

BOOK REVIEW

Intensive Psychotherapy for Persistent Dissociative Processes by Richard Chefetz

WW Norton, New York 2015
hardcover ,
462 pages, including index

Written in an engaging style, *Intensive Psychotherapy for Persistent Dissociative Processes* brings theory together with 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, as well as being a faculty member in the Washington School of Psychiatry.

The 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 style 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." (page vii)

The narrative tone creates a reader-friendly platform to learn about basic concepts; dissociation is a normal state. "Dissociative process is something we use everyday 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." (page 1). As we read further the author explains that "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..." (page 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 treatment of limiting conditions. Examples illustrate the intrusive nature and the 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." (page 2). Well-chosen case anecdotes annotate concepts in generous detail. Using his own interesting cases, he shows how clinicians can work through complex cases to recognize, 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.

The content addresses natural tendencies, processes that occur within everyone and govern life's choices and behaviors. Attention is given to the breadth of information available about dissociative phenomena and to recent efforts at synthesizing a model for working with these conditions. Chefetz addresses the evolving science of neurobiology and provides understandable commentary what is now known of the brain's anatomy and functioning. The author's depth of knowledge shows in the framework he uses, and shows again in the detailed accounts of the way he works with specific patients. Solidly based on a psychodynamic orientation, he addresses the interface of dissociative processes with various therapeutic methodologies including the use of hypnosis. Each area is addressed in a scholarly manner that reflects serious attention to current and foundational literature. The preparation and research supporting his work is evident throughout. Many times, with the introduction of new concepts, Chefetz makes reference to seminal contributions.

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." (page 31). It is clear from his case illustrations that Chefetz has a special talent in working with complex conditions as well as for guiding less experienced clinicians to learn to appreciate easily overlooked nuances. As I read this book, I felt the comfort of a professional mentor available to talk over my own difficult or confusing cases.

Intensive Psychotherapy for Persistent Dissociative Processes is a detailed overview of the work of a man who clearly made an important contribution to understanding and working with dissociative processes. Few resources on this topic rival this well written, volume; without hesitation I recommend this book as resource for any clinician who works with complex trauma or with any other conditions associated with dissociative disorders. Through the work done by Richard Chefetz we can enhance our own understanding and better serve those who seek help.

Reviewed by Roxanna Erickson-Klein PhD
Dallas Texas

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