

An Incidence of Shared Identity Dissociation Disorder (IDD) in an Adult Male and Female

by Arvid M. Paternoster, M.D.

Ed elli avea del cul fatto trombetta.

—Dante, *Inferno*¹

Randy T., a white male in his early forties, was referred to me by a friend of his wife's upon his own request for medical advice concerning the sudden onset of severe dissociative dementia. The first symptoms followed an incident in which Randy shot and killed **Charles W.**, the husband of **Renée W.**, the woman with whom he was secretly involved in an adulterous relationship. The death was ruled a justifiable homicide in self-defense, since it was determined that the enraged husband had approached Randy with a gun on a public street with the intent to shoot him; Randy attempted to disarm the man, and in the course of a violent struggle, the husband was fatally shot. Because Randy was the highly regarded founder of a prosperous software company, and the man's wife was his executive assistant, the case received a great deal of notoriety in the press and media.²

I first saw the patient in mid-May of 1998, and thereafter on a weekly basis for the next six months, our relationship ending abruptly in October when Randy was arrested in Paris for the murder of a French prostitute and her pimp, apparently, as some have said, indicating that six months of therapy had been for naught—a proposition I will demonstrate in this paper as premature, if not unwarranted.

During our first session, the patient was extremely agitated and confused. His chief complaint was that ever since the shooting, he had found himself “trapped” in another man's body. It soon became

clear to me that this was not Randy that I was talking to but Charles W., the man he had shot. I managed to calm the patient down through a series of questions, many of which he had difficulty answering, especially if they involved the issue of his identity—something he referred to as “trouble with pronouns.” I was soon able to determine that the original personality of Randy had effectively vanished and had, in the patient’s mind, been entirely replaced by Charles’s.

Our first session ended inconclusively and on a most unsatisfactory note. As a means of allaying his feelings of fear and panic, I endeavored to explain to Randy my initial understanding of his condition, namely, that he appeared to suffer from a dissociative identity syndrome brought on by the traumatic experience of killing another man. I explained that I was optimistic that the condition was not only treatable but that the odds favored an eventual cure.

Randy considered what I had told him and then responded that rather than feel relieved by my prognosis, he felt increased anxiety, since a cure surely meant the departure of the Charles personality and the return of the Randy personality, requiring him, in his words, “to die again.”

I indicated to him that my goal was not the obliteration of Charles’s personality but the reintegration of a personality that had become fragmented and separated. Randy was not reassured by this diagnosis, and I assumed he would not return for further treatment. However, several days later, he called to say that he wished to talk to me again and formally begin a series of weekly sessions. To my surprise, at the second session, the Randy T. personality emerged and conversed with me through the entire hour. For the six months of our sessions that followed, it was always the Randy personality I dealt with; the Charles personality never again put in an appearance. From what I was able to gather, Randy remained entirely in the background except for his sessions with me, although it soon

Psychiatric Quarterly

became clear that aspects of his personality over a period of time surreptitiously filtered into and colored Charles's personality.

Randy was born in 1954, in a mid-sized Massachusetts town near Boston, to Norma and Bernard Flutz, the elder of two children. His father, who suffered from chronic alcoholism, worked in a circus troupe as an aerialist ("The Flying Flutzes"). With Bernard Flutz frequently out of work (either because of his alcoholism or because of a back injury he had suffered in a trapeze fall), the family was severely impoverished. After years of domestic strife, Norma abandoned her family when Randy was twelve years old and set off for a distant state with another man, an itinerant Bible salesman. Randy never saw his mother again. She and her lover later committed suicide by lying down on railroad tracks, their dismembered bodies discovered by schoolchildren, three of whom achieved some notoriety in the local press by taking several of the smaller pieces of limbs home with them.

Randy, devastated by losing his mother and what he termed her "betrayal," saw ahead of him nothing but a life of poverty, suffering, and disappointment. Always the best student in his class, he lost interest in his studies and began skipping school and associating with a gang of toughs called the Aqua Rats, who wore aquamarine tee-shirts, required their members to answer questions in the affirmative with the word "yowza," and who specialized in vandalism and graffiti. In the depths of his despair, he contemplated suicide.

