

## Multiple personality: The three faces of Eve

*A case of multiple personality. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 49, 135-51.*

Thigpen & Cleckley (1954)

### Introduction / Background

There is something interesting about the idea of several personalities lodged in one body and evidence suggests that this does 'very rarely' happen. The question this poses for us is 'What is personality?' Are we all, to a greater or lesser extent, more than one self? After all, we all sometimes have the feeling that 'I was not being myself today'. However, personality disorders are different, and some psychologists suggest that one doesn't recover from a personality disorder, but instead learns to cope with it.

This case study looks at one individual who developed a way of coping which was extremely rare. The case study approach is usually used when psychologists study aspects of behaviour which are unusual, and case studies have the advantage of collecting rich, qualitative data as they focus on the details of one particular case. This case study took place over 14 months, comprising over 100 hours of therapy, in a series of interviews.



### The case study and the participant

A 25-year-old married woman given the name 'Eve White'. She had been experiencing 'severe and blinding headaches' and unexplained blackouts - periods of time when she couldn't remember what she had done. There appeared to be no physical cause for her symptoms and her doctor referred her to a psychiatrist.

During early interviews, the psychiatrist discussed Eve's emotional difficulties with her and her symptoms appeared to improve. She did experience one blackout during this period, but was able, when hypnotised, to recall what happened during the blackout. It seemed as if she might be getting better.

### The appearance of Eve Black

Then a letter arrived, but the letter ended with a few lines written in quite a different handwriting. On her next visit to the psychiatrist, Eve White said she had started a letter but never sent it. During this interview she became agitated and finally asked if hearing voices was a sign of insanity. She put her hands to her head as if in pain and, after a moment, a newcomer appeared who was a complete contrast to Eve White. She was mischievous and carefree, and introduced herself as Eve Black. Thigpen & Cleckley continued to interview the two Eves, recording the details of her/their thoughts and behaviour.

### Eve Black's life history

It appeared that Eve Black had been around since Eve's early childhood but Eve White had no knowledge of her existence. Eve Black was aware of all that Eve White did but the reverse was not true. Eve Black was quite scornful of Eve White's emotional problems and of Eve White's concern for her 4-year-old child. She claimed that during childhood she often emerged to play pranks, for which Eve White took the 'blame'. Eve White did confirm many of the episodes by recalling times when she was inexplicably punished. Her parents and husband also confirmed Eve Black's stories. Eve Black denied any association with the child or the husband, and their first knowledge of her existence was when a meeting was arranged in the psychiatrist's office. Eve Black's explanation was that she was able to selectively erase items from Eve White's memory. This was confirmed by several experiments tried by the psychiatrist. Eve Black was very helpful to the psychiatrists but gave some co-operation because otherwise they suggested they would limit the extent to which she was 'allowed out'. Even though the psychiatrist had enabled Eve Black to be able to 'take over' more easily than before, Eve White was at times able to suppress her completely but Eve Black made her presence known through voices and headaches.

### Psychological tests

Psychometric tests were used to compare Eve White and Eve Black. IQ tests showed that Eve White had an IQ score of 110 and a high memory function. Eve Black scored 104 with a lower memory function.

Eve White was found to be emotionally repressed. Eve Black displayed a tendency to regress to more childlike behaviour. Eve Black was described as having an extrovert personality, but Eve White was described as introvert. Eve White was also the only one who could be hypnotised.

Psychological tests revealed further differences between Eve White and Black.

Eve White found it hard to express hostility towards her own mother but Eve Black could. Eve Black also expressed intolerance of Eve White's marital predicament. Eve White showed care and tolerance, whereas Eve Black was intolerant and self-centred.

### Eight months into therapy

During the course of therapy Eve White decided to leave her husband and her daughter went to live with her grandparents. The headaches and voices disappeared. Then, after 8 months, the situation changed for the worse, her headaches and blackouts returned and she became very distressed.

### The appearance of Jane

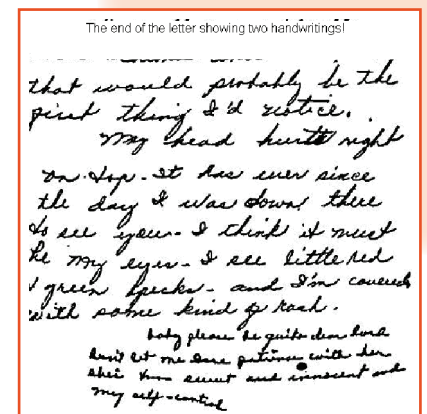
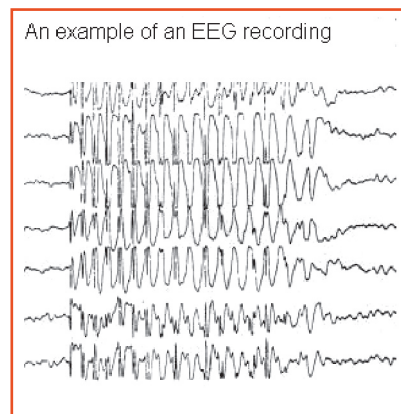
During one session of hypnosis Eve White stopped talking, looked around and said to the therapist 'Who are you?' This new person called herself Jane. Jane was more mature and confident than Eve White but not difficult like Eve Black.

### The three personalities

Jane was aware of everything the other two did but she did not have access to past memories.

A recording was made of the brain waves off all three personalities. This was done using an electroencephalogram (EEG). EEGs can show differences in states of awareness, and 'mood' is also reflected in brain waves. Eve Black's EEG was the most tense and restless and was borderline normal whereas the other two were clearly normal. This suggests the personalities weren't simply different subjective states but that there were objective differences as well.

Jane gradually 'took over' from Eve White, helping her at work and showing care and compassion for her little girl. Thigpen and Cleckley felt that Jane could provide the satisfactory reintegration of Eve's personality.



### Conclusions

Perhaps the patient was 'acting' but the fact that the therapy took place over such a prolonged period makes this doubtful. It might be suggested that Eve White was suffering from schizophrenia, though many of the appropriate symptoms were absent. If it was a case of multiple personality then it is impossible to know whether one personality had split into three, or the three had always been present.

Until this case history was presented, multiple personality had a rather mythical status in psychiatry. The details of the three Eves gave the illness a more respected status. Thigpen and Cleckley were convinced that they had witnessed a case of Multiple Personality, a very rare disorder.

The case study was popularised by a film - *The three faces of Eve* with Joanne Woodward. In 1975 the real Eve came forward, Mrs. Chris Sizemore. She reported that other personalities had emerged after she stopped seeing Thigpen & Cleckley, but that she gradually learned to assimilate all her separate selves to successfully cope with the pressures of life.