

Dissociation

By: Cynthia Yarbrough

What is Dissociation?

Dissociation is a word that is used to describe a disconnection between things that are usually associated with each other. In psychology and also in deliverance, we use the term to indicate some degree of distancing, disruption, separation, or disconnection, in ones emotions, perceptions, or memories. Dissociation can manifest itself in many different ways. Almost everyone experiences some degree of dissociation from time to time. For example, passing by your exit on the highway and not realizing it until you are down the road, or that “blacked out” or “spaced out” feeling that we all experience occasionally. These are very mild, very common forms of dissociation.

When dissociation interferes with our emotional health or our ability to function effectively in life, then there is something that needs to be addressed; something is causing the dissociation. The more serious forms of dissociation will manifest in a variety of ways. For example, someone may think about an event that was very upsetting or traumatic, yet have no emotional feelings about it. Clinically, this is called *emotional numbing*, a common symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Dissociation often affects a person in the form of sudden thoughts, feelings, or actions, that seem to come out of nowhere. For example, a person may feel overwhelmed by an emotion that does not seem to make sense at the time. Like suddenly feeling extreme sadness or anger, without any apparent reason. Then perhaps later the sadness or the anger will leave just as suddenly, in much the same way that it came. Dissociation has also been described as a person finding themselves acting in certain ways that they would not normally act, but being unable to stop themselves, feeling as if they are somehow being compelled to do it.

What Causes Dissociation?

Dissociation is most commonly caused by trauma, such as repeated physical or sexual abuse; although it can also occur when there has been severe verbal, mental, or emotional abuse, even neglect. The first *split* (or emotional separation) generally occurs in early childhood, usually before the age of eight or nine. Consider a small child of three or four years old. If that child is being sexually abused, molested, or incested, what can they do? They can't stop it, they are too small. They can't fight back, they are not strong enough. They can't run away, they are too young; where would they go? They just have to take it. So they run on the inside. They create a place inside to stuff all the pain, the fear, and the trauma; they learn to compartmentalize the pain. It reduces the overwhelming distress caused by the traumatic incident, and allows the child to go on, to cope, to survive.

If there is a tremendous amount of ongoing abuse and trauma, dissociation can become the child's primary means of coping with difficult or painful situations. They can even begin to automatically disconnect from situations that are perceived as dangerous or threatening, without taking the time to find out if they are actually in any real danger. Sometimes this pattern will continue into adulthood; but while dissociation works well for children, this method of coping usually begins to break down in adults, leaving them with a chaotic mass of jumbled emotions and negative feelings.

Dissociative Identity Disorder

The most severe forms of dissociation include Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), and involves a person doing things that they have no memory of doing. They may suddenly find themselves in another place with no memory of how they got there, or wearing different clothing, with no memory of changing their clothes. Typically in these cases people have missing chunks of memory, with no recollection of what they did or what happened to them during these missing periods of time.

Dissociative Identity Disorder, previously known as Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), is the most severe and chronic manifestation of dissociation. Clinically, it is characterized by the presence of two or more distinct identities or personalities (also called *alters*, or *alternant personalities*), that periodically

take control of the person's behavior. The person him/herself (the *core personality* or *host personality*), is unable to remember the things that happened while the alter personalities were in control.

These dissociated parts of a person's soul, are not fully formed personalities, but are usually somewhat fragmented, with varying degrees of personality formation. For example, one alter may hold the memories of a particular incident of abuse and carry all the anger over the incident. Another alter may have the same memories of the same incident, but be holding all the fear and pain from the incident. And yet another alter may hold the memories and emotions from a different incident altogether. There may not be much more to some alters than the memories and emotions of a single incident. While some might have a far more developed personality with many different memories, yet still they are only a fragmented part of the core person. All the alter personalities usually serve distinctly specific roles in coping with the problems and difficulties of life. So the events of life and living, both large and small, will often trigger sudden shifts from one personality to another.

We in deliverance, do not like the term "*disorder*" applied to this condition, because we believe that dissociation is a God given coping mechanism, to help children survive trauma. If God had not given us the ability to dissociate, a child's mind would snap under some of the extreme forms of abuse that we hear our clients describe.

Dissociation and Deliverance

In deliverance we see a great deal of dissociation. The subject of deliverance can be controversial in some churches, and of the churches that accept deliverance, the whole concept of dissociation and DID can be even more controversial. Some well meaning Christians believe that anything you find inside of someone, that is not the core person, is a demon. So when they start commanding these traumatized little child parts to get out, they end up traumatizing the already terrified alters even further.

Those who struggle with deliverance in general usually do so because they have been taught something like this: "The Holy Spirit and a demon cannot occupy the same space; therefore, because a Christian has the Holy Spirit inside, they cannot have a demon." This problem arises because of a misunderstanding of the way God created man. Man is a three part being consisting of *body*, *soul*, and *spirit*. When a person receives Jesus as Lord and invites him into their heart, they are born again, and the Holy Spirit comes to live in their spirit. The place where Satan attacks us is in our body and soul areas. Most Christians understand this when we are talking about the body. We know that sickness and disease are of the enemy; and it can be quite obvious at times that a particular physical illness is clearly demonic. Therefore, if Satan can attack our body like this, a Christian can have a demon. When one understands that, the next thing they want to argue about is exactly *where* the demon is located. Is it *in* someone or *upon* them? Are they *oppressed* or *possessed*? