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**Constructing multiple selves  
in  
a virtual landscape**

**Dr Jo Woodiwiss**

# Outline of paper

- Context / Introduction
- Research x 2 – CSA / Multiple Personalities
- An Inner child / children
- Multiple personality – the ‘Experts’
- Living as a group
- Virtual landscapes
- A virtual world

# Context / Introduction



- Social Science - Self as a project or work in progress
- Popular view - Self as a (static) inner core - can return to
- Self-help / healing / recovery lit - 'Contradictory Self' - core & project
- Accompanied by multiple selves
- Life with multiple personalities – quite isolated and solitary
- Internet – opened up new worlds to populate / explore / experience
- 2 Research projects 1. Self, Identity and Childhood Sexual Abuse  
2. Multiple personalities on the Internet

# Research – CSA Narratives



- women's use of narratives of childhood sexual abuse
- interviews with self identified (women) victims of CSA
- '*inner child*' - central to much recovered memory & recovery literature
- featured in accounts of majority of participants
- paper just draws on material related to the inner child – or for some women – inner children

# Research – Multiple personalities

- Web based research – work in progress
- Internet - variety of sites designed for / by those who share their lives with a number of inner personalities
- Types of sites, how they work, how they might be used
- Central to research - idea of Identity / personality
- How identities might be explored / played out in different landscapes

# An inner personality: The Inner child

- Split at time of abuse - holds knowledge of the abuse
- Stuck at age abuse occurred—trapped with feelings/emotions
- Needs ‘re-parenting’ to ‘heal’ & grow up
- Literature - ways to contact inner child / help her heal
- Including – enabling her to be a child and have fun
  - reading her stories / holding parties / buying her (children’s) presents / teddy bears etc
- Enables adult or ‘host’ to participate in behaviours & express aspects of self that would otherwise be difficult

# Inner child - Examples

- An important outlet or mechanism through to participate more fully in life.
  - *It's something I have to work through as well. Because I need to be able to play, I want to be able to play. I want to be able to erm... to go into an imaginary world and really feel things when I want to. (Beccy)*
  - *I'll put on music that I like and I'll have a wee dance about the place and just feel happy. (Fiona)*
  - *I used to have a colouring in book and crayons and just lie on the floor and colour in. I'd feel quite calm and happy doing that. (Fiona)*

- *I said no because if you're trying to acknowledge somebody at a certain age then you're looking at that person as an individual and to me that usually means looking at it and giving it personality or a name and something like that. Now if you have five or six or eight of them it's going to get rather crowded. That's when I realised, when I'd given them names and things like that and I thought...it was getting me crazy it was like a multiple personality and I thought no, I'm stopping this now. (Jay)*

# Multiple personalities and the 'Experts'

- Discourse of CSA: focus on accessing knowledge
- World of multiplicity: focus on identifying personalities
- Agreement: hypnosis significant in 'diagnosis'/'treatment'
  - Encourage personalities to come forward
  - Creation of Multiple personalities
- Other ways for creation of alternative personalities
  - active role for 'host' or 'front' personality.
- Past: impetus towards integration.
- Present: living as a group - more important

# Living as a group

- Identified hundreds of ‘ alters’ – contacted over 20
- Names, presents (silver jewellery), cards, wrote poems
- Celebrated ‘birthdays’ – keeping each inner child special
- Not generous to herself – but generous to inner children
- Through inner children - participate in activities, express thoughts or feelings
- Characteristics of a family or group of friends

# A very private world

- *You get used to existing as part of a group. Even the front personality gets used to existing as part of a group.*  
(Anne)
- Little interaction with others / the outside world
- Read books, subscribed to newsletters, spoke to 'help lines'

***You're almost in touch with the people out there***  
***(Anne)***

# From Private to public



- Interaction
- New personalities
- New ways for those personalities to exist /live
- New relationships –
  - Between the host and her inner personalities
  - Among different personalities within a ‘group’
  - Between different personalities from different groups
- Changed the nature of multiple personalities

# Virtual landscapes

- Type 'Multiple personalities on line support':
- 1,450,000 sites came up
  - information sites
  - support sites
  - communities of 'likeminded' people
  - umbrella sites
  - information & support sites
- Forums and chat rooms
- Different personalities can go, engage in activities and interact with other personalities

# Coping...

- Don't need to register
- You don't need a history
- In top 10 of Google search
- **cope with** life with multiple personalities.
- Not to explore the past or the creation of personalities
- A site for the present –
- For those who do not know - or are unsure
- There are no pre requisites for joining or engaging with this site.

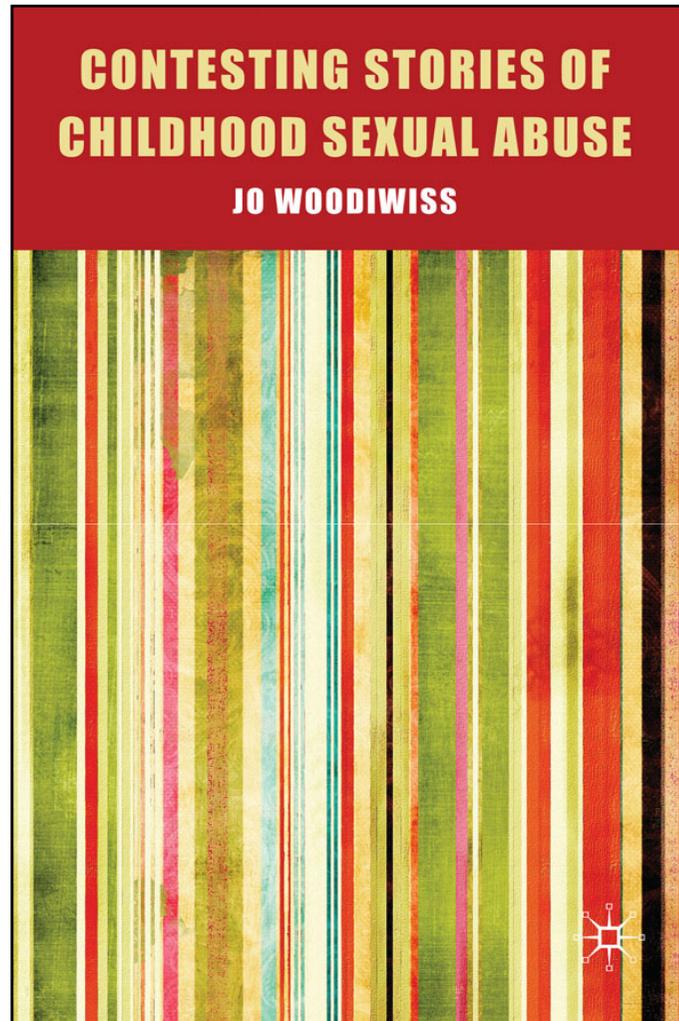
# Coping...

***‘there is no place to write our detailed histories and stories about trauma. We are focused more on how we cope today’***

# In, and for, the (virtual) present

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- Personalities exist in, and for, the (virtual) present
- Free from demands / pressures of other worlds
- Experiment - who they are / ways of being
- Engage with otherwise difficult activities (e.g. 'fun')
- Expression / articulation of different thoughts & feelings
- Not tied to a past
- Not constrained by the lack of a past



Jo Woodiwiss

## Contesting Stories of Childhood Sexual Abuse

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