

## PART III

### PRACTICE

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#### 11 FACILITATING THE EXPRESSION OF SUBPERSONALITIES: A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF TECHNIQUES

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'I feel like I'm living in a war zone', said Lynda<sup>1</sup>, during her first session in psychotherapy. 'I'm exhausted,' she continued, 'I can't seem to sit still. I desperately want to rest, but every time I stop I feel terrible and I start shaking so I carry on. Part of me wants to just lie down and cry and cry but then this voice says, "Don't stop, you've got to keep on going . . . don't stop, don't stop, don't stop." ' Lynda is a 45-year-old woman who had been physically, sexually and emotionally abused as a child. She referred herself to therapy with Helen Cruthers because she was experiencing many memories from her childhood, and wanted help with the strong feelings these aroused: disgust, shame, hurt, terror and fury. From the outset, however, it was clear that there was also a powerful struggle going on inside her, and helping her to find ways to express and explore the different sides in this struggle became a major part of the therapeutic work.

In recent years, the notion that an individual encounters their world through a plurality of selves has become increasingly prevalent in psychotherapeutic theory and practice. These selves have been known by a variety of terms – for example, 'subpersonalities' (Rowan, 1990), 'subselves' (Shapiro, 1976), 'ego-states' (Berne, 1961), 'roles' (Landy, 1993), 'inner children/parents/demons' (Stone and Winkelman, 1989)<sup>2</sup> – and can be generally defined as semi-permanent and semi-autonomous person-like constellations of behavioural, phenomenological, motivational, cognitive, physiological and affective characteristics.

Within all self-pluralistic psychotherapies, open and fluid communication between these different selves – or between the selves and a 'centre'

(Assagioli, 1975) – is considered essential for psychological well-being. As with interpersonal dialogue, if the different aspects of the person can ‘talk’ to each other and acknowledge and respect each other’s needs, then the individual is likely to have an existence which is relatively free of ongoing ‘internal’ conflict, and in which all the different subpersonalities can work together to ensure that the individual encounters each life-situation in the most effective and actualizing (Rogers, 1961) way. If, on the other hand, the intra-personal dynamic is characterized by discord between the various ‘parts’ – as seemed to be the case with Lynda – then the individual’s existence is likely to be characterized by considerable ‘internal’ strife, with each of the different parts fighting for supremacy, and with little time or attention paid to what might be most effective and actualizing in encountering the external world. A central component of self-pluralistic psychotherapies, therefore, is to encourage greater dialogue and understanding between the subpersonalities; and for this to happen, the individual must first find a way of expressing the many different sides of themselves – particularly those sides that may be disowned or neglected – in order that these aspects of the person can start to recognize and acknowledge each other, and begin to work together.

Over the years, a number of different techniques have been developed through which this expression of subpersonalities can be facilitated, and this chapter presents a review and analysis of many of these different approaches. In doing so, it classifies these techniques into three broad categories: descriptive, projective and experiential. Some overlap exists between these techniques and few practitioners work with techniques from only one category – even in the same session – yet there is a degree of commonality within each of these categories that makes this discrimination a useful one. The chapter explores each of these categories in turn, describing the techniques and illustrating them with examples and case-studies. The final section then looks at the underlying psychological processes, and compares and contrasts the different techniques.

### **Descriptive techniques**

Descriptive techniques are those approaches in which an individual is encouraged to express her subpersonalities directly through verbal or written description. A descriptive technique may simply involve suggesting to an individual that they may have a number of ‘selves’, and then asking them to describe these different subpersonalities. Rowan, for instance, suggests: ‘Write a list of all your subpersonalities, those you are aware of at a conscious level right now. Give each a name, and write about five lines describing that one’ (1993: 12). This can be also done as a table, with rows for the different subpersonalities, and columns for characteristics of the subpersonalities such as: name, appearance, when evoked, need, purpose, and so on. Alternatively,

an individual might be asked to view their life as a book, and to write out or imagine their life story (McAdams, 1985). This self-narrative can then be reviewed in terms of the different aspects of self that emerge.

