

Evidence of Multiple Personality Disorder in Handwriting

Forensic handwriting identification links the handwriting of an unknown document with a suspected author in cases involving forged checks, credit card charge slips, anonymous letters, and ransom notes. It is also used to determine the genuineness of someone's signature on documents such as wills, contracts, and trusts. This type of testimony has been accepted in state and federal courts for over 100 years.

The individuality in our handwriting, which allows it to be identified with us is caused by a number of factors: the schools we attended; our parents; our sense of neatness; the size of our hands, fingers, and arms; and our eyesight. All of these factors make handwriting a product of the brain: neurological transmissions come through the arms and fingers to impart uniqueness into our handwriting.

The material for this article originates from a medical malpractice case examined by the author in which a dispute arose regarding when the plaintiff acquired multiple personality disorder (MPD), an "abnormal condition in which two or more well developed personalities exist within the same individual. Awareness of the others among the various personalities may not occur. Each may

take over at a certain time. Change from one to another is usually sudden and linked to stress." *Mosby Medical Encyclopedia*.

My role was to examine diaries authored by the plaintiff from 1986–1991 and determine if evidence existed of different writers. The original diaries were used for the analysis. All parties agreed that the diaries and entries were prepared on their respective dates so the possibility that they were all made at one time after the filing of the lawsuit was not an issue. Consequently, no ink dating tests were performed. The examination consisted of comparing the handwriting habits in the diaries with each other to determine if they were consistent, inconsistent, contrived, or if evidence of different authors was present.

The results were startling. Most of us see differences in our handwriting from day to day, which can be caused by haste, writing position, fatigue, stress, or writing surface. In these diary entries, which appeared under different names, were four distinct handwriting styles. They presented not only pictorial differences, but the writing systems themselves were different. These differences were far outside the natural variation we all notice in our handwriting. These styles repeated over time and were identifiable with themselves but not with the others. This evidences four different neurologic contributions. Another significant finding was that when the author of the diaries handprinted, the handprinting had the quality and maturity of an elementary school child as shown by immature letter formations and baseline placement.

The conclusion was drawn from these results that the author of the diaries presented

evidence of multiple personalities. When she was one person, for example Sue, she wrote differently than when she was Jean. I have no ability or training to diagnose multiple personality disorders and am not claiming that normal variation in handwriting, which we all experience in our lives is evidence of MPD. This case involved a mature woman who was diagnosed with MPD. Her diagnosis was not in question nor was the production dates of the diaries. This presented a rare insight into the writing product of an MPD patient.

If you are confronted with a case involving a person with suspected or alleged MPD, one yardstick that can be used to determine the existence of the disorder is an examination of this person's handwriting over a period of time to see if there is evidence of different writers. This evidence alone would not support a finding of MPD without a competent psychiatric evaluation, the most important diagnostic tool.

Care must also be exercised to determine that the writings are the patient's natural work product and were done over a period of time such as with diaries, work records, and related documents. Documents generated at one time to establish an alibi or buttress a claim and then backdated are, in most cases, easily detected through modern forensic document examination and ink dating technology. ♦

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REFERENCES

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"Trial Practice" appears regularly in the *Michigan Bar Journal*. This column is designed to provide advice and guidance on how to effectively prepare for and conduct trials.
