Self through controlled dissociation are sometimes reported in a group setting. In 1984, I observed a Balinese performance of the “Kecak,” which relates a story from the Hindu Ramayana collection. Sita, the heroine of the tale, is captured by the abhorrent Rawana but is rescued by Hanuman and his indomitable monkey army. At one point a circle of some 150 men provided incredibly coordinated movements, and their vocalizations, “Chak-Chak-Chak,” were remarkable imitations of monkey chatter. The purpose of this performance was to drive away Rawana and his evil coterie; as this occurred, individual awareness gave way to group awareness, that is, the All-Self.

In Bali, I have witnessed childhood dissociation in which union with the All-Self is accomplished in the form of “holy energy” from *niskala*, the realm of the sacred. For example, I have seen the “Sanghyang Dedari,” the “dance of revered angels” that is performed by young girls after they supposedly “incorporate” this “holy energy,” assisted by the smell of sweet incense and the music of a chorus that chants sacred songs. I observed two girls moving rhythmically with their eyes closed for the purpose of protecting their beloved temple from malevolent entities, dancing in flawless tandem, never opening their eyes but—perhaps—carefully responding to the music and to kinesthetic cues, keeping their movements perfectly synchronized. Once the chanting ended, the girls, their undertaking a success, fell to the ground and were attended to by the *pemangku*, a village priest.

I also witnessed the “Sanghyang Jaran” dance during which a young man purifies the temple by “incorporating holy energy” while riding a wooden hobby horse around and through a bonfire made of burning coconut husks, fiercely pounding out the flames with his bare feet, proudly showing no burns or callouses on his feet once the fire diminishes. These ceremonial dances are so frequently performed that some skeptics claim that those done for tourists no longer involve much of a dissociative element. However, dissociation is ubiquitous in Bali, and one study (Picard, 1990) found it impossible to distinguish between “authentic” and “touristic” dances. Local authorities

claim that the young girl dancers do not rehearse the Sanghyang dances and that the young men cannot ordinarily walk on fire.

The Indonesian psychiatrist Denny Thong (1993, pp. 77-88) has deconstructed the word “trance” as a special state of consciousness, and has reconstructed it as a set of learned behaviors that evoke special attention and gain social approval (p. 74). His reconstruction, for me, eliminates the dichotomy between “authentic” and “contrived” performance unless there is deliberate manipulation and exploitation involved. Even here, the issue is not clear-cut; James McClenon (1994) suspects that some self-styled “psychic surgeons” whom he observed using sleight-of-hand, engage in dissociation to block out the perceptions or activities that contradict their beliefs (p. 114). He also suggests that in such hazardous performances as firewalking, dancing on knives, and penetrating the skin with sharp objects, a “hidden observer” remains aware of the dissociation, protecting the practitioner from serious harm (p. 120).

#### Uncontrolled Dissociation and Encounters With the All-Self

ACCORDING TO some yogic traditions, *Akudalini* (“spiral”) energy creates and sustains the universe (Radha, 1993); it is symbolized by a coiled serpent that can be awakened slowly by meditation and yoga, or abruptly without an obvious trigger. In the latter instances, the rush of energy, typically from the base of the spinal column to the head, can be alarming, bringing with it uncontrolled emotions, involuntary movements, and memories of psychological and physical trauma (Grof & Grof, 1990, pp. 77-80).

On two occasions in the 1970s, I visited Gopi Krishna (1971) in Kashmir to discuss the spontaneous *kudalini* awakening which occurred during his morning meditation in 1935 that was life-denying and propelled him to the edge of insanity and death. He recalled, “Suddenly, with a roar like that of a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord...I was no longer myself...but instead was a vast circle of consciousness in which the body was but a point, bathed in light and in a state of exultation and

happiness impossible to describe” (pp. 12-13). However, Krishna was unable to sleep, became depressed, and entered a profound crisis regarding his sense of reality. It took him more than a decade to regain his health. A new identity emerged, “endowed with a brighter, more refined and artistic perceptive equipment, derived from the original one by a strange process of cellular and organic transformation” (p. 145). Krishna spent the rest of his life lecturing, writing, and teaching about the potentials of properly awakened life-affirming *kundalini* for spiritual growth and creativity.