A more time-limited approach is the 'evening review', in which an individual is invited to review the different people they have been throughout a particular day (Ferrucci, 1982). In an early session, Lynda 'reviewed' one day in which she had been constantly rushing around completing tasks, thinking a lot but not particularly aware of any feelings. She named this part of her the 'Busy Coper'. In talking further, Lynda became aware that she felt most comfortable in this mode, and that the busyness seemed to keep more painful and threatening feelings at bay. Her Busy Coper was expressed in therapy by such phrases as, 'You've just got to get on with things haven't you', and by the fast pace and lack of pauses in her speech. On the day under review, however, she noted that she had shifted out of Busy Coper mode while talking to her mother on the phone. During the conversation, she had suddenly become flooded by feelings of hurt, fear and resentment, and had ended up sitting in the corner of the lounge crying and sucking her thumb. Lynda called this her 'Little Lynda' subpersonality. Lynda noted that a third mode of Being had emerged some time after the phone call, when she had been pacing angrily around the flat, cursing her mother and feeling furious. She called this her 'Mrs Angry' subpersonality.

Another widely used descriptive approach to exploring subpersonalities is the 'Who am I?' technique (Rowan, 1993; Shapiro, 1976). Here, the individual is asked to write down on separate pieces of paper as many answers to the question 'Who am I?' as they can: roles, personal qualities, physical characteristics, names and nicknames, etc. The individual can then look through the pieces of paper and try to pile together those answers that 'go together', hence compiling a smaller number of superordinate identities.

Within most self-pluralistic psychotherapies, however, the way in which an individual is encouraged to describe their different selves is relatively unformalized, and develops out of the dialogic interchange between client and therapist. This interactive exploration of an individual's subpersonalities is sometimes termed 'psychic mapping' (Assagioli, 1975; Stone and Winkelman, 1989; Watkins and Watkins, 1979); and in some cases, diagrammatic 'maps' of the client's different selves and their interrelationships may actually be drawn or symbolized (Ryle, 1990; Shapiro, 1976; Stewart and Joines, 1987; Stone and Winkelman, 1989). In those psychotherapies where the practitioner has specific hypotheses regarding the client's different selves – for example, transactional analysis (Berne, 1961) – a descriptive exploration of the client's subpersonalities may also be facilitated through the use of pre-defined diagnostic criteria, such as ego-state-related behaviours (for example, words, tones, gestures, postures and facial expressions) and ego-state-related phenomenological experiences. If, for instance, a client says that he often feels playful, mischievous and young around his girlfriend, it might be suggested that at those times he is expressing his 'free child'.

### **Projective techniques**

Projective techniques are based on the principle of projection: 'the process by which specific impulses, wishes, aspects of the self or internal objects are imagined to be located in some object external to oneself' (Rycroft, 1995: 139). In these techniques, the individual is not asked directly to describe his or her different selves, but is invited to express them indirectly through a variety of non-self mediums.

Perhaps the most frequently used projective mediums for facilitating the expression of subpersonalities is that of imaginal figures. This approach is known as 'creative visualization', 'guided visualization', 'guided imagination', 'active imagination', or 'guided daydreams'. Ferrucci's (1982) guided visualization is typical, and begins by asking individuals to consider one of their prominent traits, attitudes or motives. They are then asked to close their eyes, become aware of this part of them, and then let a representative image spontaneously emerge. Getting in touch with the general feeling emanating from this image, they are then encouraged to let the image talk and express itself, before writing down the characteristics of the subpersonality-image and giving it a name. A similar visualization might begin by asking the individual to consider an animal, someone who is significant to them, a figure coming out of a cave, or a particular subpersonality (for example, their nurturing parent) (Rowan, 1993). Alternatively, they may be asked to imagine their subpersonalities coming through a door (Cullen and Russell, 1989; Shapiro, 1976; Vargiu, 1974), stepping off a bus (Rowan, 1990), performing on, or coming on to, a stage (Rueffler, 1995; Satir, 1978), or meeting as a board of directors/committee (Rowan, 1993; Sliker, 1992).