It was in this troubled state that during his freshman year of high school he met a fellow student, **Helena S.**, the daughter of a bank president and one of the town's leading citizens. It was Helena who convinced Randy that he needed to take charge of his life and do something with himself. She brought him home to meet her parents and for the first time exposed him to the world of wealth and privilege. Helena's parents, especially her mother, treated Randy uncommonly well and took an interest in his situation, giving him advice

Psychiatric Quarterly

and helping him out in any way they could, short of putting dollar bills in his pockets. Randy made up his mind that his goal in life was to attain the same level of prosperity and influence as Helena's family enjoyed.

Over the next several months, his relationship with Helena changed. What began as a friendship rapidly evolved into a romance. Randy was sure that Helena was the "love of [his] life" and that she would at some point (perhaps when he obtained his first professional job) become his wife. But such an outcome was not to be. Just as the school year was about to end, Helena informed Randy that they would have to break up. She told him that she no longer felt the same way about him. He asked her why. At first she would not tell him, but when he persisted, she blurted out that she had discovered that he had not only been cheating on her but that the person in question was her own mother. She could never trust him again, she said. Their relationship was over.

Randy was devastated by a profound sense of loss, abandonment, and feelings of insignificance. A suicidal gloom fell over him, made even worse when he discovered that Helena had taken up with another boy, the son of an industrialist. Randy eventually "got over" his loss with the help of Helena's mother, who persuaded him to run off with her to California, where the two joined a desert commune founded by the survivalist and tattoo artist Henderson "Bee Bop" Jones, sharing a school-bus domicile with Jones and his then common-law wife Bambi Lombardo.

Randy remained at the commune for six months until it became known that Bambi was pregnant with his child. Warned by Bambi that "Bee Bop" was coming for him armed with a shotgun, Randy made his escape on Bambi's motorcycle, with enraged husband in hot pursuit. The chase ended in Watsonville when Randy was stopped and arrested by the town sheriff. Returned home, Randy discovered that in his absence his father had remarried a former

Psychiatric Quarterly

waitress named Antonia Arbuckle, a plain middle-aged, largish divorcee whose charms entirely resided in the ten-million-dollar nest egg she had acquired from the state lottery. The small two-bedroom bungalow that Randy had left when he had run off with Helena's mother had now been replaced by a ten-bedroom mansion with a swimming pool, tennis court, and horse stable. Back in high school, Randy hoped that he might renew his love affair with Helena, but it was never to be.

"Stay away from me, you sick fuck," she liked to say.

Randy graduated near the top of his high school class and went on to study at a distinguished private university in the Boston area, where he majored in history. Helena attended Julliard in New York and broke up with the industrialist's son. She eventually married **Richard S.**, a man ten years her senior and, at the time, married to someone else.

As soon as Randy graduated from college, he changed his name from Flutz to one with an Anglo-Saxon derivation. He took an entry-level marketing job with a high-technology company in Cambridge and rapidly rose through the ranks. After ten years at this firm, he went on to found his own company, rapidly making it one of the most successful start-ups in the country. Still a relatively young man in his early forties, he had not only accumulated a sizeable fortune but had achieved a national reputation as an astute business leader and technology visionary.

Randy had attained his childhood ambition of becoming a man of wealth and influence and yet remained unfulfilled. With the goal of his life reached, what was he to do next? This question, I believe, lay at the heart of his discontent and engendered once again those feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt that had plagued him as a child. Despite all his best efforts, happiness had again eluded him. Perhaps he was incapable of being happy? Or perhaps he had chosen the wrong goal? In any case, he felt something was fundamentally

wrong.

He had married in his mid-thirties but the marriage foundered when Randy continued to seek out other women with the same enthusiasm and frequency that had characterized his pre-married life. Randy admitted that the wound that Helena had caused had never healed. He said: "I was never going to let another woman hurt me again. And I was going to avenge that hurt by hurting other women."

Randy was only partly right in his self-diagnosis. In fact, it was the rejection by Helena, combined with the abandonment by his mother when he was a child, that defined his misogynist attitude and subsequent satyriacal behaviors. Whatever pangs of conscience or feelings of guilt he might have felt were effectively suppressed by the same Herculean willpower that had made him such a financial success. It's impossible to say what exactly it was that caused that defense mechanism to break down, but Randy's affair with Charles's wife set the stage for it. Perhaps the contradictions of his life had become impossible to handle, so that when he met Charles at one of his company's parties, he found himself strongly identifying with the man, for Charles was exactly what Randy would have been had he not dedicated all his efforts to rising far above the challenging circumstances of his early life, and by an exercise of pure will made himself into "the kind of man [he] wanted to be."

