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The Myth Of Sanity: Divided Consciousness And The Promise Of Awareness



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

No one likes being called crazy. But Dr. Martha Stout, a psychological trauma specialist, invites all to question their own level of mental acumen in *The Myth of Sanity*. Her logic makes sense: all humans experience fear, especially during youth; individuals' response systems determine how their brains catalogue traumatic experiences and trigger "dissociative" coping strategies. Those who

experience horrific situations like abuse, catastrophe, or grueling medical procedures fare the worst over time; their dissociative behaviors can manifest themselves as situational fatigue, "lost" hours or days, or split personalities. Drawing from 20 years of treating such patients, Stout presents several composite characters to illustrate all levels of dissociative behavior: from the very serious DID (dissociative identity disorder, or "switching" among distinct personalities) to the nearly universal "brief phasing out" (losing a thought or getting "caught up" in something). As each patient undergoes psychoanalysis, Stout highlights clues for identifying trauma sufferers and lends advice to their loved ones. Tending away from scientific data or supportive research findings--while tending toward a fiction-lover's prose--The Myth of Sanity focuses on personal stories and Stout's zealous admiration for responsible therapy patients who wake to a sanity unclouded by past fears. --Liane Thomas --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Stout, a clinical psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital and an instructor at Harvard Medical School, writes here about her experiences working with abuse survivors who exhibit dissociative behavior--blacking out, losing time, even developing "alters" or multiple personalities. Engaging in the fashionable practice of analyzing psychiatric disorders in terms of the culture at large, Stout claims that in our repeated exposure to media violence, we have become a "shell-shocked species." In other words, the everyday experiences of distraction and escape ("spacing out" during a meeting, losing oneself in a movie) are not that different--in terms of physiology and behavior--from an abused individual's experiences of dissociation and hypnotic trance, which she illustrates through fascinating accounts of her patients' lives, such as the boy who witnesses his brother being kicked to death by a sexually abusive uncle and the girl whose mother threatens, during a terrifying game of hide and seek, to cut off her thumbs. Stout describes dissociative experiences in compassionate and moving prose ("Julia did not remember her childhood because she was not present for it

This is a fascinating glimpse into the types of dissociative behaviors we ALL have (daydreaming, escaping into a good book or movie or just "spacing out" for a few minutes now and then) - as well as those which are more rare (multiple personality disorder, anxiety caused by forgotten and buried memories of past traumas) In the most extreme cases, several personalities may exist in one body. Luckily, most of us don't have dissociative states that are that severe but, as the author points out time and again, we all exhibit some dissociative behaviors from time to time and for good reason - as a survival mechanism. Filled with inspiring as well as mindboggling stories of people whose lives have been greatly affected by dissociation and then remade, The Myth of Sanity reveals the very

thin veneer of normalcy we all live with and the small amount of true consciousness accessible to our awareness...but with so many layers buried underneath. The author also offers insights as to how we can recognize our own moments of altered consciousness and what to do about these moments, to embrace them as well as to learn and grow from the lessons they may teach us.

How many times have you asked yourself why did I act that way, who is this other person acting through me, or why do I repeat the same mental program and actions to similar situations and/or emotions and feelings especially when I realize it hurts others? I've done this many times and this book has helped me to see a part of the reason why. Everyone goes through some kind of trauma in their childhood, some more severe than others, which affects who we are as adults and how we react the way we do to given situations. We learn to dissociate as a survival mechanism from the pain and stress brought on by trauma that we aren't equipped to deal with as children. As adults we may not remember or understand this dissociation, but we can see a pattern in our behavior and how this behavior affects friends, family and everyone else we interact with, which we can take the responsibility to try to understand and change. I think these two paragraphs near the end of the book tell something important about possible change and the alternative: "The true remedies are making a safe place, finding out, remembering, not hiding from the memories, and not blaming. Also, at first, simply learning to recognize dissociative behavior in oneself and in others, at least some of the time, may be counted as a part of the cure. By definition, increased self-observation exercises the observing ego, the part of the self that will be able to view dissociation as a currently unnecessary limit upon one's freedom. These are difficult prescriptions, and as I say, the presence of another person, a therapist or a mentor, is helpful, may even be required. But the alternative is for us to continue in something reminiscent of a tedious science fiction plot in which the otherwise admirable characters are trapped in a hermetic time loop, and repeat over and over again the same galaxy-shattering mistakes, never ascertaining that they have done it all a fathomless number of times before. In this sort of plot, the only way out is somehow to perceive and sever the time loop, of which the only detectable symptom is a wispy sense of déjà vu." A must read book if you want to start to understand yourself, who you are, and why you are who you are.

This book is about DID, Dissociative Identity Disorder, or "multiple personality disorder". It is not as rare of a disorder as I thought, or maybe as many people may think. This book presents examples of how each of us dissociate in our daily lives, and contains examples from her case studies of trauma victims. It is very approachable and easy to understand. She explains the subject matter

clearly and in such an interesting way I didn't want to put the book down! I found this book to be full of useful and applicable information to understanding both myself and people around me. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in psychology but does not have the full use of the terminology present in many psychological texts. I also read her book "The Sociopath next Door", and find myself eagerly waiting for another book by Martha Stout.

As a clinical psychologist, Stout draws upon twenty years experience with trauma survivors to explain, in clear, easy-to-understand prose, the spectrum of dissociative disorders--from the everyday experience of being completely absorbed in a movie to the most well-known of the dissociative disorders, dissociative identity disorder (DID), previously known as multiple personality disorder (MPD). Her story-telling approach, using individual cases and composite characters, has the air of a good novel. What sort of dissociative events have you experienced? Is there someone in your life who never seems to remember something they said just yesterday, just an hour ago? Stout is helpful and hopeful to those who suffer and those who know someone who suffers from any of the various dissociative disorders. Awareness and self-responsibility, she writes, are the first steps to a return to normalcy, even for victims of the more extreme dissociative disorders.

This book really spoke to my heart. I live with dissociative identity disorder and the author really explained what it is like so very well. I would highly recommend this book to anyone.

Very interesting book that gave me an insight on disassociation. It tells about different degrees of disassociation that people live with during their day to day lives including day dreaming and zoning out, to an outright disassociative personality identity (DPI). I found out that DPI is not commonly like the movies portray it as dramatically different personalities, but there is many people that may have it that you would not realize. I would recommend this book not only because it is interesting, but it is well written by a professional qualified psychologist who works with clients in this field.

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