Once these subpersonality-figures have emerged, the visualization process can then be continued to explore the relationships between the various subpersonalities: what happens once all the subpersonalities emerge?; how will they get on?; which subpersonality will dominate?; and so on. One of Shapiro's clients, for instance, describes what he visualized after his 'whole gang' of subpersonalities came through a door:

Somehow Father Time seemed annoyed that the others were passing him by, and he began to yell at them. They all kind of made fun of Father Time and formed a ring around him and danced around him, teasing him. Then I think Father Time got into an arm-wrestling contest with the Clown and I could see both of them were enjoying it. I was aware that Father Time was much stronger than he looked. I could only tell by that fierce energy that showed in his eyes that he was anything but fragile. (1976: 76-7)

The client can also be encouraged to ask the subpersonalities different questions, and then to imagine the figures responding. John Rowan lists a number of questions which he believes are of most value in making the subpersonalities concrete and explicit:

What do you look like?  
How old are you?

What situations bring you out?  
 What is your approach to the world?  
 What is your basic motive for being there?  
 What do you want?  
 What do you need?  
 What have you got to offer?  
 What are your blocks to full functioning?  
 Where did you come from?  
 When did you first meet (name of person)? What was going on?  
 What would happen if you took over permanently?  
 What helps you to grow?  
 How do you relate to men/women/children? (1990: 198)

Guided visualizations are frequently used as a first step in exploring an individual's subpersonalities, and they may also be used as an ongoing part of the therapeutic process – as a means, for instance, of further investigating one particular subpersonality. Ferrucci (1982) gives the example of a young doctor, Robert, who felt he was blocked by an inner rigidity which interfered with his relationships and hampered his potential. Robert identified this rigidity as part of a 'critic' subpersonality, which consistently judged and attacked whatever he or anyone else did or said.

When he deliberately evokes this quality and tries to let an image emerge, Robert sees a bespectacled, old-fashioned priest, grim, stern, and dressed entirely in black. As soon as he can see the image clearly, he also discerns the outlines of the rigidity which has been controlling him. While before he would feel this as a vague discomfort and merely endure it, now for the first time he is able to shake it off. (Ferrucci, 1982: 49)

With Lynda, subpersonality visualizations often began with her current awareness of emotional and physical sensations. In one session, Lynda said she was feeling very alone, and that her body felt rigid. Lynda was asked whether she had an image for how she was feeling, and she visualized a tiny, frightened child, crouched in the corner of an attic of a derelict old house, her body rigid with fear – 'Little Lynda'. Lynda said that Little Lynda desperately wanted to leave the horrible place, but was too frightened to move an inch as the floorboards were rotting away. When asked, 'What does Little Lynda need right now?', Lynda visualized for her frightened little child some toys she could play with and a teddy bear to hug. Through imaging this subpersonality, Lynda started to feel compassion for this hurt and terrified part of herself; and, in doing so, realized that there was also a part of her with the potential to nurture and care for this 'inner child'. She named this mode of her Being, 'Big Lynda'.

Art media are another common means used to facilitate the projective expression of subpersonalities (see, for example, Capacchione, 1991; Shapiro, 1976; Turner, 1988). As Zinker writes: 'painting is a projection of myself, a part of my inner life superimposed on a surface' (1977: 239). Having recognized and named some of her different subpersonalities, Lynda was

asked to draw them using only shapes and colours in order to learn as much as possible about these aspects of herself – their feelings, their qualities, their needs, and their interrelationships. Lynda grabbed bottles of red and black paint and squirted them vigorously onto a sheet of paper announcing, ‘This is Mrs Angry’. As Lynda surveyed the ‘explosion’ of painted feeling, she became most aware of how much the paint spilled over the edges of the paper. She related this to her belief that this part of herself knew no limits, and that if she did not keep ‘Mrs Angry’ on a tight leash then terrible things could happen: like killing one of her parents or going mad. After expressing Mrs Angry, Lynda then became aware of feeling small and vulnerable and moved on to drawing Little Lynda as a blue and black circle in the corner of a page. Immediately she turned the page over, drawing her Busy Coper on the other side – filling the page with orange lines and boxes. When this immediate turning of the page was reflected back to her, she felt that maybe this was something that often happens: that when she feels some of the blue tears and black hurt of her inner child being expressed she quickly shifts into being busy and sensible – effectively pushing these feelings away. She also became aware, however, that the feelings of smallness and vulnerability are not eradicated by this manoeuvre. Rather, they are left constantly waiting, just on the other side of the page, nagging away at her and affecting her ability to concentrate.

