



Chronic Traumatization and Dissociation of the Personality: Theory, Assessment, and Treatment

Ellert R.S. Nijenhuis Ph.D

June 15th & 16th, 2012

National Council for Voluntary Organisation London N1 9RL

In this workshop, Dr Ellert will present an introduction to the theory of structural dissociation and a psychology of action, and their application in the various treatment phases of chronically traumatized individuals. The theory hypothesizes that traumatisation divides the biopsychosocial system that constitutes an individual's personality.

The basic division is between two different types of dissociative subsystems or parts. As an 'apparently normal part of the personality', the individual avoids traumatic memories. Primarily mediated by action systems such as energy management, exploration, and reproduction, this part focuses on functioning in daily life and survival of the species. As an 'emotional part of the personality', the individual is fixated in traumatic memories and engages in animal-defence like reactions to major threat and attachment cry (i.e., survival of the individual).

In chronic traumatisation, structural dissociation becomes ever more complex and fixed. The workshop highlights the breakdown of integrative actions during traumatization that cause structural dissociation, describes mental and behavioural actions that maintain structural dissociation and emphasize integrative actions needed to resolve structural dissociation and become more adaptive in meeting daily life challenges.

Phase-oriented treatment is framed in terms of overcoming specific trauma-related phobias. Phase 1 is geared toward overcoming phobias of trauma-derived mental and behavioural actions, of dissociative parts of the personality, and of attachment and attachment loss with the therapist. Phase 2 is directed toward overcoming the phobia of traumatic memories, and phobias related to insecure attachment to perpetrator(s). In Phase 3, treatment is focused on overcoming phobias of normal life, healthy risk-taking and change, and intimacy. In clinical practice, these phases are flexible and recursive.

The workshop will include didactics on theory and a demonstration of some techniques using video presentations. Supportive research findings, including correlational, psychophysiological and neuroimaging studies will be presented and discussed.

Ellert R.S. Nijenhuis, Ph.D is a psychologist, psychotherapist, and researcher. He received his Ph.D. with the highest honors at the Medical Department of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam for his book: *Somatoform dissociation: Phenomena, measurement, and theoretical issues* [reprint: W.W. Norton, New York/London].

In 1998 the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (ISSTD) granted him the Morton Prince Award for Scientific Excellence for his scientific contributions; in 2000 the Pierre Janet



Writing Award; in 2002 the status of Fellow for his outstanding contributions to the diagnosis, treatment, research, and education in dissociative disorders; and in 2005, together with several of his colleagues, the David Caul Memorial Award for a paper on an innovative PET study of dissociative identity disorder.

He works at the Top Referent Trauma Center of Mental Health Care Drenthe, Assen, The Netherlands, where he engages in the diagnosis and treatment of severely traumatized patients. He performs his innovating scientific research at this hospital, and collaborates with the University of Groningen (Netherlands), the University of Zürich (Switzerland) and several clinics. His research addresses the psychology and psychobiology of chronic traumatization and dissociation.

He has written many clinical and scientific articles, book chapters, and some books, he is a reviewer of several professional journals, and he provides presentations and workshops at many international conferences. In 2003, he was granted the closing plenary at the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (Chicago) addressing the emerging psychobiology of trauma-related dissociation and dissociative disorders.

Dr Nijenhuis is a former Director of the Executive Council of the ISSTD. In 2004 Queen Beatrix from the Netherlands appointed him Knight in the Order of the Dutch Lion for his outstanding contributions to the study and treatment of chronically traumatized individuals. In 2005, together with Helga Matthess, he founded Psychotraumatology Institute Europe. PIE organizes workshops and courses with leaders in the field regarding the assessment and treatment of chronic traumatization.

November 2006 witnessed the release of the book *The haunted self: Structural dissociation and the treatment of chronic traumatization*, authored by Onno van der Hart, Ellert Nijenhuis and Kathy Steele, and published by W.W. Norton, New York/London. The authors were awarded ISSTD's Media Award for this work. According to Prof. Dr. Chris Brewin, the book is "brilliant," and Dr. Richard Kluft regards it as ".... a landmark contribution to the study of trauma and an instant classic in the study of dissociation and dissociative disorders."

For further information, go to <http://www.enijenhuis.nl/>.