



The Haunted Self: Structural Dissociation and the Treatment of Chronic Traumatization (Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology)

By Onno van der Hart Ph.D., Ellert R. S. Nijenhuis Ph.D., Kathy Steele

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Life is an ongoing struggle for patients who have been chronically traumatized.

They typically have a wide array of symptoms, often classified under different combinations of comorbidity, which can make assessment and treatment complicated and confusing for the therapist.

Many patients have substantial problems with daily living and relationships, including serious intrapsychic conflicts and maladaptive coping strategies. Their suffering essentially relates to a terrifying and painful past that haunts them. Even when survivors attempt to hide their distress beneath a facade of normality—a common strategy—therapists often feel besieged by their many symptoms and serious pain. Small wonder that many survivors of chronic traumatization have seen several therapists with little if any gains, and that quite a few have been labeled as untreatable or resistant.

In this book, three leading researchers and clinicians share what they have learned from treating and studying chronically traumatized individuals across more than 65 years of collective experience. Based on the theory of structural dissociation of the personality in combination with a Janetian psychology of action, the authors have developed a model of phase-oriented treatment that focuses on the identification and treatment of structural dissociation and related maladaptive mental and behavioral actions. The foundation of this approach is to support patients in learning more effective mental and behavioral actions that will enable them to become more adaptive in life and to resolve their structural dissociation. This principle implies an overall therapeutic goal of raising the integrative capacity, in order to cope with the demands of daily life and deal with the haunting remnants of the past, with the “unfinished business” of traumatic memories.

Of interest to clinicians, students of clinical psychology and psychiatry, as well as to researchers, all those interested in adult survivors of chronic child abuse and neglect will find helpful insights and tools that may make the treatment more effective and efficient, and more tolerable for the suffering patient.

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Editorial Review

Review

A powerful set of insights for clinicians, students of clinical psychology and psychiatry, and any involved in mental health issues. (*The Bookwatch*)

About the Author

Onno van der Hart, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of Psychopathology of Chronic Traumatization, Department of Clinical and Health Psychology, Utrecht University, Utrecht, the Netherlands, and a psychologist / psychotherapist in private practice in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. He is a Past President of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS).

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Kathy Steele, MN, CS, is in private practice with Metropolitan Psychotherapy Associates in Atlanta, Georgia. She is a former President of the International Society for the Study of Dissociation.

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