Artistic methods of facilitating the expression of subpersonalities can be tailored to particular models of self-plurality. Capacchione, for instance, encourages readers to draw pictures of specific subpersonalities such as their ‘vulnerable child’ and ‘protective parent’ using a variety of coloured pens and crayons (1991: 44).<sup>3</sup> Turner’s (1988) ‘Parent-Adult-Child Projective Drawing Task’ (PAC-D) also uses figure drawing as a means of eliciting specific ego states. Clients are given the instructions to draw three figures: one who looks like a parent, one who looks like an adult, and one who looks like a child. ‘The essential assumption of the PAC-D is that clients will project into the drawings of each figure the individual character of their own three primary ego states’ (Turner, 1988: 61). Rueffler (1995), on the other hand, who comes from a psychosynthesis background, proposes a drawing exercise which incorporates the Assagiolian (1975) notion of an observing, non-subpersonality-like ‘centre’. She invites her readers to draw a daisy-like flower with six petals surrounding a middle circle. Readers are then asked to think of six subpersonalities, to draw one into each of the six petals, and then to visualize themselves at the centre, observing and experiencing each of the six surrounding subpersonality-petals.

One particularly effective medium onto which subpersonalities can be projected is that of masks. Because the face plays such an important role in human expression and communication, masks have the potential to symbolize extremely powerful and evocative modes of Being. A stern judge’s face, for instance, can be used to symbolize an overpowering critical subpersonality; while a terrifying devil mask can be made to symbolize an individual’s ‘shadow’. Furthermore, there are a number of interesting parallels

between masks and subpersonalities which make them an ideal medium on which to project an individual's different selves. First, like subpersonalities, the mask has the appearance of a person, yet it is not a person – it lacks the multidimensionality of the human face, just as subpersonalities lack the multidimensionality of the human personality. Second, the mask is fixed, and hence parallels the fixidity of the subpersonalities. Like a 'critical parent' subpersonality, for instance, a critical parent mask is scowling whatever the context: it scowls when things go right, it scowls when things go wrong. Third, in those self-pluralistic psychotherapies (for example, psychosynthesis) which advocate the existence of a 'real self' masked by the subpersonalities, then the mask is an excellent representative of that which is worn over the real self (that is, the 'real' face), that which protects the individual, that which can be taken off or swapped around, and that which has the potential to allow the individual to 'be' someone else.

Another projective technique that has been used to facilitate the expression of subpersonalities is that of storytelling (for example, Landy, 1993). This may be augmented through the use of plastic figures, toys or puppets. Twenty-nine-year-old Martin was another of Helen's clients. Asked to choose figures to enact a story, he chose a small pink worm, a muscleman and a good witch. His story went as follows:

Once upon a time there was a worm who was very unhappy because he felt naked and vulnerable and ugly. He decided to leave home in search of happiness. When he reached the next land he found a muscleman lifting weights. The worm was very impressed by the muscleman's strength and beauty, and wished he could be like that. Suddenly the witch appeared and said: 'I have the power to grant you one wish.' The worm was overjoyed. 'However,' the witch said, 'the rule is that before I grant your wish, you must spend a week with your own kind.' The worm couldn't think of anything worse than spending a week with other ugly, pathetic creatures like himself, but he reluctantly agreed. At first it was horrible, but, he met lots of other worms and realized that what he started to like about them – their wiggly squiggliness, their gentleness and their kindness – he liked about himself too. At the end of the week, the witch returned asking, 'What is your wish?' The worm thought long and hard and said, 'Actually I like being a worm but I would like some friends. I wish that the witch and the muscleman could come and live with me.' . . . and they all lived happily ever after.

Martin felt that the characters in the story symbolized different parts of himself:

It's like part of me is the worm – all small and pink and weedy – and part of me is the strong and capable muscleman. I like being the muscleman much more, so the worm keeps trying to change and get stronger, but when I really focus on that worm and think about what he's like I can also see his strong points: like his flexibility and sense of compassion. He's not rigid and hard and insensitive like the muscleman. I think the witch is the wise part of me that knows the worm is just as important and just as much part of who I am as the muscleman.

The Jungian technique of 'sandplay' (see, for example, Ryce-Menuhin, 1992) can also be adapted for work with subpersonalities. The sandtray is a

shallow box filled with sand, to which water can be added. The sand can then be moulded to make images or represent landscapes, and there is usually a blue base for symbolizing ponds and rivers, etc. The sandtray forms the frame of the picture and can symbolize a miniature world. The individual can then choose sandtray figures – for example, people, animals, monsters, heroes, structures (such as walls, castles, and so on), and various other objects – and place them in the tray to make their image.

