

Summary: 28 April 2009 Workshop Meeting:

Dissociation: An Evening with Janet, Freud and Jung in their own Words

Moderated by Dr. Ken Kaplan.

Part 1 Janet and Freud

Janet's idea of dissociation was based on his study of hysteria in the 1880s. He saw dissociation as a parallel splitting of consciousness. This splitting resulted in subsystems of consciousness which he referred to as the subconscious. This consisted of subconscious fixed ideas that lacked a personal sense of self and was associated with strong feelings related to traumatic experiences. For Janet, if treatment represented a cure, it was not only a matter of awareness of the traumatic experience and expression of feelings, but also the complete resolution of the subconscious fixed ideas.

Freud and Breuer, in their paper on "Unconscious Ideas and Ideas Inadmissible to Consciousness – Splitting of the Mind", argued that unconscious ideas are often inadmissible to consciousness and therefore cannot be spoken of as a splitting of consciousness. They preferred the term splitting of mind. They also argued that not all hysterics have a splitting of consciousness as described by Janet. In Freud's paper, "The Neuro-psychoses of Defense", he elaborated that in addition to what he referred to as 'Hypnoid Hysteria', there was also a "Defense Hysteria". Here the splitting of the mind took place between the conscious and unconscious. In this form of hysteria, an anxiety or dread was associated with an unacceptable idea. The affect was split off from the idea and 'converted' and expressed as a symbolic somatic symptom. This served as a defense against the unacceptable idea. This contribution of Freud expanded the concept of Hysterical Neuroses to include a Dissociative Type and Conversion Type. By 1938, Freud returned to the topic of "Splitting of the Ego in the process of Defense". He stated it was important to return to the topic of splitting. Unfortunately this was an unfinished paper. Freud was correct in making this point and others (Klein, Kernberg, Winnicott and Bromberg) picked up on the topic of splitting after his death.

Janet – Freud discussion raises many questions: What do we mean by the concepts of dissociation, consciousness, unconscious, and splitting?