Albert Taylor (1998), an aeronautical engineer, reported a 1993 experience that allegedly changed him “forever.” While he “floated” about his body, he had an encounter with “soul consciousness” later described to him as a *kundalini* experience. He recalls, “For the first time in my life I had absolutely *no* questions about anything... Suddenly the ups and downs of the earth life system made sense... The mysteries, frustrations, disappointments, and miracles, all had a distinct purpose... I had the overwhelming feeling of finally being home” (p. 54). Allegedly long-lasting effects of this dissociative experience were “losing the fear of death” and “realizing that although I am on this earth, I am not of it” (p. 54).

#### Controlled Dissociation Without Major Shifts in the Ego-Self or Encounters With the All-Self

CONTROLLED DISSOCIATION can occur without major shifts in the ego-self or encounters with the All-Self. This was made evident to me during my first journey to Portugal in 1967 when I discovered the work of Fernando Pessoa. Born in 1888, Pessoa was a poet who described Portugal as “his passion” and who also manifested all the major symptoms of a dissociative disorder (Bacarisse, 1980; Saraiva, 1990). Amnesia? Pessoa wrote, “Do you know who I am? I don’t know.” Depersonalization? “I’m sort of like I’m here, but I’m not really here, and that I kind of stepped out of myself, like a ghost.” Derealization? “Not even the bedroom was stable... Like fog, it drifted away.” Confused Identity? “Who am I beyond this unreality? I don’t know. I must be someone.” Multiplicity? “I break my soul into pieces, and into diverse people.” Pessoa’s dissociative experiences were apparently outside of his volitional control,

but extraordinary language skills were within his grasp, and Pessoa had the ability to put his unusual experiences to use in his remarkable poetry. In 1931, Pessoa (1986) wrote:

Cat, you tumble down the street  
As if it were your bed.  
I think such luck’s a treat,  
Like feeding without being fed...  
Because you’re like that you’re happy;  
You’re all the nothing you see.  
I look at myself—it’s not me.  
I know myself—I’m not I. (p. 146)

Marlene Steinberg (1995) has cited excerpts from Pessoa’s poetry to help diagnosticians learn how to utilize her structured clinical interview for the identification of dissociative disorders.

Another case of controlled dissociation is the pain management phenomena I have observed on the part of Jack Schwartz who dates his capacity for self-regulation to his childhood in the Netherlands, a talent that was to help him withstand the tortures of Nazi troops during the occupation of his country. Years later, I observed him run a 26-gauge steel needle through the medial aspect of his left upper arm during a demonstration sponsored by the Menninger Foundation. There was no observable or subcutaneous bleeding; Schwartz (1978) attributed these skills to insights and abilities derived from his meditative practice.

Pelletier and Peper (1977) included Schwartz in a study of three adept meditators who voluntarily inserted steel needles into their bodies while physiological measures were recorded. None of them reported pain, but each described a different self-regulation technique to control pain. Schwartz dissociated himself from his arm, recalling, “I did not stick a needle through my arm; I stuck a needle through *an* arm.” A Korean adept voluntarily dissociated himself from the stimulus sensation as he placed spokes through his skin, diverting his awareness by letting it “drift away.” An Ecuadorian adept told how he had focused on a small point of light that he moved from the bottom of his abdomen to the place where he inserted the needle, “in other words... voluntarily dissociating himself from the stimulus sensation as he placed spokes through his skin” (p. 363). When compared with baseline data, levels of respiration rate and muscle tonus showed no

significant differences. Alpha brain wave activity increased for two adepts, heart rate decreased, and skin resistance increased. For all adepts, there was no spontaneous or subcutaneous bleeding at the puncture site.

### **Uncontrolled Dissociation Without Major Shifts in the Ego-Self or Encounters With the All-Self**

SOMETIMES AN individual experiences “leaving the body” involuntarily; one’s conscious flow is interrupted in a way often described as “depersonalization.” The Dutch actor, Jean-Claude Van Damme, describing the depths of his cocaine addiction, recalled being “in the corner of the room. I was dying. I saw my body on the floor. I felt cold, I felt hot, I felt scared. I didn’t feel like a man or a woman. And then I just came back into that envelope, that body, with that soul, and I said, ‘I’m not ready. I know what’s death after life’” (Garchik, 1998).

