

## B O O K R E V I E W

***Intensive Psychotherapy for  
Persistent Dissociative Processes:  
The Fear of Feeling Real***

By Richard Chefetz

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462 pages, including Index

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The engaging *Intensive Psychotherapy for Persistent Dissociative Processes* brings together theory, practical wisdom, and rich clinical illustrations. A psychiatrist in private practice, Richard Chefetz has robust professional credentials, including tenure as President of the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation, and faculty member at the Washington School of Psychiatry.

This tome is written in a clear, almost conversational style, inviting readers to take an in-depth look at dissociative processes, often considered one of the more challenging areas of clinical work. Chefetz sets the tone in the preface, entitling it "Holding Hope." The friendly mode of writing counterbalances what the author describes in opening as "not an easy emotional read," further clarifying that the "subject matter is almost always invariably related to the horrors of severe interpersonal abuse." (p. vii)

A narrative tone also creates a reader-friendly platform to learn about basic concepts; dissociation is a normal state. "Dissociative process is something we use every day, as we unconsciously sort salience in the flow of unconsciously perceived mental input. Associative process alerts our awareness that something is worth noticing. Dissociation tells us when we need not pay any attention." (p. 1) The author further explains: "Subtle dissociative processes operating in tension with our more familiar associative processes can change our subjective experiences in ways that designed to protect us but might nevertheless end up imprisoning us..." (p. 32)

Chefetz identifies the multitude of ways that dissociative processes can present, persist, and interfere with a patient's life experiences. Information is offered in a logical and sequential order. Step by step, Chefetz addresses the constructs of healthy and unhealthy dissociation and generates building blocks for effective treatments. Examples illustrate the intrusive nature and subtle ways in which the process can undermine mental health. "When dissociative processes are overly active in a person's life, they create a burden that is palpable yet hidden from view." (p. 2) Well-chosen case anecdotes annotate concepts in generous detail. Chefetz's own interesting cases show how clinicians can work through complex cases to recognize and sort through dissociative elements, and begin to redirect resources in healing directions. The concepts are so thoroughly entwined with case examples, that the common gap between theory and practice dissipates.

Chefetz shows by example that we can reach beyond the limits of these disabling disorders. He offers a clear path of working through the uncertainty, ambiguity, and difficulties associated with complex cases. A wealth of knowledge appears within succinct descriptions: "What happens in dissociation is subtle on one hand and profound on the other. Dissociative process unlinks the elements of experience in such a way as to often leave us unaware that anything is broken." (p. 31) It is clear from case illustrations that Chefetz has a special talent for working with complex conditions, as well guiding less experienced clinicians. Reading this book, I felt the comfort of talking with a mentor about my own difficult or confusing cases.

*Intensive Psychotherapy for Persistent Dissociative Processes* is a detailed overview from a professional who clearly made an important contribution. Few resources on this topic rival this well-written book. Without hesitation, I recommend it to all clinicians who work with complex disorders. Through work done by Richard Chefetz, we can enhance our understanding and better serve those who seek help.