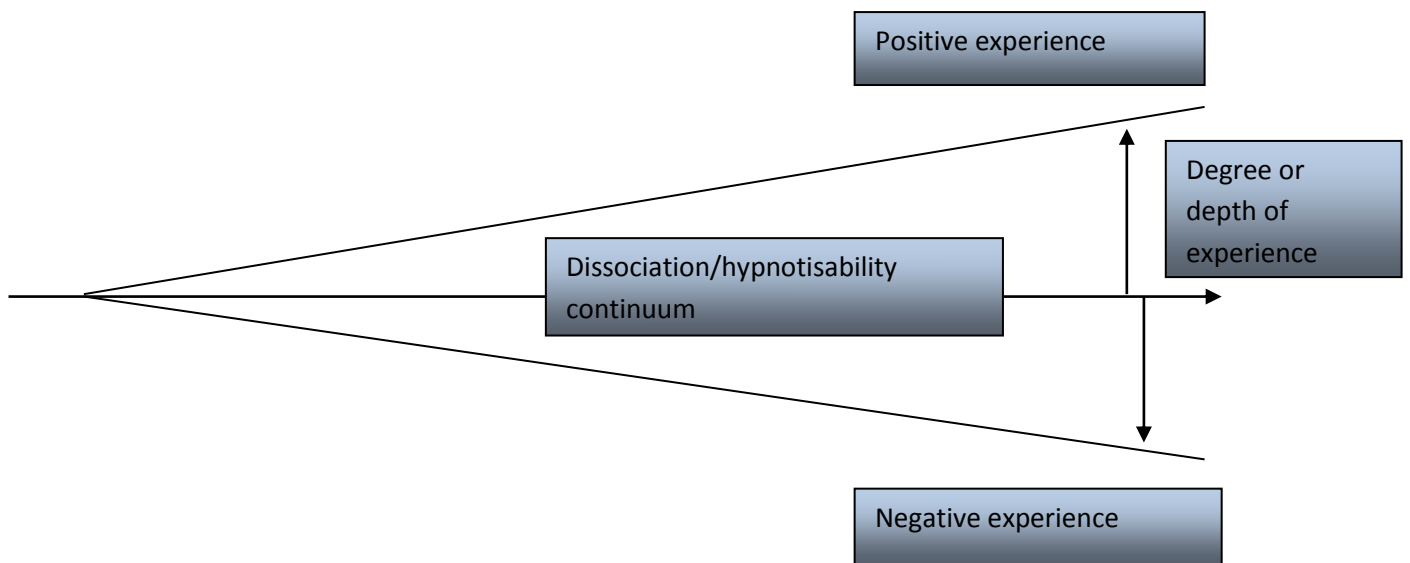


Fig .. A model for the dissociation – schizotypal continuum



It is hypothesised that as the dissociative continuum progresses so the vulnerability to psychosis or negative and positive spiritual experience increases. As the difference between positive and negative experience widens the pathological symptoms would be commensurate with current diagnostic categories of neurosis, dissociative disorders and psychosis. The psychotic would experience the widest fluctuations between positive and negative extremes, whilst the mediumistic would be more liable to positive only. Ultimate vulnerability to psychosis or negative spiritual experience would be determined by early experiences on the vulnerability of the ego. A person who had experienced birth separation or childhood trauma, and has high dissociative potential but who has a robust ego would be less prone to psychosis and more prone to positive spiritual experience.

Based on this theory a more detailed model could be built with all the factors previously identified by Bentall and colleagues (1989) and those factors identified by Heap *et al* (2004), together with factors of creativity and early birth experiences, etc.

In conclusion it may be hypothesised that the ability to dissociate is the ability to enter into altered states of consciousness that facilitate not only pathological fragmentation, but also mystical, spiritual and religious experiences of a wide ranging order. Dissociation could be the gateway to other realms of experience including mediumship, shamanic journeying and contact with alternate realities. If the ability to dissociate is on a continuum of human ability, vulnerability or sensitivity then it is the gateway to a variety of altered states and spiritual worlds that could be seen as 'discontinuous' with normal waking consciousness as proposed by Clarke (2001). To acknowledge this possibility is to adopt a completely different epistemology and series of alternative conceptual frameworks that include realities other than the physical realm of quantitative science.

This is the approach adopted by Spirit Release Therapy, and it is in the next chapter that the conceptual frameworks for this therapeutic modality are to be reviewed.

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