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**Constructing multiple selves
in
a virtual landscape**

Dr Jo Woodiwiss

Outline of paper

- Context / Introduction
- Research x 2 – CSA / Multiple Personalities
- An Inner child / children
- Multiple personality – the ‘Experts’
- Living as a group
- Virtual landscapes
- A virtual world

Context / Introduction



- Social Science - Self as a project or work in progress
- Popular view - Self as a (static) inner core - can return to
- Self-help / healing / recovery lit - 'Contradictory Self' - core & project
- Accompanied by multiple selves
- Life with multiple personalities – quite isolated and solitary
- Internet – opened up new worlds to populate / explore / experience
- 2 Research projects 1. Self, Identity and Childhood Sexual Abuse
2. Multiple personalities on the Internet

Research – CSA Narratives

- women's use of narratives of childhood sexual abuse
- interviews with self identified (women) victims of CSA
- '*inner child*' - central to much recovered memory & recovery literature
- featured in accounts of majority of participants
- paper just draws on material related to the inner child – or for some women – inner children

Research – Multiple personalities

- Web based research – work in progress
- Internet - variety of sites designed for / by those who share their lives with a number of inner personalities
- Types of sites, how they work, how they might be used
- Central to research - idea of Identity / personality
- How identities might be explored / played out in different landscapes

An inner personality: The Inner child

- Split at time of abuse - holds knowledge of the abuse
- Stuck at age abuse occurred—trapped with feelings/emotions
- Needs ‘re-parenting’ to ‘heal’ & grow up
- Literature - ways to contact inner child / help her heal
- Including – enabling her to be a child and have fun
 - reading her stories / holding parties / buying her (children’s) presents / teddy bears etc
- Enables adult or ‘host’ to participate in behaviours & express aspects of self that would otherwise be difficult

Inner child - Examples

- An important outlet or mechanism through to participate more fully in life.
 - *It's something I have to work through as well. Because I need to be able to play, I want to be able to play. I want to be able to erm... to go into an imaginary world and really feel things when I want to. (Beccy)*
 - *I'll put on music that I like and I'll have a wee dance about the place and just feel happy. (Fiona)*
 - *I used to have a colouring in book and crayons and just lie on the floor and colour in. I'd feel quite calm and happy doing that. (Fiona)*

- *I said no because if you're trying to acknowledge somebody at a certain age then you're looking at that person as an individual and to me that usually means looking at it and giving it personality or a name and something like that. Now if you have five or six or eight of them it's going to get rather crowded. That's when I realised, when I'd given them names and things like that and I thought...it was getting me crazy it was like a multiple personality and I thought no, I'm stopping this now. (Jay)*

Multiple personalities and the 'Experts'

- Discourse of CSA: focus on accessing knowledge
- World of multiplicity: focus on identifying personalities
- Agreement: hypnosis significant in 'diagnosis'/'treatment'
 - Encourage personalities to come forward
 - Creation of Multiple personalities
- Other ways for creation of alternative personalities
 - active role for 'host' or 'front' personality.
- Past: impetus towards integration.
- Present: living as a group - more important

Living as a group

- Identified hundreds of ‘ alters’ – contacted over 20
- Names, presents (silver jewellery), cards, wrote poems
- Celebrated ‘birthdays’ – keeping each inner child special
- Not generous to herself – but generous to inner children
- Through inner children - participate in activities, express thoughts or feelings
- Characteristics of a family or group of friends

A very private world

- *You get used to existing as part of a group. Even the front personality gets used to existing as part of a group.*
(Anne)
- Little interaction with others / the outside world
- Read books, subscribed to newsletters, spoke to 'help lines'

You're almost in touch with the people out there
(Anne)

From Private to public



- Interaction
- New personalities
- New ways for those personalities to exist /live
- New relationships –
 - Between the host and her inner personalities
 - Among different personalities within a ‘group’
 - Between different personalities from different groups
- Changed the nature of multiple personalities

Virtual landscapes

- Type 'Multiple personalities on line support':
- 1,450,000 sites came up
 - information sites
 - support sites
 - communities of 'likeminded' people
 - umbrella sites
 - information & support sites
- Forums and chat rooms
- Different personalities can go, engage in activities and interact with other personalities

Coping...

- Don't need to register
- You don't need a history
- In top 10 of Google search
- **cope with** life with multiple personalities.
- Not to explore the past or the creation of personalities
- A site for the present –
- For those who do not know - or are unsure
- There are no pre requisites for joining or engaging with this site.

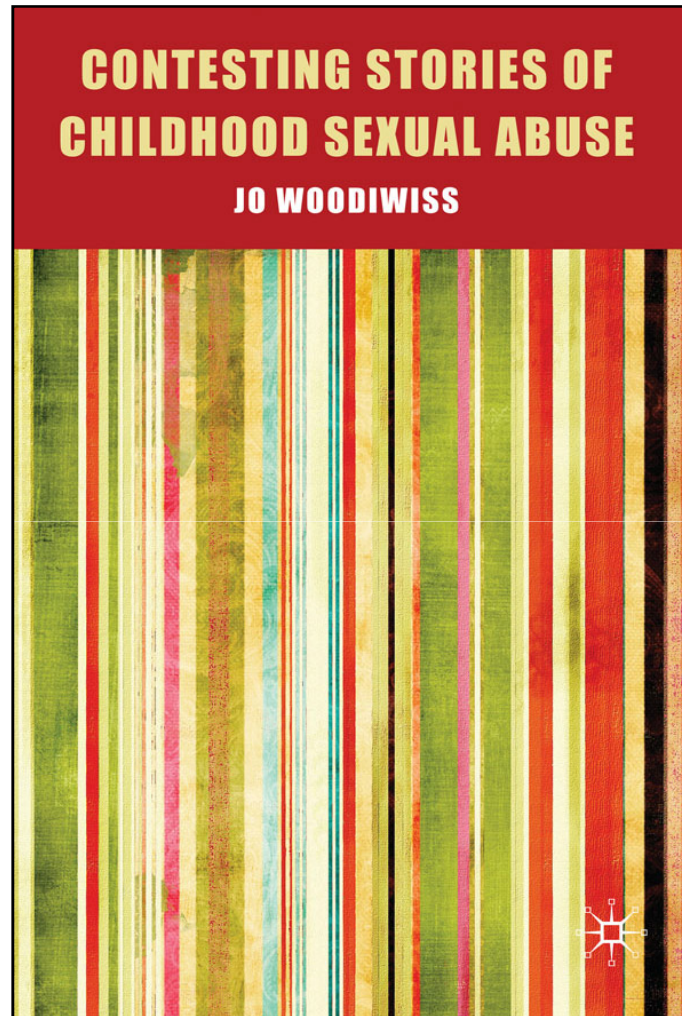
Coping...

‘there is no place to write our detailed histories and stories about trauma. We are focused more on how we cope today’

In, and for, the (virtual) present

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- Personalities exist in, and for, the (virtual) present
- Free from demands / pressures of other worlds
- Experiment - who they are / ways of being
- Engage with otherwise difficult activities (e.g. 'fun')
- Expression / articulation of different thoughts & feelings
- Not tied to a past
- Not constrained by the lack of a past



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