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# Switching Time: Multiple Personalities

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A with Honor project

The memoir I have read is called *Switching Time* written by Dr. Richard Baer, the President of the Illinois Psychiatric Society and had private practice for fourteen years. The memoir records the process of helping Karen Overhill, who had seventeen different personalities. Karen was first diagnosed as suffering from major depressive episode and had current suicidal thoughts. Dr. Baer started treating her with various antidepressants but they did not help Karen at all. After years of therapies, Dr. Baer noticed that Karen had a horrible childhood that Karen kept complaining she has been abused by different men, including her father and her husband. Later, Dr. Baer first received an envelope in the mail which is sent out from a seven-year-old little girl, who wrote that she was living inside of Karen. Then Dr. Baer started receiving letters from others claiming to be parts of Karen. Because of the letters written by different parts of Karen, Dr. Baer realized that Karen was representing an extreme case of multiple personality disorder. In this case, Karen's disorder became more difficult to treat because Dr. Baer "must gain the trust of each Karen's seventeen 'alters' and convince them of the necessity of their own annihilation" (Baer). By reading the memoir, I have found that the seventeen personalities discovered by Dr. Baer share different memories and different "born year". All seventeen personalities know each other and they are usually born to help Karen. Different personalities have different purposes to be there. Dr. Baer finally treated Karen successfully by using different types of medications and psychotherapies throughout almost nine years treatment.

According to the DSM-IV-TR checklist, Karen was first diagnosed that she was suffering from major depressive episode. Refers to the memoir, Karen has been depressed for three and a half months when she went to Dr. Baer. As she said, she had diminished interest in almost activities most of the day and a feeling of lack of energy. She refused to go out and she stayed at home all the time. She experienced insomnia that she woke up several times at night and she sometimes wrote letters to Dr. Baer when she failed to get back to sleep. The most obvious recorded symptom was that she had recurrent thoughts of suicide, although she never had a specific plan or suicide attempt. Karen's symptoms caused significant impairment to her normal daily life because she could not even feed her own new born daughter. As this point Karen receive the diagnosis of major depressive episode by Dr. Baer. However, Dr. Baer realized that medication did not help Karen very much. Karen kept taking the medication just because she did not want to disappoint Dr. Baer. At one night, Dr. Baer received a letter from "another part" of Karen. Dr. Baer later recognized that Karen was also experiencing multiple personality disorder. Karen had totally seventeen different personalities. These subpersonalities recurrently controlled Karen's behavior, such as crying in clothes chest and absent from the appointment with Dr. Baer because another personality did not want to go. Also, Karen could not recall important personal information that is too extensive to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness. Karen could not recall memory during the time that other subpersonalities "came out" either. Because all subpersonalities know each other, her multiple personality disorder would be defined as mutually cognizant patterns. However, Karen's subpersonalities seem to be controllable by Dr. Baer that he could ask the subpersonality to step back and change to another one. This issue is not discovered in the DSM-IV-TR.

The first concept which causes particular dysfunction is that Karen had different personalities who know each other. Since all subpersonalities know each other well, they often thought that their existences are to help Karen. It sometimes made the therapy become difficult because Dr. Baer needed to gain all personalities' trust. The second fact is that there were 17 different subpersonalities "lived" in Karen's body, and sometimes led to that she could not have enough time to sleep. Besides, Karen's subpersonalities like to call Dr. Baer at midnight complaining about different things. For example, one subpersonality called Dr. Baer one night complaining about the man who wanted to get her (there was no one). Incidentally, Dr. Baer found out that the experiences of different personalities maybe helpful to understand more about Karen's childhood. The last fact is that all subpersonalities thought that they were there for helping and protecting Karen. This increased the probability for Karen to commit certain crimes and made Karen's behavior become unpredictable. For example, a subpersonality called Miles, who said that he was protecting Karen from any harms, punched a robber right in the face because he saw the robber was holding a knife and tried to stab Karen. Karen was very avoidant and that may lead to that most existences of other personalities are "born" to be brave and protective. Dr. Baer could know more about Karen's original personality by interviewing other subpersonalities. On the positive side, Dr. Baer could understand more history, personality, and other important triggers to her disorder by interacting with Karen's subpersonalities. But on the negative side, it was very dangerous if one of the personalities resist Dr. Baer. And also, Karen could not live normally with 17 different personalities and the disorder caused extreme impairment to Karen's daily life. By ongoing years of treatments, Dr. Baer finally helped Karen to recover from her major depressive episode and multiple personality disorder. Dr. Baer

personally would also say that Karen's case was an extremely difficult task that he must be very careful when he was dealing with each personality.

This memoir is written by professional psychiatrist and so the processes of diagnosis and treatments are very well presented. Dr. Baer also put a lot of details into the memoir, such as the pictures of original letters written by different personalities. By reading and looking to the professional writing and pictures, I can understand more about multiple personality disorder. For example, I found out that the writing can be totally different although it is written by a same person. Also, this memoir makes me aware that trust is very important between therapist and clients. Clients must fully trust their therapists in order to receive the most suitable treatment. For example, Dr. Baer knew that Karen does not trust men, but Dr. Baer could not figure out the reasons until Karen trust him that he is going to help her, but not harm her. The disorders we learn from textbook are just board knowledge. But in the real world, disorders are not always the same as textbooks describe. Therapists need to be careful and concentrate to every single detail in order to provide the best diagnosis, advice, and treatment. This memoir makes me know more about multiple personality disorder and the attitude that a therapist should have when he/she is facing a very difficult and exclusive case. In short, *Switching Time* is a very good memoir for people who are interested in multiple personality disorder.