

Introduction: Exploring Dissociation: Setting the Course

Exploring Dissociation. We have chosen a theme of *exploration* for this volume because successful efforts by dissociation researchers and theorists embody the spirit and skills of explorers. When envisioning an explorer embarking on a trek, one imagines important requisite skills and attitudes. Explorers must be well-grounded in history, drawing on the experience, maps, and map-making tools of those who travelled before. They require curiosity and compassion to motivate their efforts and temper their interpretation of new discoveries and patterning of new knowledge. Indeed, explorers must be open to surprises and to re-evaluating their maps, map-making tools, and travel plans. Thus, exploration is a transactional rather than linear process: new explorations shed new light on previous discoveries and ideas, just as previous ideas affect the development of new plans for future exploration.

As dissociation has garnered greater attention, explorations seeking to describe and understand dissociative phenomena have emerged rapidly in both research and treatment literatures. This surge follows a long history of clinicians and researchers seeking simply to evidence the existence of dissociative phenomena. Early endeavors to document dissociative phenomena were often based on case study descriptions and philosophical musings (see Rieber, 2002 for historical review). Remarkably, many of the ideas of the early theorists who grappled with

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dissociative phenomena (such as William James, Pierre Janet, G. E. Muller, and Morton Prince) are quite relevant today, including to this volume. For example, Janet talked about divided consciousness, Muller hypothesized inhibition as being related to dissociation, and Morton Prince postulated that more than one explanatory principle would be needed to account for the various facets of dissociation (Rieber, 2002). Thus, current explorations of dissociation can and should be informed by the work of theorists historically.

As the concept of dissociation has gained traction in mainstream psychology and psychiatry in recent years, empirical investigations have enhanced our understanding of the complexity of dissociative phenomena. In the face of these contemporary advancements, the field now faces many theoretical and empirical priorities that are central to continued progress. This volume addresses three of these inter-related priority areas, including efforts to: (1) define dissociation; (2) examine the development of dissociation in terms of both function and etiology; and (3) identify cognitive correlates of dissociation. We will address each of these priority areas in turn.

The first priority area focuses on defining dissociative phenomena. As research and clinical interest in dissociation has increased over the last twenty years, frameworks for organizing dissociative phenomena have developed, at times, in an ad hoc or piecemeal manner. The scope and specificity of the term dissociation has been affected by problems of both over- and under-inclusiveness (see van der Hart, Nihenhuis, Steele, & Brown, 2004). Definitional issues are of central importance to both theory-building and empirical investigations. As the field grows, delineating and clarifying definitional issues, such as whether dissociation is premised to be a state or trait, a continuum or a taxon, an outcome or a mechanism (DePrince & Freyd, in press), is of critical importance for several reasons. Theory building, assessment, and data interpretation all inherently depend on answers to each of those questions: is dissociation a state or trait, a continuum or taxon, an outcome or a mechanism, or some combination? In addition, issues of *construct* validity (i.e., are we measuring the construct, the whole construct and nothing but the construct) affect not only all stages of the research process, but also theory development. Further, only when we have a well-defined construct can we engage in the extraordinarily important work of testing and reconciling competing theories regarding the function, etiology and underlying mechanisms of dissociation. Thus, from early research design efforts up through data interpretation, definitional issues are a core concern.

The second priority area involves developmental issues about the function and etiology of dissociation. Views about the function and etiology of dissociation have expanded in recent years, requiring additional theoretical and empirical attention to distil and extend this literature. As we sort out the various facets and functions of dissociation, definitional issues influence how etiology and function are understood (i.e., whether dissociation is viewed as adaptive or maladaptive, pathological or normative). For example, if dissociation is defined as pathological, views of the function and etiology of dissociative experiences will be linked to that perspective, looking for explanations for a *problem*. In turn, how one views function and etiology acts as a compass for broader theorizing. Further, the framework used to conceptualize etiology acts as a sextant for understanding the role of development and dissociation (and vice versa). For example, to the extent that theorists assume dissociation may play a protective function for children in violent environments, theories about the etiology of symptoms will be tied to those environments. In turn, views of both etiology and function necessarily inform intervention theory and practice.

