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HALLOWEEN ISSUE

Possessed or Dissociated?

By Nicole Fritz

A young girl screams and glares around the room, a twisted expression on her face. She vomits and roars angrily. She thrashes around on the floor growling obscenities about the devil and religion. She claims her body is being inhabited by a demon. This may seem like a scene from a horror flick. In actuality, these behaviors were seen in a study on possession trance state by Ferracuti, Sacco, and Lazzari in 1996.

According to the researchers, possession trance is the presence of a single or episodic altered state of consciousness, in which a person's customary identity is replaced by a new identity attributed to the influence of a spirit or deity when it causes distress or dysfunction.

Ferracuti, Sacco, and Lazzari looked at "possessed" individuals from a psychological prospective. They selected 10 people recommended from the official exorcist of Rome. Exorcisms can typically bring individuals into the possession trance state. Participants were only asked to be in the study if they exhibited an altered pattern of behavior in the exorcism (facial expressions, physical manifestations, or statements such as "I am Satan.").

During the exorcism, all the participants displayed remarkably similar behavior. None of the participants could remember anything that happened after the possession trance state.

The 10 participants were not receiving any psychological treatment at the time of the study. All the participants stated that past psychological treatment had not helped their symptoms like exorcism had. Upon previous evaluations, participants had been diagnosed with various psychological disorders, such as schizophrenia and depression.

The researchers administered psychological tests in attempts to explain the behavior exhibited by the participants. Their main interest was whether the participants had the typical pattern of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). The DSM-IV defines describes DID as "disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity or perception of the environment usually associated with traumatic events" (1994). The participants showed some symptoms of DID, but not enough to diagnose them with the disorder. All of the participants strongly denied experiencing any traumatic episodes in their past. Other aspects of the testing failed to

conclude that any of the participants could be diagnosed with DID.

Although the two conditions seem to have many behaviors in common, it is inconclusive that DID can explain behaviors in possession trances. However, Ferracuti, Sacco, and Lazzari suggest that there may be other explanations for the participants' behaviors. The research suggests that the participants may show the dissociative behaviors in only controlled settings, which an exorcism certainly is. They hypothesize conflicting religious beliefs could be behind the behavior. They believe possession trance is likely to occur in conflicted individuals with guilt feelings, strong religious beliefs, and problems with control. Like a form of hypnosis, the exorcism guides the person in bringing out their inner-conflicts in a "safe" altered form of consciousness.

Researchers of possession trance state have massive amounts of work ahead of them to account for the many unknowns of this psychological phenomenon. We may never truly know what causes the "possessed" to behave the way they do. It remains a captivating mystery in the field of psychology....



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IMPORTANT EVENT:

Graduate School
in Psychology
Panel: November
3rd, 6:30-8:30pm,
TRC Board room



Demonic Possession: Your Soul, or Mine?

By Jake Foster

Possession is the act or state of owning or holding something. It is the condition of being controlled by or appearing to be controlled by a supernatural force or strong emotion. Throughout the existence of the church, demonic possession has been present. Whether or not it is, in fact, true, is the real question.

It seems like society has always had an appeal towards the provocative and the supernatural. The possibility of demonic possession and exorcisms has also always been prevalent. There have even been a number of books and films that have been made dealing with this topic, but do possessions exist?

The idea of possession is known to be when a demon or Satan actually enters and controls the body on many different levels. In some cases it is documented that the supposed demon contained by a person can give that person super human powers. In one instance it was said that a possessed woman could see the future due to powers given to her by the demon within. There are a wide range of beliefs in how a possessed person might act. Some believe that they look and act normal, they are very quiet, they go about doing small sins, and try and talk people out

of their faith. Some other very different symptoms that have been documented are, speaking in tongues or a devilish voice, or cause someone to act violently or attack a person when otherwise they would not. Some people believe in both of these sides of symptoms. They believe the typical possessed victim would be the silent type, but once confronted about their possession they act out in the violent rage, and speak satanically.

There are basically two interpretations of how or why possessions take place. The first would be from a religious standpoint and the second a psychological. The psychological idea would obviously be what I will be interpreting. There are two pretty basic psychological thoughts of what these possessions could be. Firstly would be hysteria of a sort, namely religious hysteria. This hysteria becomes a mechanism in dealing with religious unrest. The victim can be unable to recall certain mental contents unless they become somewhat unconscious (usually sleeping). Many of these people who are affected by this kind hysteria have hallucinations. This would explain a lot of the demonic feelings or possibly seeing a demon. The other main idea would be in fact that the

possessed human is schizophrenic. A schizophrenic person has many different symptoms that could directly correlate with the possibility of possession. Along with someone who suffers from hysteria, a schizophrenic experiences hallucinations. They can both act according to these hallucinations in which others do not witness. Schizophrenics also experience delusions. These delusions are a false belief that something is happening to them despite contradictory evidence. This would also cause the person to act irrationally or act like they are indeed possessed. They also experience a lack of motivation, or altered emotions. This would explain the idea of a possessed person to be quiet, or act in a way they normally wouldn't. This obviously includes acting violent, such as a possessed person might. They also can expect disorganized thinking. This could correlate with speaking in "tongues." When they think this way overall they cannot communicate effectively, and are very misunderstood.

