

Multiple Personality Disorder: Is There a Cure for it in Hypnosis?

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RESEARCH NOTE

Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), more formally known as Dissociative Identity Disorder, refers to cases in which a person's identity is simultaneously shared across multiple personality types (Merskey, 1992). In various other popular contexts, this is often called "possession" because, the behavior of the affected person resembles that of some others' whose spirits apparently "possess" the victim of this disorder (Spanos, 1994). Unfortunately, many of us do not recognize the presence of this disorder because of the manner our cultural - religious practices eulogize them (Castillo, 1994).

Recent research suggests that this occurs as a result of the fragmentation of the existing identity in an individual rather than the inducement and proliferation of newer identities (Ringrose, 2018). For human beings to function meaningfully, our brains need to construct a unified identity by integrating memories in a logically sound manner and a failure to do this means different combinations of memory bits begin to constitute different identities all of which want to bring to the level of consciousness (Ross, Norton, & Wozney, 1989). Proper psychotherapy treatment for long term could alleviate the symptoms of this. While drugs that treat the physiological bases of disorder are not available, antidepressants and tranquilizers are employed in the treatment of MPD, too.

While the field of psychology has slowly reverted back from Freud's notion that hypnosis is quackery, it has not yet regained sufficient scientific support as a treatment tool (Kluft, 2018). Psychiatric consultants are known to advise patients to self-hypnotize to defend against the intrusive invasion of traumatic memories (Donald & Ross, 2014). Researchers like Bliss (1984) and Fahy (1988) claim

that hypnosis / hypnotherapy could eventually offer a cure for it because MPD itself is the product of some kind of self-hypnosis by the patient (Ross, Norton, & Wozney, 1989).

High hypnotizability is accepted by a part of the research community to be a characteristic of MPD patients, observes Dell (2017). It must however be noted that MPD has a basis in hypnosis is a controversial view (Braun & Sachs, 1985). Dell (2018) questions the very fundamental assumptions of autohypnotic model in constructing dissociative disorders like MPD and call for the need of a more scientific approach in advancing our knowledge of them.

While hypnosis could not grossly alter the features of MPD, certain memories associated with it were differently recalled after it, according to Ross and Norton (1989). Of particular mention included patient recall of sexual and physical abuse and also recall of alter-personality types such as child personalities and personalities of who were considered protectors. These researchers speculate that hypnosis could help with better recall of traumatic memories held by child personalities which might make later treatment more effective. Findings of the study by Webster, Michalowski, & Hranilovich, (2018) support the view that hypnotherapy could become part of a multimodal treatment aimed at identity reintegration. These researchers employed a combination of psychodynamic psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, existential-humanistic, problem-centered, and cognitive behavioral therapy, and found the results to be practically useful in mitigating MPD.

In summary, while research indicating that hypnosis could cure MPD is scant, various researchers have employed hypnosis in limited yet creative ways in tackling aspects of issues related to various identity disorders.

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