

Preface

Let me start by saying that I've had this bug, even as a child. I remember reading a personal biography that I wrote for a sixth grade homework assignment. There it was, plain as day. I wanted to be a psychologist! In my high school science fair, I won runner-up for my sensory deprivation experiments using an isolation chamber that my father helped me build. Even to this day, my former classmates remember me as the weird kid who ran the strange experiments on other students down in my "dungeon." Before I graduated, I was mentored by a prominent scientist, Dr. Jay Shirley, who pioneered research in the field of sensory deprivation. When I was 17, I spent one incredible summer floating in his sensory deprivation tanks and watching the brain waves of his sleeping subjects. The bug bit me hard and early. Of course, I'm referring to my intense desire to explore the depths of our human mind and our human experience.

In 1977, I completed my graduate program in personality at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. At that time, personality was viewed as consisting of the sum of relatively consistent traits. Since that time, my odyssey through various fields of study has given me a more complex and dynamic picture. I gradually came to view people as being a mosaic composition of sometimes conflicting self-parts. There were several experiences that promoted this evolution. My training in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) psychotherapy taught me about different types of memory and different types of learning. My training in the treatment of dissociative disorders increased my understanding of how personality is composed of an internal family of self-parts. For a number of years I independently studied both recent brain imaging works and decades of old Soviet research in reflexology and psychophysiology. I successfully used this information to evolve some of my techniques for treating trauma and dissociation. The Soviet research by Evgenii Nikolaevich Sokolov was an important early influence. Later influences include Hobart Mowrer's work on socialization, Michael Posner's work on attention, Michael Apter's Reversal Theory, and especially C. Robert Cloninger's work on personality and levels of consciousness.

All the while I studied personality, reflexes, and emotion, I also worked with couples and read the usual literature about relationships. Since emotions are reflexes, my background served me well by enabling me to see the underlying reasons why many couples develop emotional difficulties. I was also struck by how so much was missing from the literature about relationships. Few authors write about how

people can train their emotions over time. Most self-help authors recommend fast food strategies that purport quick and easy solutions. One popular author exhorted his readers to exorcise their “bad spirits” by choosing to just give them up. Very few of the authors are willing to say that some relationship problems can only be fixed with repetitive training. Other relationship problems require the more arduous task of integrating personality. Knowledge and will power alone are inadequate for many problems. However, that kind of honesty usually doesn’t sell many books.

I’ve come to believe that people can understand shame, inhibition, and reactive defenses without referring to them as “bad spirits.” There are better methods than willful exorcism for working with emotion. But how would I convey these dynamics and methods to readers such as you? That was my challenge in writing this book. I decided to adopt a vernacular style of writing, complete with slang, contractions, and self-disclosure. I even consciously violate some grammatical rules similar to the way I normally speak. My intent is to make you more comfortable to face some of the challenging insights that you might find a bit unsettling. I also hope that the cartoons, illustrations, stories and out-takes will provide you with some periodic relief from what is an inherently complex topic. We’re not going to take the fast food approach. Even though the title of this book uses a first aid metaphor, we’re going to be honest. Many problems can be helped quickly, but others require protracted care.

I should mention something about the therapy cases in this book. For obvious reasons, I couldn’t reveal any identifying information about my clients. I also couldn’t risk their emotional injury if they were to specifically identify themselves in the text. For these reasons, each case story isn’t real in the sense that it depicts a specific case. Most are “Frankensteined” together from several cases as well as my own personal material. The case material has been sufficiently mixed and shuffled so that my clients are well protected. However, the case stories in this book are *psychologically true* in that they closely resemble the stories and dynamics that I see in many couples.

I hope you find the book helpful and enjoyable.

- *Bryce Kaye*
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