

MULTIPLE-BODY DISORDER: A NEW PSYCHIATRIC SYNDROME

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ABSTRACT: This paper reports the discovery of a new psychiatric syndrome. Multiple-body disorder (MBD) has not been recognized or discussed in the clinical literature. The illness is similar to multiple-personality disorder where several minds have the same body. MBD syndrome occurs when a single personality has several bodies. These duplicate personalities are typically not aware of one another. Several examples of MBD are given.

Recently, a television news bulletin (September 24, 1991) reported that five women in Winnipeg were protesting discrimination against them because they were all victims of multiple personality. One of the women said she had fifty personalities. We don't know which of them was protesting, but one of them was. In any case, for years, multiple-personality disorder (MPD) has been an issue of prime concern; recently, therapists have recognized that MPD is far more widespread than previously believed.

Multiple Personality and Single Body

Most people who complain about their personalities have had a number of bad experiences and this makes one of their personalities complain. Usually a personality contacts a counsellor and the counsellor discovers more personalities. It is bad news to find out that your body belongs to several people. This is because one personality may control the body in ways that other personalities object to. Even if a personality has fun with the body, it is a sign of poor personal integration. We don't know for certain why it is a problem to have multiple personalities, but psychiatrists and psychologists assure us that it is not mentally healthy.

Probably, the Winnipeg women were more concerned with what other personalities in other bodies thought about them than with squabbles among their own selves. After all, why bother to protest in public if you are the public? What could you do, shout at yourself? All of this raises an interesting question—namely, how can one discriminate against minds independent of a body?

It seems confusing, but really it's not. Modern psychology has an answer. Part of the answer is that all kinds of minds can inhabit the same body. This sounds a bit bizarre but it makes sense. Personalities, it turns out, are really very easy to acquire. Mostly, you only have to have a few unusual experiences as a kid and there it is—more than one personality.

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Multiple Body and Duplicate Personality

Even more important than multiple personality is the possibility of one personality having several bodies. The logic is obvious. If one body can have several people, then one personality can inhabit several bodies. The reasons this has not come to light (until now) is that each body is unaware of its duplicate. Multiple-body disorder is more serious than multiple personality disorder because one deranged personality can create havoc if it has several bodies. This has been documented as mass hysteria, the bystander effect, and it has been observed in Iran where the personality shakes thousands of swords at the same time.

It appears obvious that one dog is just one dog, but what if it is not? Think about the implications. One day you come home to your poodle and the next day it has the personality of a pit-bull. Fortunately, your dog has not changed from a poodle into the body of a pit-bull. Like most of us, I would rather deal with its personality than a change of body. I mean how could we deal with a world where multiple bodies and single personalities were common? Look, there go the Davids! Logically, though, it makes sense: If one person can have several personalities, then surely one personality can have several bodies.

We discovered this syndrome at 9:00 a.m. on a Saturday morning several months ago. The doorbell rang and two neatly attired young men, with identical bicycles parked behind them stood on our porch. Each held a pamphlet in his left hand and had a Bible tucked under his left arm. Number one said "Good morning sir" and flashed a perfect smile with perfect teeth. Number two followed with "May we come in and talk to you about our Church." He also flashed a perfect smile with perfect teeth. Because of the previous night both of us were dehydrated and we had difficulty opening our mouths.¹ To make a long story short we got rid of the young men and watched them peddle in synchrony to the next house.

Following this visit, it struck us that we had just witnessed a case of multiple body. There are other examples: The Marine Corps goes to great lengths to induce multiple-body disorder. Fortunately, it appears that when MBD is trained after adolescence, it eventually wears off. This is why some former marines let their hair grow long. However, if the disorder is induced during childhood it may be resistant to treatment. Consider the audience for a tele-evangelist Sunday morning broadcast. These people are indistinguishable from one another, sound like the same voice, wear the same clothes, are very happy, have common moral values, don't drink beer, are all healthy, and after talking to one you have interviewed them all. Importantly, many of these individuals are really old and have been old most of their lives.

As we have implied these are just a few illustrations of multiple body. There are probably thousands of other examples. Multiple-body disorder should be a diagnostic category included in DSM-IV. A good guess is that when trained counsellors, psychologists, and psychiatrists are made aware of this syndrome, they will identify many more cases.

NOTE

1. This was a case of common experience, not multiple body.