In “flashbacks,” past memories invade a person’s ordinary stream of conscious awareness. They may consist of a visual image or a video-like replay of a scene, usually traumatic in nature (Fraser, 1994, p. 140). I have had “flashbacks” reported to me during my work with the Olympia Institute where I have met with U.S. veterans of the Vietnam War and Russian veterans of the Afghanistan War, as well as during a 1992 visit to a Bosnian refugee camp in Slovenia. These intrusive memories often are triggered by loud noises or other stimuli that some investigators believe cause an overload of norepinephrine in the brain. They may also represent memories that have been rendered amnesic by dissociation, although the recollection in these “flashbacks” may not be completely veridical (Fraser, 1994, p. 140).

Many of my students at Saybrook Graduate School have studied instances of uncontrolled dissociation. Jack Morin (1995), whose graduate work focused on sexual experience, noted that if abused sexually, boys and girls often protect themselves by dissociating. Consequently, they are not “fully present” during the abusive act; some “leave their bodies,” viewing their abuse with detached indifference as if it were not really happening to them. In the prize-winning play, *How I Learned to Drive*, the central character, a

young woman nicknamed “Itsy,” is sexually abused by her uncle during a driving lesson. At that moment, she recalls, “All the feeling left my body and went to my head. It never came back.”

Only rarely does this type of experience lead to DID, but these children’s memories may be “stored” differently than they would be under ordinary circumstances. Later, “flashbacks” of these abuse memories may be triggered by something related to the event, for example, a sound, a smell, or an image (Morin, 1995, pp. 365-366). Abuse memories often are difficult to retrieve accurately; they may be distorted due to attempts to keep them in check through repression, denial, and rationalization (p. 208).

Selma Ciornai (1997), another doctoral student at Saybrook Graduate School, interviewed Brazilian women who had been active in the counterculture movement of the 1960s. Some of them had been incarcerated and tortured by the military, experiencing episodes of dissociation under the most reprehensible circumstances. One woman, demonstrating exceptional resilience, described how she “fell to pieces” when electric shocks were administered to her eyes, lips, and genital areas, but laboriously “put myself together again because I would not let them break me.”

Major or minor instances of uncontrolled dissociation may occur in any number of ordinary situations—daydreaming, reverie, hypnagogic and hypnopompic “twilight” states, nightmares, sleepwalking, absentmindedness, “déjà vu” experiences, absorption in fantasy, culture shock, engaging in performance arts such as acting, carrying on two complex activities at the same time, religious conversion, charismatic healing, anxiety attacks, bouts of depression, marathon psychotherapy group sessions, scrying (i.e., staring at mirrors or a crystal ball), and computer-generated “cybersickness” in which the computer user becomes disoriented and nauseous after riveting his or her attention on the keyboard and screen (e.g., Moyer, 1996).

Dissociative events may emerge from several less common problems—eating disorders, substance abuse, ritual abuse, brainwashing and political indoctrination, long-term sensory deprivation, self-mutilation, aftereffects from natural disasters (e.g., firestorms, tornados, earthquakes), residue from incarceration (including the Nazi

Holocaust and Communist repression), physical, sexual, and emotional victimization, and so on. However, dissociation as the term is defined here, does not *inevitably* accompany the above situations, nor is it an inexorable component of most of the schizophrenias or other major psychoses (Steinberg, 1995, p. 295); in these afflictions, the “reality-testing” aspects of reflective consciousness are not sufficiently integrated for “depersonalization” or “derealization” to occur (p. 109).

Uncontrolled dissociation is sometimes associated with various conditions—sleep disorders, strokes, encephalitis, Alzheimer’s disease, a severing of the cerebral commissure between the brain’s hemispheres, temporal lobe epilepsy, and so on. These lists may seem intimidating, but my preference is to use the construct of “dissociation” cautiously. I have delimited the domain of dissociation severely, asserting that it is not found in most instances of what passes for “dreaming,” “meditating,” or “shamanizing,” three constructs that some writers have considered tantamount to dissociation in the past.

#### Controlled Flow With Major Shifts in the Ego-Self

CONTROLLED FLOW can take place with major shifts in the ego-self. Some actors describe a number of ways in which their awareness shifts while playing a role for the stage, movies, or television. Liv Ullman, in performance, reports that she is filled with another presence, a character possessing her, a spirit shared by the actor and audience (Bates, 1987, p. 2). When John Hurt was filming the George Orwell novel, *1984*, he admitted that he could not leave the part of Winston Smith behind. He remarked, “When you create a whole fantasy world like this you can lose your self in it” (Bonner, 1984).