Like Randy, Charles had been a gifted student who had a particular affinity for history. Highly intelligent, he was nevertheless deficient in the ambition and overwhelming desire required to succeed in the world, in good part because he had no idea what he wanted to succeed at. He felt helplessly trapped by his limitations and had no faith in himself to create an improved persona that could be substituted for the skeptical, fearful, doubting man that he believed himself to be. All of this came to a head in his wife's infidelity and in his termination from his job for writing and distributing a satirical press release. The first confirmed his failure as

Psychiatric Quarterly

a husband, the second his failure as a professional man.

Randy's gift, which Charles lacked, was an almost superhuman ability to create exactly the kind of persona required to achieve success. Charles had no desire to become anything other than what he was. Any understanding of how to be successful eluded him, and he came to believe that not only was he incapable of attaining success, but that even if he somehow managed to do it, it would destroy him. Instead, he followed the advice of Joseph Campbell, "Follow your bliss." In the end, he followed it all the way to that Cambridge street where he met his death by a bullet fired from his own gun. So much, if I may offer a personal critique, for the "wisdom" of Joseph Campbell.

Having identified himself with Charles in a highly personal way, Randy must have found himself feeling like both a victimizer and a victim. He had taken away a man's wife in the same way a man had taken away his mother and the only girl he had ever loved. As he and Charles struggled for Charles's gun, Randy was, in effect, struggling with himself. The gun went off, and Charles was killed. The worst had happened. Randy had fully become the man he had always hated. It was an outcome he was unwilling to live with, and so in an instant of overwhelming regret and self-loathing, he *became* Charles. The Randy personality was banished to the oblivion of his unconscious, and the Charles personality took over.

Self-Reinforcing Delusion

At this point, the case becomes far more complex when Randy meets a woman who happens to suffer from a diagnosis of IDD virtually identical to his. The result in both subjects is a self-reinforcing mechanism in which their delusions are more firmly solidified and confirmed than ever before.

Four months into his treatment, Randy, acting under the influ-

Psychiatric Quarterly

ence of the Charles personality, attended a meeting of people apparently symptomatic of IDD who rejected any diagnosis of mental dysfunction and instead were convinced that one of their personalities was actually an “exiled” alien from another planet—a typical denial mechanism frequently seen in such cases. At one of these meetings he met a woman who called herself **Serena** and who firmly believed she was an alien exile. As it turned out, Serena was actually the recessive secondary personality of a woman named **Veronique P.**, who made her living as a strip-club dancer and prostitute.

During our sessions at this time, I had to exert considerable vigilance to keep from becoming totally disoriented by Randy’s point of view. Veronique was a stranger to him and, thus so was the Serena personality. Moreover, Randy never overtly interacted with Serena. It was Charles who met her when she came to interview for a job at Randy’s company, and it was Charles who attended the meeting of the “exiled aliens” and subsequently fell in love with her. This love affair blossomed against the strenuous objections of Veronique, who was then involved with a man of middle-eastern descent, her boyfriend and procurer.

As Charles discovered, the Serena personality was the exact opposite of Veronique’s. Like Charles himself, she was killed by her “host”—in her case, in an automobile accident. A cellist in a symphony orchestra, Serena was married to **Richard S.** and had two children. Unlike Charles, who very much appreciated having a much better life in another body, Serena despised her condition and saw it as a form of hellish imprisonment.

Not long after meeting her, Charles hired an investigator and learned the identity of Serena, who unbeknownst to Charles was Helena, the girl Randy had fallen in love with in high school. When her true identity became known to him, Randy chose to do nothing. As Randy explained to me: “I assumed that whatever previous relationship she’d had must have failed and that she had come to my

Psychiatric Quarterly

company to see if I might have changed. What she found was that I *had* changed. But that changed personality wasn't me, it was Charles. What was I to do? There was no way I could reveal myself to her without driving her away again. So I let Charles fall in love." A remarkable statement, indicative of the depth of pathology at work here.