As with other projective techniques, a sandtray exploration may start with a particular subpersonality (for example, ‘Can you choose a figure to represent this part of yourself?’); or else a client may be invited spontaneously to create an image, choosing figures and objects he or she feels drawn to. These figures may then emerge as subpersonalities. Lynda began one therapy session feeling detached and confused, and was invited to make a sandtray picture. In one corner of the sandtray she put a tiny dinosaur emerging from an egg. When asked what the dinosaur might say, she replied: ‘I am a baby but I can grow and I can be strong. I’ve got sharp teeth but only for eating my food, I don’t want to hurt anyone if they don’t hurt me. I want to have lots of food and grow and play and feel good. I need this egg for protection ’cos I’ve been hurt and that feels OK.’ After speaking, Lynda was silent for several minutes. She then said, ‘I think the dinosaur is Little Lynda too.’ Lynda felt that this new image expressed some of the positive qualities and potential of this side of herself – not just the pain and fear of the terrified little girl crouched in the attic.

### **Experiential techniques**

Experiential techniques are those approaches which attempt to help a client express her or his subpersonalities by encouraging the individual actually to enter – behaviourally, cognitively, affectively, physiologically – into that mode of Being. The most direct experiential technique is simply to ask the client to ‘become’ a particular subpersonality. This approach is used in the ‘redecision’ and ‘cathexis’ schools of transactional analysis, where the client is encouraged to regress to their child ego state (Stewart and Joines, 1987). Rueffler adopts a similar approach, inviting clients to close their eyes, deep breathe, and allow themselves to be carried back through time, ‘back to the time when you were lying in your mother’s breast or in the arms of a primary caretaker’ (1995: 106). Rueffler then dialogues with the client in this child-like state, asking them such questions as how they feel, what they sense, whether they are satisfied, and what current subpersonality may be a result of these feelings. Such an immersion into – and dialoguing with – subpersonality modes, can be used with any of the client’s aspects of Being. Rueffler, for instance, suggests that the client should think of a situation in the past few days which has kept them preoccupied, imagine themselves in that situation, and then concentrate on how they are thinking, feeling, wanting to act, etc. They can then step back and analyse this mode of Being,

thinking about their attitudes and feelings towards it; or else they can respond to further experiential techniques and answer questions such as: 'What is your purpose? Why are you here?'

However, while such an invitation is one way of experientially invoking a subpersonality-complex, numerous other starting points have been proposed: astrological signs, tarot cards, dream characters (Rowan, 1993), roles that emerge from the 'Who am I?' brainstorm (Cullen and Russell, 1989), or subpersonalities elicited through psychic mapping (Shapiro, 1976; Stone and Winkelman, 1989; Watkins and Watkins, 1979). Parts of the body can also be used to elicit subpersonalities (Capacchione, 1991; Landy, 1993; Rowan, 1993). Landy, for instance, encourages his clients to focus on one body part, and then allow a movement to extend from that source: 'for example, a prominent belly may lead to a slow and heavy movement' (1993: 47). Once the movement has extended to the whole body, suggests Landy, the invocation of the subpersonality is complete. Capacchione is even more specific in proposing physiological starting points. She suggests, for instance, that by focusing on areas that are tense, sore or painful, a vulnerable child sub-personality can be evoked.

Aware of Little Lynda's level of terror and need for safety, Lynda reiterated in one session that she still needed to proceed at a slow pace in therapy without any demands being made of her (for example, to talk about her abuse or get more in touch with her feelings). Lynda was expressing much gratitude towards the therapist for having respected this, and for, 'Listening to all this "shit".' While expressing these positive feelings, however, the therapist noted that Lynda was also tapping her foot more and more insistently, and drew Lynda's attention to this. 'What might your foot be saying if it could speak?', Lynda was asked.

'Ummmm . . . What it would *really* say?' she enquired.

'Yes . . . If your foot could say anything it liked.'

'Get the fuck on with it you stupid woman!' Lynda shouted.