When playing Captain Queeg in a stage version of *The Caine Mutiny Court Martial*, Charlton Heston confided that he sometimes allowed the character of Queeg to possess him, often to the point where he could not control the resulting emotional outburst, despite his conviction that the best acting comes when one is only “partially possessed” by a character. “After all,” Heston remarked, “when I’m playing Macbeth, if I lose control in the dagger speech then I’m going to stab some poor stagehand” (Bates, 1987, p. 76). In this

instance, Heston described the difference between life-denying and life-affirming instances of theatrical “possession.” Sam Waterston, while playing Torvald in *A Doll’s House*, allowed the character to live through him, revealing his inner life as if it belonged to the possessing personality (p. 82).

Shirley MacLaine (1983), incarnating characters in film roles, feels that these are not always imaginary people, but sometimes are the spiritual essence of people who have lived and died, reborn to be among us. Marlon Brando has observed that actors each contain within themselves the seeds of all the characters they will ever play (Bates, 1987, p. 83). In comparing contemporary actors with tribal shamans, Brian Bates (1987) notes that actors build from imagination and observation as well as from early life experience to learn the secret of “self possession” (pp. 83-84).

#### Controlled Flow With Encounters With the All-Self

MY WORK with shamanic practitioners has brought me to the realization that dissociation is not a prerequisite for major shifts in the ego-self or encounters with the All-Self. There can be controlled flow accompanied by encounters with the All-Self. In 1980, a Mazatec Indian, María Sabina (Figure 5), the most celebrated shaman of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, allowed me to interview her at her home in the hills of Oaxaca, Mexico. Mazatec shamanic healers are referred to as *sabias* and access esoteric information through the ingestion of psychotropic mushrooms during sacred ceremonies known as *veladas*. Claiming that “with words we live and grow,” doña María chanted a liturgy that contained an overlay of Roman Catholic imagery which cloaked the odes and psalms used by the Mazatec priests who were overthrown by the Spanish invaders in 1521. The Spanish Inquisition outlawed the *veladas* but, among the Mazatecs, the rituals simply went underground for more than four centuries. Doña María, as a *sabia*, had studied these sources and was the recipient of oral traditions that preserved the colorful material that had survived the Spanish repression. However, she used her own creative abilities to add personal references, symbols, and metaphors to the existing



framework. Her ability to encounter the All-Self is revealed by her chants:

I am the sacred eagle woman [the mushroom] says,  
I am the Lord eagle woman, says,  
I am the lady who swims, says,  
Because I can swim in the immense,  
Because I can swim in all forms...  
I am the shooting star woman, says,  
I am the shooting star woman beneath the water, says,  
I am the lady doll, says,  
I am the sacred clown, says,  
Because I can swim,  
Because I can fly.  
(Estrada, 1981, pp. 93-94, 96)

I have the heart of the Virgin,  
I have the heart of Christ,  
I have the heart of the Father,  
I have the heart of the Old One,  
It's that I have the same soul,  
The same heart as the saint, as the saintess.  
(Estrada, 1981, p. 107)

In these brief excerpts from María Sabina's life-affirming *veladas*, we find a woman whose faculties of control allowed her to travel into the primordial "waters" of oceanic union but to emerge safely. She returned to devote herself to service, to healing, and to her community. I have also interviewed shamans who regulate their attention through controlled breathing, lucid dreaming, mental imagery, and the meticulous utilization of music, movement, and vocalization during ceremonies, rites, and rituals, claiming to encounter the All-Self or its equivalent.

Unlike the controlled dissociation of a medium or spiritistic practitioner, and unlike the controlled dissociation of those shamans who claim to incorporate "spirits" or other entities (Peters & Price-Williams, 1980), María Sabina's controlled flow of awareness allowed contact with the All-Self, but without a major disruption in the mainstream of her ongoing activities. This is in line with White's (1997) suggestion that optimum

conscious states may involve awareness of both the ego-self and the All-Self while not identifying with either.