As far as Charles was concerned, Randy no longer existed. In fact, Randy was able to exercise limited action during his sessions with me and possessed relatively unlimited perceptive abilities. Not having examined Veronique, I can only assume that Serena, as the recessive personality like Randy, had limited action capability, but unlike him had extensive collaborative ability. I have insufficient knowledge to say exactly what her perceptive capabilities were, but they do not seem as extensive as Randy's.

Despite these overt and apparently rigid demarcations between dominant and recessive personalities, there was a considerable amount of subterranean leakage from one personality to another. I saw this quite clearly in the subversive influence Randy came to have over Charles. Something similar must have been going on with Veronique, but once again, lacking direct contact with her, I cannot make a definitive determination. I will have more to say on this topic shortly.

As we consider the interactions of these four personalities, we must always keep in mind the great difference between what the personalities believed and what was actually true. For example, Randy believed that Serena refused to identify herself to him because of her previously unhappy experience with him when they were dating in high school. In fact, Serena, as an alternate personality of Veronique, had never actually had that experience because she was not, and had never been, Helena. It was Veronique who adopted the personality of Helena, building on the characteristics she had picked up during her affair with Helena's husband, Richard S. Similarly, it was Randy

Psychiatric Quarterly

who adopted the personality of Charles, based on the information he had very likely obtained from his adulterous relationship with Charles's wife Renée. *It is important to note that as far as Randy was concerned both Charles and Serena were mostly constructs of his schizoid imagination, substantially different from the actual Charles and Serena.*

The question one must ask, then, is what unconscious power, what motivation, engendered his subsequent perceptions and behaviors? At the risk of sounding simplistic, I must say that I believe it was essentially guilt—the guilt and accompanying remorse for having killed a man—Charles Weed, his lover's husband. The trauma of that deed, exacerbated by the childhood traumas mentioned earlier, had the effect of cleaving his personality in two: the amoral, confident, womanizing, power-loving man of action remained as “Randy,” while the sensitive, questioning, self-doubting, self-destructive man of thought became “personified” in “Charles.” No doubt a similar situation prevailed with “Veronique”: the solipsistic, antisocial, or aggressive traits were separated off from the altruistic, empathetic, and passive ones, and each was embodied in its own personality so as to better engage with and overcome the other.

Conflict and Resolution

Typically in cases of IDD, there is extensive collaboration between the personalities, but sometimes there is conflict or even a bitter rivalry, as in the relationship between Veronique and Serena. In the interactions of Randy and Veronique, we have a rather more complex situation. There was an intense conflict between Charles and Veronique and what turned out to be a love affair between Charles and Serena. This disparity proved to have disastrous consequences. With Veronique refusing to give Charles access to Serena, Charles opted for the extreme but only possible solution—eliminating Veronique by killing her.

How is Charles able to justify such an action? To answer that

question, we must first understand the role that the book *The Exile's Handbook* played in their lives. Written in 1938 by Benno Frank, *The Exile's Handbook* is a novel about a superior race of beings from the planet T4, who after putting down a rebellion, send their unrepentant rebels to Earth where they are "exiled" in the hosts of various human individuals.³ At some point called the "Release," the "Tiforian" exiles would be extracted from their hosts and returned home to T4. In a sense, the book is a repackaging of Christian apocalyptic ideas and Gnostic theology in science fiction form. From Christianity Benno Frank took the belief that the souls of the redeemed would be raised to heaven in the "Rapture." From Gnosticism, he borrowed the notion that all human beings were the spiritual "children of light" imprisoned in the darkness of the material world, waiting to be raised and reunited with God himself.⁴

For Serena, the book, which is actually an attack against wish-fulfilling religion, blind faith, and belief in mythologies, was a kind of Bible that offered her the hope of one day casting off the bullying Veronique and living an autonomous life on the planet T4. Charles, on the other hand, saw the book in its true light and rejected the idea that it had an answer to their problems. In a sense, Charles and Serena are on opposite sides of the great Tiforian debate: orthodox Tiforians believed in science and the ultimate unification of every individual in an entity called Macromind, while the rebels believed in mythology and the invincible sanctity and autonomy of the individual. Charles and Serena were very aware of their differences on this matter but assumed, like the fictional couple, Bel and Nor, in *The Exile's Handbook*, love would ultimately unite them.