For Lynda, this statement was an expression of her Mrs Angry sub-personality, who was feeling frustrated with the therapist for the gentle pace of the therapy, and angry with Little Lynda for being so fragile. On reflection, Lynda realized that her Little Lynda subpersonality perhaps was not so powerless after all, but actually had the ability to block out her more aggressive side as a form of self-protection. (It was Little Lynda's strong fear that if she expressed any anger she would be hurt and punished.) Having found a way to express her Mrs Angry subpersonality, however, Lynda saw that it too needed a voice and had positive qualities: strength, protection and self-belief.

Any of the projective techniques can also be used as a starting point for the experiential expression of a subpersonality: for example, 'I'd like you to "be" Father Time.' or, 'I'd like you to "become" the explosion of red and black paint.' Masks, as a wearable projective medium, are perhaps unique in that they allow the wearer actually to inhabit what it is they have projected.

The potentially disinhibiting effect of masked-anonymity may contribute to the fullness of this inhabitation; as may the presence of mirrors, which allow the client to see their face as the ‘face’ of the subpersonality-mask. Some years ago, we led a workshop in which participants were asked to make a mask of their ‘vulnerable child’, to put the mask on, to look at themselves in a mirror, and then to speak as their mask. A number of participants described this experience as, ‘powerful’ and ‘surprising’, revealing unexpected feelings and responses.

The above techniques allow an individual to immerse themselves in one particular subpersonality, but there are also a number of techniques which are specifically aimed at helping individuals to dialogue between their different selves. One of the most common of these is that of ‘chair-work’. Shapiro (1976), for instance, suggests an individual should have a few chairs handy, and then, sitting in one of the chairs, begin with a concern, decision, issue, problem or feeling that they want to deal with. Giving a voice to that situation, they should then let it express itself, before moving to another chair, listening to the message, and then responding in any way that feels appropriate. The individual is then encouraged to continue the dialogue between these two chairs/subpersonalities, or move to new chairs as new subpersonalities emerge. Finally, finding an ‘observer’/central chair, the individual is asked to try to hold a ‘meeting’ of their subpersonalities. This chair-based ‘voice dialogue’ technique is almost identical to the one outlined by Stone and Winkelman (1989) and Watkins and Watkins (1979). In all these techniques, as the client moves from chair to chair, the individual is encouraged to act out their various subpersonalities, moving at times to an observational position from which she or he can gain a more ‘objective’, ‘central’ perspective. This process of moving from subpersonality to subpersonality to centre can also occur with the client physically remaining in one chair (see, for example, Vargiu, 1974; Watkins, 1990).

At the less structured end of the spectrum, in psychodrama and drama therapy (Hawkins, 1988; Landy, 1993; Moreno, 1972; Pitzele, 1991), the process of dialoguing between subpersonalities and centre may be given more dramatic licence. The individual(s) may be encouraged to improvise a scene with their role, act out a story or play, develop monologues (Landy, 1993) or soliloquies (Pitzele, 1991). These soliloquies can then be worked into a group psychodrama, such that there is an ongoing dialogue between the many different parts. Alternatively, the client may be encouraged to act out his or her subpersonality through the medium of different theatrical roles or characters, rather than as a directly personalized aspect of his- or herself (Landy, 1993).

As with an immersion into one particular subpersonality, any of the projective techniques can be used as a starting point for an experiential dialogue between subpersonalities: for example, ‘I wonder if you could “become” the orange lines, and tell the blue and black circle on the other side of the page how you feel?’ ‘Now, can you “become” the circle and reply to the orange lines, telling them how you feel?’ With Lynda, sandtray

figures were frequently used as the starting point for an experiential expression – and dialogue between – her different sides. In one session, Lynda chose an owl to symbolize her Busy Coper and a monkey to symbolize her Little Lynda. Lynda placed these in the sandtray either side of a big wall. She was then asked to ‘be’ each of the figures and to enact a conversation between them. She began to enact their communication by banging the monkey’s head against the wall. The monkey was trying to get the owl to take notice; but Lynda positioned the owl facing the other way, with its head in a book.

Monkey: Please let me out I need to play and have fun and I’m hurt and I need a cuddle and I hate it here behind this wall.

Owl: No – there’s no room for you in my life, you muck everything up, I don’t have time. I don’t like you, I don’t want you . . . shut up and go away.