### Controlled Flow Without Major Shifts in the Ego-Self or Encounters With the All-Self

CONTROLLED FLOW most typically occurs without major shifts in the ego-self or encounters with the All-Self. I define "consciousness" as the ongoing stream of perception, cognition, affect, and/or motivation displayed by an organism at any given point in time. When people are aware of this stream of consciousness, it can be said that they are "mindful." Swami Sivananda Radha (1993) referred to this process as "awakened consciousness," often telling me that spiritual work must be applicable in a practical way to one's daily life, otherwise it lacks meaning. Various meditative disciplines have endeavored to develop and extend their students' control of awareness. Adepts may claim to reach a stage in their practice which

is life-affirming and during which the ego-self is transcended and the All-Self is encountered, but most meditation emphasizes "direct awareness" (Whiteman, 1986, p. viii). Even when so-called "mystical experience" occurs as a result of these practices and the practitioner is enveloped in the All-Self, the resulting phenomenon

can hardly be labelled "dissociation" because its attainment has emerged from the experient's flow of meditation, contemplation, prayer, the martial arts, or a similar method of controlled flow.

### Uncontrolled Flow With Major Shifts in the Ego-Self

MAJOR SHIFTS in the ego-self can occur spontaneously apart from a dissociative episode. Marlon Brando once observed that "Acting is something that most people think they're incapable of but they do it from morning



Figure 5. María Sabina (left)

Photo by Bonnie Colodzin

to night" (Bates, 1987, p. 7). People develop their own performances and their own cast of characters, each becoming a familiar and well-rehearsed "ego state" to be performed in appropriate settings. Role-playing in such forms of psychotherapy as Psychodrama or Gestalt therapy allows clients to portray an important person in their life history or a part of their own psyche. This role-playing has been conceptualized as a specific form of behavior simulation, one that creates experiential processes that can offer clients a direct way to address their difficulties (Kipper, 1990). The workshops in "personal mythology" that David Feinstein and I originated encourage participants to play the roles of their parents, positioning their bodies to reflect parental myths. We also enable participants to identify their own conflicting myths, giving each a distinctive voice, body posture, and gesture pattern (Feinstein & Krippner, 1997).

Rockefeller (1994) observed how motion pictures provide larger-than-life visual images and auditory stimuli that are interpreted, processed, and become attached to one's internal world, aiding in the construction or revision of an individual's personal mythology. "Seeking out a film, standing in line, buying a ticket, and sharing with others who, for the most part, are strangers sharing an intimate experience in a darkened theater, may be one of our last large-scale modern, cultural ritualistic behaviors" (p. 185). In an interview study conducted at Saybrook Graduate School, Rockefeller's research participants reported identifying with characters from their favorite films. Interview material revealed how particular scenes in the films reiterated a personal myth. One research participant identified with Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, and stated, "Scarlett makes it and I'm going to make it too," giving her a strong renewed personal myth to carry forward into her life—one that had just been freed from a desperate, abusive marriage.

#### Uncontrolled Flow with Encounters With the All-Self

**A**N EXAMPLE of uncontrolled flow accompanied by an encounter with the All-Self occurred in a hypnotic dream experiment I conducted at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn (Krippner, 1968). Some participants were taken

through formal hypnotic induction procedures, and members of a comparison group were given relaxation suggestions. A member of the latter group reported several imagery sequences, one of which could be said to represent an encounter with the All-Self. This research participant had a spontaneous exceptional experience, the results of which were long-lasting and perceived as beneficial. Her mental imagery centered around:

...a painting of the sky, clouds, and God stretching forth his hand and touching the finger of a man whose hand is outstretched too...A spark is ignited by God's touch...I feel good about this thought, as if to say, "This is it, now I've got it." The picture seems to say that man is dependent on God for his discoveries and intuitions. Religion and God and the search for some new discovery in reality seem connected with this picture and my thoughts right now. I see space, distant myriad stars, expanding universe, stars flying away from each other, and man's voice resounding, "Who are you? Where are you?" I feel embarrassed by these thoughts as if I'm a religious fanatic. Yet at the moment they fill my head. (p. 52)

This experience took the research participant by surprise; the label of "dissociation" is not warranted, and the experient felt that her experience was life-affirming.

#### Uncontrolled Flow Without Major Shifts in the Ego-Self or Encounters With the All-Self

**U**NCONTROLLED FLOW usually occurs without major shifts in the ego-self or encounters with the All-Self. In 1993, I gave several dream seminars for the Human Development Corporation in Osaka and Tokyo and was struck by the number of minor shifts in identity in some of the dream reports. These were not of the magnitude to qualify as derealization or depersonalization, but they illustrate the alterations along these lines so common in dreams. One man, the executive director of an organization, reported, "I am at a narrow side street between my neighbors' houses. A white snake is chasing me. I am very scared. *I leave my body and observe my body* running toward a larger street, but the street gets longer and longer, until it is almost impossible to reach the end of it." A black-haired housewife reported, "I am looking at myself in a room. I notice that *my hair is blonde*."

