

## The Reality of Multiple Personality Disorder/Dissociative Identity Disorder

In graduate school, my professors skimmed over the diagnosis dissociative identity disorder, formerly called multiple personality disorder. It was thought that most of us would never treat an individual with this condition. Wrong! There has been a sharp rise in the diagnosis of this disorder in the United States in recent years.

The Diagnostic Criteria for 300.14 Dissociative Identity Disorder is:

Note: In children, the symptoms are not attributable to imaginary playmates or other fantasy play.

Dissociation is a gift to all of us. It allows us to not remember traumatic and painful events. Everyone has some level of disassociation. For some, it is occasional mere daydreaming in class or getting lost in a television movie. We were taught a form of dissociation to help with the pains of childbirth. Other people report blacking out in the face of trauma.

In severe and repeated cases of trauma, the disassociation must be more complex. Sometimes a whole new identity is formed to deal with the torture. These individuals with complex dissociative abilities are said to have dissociative identity disorder.

Dissociative disorders are especially common in those who have been traumatized by ritual abuse or other severe sexual child abuse and torture. Just like we have scars on our knees from falls in childhood, some people have "scars" on their minds and bodies from the tortures they have experienced. Pain leaves a mark or a memory. A life of abuse may make marital sexuality nearly impossible because the mere act triggers a flashback to the abuse. Anything that one associates with any abuse may be a trigger.

Unless you or someone close to you has this diagnosis it may seem hard to comprehend. Maybe it can be looked at metaphorically like a conjoined twin. There is only one shared body with two minds/personalities.

I sometimes try to explain it by saying that it is like a woman carrying quintuplets. One body is carrying around five minds in the womb, plus her own - six minds within the same main body. For illustration purposes, let's assume that each of these minds remained within the pregnant woman for an entire lifetime. As we continue this illustration, these minds carry on conversations among themselves, which is why people with this disorder say they "hear voices."

Although they share the same body, some have a male identity and some are female. They have different likes and dislikes. They have different names. Their handwriting, speech and educational level may vary. They have some differences in medical conditions.

The members of this internal family are of various ages depending upon the trauma that occurred to the core person. These members compete for an opportunity to share the outside world or to perform their function.