Monkey: I’m going to scream and shout and make lots of noise and hammer on the wall and I’m not going to go away.

Owl: Well I’m not going to listen to you, you’re trouble.

The dialogue went round and round in circles, and Lynda was beginning to feel decidedly stuck. It was suggested to her, therefore, that she might take on the role of Big Lynda to gain a more ‘objective’ overview of this conflict. Lynda enjoyed identifying with this empowered, compassionate, wise adult, and was able to talk with both the owl and the monkey about their feelings and needs in a way which they were not able to do for each other.

Big Lynda: Monkey – I know that you are scared and hurt and I will try to protect you. And it’s also really important that the house gets cleaned, the bills get paid, and that the study gets done because it’s really important to Lynda that she is achieving something and moving forward in her life. I know you need time to play and that the Owl stops you. The Owl is scared too – she’s scared that you’re going to take over and not give her any time to get her work done. She needs to know that you’ll listen to reason.

Owl – I hope you’ve heard what I’ve said to Monkey. She’s very important because she’s got lots of energy and fun and life can be very dull without her. She’s also hurt and she needs time to rest and look after herself or she’ll only get worse. I think it’s really important that she’s not in charge all the time because she’s only young, so it’s really important that you can be sensible and grown-up and get things done.

As the dialogue between these three subpersonalities continued, the owl (Busy Coper) agreed that the monkey (Little Lynda) could have at least ten minutes every day just to play or be sad. The owl also agreed that she wouldn’t ignore the monkey when she needed more attention – she would listen and acknowledge her feelings but explain that right now they needed to work. The Monkey was very pleased to be listened to and felt that ten

minutes a day would be just about enough for now. The owl also agreed that the monkey could have more time in therapy. Lynda symbolized this shift by removing the wall and by giving the Monkey toys to play with and bringing her nearer to the owl. She placed a clock in the sand to symbolize their agreement.

An alternative means of experientially facilitating the expression of subpersonalities – particularly appropriate in the absence of a therapist or facilitator – is the use of written dialogue, either between the ‘centre’ and a subpersonality (Capacchione, 1991), or between two subpersonalities themselves (Rowan, 1993; Shapiro, 1976). Capacchione combines written dialogue with art-work, inviting her readers to talk with and talk *as* the subpersonality-images that they have drawn. Such an approach offers the individual an opportunity to express themselves from a particularly subpersonality, but in a manner less direct and ‘total’ than if they were acting it out.

### **Underlying principles**

On a manifest level, each of these descriptive, projective and experiential methods of facilitating the expression of subpersonalities would appear somewhat different. And yet, examined more closely, many of them seem to share an underlying premise – a premise that can be developed and applied in an infinite variety of ways. Each method begins with one or more personal characteristics: such as, a role, a prominent trait, character, a name, or a body part. Then, through a variety of mediums – for example, putting pieces of paper into piles, drawing pictures, performing – related characteristics are constellated around the initial one, such that a fully constellated subpersonality emerges. In other words, the assumption is that: ‘The entire pattern can be activated by focusing attention on one of its behavioural or experiential elements’ (Watkins and Watkins, 1979: 196). For example, in Ferrucci’s (1982) guided visualization, the individual is asked to begin with a prominent trait, attitude or motivation, allow an image to emerge representing it, and then let the image talk and express itself. Here, the trait, attitude or motivation is used as the initial starting point, and then, through visualization and verbalizations, the individual is encouraged to constellate related behavioural, phenomenological, motivational, cognitive, physiological and affective components around it until a fully formed subpersonality emerges. The underlying principle behind this seems to be that the subpersonalities, as interdependent gestalt formations, exist as – and act as – unified and inseparable wholes. Hook one element of it, and it will bring up all its related parts.