I did not have an opportunity to speak to Randy after he was arrested in France, but it seems to me, based on all our previous conversations, that it was out of love that the Charles personality committed murder. At the very end, Charles must have acquiesced to Serena's belief. His love overmastered his reason, and so he killed

Veronique in order to set Serena free. But let's not forget that Charles and Serena are not all there is to these individuals. Certainly Randy had an important, if not crucial, role to play, although not an overt one, in resolving the inherent conflict between the two individuals. Ultimately, Randy was the controlling intelligence, whether he exerted his influence directly or indirectly. I have no doubt that in this final terrible act of murder, we can detect the ramifications of that failed relationship that Randy and Helena had in high school. If we read between the lines of the testimony given at the murder trial, it is clear that, in the end, Charles was only Randy's agent in doing what had to be done: killing his beloved Helena to save her, killing her to make her his own.

The result, in the end, was a tripartite consciousness, with the constituent personalities representing three collections of traits found in varying proportions in every human being. Freud had three broad groupings and called them the id, ego, and superego. Other researchers have come up with different names and different configurations. I have no intention of proposing yet another theory of human psychology; nor do I believe that there exist universal "components" of the human personality. The brain is no doubt made up of successively evolved constituent parts, with primitive organs overlaid by more advanced ones, adding the higher capabilities we associate with human consciousness. But these merely form the framework upon which the personality is built. It helps to imagine the personality as a three-dimensional construct in which the surface area contains the capability for conscious thought, while the deeper, inner, areas are the sites where unconscious processing takes place.

We now believe that under conditions of extraordinary stress, the personality-construct can fracture along fault lines that differ from individual to individual, creating, if the stress is severe enough, distinct and separate identities. At first, a new identity may simply be a "satellite personality"—an identity still attached to the original

Psychiatric Quarterly

personality with only limited powers of awareness and action. The creation of personality satellites, some researchers have said, may be a fairly common phenomenon, with the condition occurring in over sixty percent of all adult men and women, and up to eighty to ninety percent in persons employed in corporate offices.

As progressive dissociative stress increases, the satellite becomes more autonomous, assuming the characteristics of a “hypomorphic personality”—a distinct but still dependant identity. The majority of IDD subjects fall into this category. Some display the characteristics of the “occluded personality,” as we have seen with Randy and Charles—the former working his will though the actions of the latter. Others are “recessive personalities,” as with Serena, whose will was subordinated to that of Veronique.

Finally, when dissociative stress reaches its ultimate strength, the hypomorph becomes a full-fledged “avatar”—a wholly autonomous identity, co-existent with the “mother” personality and forever incapable of reintegrating with it. It is my considered opinion that after the death of Veronique, Charles and Serena achieved this maximum state of separation from Randy’s consciousness.

The “Randy” personality emerged as the amoral hedonist, the solipsist, the man of action, the expedient opportunist who believes in nothing and everything, depending on what will produce the best results. “Charles” represented the rational idealist, the moralist, the altruist, the thinker, the skeptic who finds it nearly impossible to believe in anything. And “Serena” came to embody the passive follower, the redoubtable irrationalist, the invincible believer who is so afraid of doubt and uncertainty that both independent thought and action are avoided, and whose ego is like a black hole, accepting everything as true, including contradictions.

Let me stress the fact that only further observation and analysis of the subject can confirm whether or not true avatars have been created. I have not followed up with Randy since his arrest, trial, and

Psychiatric Quarterly

incarceration in a mental institution in France, so I have no idea what progress, if any, he has made in reintegrating his personality. I would guess that he has not made very much progress at all. Nor do I think that such a thing would be easily accomplished, even with intense psychotherapy. The status quo is too convenient, the constituent personalities too adversarial. Moreover, Randy has gotten so deeply involved with the drama inside his own head that, like an author who has become one of his own characters, he is reluctant to give up his godlike powers. Randy long ago found the real world impossible to live in. He preferred his imagination, where, no doubt, I'm a character there as well.