My mother is there but *I do not recognize her; she is sitting in a rocking chair and she has blonde hair too*. My grandmother is also in the room, *also with blonde hair and I do not recognize her at first*. They both wear some strong *classic long fluffy skirt with many pleats*. They are drinking black tea and the room has a fireplace; *it resembled our room at home but there is no fireplace* [italics added]. Both dreams were described as repetitive, dating back to the dreamers' childhoods.

Those who subscribe to the notion that hypnosis involves "special processes" that differ in certain ways from ordinary waking behavior emphasize the potentially dissociative or "neo-dissociative" aspects of hypnotic experience (e.g., Bowers, 1991; Hilgard, 1994; Woody & Farvolden, 1998), while those who see hypnosis as a "sociocognitive" phenomenon discount its relationship with dissociation (e.g., Spanos, 1989, 1996). Keeping in mind the continuum of dissociation in each of the categories I have discussed to illustrate my model, it should be apparent that hypnotic induction procedures could produce experiences at many points on this continuum. However, even experiencers who are highly responsive frequently describe hypnosis in ways that McConkey (1986) interprets as "a normal state of consciousness that simply involves the focusing of attention [and] thinking along with and imagining the suggestions given by the hypnotist" (p. 314).

Many clients report important health benefits from hypnosis; those who make high scores on fantasy tests and on tests for amnesia typically report hypnotic experiences that appear to be dissociative. Those clients who are highly motivated may obtain equal benefits from hypnosis without a break in the ordinary flow of their awareness, behavior, and/or identity that is dramatic enough for it to be labeled dissociative (Barber, 1997).

## ✿ Conclusion ✿

AS A Founding Member of the International Society for the Study of Dissociation, I consider its initial meeting in 1984 an historic event in the understanding of dissociative experiences. But this revival of interest may be but one blip in Ellenberger's (1970) registry of the cycles in psychotherapists' interest in dissociative disorders.

Kenny (1981) found that 19<sup>th</sup> century spiritualism not only favored the development of mediums, some of whom were studied by William James and his colleagues, but stimulated the appearance of multiplicity in the same communities. With the decline in the belief of "spirit possession," fewer cases were reported.

Hacking (1995) claims that the attention given to child abuse in the United States to some extent has taken the place of possession and mediumship as a spur for the diagnosis of DID. The possibility of iatrogenesis, in which alter identities are created in a therapist's office, in multiplicity, was considered by many of the pioneers in this field (Alvarado, 1991). Janet (1889) noted that once he had named a "personality," that "personality" became more lifelike (p. 318). James (1890) asserted that "It is very easy...to suggest during trance the appearance of a secondary personage" (p. 465). Ross (1989, pp. 58-63) has argued convincingly that a condition as serious and complex as DID cannot be haphazardly elicited, but the controversy remains. This issue is a critical one because the diagnosis of DID, even when accurate, tends to frighten both the patient's caregivers and family members. Gergen (1991) recognizes that the term "dissociation" is a negative one as currently used, as it tends to "discredit the individual, drawing attention to problems, shortcomings, or incapacities" (p. 13).

"To put it more broadly," Gergen (1991) continues, "the vocabulary of human deficit has undergone enormous expansion within the present century" (p. 13). Koss-Chiino (1992) even raises questions concerning "the validity of the concepts behind the definitions of hallucinations and delusions" (p. 140) because "relatively few ideas have been advanced of ways to distinguish hallucinations from visionary experiences" (p. 143). For this reason, my model has drawn upon two contributors to transpersonal psychology, Heinze (1993) and White (1997), because their designations of the varieties of dissociative experiences illustrate both volitional control and nonvolitional dissociation, as well as the part played in the experience by contact with the so-called ego-self and the All-Self. These issues have been central to transpersonal psychologists since the founding of *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* in 1969.

