

THE THREE FACES OF EVE

■ THIGPEN, C.H. & CLECKLEY, H. (1954).

A case of multiple personality.

Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 49, 135–51.

INTRODUCTION

Our definition and understanding of 'abnormality' is affected by the culture we live in. Some explanations fit neatly into the general view of life that prevails in a particular culture at a particular time. Some phenomena, on the other hand, challenge our view of life and are regarded with much greater scepticism. The many 'supernatural' experiences that people report are an example of this. Religious visions, and visions of deceased loved ones are commonly reported but do not fit into our current explanations of the world. These experiences, therefore, become marginalised and ignored.

One relatively rare observation of abnormality is the person with multiple personalities. This condition is not to be confused with schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders since the sufferers do not show the disturbances of emotion, perception and reality testing associated with psychosis. The multiple personality challenges our view of people, and receives considerable scepticism as a result. Thigpen and Cleckley recognise this scepticism but suggest that their case study of a unique individual is evidence for the existence of this condition.

THE CASE STUDY

The patient (referred to as Eve White in the study) had been referred for therapy to one of the authors because of 'severe and blinding headaches'. She also complained of 'blackouts' though her family were not aware of anything that would suggest a real loss of consciousness or serious mental confusion. The patient appeared to have a number of complex, but relatively unexceptional marital conflicts and personal frustrations. She showed amnesia for a recent trip, and the therapists used *hypnosis* to restore that memory.

The first sign of anything unusual in the case was when a letter arrived some days after the hypnosis. It was written in a confident

hand and concerned her therapy, but at the bottom of the page there was a childish postscript written in a different hand (see Figure 11.2). On her next visit Eve White denied sending the letter though she remembered having begun one which she had not finished. During the interview she became distressed and asked whether hearing an imaginary voice indicated that she was insane. She reported that she had on several occasions briefly heard a voice addressing her. During this conversation Eve White suddenly put both hands to her head as if in pain. After a tense moment of silence her hands dropped, and the therapist observed a 'quick, reckless smile'. In a bright voice she said: 'Hi there, Doc!'

The demure and retiring Eve White had changed into a confident and relaxed person, with a very different physical presence. She crossed her legs and 'the therapist noted from the corner of his awareness something distinctly attractive about them, and also this was the first time he had received such an impression' (p.137). This new person 'had a childishly daredevil air, an erotically mischievous glance, a face marvelously free from the habitual signs of care, seriousness and underlying distress' (p.137). The voice and language structure were different, and to the therapist it appeared to be an entirely different woman.

Over the next 14 months, a series of interviews totalling over 100 hours explored the behaviour and experience of Eve White and the other woman, Eve Black. Although Eve Black could sometimes appear unexpectedly, she could only be 'called out' by the therapists when Eve White was under hypnosis. Eve Black had been in existence since early childhood, and when she was 'out' Eve White was not aware of what was happening. In contrast, when Eve Black was not out she was aware of what was happening. This loss of awareness by Eve White, and the coming out of Eve Black to be mischievous, led to a number of incidents in childhood where Eve White was punished for wrong doings she was unaware of. Some of these incidents, revealed during the therapy, were later substantiated in interviews with her parents and her husband.

Eve Black was irresponsible and shallow, looking for pleasure and excitement. She succeeded in concealing her identity from Eve White, and also from her parents and husband. She denied marriage to the man, who she despised, and denied any relationship to Eve White's daughter. Her unpleasant behaviour, harshness and occasional acts of violence observed by the husband and parents were attributed to unaccountable fits of temper in a woman who was habitually gentle and considerate.

June -

Dear Doctor,

Remembering my visit
to brought me a great
deal of relief, to begin with.

Just being able to recall
the trip seemed enough, but
now that I've had time to
think about it and all that
occurred, it's more painful
than I ever thought possible.

How can I be sure
that I remember all that
happened, even now? How

can I know that it won't
happen again? I wonder
if I'll ever be sure of
anything again.

While I was there with
you it seemed different.
Somehow it didn't matter
so much, to have forgotten;
but now it does matter. I
know it's something that
doesn't happen so

I can't even recall
color schemes and I know
that would probably be the
first thing I'd notice.

My head hurts right
on top. It has ever since
the day I was down there
to see you. I think it must
be my eyes. I see little red
& green specks - and I'm covered
with some kind of rash.

oh, please be quite dear love
and let me have patience with her
she's so sweet and innocent and
my self-control

Figure 11.2 Letter from Eve
Source: Thigpen & Cleckley (1954)

Both personalities were given a series of psychological tests with the following results:

IQ scores - White 110, Black 104;

Memory function - White was far superior;

Rorschach (ink-blot) - profile of Black far healthier; the personality of White was repressive, and Black was regressive.

During the therapy sessions it became clear that Eve Black had little compassion for Eve White, and could not be persuaded to help with the therapy. However, as Eve White became aware of the other personality she became able to prevent her 'getting out' on occasions, and so negotiation was necessary for Eve Black to get more time 'out'.

As the treatment progressed, Eve White's headaches started to recur and she started to experience more 'blackouts'. Eve Black denied responsibility and said that she also experienced lack of awareness during these blackouts. The general state of mind of Eve White deteriorated and confinement was considered. It became easier for the therapist to call up whichever personality he wanted to examine, and childhood experiences were investigated under hypnosis. During one such episode, Eve White appeared to relax into a sleepy state. After a while her eyes opened and she stared blankly around the room before looking at the therapist and saying: 'Who are you?' It appeared that a third personality had emerged who called herself Jane. This new character had full awareness of the other two, but neither of them could be aware of her.

The three personalities were subjected to *electroencephalogram* studies (EEG; see the study by Dement & Kleitman, 1957, Chapter 6 of this volume), and it was possible to make a clear distinction between the readings of Eve Black and the other two personalities.

The therapy then continued of the three women in the same body. To the therapists, it appeared that Jane was the person most likely to bring a solution to the troubled mind, and that her growing dominance over the other personalities appeared to be an appropriate resolution. However, they point out that 'we have not judged ourselves as wise enough to make active decisions' about how the drama should develop, and they note the moral problems with 'killing' one or more of the personalities.

DISCUSSION

What does this all mean? Could the therapists have been conned by a successful actress? They assert that the performance could not have

continued so long and so consistently. Was the woman psychotic? The answer appears to be 'no', since she showed no other symptoms of psychosis. Thigpen and Cleckley ask us to judge whether they became so involved that they lost their sense of judgement and overdramatised the result.

They remained convinced that they had witnessed three personalities within the same body. They noted that this observation created as many problems as it solved, not least of which was the question of what we mean by *personality*. In everyday speech we refer to dramatic changes in personality with phrases like 'he's a new man' or 'she's not herself' or 'he's been re-born.' So, maybe our personalities are not as fixed or stable as we like to believe.

Thigpen and Cleckley finished their account with a plea for psychiatry and psychology to consider a wider range of behavioural and experiential phenomena, even when they do not fit into established theories.

A postscript to this remarkable story came in the revelation in 1975 by Eve that she had experienced many other personalities before the original therapy and after it. She recalled a total of 22 and suggested that the fragmentation of her personality had been to protect herself from things she could not bear.

KEY WORDS

abnormality
case study
electroencephalogram
hypnosis

multiple personality
psychological tests
psychosis
Rorschach ink-blot

QUESTIONS

- 1 What were the main differences between Eve White and Eve Black?
- 2 What is the difference between multiple personality and schizophrenia?
- 3 Give some examples of the therapists' involvement with their patient.
- 4 What problems with the case study method does this study highlight?

Suggested Answers start at p. 450