Workplace Personality Disorder

In my twenty-year study of IDD, I have discovered that the majority of these patients come from the world of business and commerce, as indeed Randy did. There is something about the office environment of the business world, composed of intricate hierarchies of managers and subordinates, that is highly conducive to disordered thinking, producing and harboring a surprisingly large number of untreated neurotics and other behavioral deviants. The American corporate office is a moral universe orthogonal to the one taught to us in our schools and enshrined in our political, religious, and ethical ideals. It is a circumscribed, atavistic space where aggressive, competitive instincts are allowed free reign; solipsism and greed are encouraged and rewarded; and dishonesty and deception are justified as expediencies to attain a greater good—production, profit, and the accumulation of capital.⁵

Although this is the unvarnished reality of office life, it is almost never presented, or even generally understood, in these terms. A certain arcane mix of euphemism, casuistry, and rationalization is used to manufacture the large number of “rose-colored glasses” that are the standard issue to those working in these environments. The glasses help but they cannot, in the end, resolve the inherent tension

Psychiatric Quarterly

between the two very different worlds that workers have to inhabit if they are to survive and prosper in a modern industrial state.

Randy entered business to maximize his power over others and achieve the wealth and status necessary to advance his own happiness. Ironically, business was the trigger that in the end brought about the disintegration of his identity. The same kind of antipathetic ruthlessness and immunity from moral qualms seen in Mafia dons is what is ideally required to prevail at the top of the corporate heap. Those lacking such “leadership” qualities become helpless victims of severe identity disorders who, like Randy T., often manage to remain undetected and untreated until some traumatic event finally exposes their heroic charade.

In his seminal paper, “An Approach to the Identification, Diagnosis, and Treatment of the Crypto-Neurotic,” Vannevar Nagel argues that vast numbers of people struggling with a variety of disabling identity syndromes “fly under the radar” of mental health professionals.⁶ “The corporations contain the largest population of untreated neurotics in our society,” Nagel wrote. “In its psychodynamics, the office milieu is a Dantean inferno where the condemned—torturers and tortured alike—exchange pain and punishment according to what they believe is a divinely ordained plan requiring them to endure eight hours of Hell for the unforgivable sin of worshipping Mammon.”⁷

Clearly more research is needed in this area, especially in the development of therapeutic interventions, although perhaps not the creation of a new class of psychotropic drugs, something Nagel suggested, as if the symptoms of an fundamentally diseased social order can or should be addressed by the mass medication of an entire population.

Notes

- ¹ From the last line of Canto XXI. This is the part of the *Inferno* where the treacherous are punished. A group of devils heads off to afflict more of the damned, now spending an eternity wallowing in boiling tar pits, with their leader signaling them by “making a trumpet out of his ass.”
- ² Dr. Paternoster used initials to refer to persons mentioned in the original published paper. Here the actual names have been substituted to avoid confusion.
- ³ Originally published in German as *Die Verbannung*. The author, a German mathematician, died in the Auschwitz concentration camp. The copyright on the German edition of the book lapsed and was not renewed.
- ⁴ According to the Gnostics, the material world is the creation of a semi-divine being known as the Demiurge, who is ignorant of the True God and believes that he himself is the only God. Human beings, who are his perishable material creation but contain a fragment of the divine essence, are ignorant of what they must do to achieve return to the True God after death. To help them, Messengers of the Light have come from the True God in order to assist them in their quest for the knowledge they will need to escape the grip of the Demiurge.
- ⁵ The flourishing of this “dark side” of capitalism had a profound impact on the history of the twentieth century. Marxist theory and its program to replace capitalism with a more ethical economic system was popular among certain intellectual classes precisely because of its utopian goal of aligning high standards of moral behavior with economic activity—an idealism later incorporated and perverted in Communism. The subsequent clash of ideologies in two world wars and their aftermath brought unprecedented ruin to Europe and much of Asia.
- ⁶ *Journal of Postmodern Psychiatry*, 1987, pp 84-105. Vannevar R. Nagel is the Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the University of Freedonia.
- ⁷ Mammon is commonly, but wrongly, associated with a demonic deity. It is simply the Aramaic word for “riches.” Christianity has long associated the acquisition of wealth with sinful behavior. Jesus himself

Psychiatric Quarterly

said: “No one can serve two masters.... You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:19-24).