For me, transpersonal psychology is the disciplined study of behaviors and experiences that appear to transcend those hypothetical constructs associated with individual identities and self-concepts, as well as their developmental antecedents, and the implications of these behaviors and experiences for education, training, and psychotherapy (Krippner, 1998). Classification systems (such as those of Heinze and White) based on this perspective are useful when attempting to comprehend such accounts as the one Braude (1995) gives of a Zen Buddhist nun who claims that she has no self and who avoids using personal pronouns in order to counter the illusion that she is characterized by selfhood. Instead of saying, "I'm hungry," she will say, "There's hunger here" (p. 75). In this case, controlled dissociation apparently has led away from the ego-self to the All-Self in a way that is considered positive by the experient and her social group.

In Euro-American culture, White's proposal of being aware of both but not identified with either might be more likely to promote optimal functioning, especially as regards empathy with and communication among others. Such persons are equally at home with those who are totally identified with the ego-self or the All-self. Experiences of this nature are taken on their own merit by transpersonal psychologists (see Grof & Grof, 1990) rather than being subjected to a Procrustean bed of psychodynamic causation, schedules of behavioral reinforcement, or psychopathological labelling.

The first aspect of my model focuses on whether an experience can be thought of as controlled flow, uncontrolled flow, controlled dissociation, or uncontrolled dissociation, while acknowledging frequent fluctuations in these spectrums. The second aspect asks whether there are alterations in one's identification with the ego-self or whether one transcends the ego-self, making contact with a hypothetical All-Self. The third aspect of my model of dissociative experiences is in concordance with the descriptions proposed by White (1997) of life-affirming experiences and life-denying experiences, classifications that are extremely subjective. For example, when Sister Teresa, who later became Mother Teresa, the Nobel laureate, was traveling to Darjeeling on a train in 1946, she claims that she "heard God." God allegedly told her that her life's work was to recognize the

divinity in the poorest of the poor and to serve them with love.

In 1996, an Israeli student also "heard God." In this case, God allegedly gave him orders to kill Yitzchak Rabin, another Nobel laureate. There are devout persons who would reject the divine origins of one or another of these divine commands, and skeptics who would belittle them both. Taking a postmodern perspective, the judgments of "life-affirming" and "life-denying" are a matter of time, place, and power (see Foucault, 1980), although White's (1997) description circumvents a relativistic stance by adding that any "voice" that advocates behaviors the experient would not like done to him or her is not "life-affirming." Hermeneutic and phenomenological research studies need to be applied to dissociative narratives to help clarify these issues.

Instances of dissociative experiences evaluated positively among athletes have been cataloged by Murphy and White (1995), who have proposed several implications of their findings for mind/body training. Masters (1992) found that marathon runners often use a cognitive style in which they cut themselves off from the sensory feedback they would normally receive from their body during the run. Their deliberate use of this type of dissociation as a running strategy was positively related to scores on a hypnotic susceptibility test. For example, one runner "regressed" back to the first grade, then proceeded to recall his educational experiences up through receiving his doctorate. Other positive uses of dissociation include "tuning out" a boring conversation, exerting pain control by "distancing" oneself from the excruciating area, holding a conversation while skillfully driving an automobile, and fostering creativity through "fancy" or "musing." In some parts of the world, fantasy-proneness is reinforced by cultural forces, but "daydreaming" and "not keeping your mind on the job" are pejorative descriptors in most Western cultures (Krippner, 1994).

"Dissociation" as a hypothetical construct is felt to indicate dysfunctional behavior by most Western psychotherapists. But the term also can be applied to voluntary "spirit incorporation," which in certain cultural contexts is socially adaptive, especially when it empowers women who have few other ways of redefining themselves

and asserting their capabilities. In the Ethiopian *zar* cults, many ailing women are believed to be possessed by entities. Boddy (1988, p. 19) identifies this diagnosis as an opportunity for the possessed woman to develop her capabilities, becoming "life-affirming," in White's terms. Indeed, there are alternative prototypes for the 3-part model I have constructed to discuss dissociation; prominent categories could be built according to gender, age, intensity of the experience, empowerment of the experient, and any number of other variables.

The DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) attempted to enhance its claim to universal validity with a brief mention of "dissociative trance disorder," a supplemental category of "religious or spiritual problem" and a glossary of "culture-bound syndromes." Lewis-Fernández and Kleinman (1995) admit that this aspect of the DSM-IV stands as the "main clinical development in current cultural psychiatry in North America" (p. 437), even though they consider *anorexia nervosa*, "chronic fatigue syndrome," and DID Western "culture-bound disorders." The application of the DSM categories has often been acontextual. For example, Breasure (1996) tells of meeting a 70-year-old woman who had been diagnosed as schizophrenic because she had answered affirmatively when a psychiatrist asked if she heard voices. The psychiatrist had not inquired as to whether this was part of her culture as a Native American where part of her life style was to listen to the Earth's messages for signs sent by a higher power, in other words, the All-Self. This woman was hospitalized as a result of this diagnosis, remaining in the hospital until her inner voices guided her in ways to obtain a release. Steinberg (1995) cites both "out-of-body" experiences and auditory hallucinations as clinical symptoms of DID, but they could also be indicators of such types of controlled dissociation as shamanic journeying or mystical experience, or simply as an indicator of someone who is highly hypnotizable or "fantasy-prone" (Lynn, Pintar, & Rhue, 1997).

In four decades of studying dissociative events on five continents, I have learned that, at best, dissociation can yield tangible and intangible rewards and benefits for experients and their community; at worst, dissociation is tantamount

to agony and pain—but may represent the most viable strategy that is available in an otherwise unbearable situation. If psychology is to integrate lessons from this literature, as well as insights from alternative and complementary models of psychotherapy, it needs to determine if the practices under consideration are safe, efficient, and effective (Steering Committee, 1997, p. 5). The hypnosis literature contains examples of well-designed studies that could be used as models for other treatment procedures, as well as meta-analyses that demonstrate the effectiveness of hypnotically-facilitated psychotherapy (e.g., Kirsch, 1993; Patterson & Ptacek, 1997).

Gergen (1985) reminds us that the "self" is constructed differently by society in various times and places. In traditional Balinese culture, the individual self plays a minimal role in everyday life; rather, individuals are considered representatives of more general social categories (Geertz, 1973), and Triandis (1996) has described the variety of ways, many of them contradictory, that contemporary societies conceptualize individualism. It also appears that the human being is extremely malleable. People can create identities as required to defend themselves against trauma, to conform to cultural pressures, or to meet the expectations of a psychotherapist, medium, or exorcist (Cole, Alexander, & Anderson, 1996; Martínez-Taboas, 1991). This malleability can have both adaptive and maladaptive, both life-affirming and life-denying aspects; these authors have contributed narratives elucidating such possibilities. One of the beneficial results of renewed interest in dissociation is to illustrate the urgent need by health care practitioners for informed information about this exceptional human capacity, and the recognition of its ubiquity in human behavior and experience.

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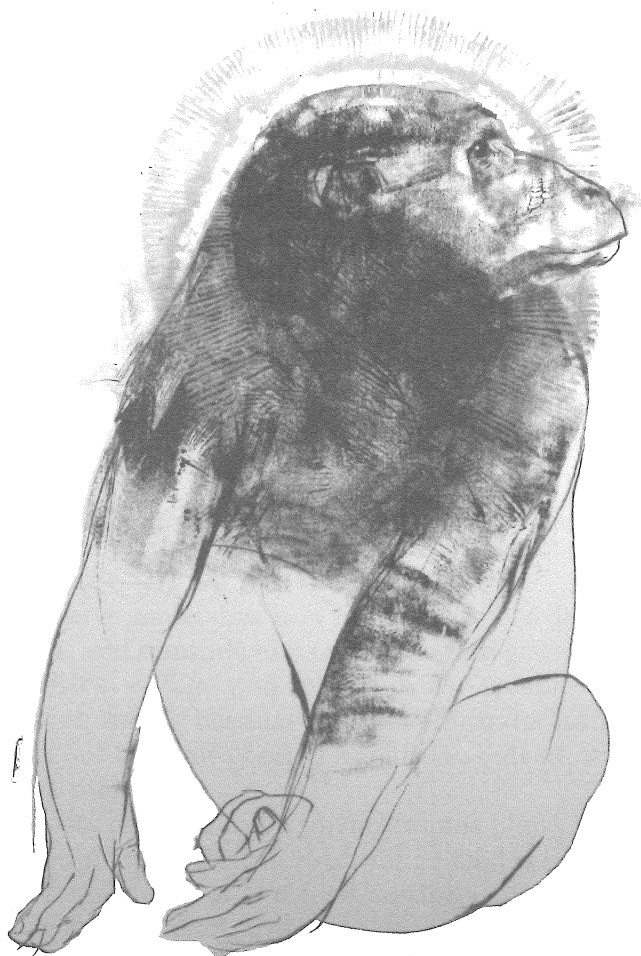
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