Despite what seems to be a shared underlying assumption, however, there are a number of dimensions along which each of these techniques varies. First is the amount of the subpersonality-complex which is initially used to attract related elements. In some cases, where the starting point is a sandtray figure, a part of the body, or a prominent attitude, there is little of immediate

significance with which to lift out the subpersonality-complex. On the other hand, where the starting point is a role, a term such as 'the vulnerable child', or a previously identified subpersonality, then much of the subpersonality is already known. Both small and large starting points have their advantages. A small starting point, being only a minor part of the total subpersonality-complex, has the advantage that there is much of the subpersonality remaining to elicit. Hence, there is more chance of facilitating the expression of subpersonalities that are deeply hidden or only partially known. Perls, for instance, would put in the empty chair such small starting points as 'your smirk' or 'the old man you saw when you were five and a half'. '[A]ll these things could be talked to and talked back. And as they did so, they turned into subpersonalities – sometimes quite familiar subpersonalities and sometimes new and surprising subpersonalities' (Rowan, 1993: 127). A large starting point, on the other hand, has the advantage that you are more certain that what does emerge is indeed a subpersonality. In other words, a smirk or an old man *might* elicit a subpersonality, but there is no reason to assume that this will always be the case.

Another difference is the degree to which the technique 'distances' the individual from their subpersonality or directly identifies them with it. Projective techniques tend to be the most distancing in that they allow the individual to express an aspect of themselves through an entirely not-self medium. Indeed, in the case of role-play (Landy, 1993), the individual may never actually be asked to identify with the 'subpersonality' they are acting out. This contrasts with those approaches – such as the evening review – where it is clear to the individual from the beginning that what they are expressing is one of *their* subpersonalities. The advantage of the more distancing techniques is that, by allowing the individual to be an 'other' they may feel freer to express parts of themselves that, as them-selves, they would be too inhibited to reveal. Distancing techniques may also provide the individual with more opportunity to 'stand back' from themselves and gain a more 'centred' and 'objective' perspective on their different sides. More direct approaches, on the other hand, may have the advantage of confronting the individual with the fact that what is being expressed really is a side of them – an awareness which may be easier to avoid with the more projective techniques.

A final difference between these techniques is the extent to which the subpersonality is overtly manifested. Whereas in the descriptive and projective techniques, used exclusively, the subpersonality is only talked or drawn *about*; in the experiential techniques, the subpersonality is actually manifested at an overt level. The advantage of this overt manifestation is that the individual can get a sense of their subpersonality from the 'inside', can identify and empathize with it more fully, and can cathart any strong emotions that may be associated with it. The advantage of a more covert expression, however, is that the individual may find it easier to really stand back from the subpersonality and gain a reflective awareness of it.

Given these dimensions, a therapeutic approach which combines elements of descriptive, projective, and experiential techniques may be most effective at facilitating the therapeutic exploration of subpersonalities. Art-work, for instance, might allow the individual to project outwards a relatively unidentified part of themselves. By 'being' the entity they have drawn, they may then have an opportunity fully to understand the phenomenological elements of that mode of Being. Standing back and talking about the sub-personality may then allow them to integrate it at a more reflective level, and to understand how that subpersonality affects their life.

Through a variety of techniques, Lynda learned to express the many different sides of her Being. As a consequence of this process, she began to develop a greater ability to communicate within her-self, and to resolve the self-to-self conflicts that had previously been pulling her apart. When Lynda came into psychotherapy, her Busy Coper had been trying to silence her Little Lynda – albeit unsuccessfully – while her Mrs Angry mode, red with frustration, had been helplessly shouting nearby. Now, having expressed and identified these different sides to herself, Busy Coper had begun to allow some space for Little Lynda who had reciprocated by calling off the ongoing demands for attention, and Mrs Angry was beginning to reveal some of her more positive and constructive qualities. Furthermore, through these techniques, a fourth subpersonality had emerged – the centred, wise Big Lynda – who had the potential to understand and bring together the different sub-personalities.

These techniques of expression, then, allow the individual to move from a state of internal distrust and conflict to a state in which the different selves can come to learn about, understand and value each other. This constitutes essential groundwork for the healthy communication between different subpersonalities, enabling them to work together in a more effective and actualizing way.

## Notes

- 1 To ensure complete confidentiality, some details in this case-example have been changed.
- 2 These terms will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter.
- 3 L. Capacchione, *Recovery of your Inner Child* (Simon and Schuster, London, 1991) also encourages individuals to draw and write down their subpersonality's words with their non-dominant hand. This, she argues, directly accesses the right brain hemisphere, hence encouraging more creative and less consciously dictated functioning. Capacchione also suggests that the awkwardness and lack of control experienced when writing with the non-dominant hand actually puts individuals into their inner child state.

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