In conclusion there are many facts in which psychology can define demonic possession. Whether or not you believe it is up to you!



A New Face in the Psychology Dept.!

By Lisa Egan

Dr. Laura Helfritz joined the CSB/SJU Psychology faculty this year! Originally from



Minnesota, she earned her undergraduate degree in Psychology at Southwest State University, received her M.S. in Biopsychology from the University of New Orleans, and obtained

her Ph.D. in Neuroscience at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

This semester, Laura is teaching Introduction to Psychology and a Senior Seminar in Clinical Neuroscience. Next semester, she will be teach-

ing Physiological Psychology and Research Methods. She is excited that her Physio class will be including brain anatomy using sheep brains.

Laura is not the only new member of the CSB/SJU family. She also brought along her cat, Bailey, who recently celebrated her second birthday with a few extra catnip shrimp treats.

To tie in the "spooky" theme of the rest of the newsletter, Laura related some interesting facts about herself. A note for all of her current students: Laura's favorite Halloween candies are Snickers and Twix bars. When asked what her most unusual Halloween

costume has ever been, Laura said that when she was younger, she went trick-or-treating dressed as a carrot. Laura also related a spooky story.



Although she does not normally believe in such things, Laura shared that when she was growing up, there was a ghost in her house! The original owner, Dr. Carrey, died in the house and Laura said that she and her family sometimes heard weird noises in other rooms, but when they checked to see who it was, no one was there!

Roots of Evil

Evil has always been present in society, but why do we have it? What makes some people "more" evil than others? These are questions that have long been debated. The answers can be found by analyzing the root causes of evil. Violence has always been the byproduct of evil and it is expelled in four different ways, as described by Arthur Miller in his book *The Social Psychology of Evil*. The first way he describes is as a means to an end. The second method is in response to a threatened ego. Third he illustrated as a misguided effort to do good, and finally, as a means of sadistic pleasure (Miller, 2004).

As a mean to an end, people use violence as a way to get what they want. Violence is used to resolve conflict sometimes but, unfortunately, not everyone always agrees on things. Although some level of disagreement should be expected, violence does not need to be utilized to get what one wants.

Many times violence does not result in the desired outcome anyway (Miller, 2004).

When an individual feels threatened, either physically or egotistically, violence can be used in self-defense. This is the second way evil comes about. It was thought that people who act violently have low self-esteem, but the personality of these individuals does not fit the pattern of violence. People with low self-esteem are typically quiet, reluctant to take risks, and are slow to call attention to themselves (Miller, 2004). These qualities hardly seem similar to those of a killer, or rapist. The more widely accepted view is that violent people have too much of an ego. This causes the defensive mode. When these people are beaten they become defensive of their overbearing ego and so act to protect it.

The third root of evil has to do with people taking the initiative to enforce something they per-

ceive as good by using violence. These people believe that it is a necessary means to achieve the desired good.

The fourth root is due to sadism, when one individual receives pleasure resulting from another's pain. A good example of this is the Nazi party. Hitler and his followers were set on creating a perfect race, and to do so they attempted to extinguish all races that were not "perfect" to them. They got pleasure in doing so. Although sadism may be the least common form of evil, it can potentially be the most harmful (Miller, 2004).

This is just one theory of evil. Due to varying points of view, evil has been perceived to come from many different places and developed in many different ways. Miller (2004) has presented a very in depth explanation of where evil originates from, describing the four sources in detail. To read more, look for Miller's book.

By Nate Dick

"AS A MEANS
TO AN END,
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Meghan's Corner

For this month I wanted to focus on something that can be both exciting and scary—graduate school. If you are interested in pursuing graduate school, read on! I will try to provide you with some helpful tips that can make this process A LOT less intimidating.

First, utilize the resources available to you on campus. Both psych departments have books, bulletins, and materials available to you. Academic services also has a plethora of information to help in your search for the best program for you. Sophomores and juniors these are things you should already be thinking about!

Once you have selected the schools and programs of interest, be sure to check the deadlines for applications. There is some variance between programs, but many deadlines fall in the end of December/beginning of January. You should also look for what types of information they require, such as a personal statement, transcripts, GRE scores and letters of recommendation.

Some of these take time to prepare so be sure to leave yourself enough time to do a quality job. Specifically for letters of recommendation, make sure you ask faculty well in advance if they are willing to write a letter for you. Talk to them in person and prepare materials that will help them in writing the recommendation (e.g., personal statement, resume, or unofficial transcripts).

At some point early in the application process you should think about drafting your personal statement. This is your chance to promote yourself. One tip I have for you is to study the individual programs you are applying to and even become familiar with the research their faculty are doing. If you express enthusiasm in their program and research this could potentially make you a more marketable candidate.

To help further address concerns and questions about graduate school, the **Psychology Department** will hold a **Graduate School in Psychology Panel** on Novem-

ber 3rd. Whether you are a first-year unsure of if graduate school is for you or a Senior looking at last minute options, this is something you won't want to miss!!! This will be an EXCELLENT way to get your questions answered from different program representatives, recent graduates, and professors willing to help you make this process as far from spooky as possible. Stay tuned for more information on **The Graduate School in Psychology Panel** headed your way in the near future!

And remember, as I have said before, I am also here to help you with any questions you may have.

-Meghan