The third priority area involves identifying cognitive correlates of dissociation. Against the backdrop of developing tools to aid in differential diagnosis and burgeoning exploration into cognitive neuroscience of trauma, investigations into the cognitive correlates of dissociation are a rapidly evolving frontier. Cognitive research and data interpretation are (as all research is) influenced by the paradigm of the researcher. Thus, approaches to examining the cognitive correlates of dissociation tie back to the experimenters' views of the etiology and development of dissociation. For instance, to the extent that dissociative experiences are viewed as pathological in nature, investigations are more likely to focus on deficit-based outcomes. Likewise, to the extent that dissociation is viewed as protective and adaptive, investigations will be geared towards identifying strengths correlated with dissociation. A dialectical view—that dissociation may be both adaptive and harmful (see DePrince & Freyd, in press)—acknowledges both positive and negative correlates of dissociation. As researchers with diverse views about etiology and function of dissociation have ventured into cognitive research, both expected and unexpected findings have emerged. The studies in this volume highlight some interesting, and perhaps surprising, relationships between dissociation (or dissociative styles) and seemingly adaptive aspects of the cognitive flexibility.

Current Volume. Attending to the three priority areas reviewed above, this volume's chapters explore coordinates of definitions, func-

tion and etiology, and cognitive correlates of dissociation. Like explorers, the authors build on historical views while synthesizing past theory with contemporary research. Reflecting the spirit of curiosity and intrigue, several chapters in this volume report on unexpected findings regarding dissociation, particularly information processing alterations associated with dissociation. A transactional process is also evident in theoretical chapters that draw on previous theory to innovate and pattern new directions.

Volume Organization. This volume addresses three major issues in dissociation research and theory, respectively: definitions, development (both function and etiology), and cognitive correlates. Volume contributors include international experts on dissociation, cognition, development, and clinical science. This volume offers a compilation of theory and empirical research in a series of chapters that synthesize existing literature with advanced study. The contributors also pose innovative questions about correlates of dissociation. Across articles the contributors offer rich discussions of previous research to inform new viewpoints. This volume is poised to galvanize discussion about models of dissociation, particularly innovative views of dissociation, cognition and development.

Mapping Definitions. The first two chapters focus on defining dissociative phenomena. Brown's opens the volume by building on recent work in defining a bipartite model of dissociation. Expanding on Holmes' and colleagues (2005) model, Brown delineates two qualitatively distinct forms of dissociation: detachment and compartmentalization. These different phenomena are argued to have different mechanisms, base rates, and treatment implications. Dorahy's chapter extends an important discussion of definitional issues in the literature. Dorahy proposes that a dissociative processing style precedes dissociative experiences, and draws critical distinctions between cognitive styles, dissociative phenomena, and correlates of dissociative phenomena. Dorahy's article also raises important issues about the function of dissociation, particularly in the face of perceived threat.

Mapping Development. Extending themes about both function and etiology, chapters by Liotti, and by Chu and DePrince, address questions of developmental etiology. Liotti navigates through the attachment literature providing important etiological and intervention considerations. Chu and DePrince embark upon empirically investigating parenting (including parent dissociation and trauma exposure) and parenting behaviors that influence the intergenerational transmission of mothers' dissociation to children.

Mapping Cognitive Correlates. Finally, surprising consequences of dissociation are explored across three manuscripts: Holmes and colleagues, de Ruiter and colleagues, and Cromer and colleagues. Holmes and colleagues take the reader back to dissociation's early roots in hypnosis to experimentally test the impact of state dissociation on intrusive memories for a traumatic film. de Ruiter and collaborators utilize brain imaging experimental data to explore learning styles and cognitive elaboration in nonpathological dissociation. Venturing into relatively new territory, these studies add to only a handful of others (e.g., DePrince & Freyd, 1999; Elzinga, deBeurs, Sergeant, vanDyck, & Phaf, 2000) that document relative cognitive strengths associated with dissociation, versus *disabilities*. Finally, Cromer and colleagues extend the scope of their investigation of dissociation to children as young as 5 years old, finding that Muller's suggestion made over a century ago, that dissociation is related to inhibition, may indeed have roots in childhood.

Summary. This volume brings together researchers of many theoretical and empirical perspectives to comment on three central issues in the field through both theoretical and empirical papers. Together, these papers transact to inform, challenge, and synthesize ideas from each priority area (definition, development, and cognitive correlates). The chapters are by no means an exhaustive review of the exciting breadth and depth reflected in the dissociation literature; however, we hope these contributions will galvanize interest and discussion in pushing explorations of dissociation forward.

*Anne P. DePrince, PhD
Department of Psychology
University of Denver
Denver, CO 80208*

*Lisa DeMarni Cromer, PhD
Department of Psychology
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403*

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