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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

Martha Stout has written a cogent, eminently readable book on the wide range of dissociative reactions we have to different stimuli, providing meaningful insight into the behavior of ourselves and those around us. We are all a little bit crazy, she declares. This book was something of an eye opener for me, as I had never considered dissociation as a common condition in society.

Dissociation is actually a natural survival mechanism that has helped man survive for thousands of years on this planet; in cases of extreme, disturbing stimuli, the human mind may be unable to handle what it is witnessing, so it compartmentalizes the trauma into self-contained groupings within it. The person may withdraw his/her own awareness from the situation at hand, and he/she may well have no conscious memory of it after the fact. The effects of significant trauma cannot be self-contained in such a way forever, though, and so eventually the individual begins having nightmares or flashbacks, begins to space out or lose himself/herself at different times, exhibits dramatic mood swings, etc. In the most serious cases, the person may well harm himself or someone else, transform into a completely new person, lose control of his own conscious self, or exhibit what used to be called multiple personalities. It has been my understanding for some time that the number of actual multiple personality cases is extremely small, but Stout points to a small but significant number of cases of dissociative identity disorder (DID), an unknown number of which go undiagnosed. Pointing to vivid examples from her own case files as well as anecdotal accounts of nonprofessional acquaintances, Stout identifies the points along the dissociative spectrum.

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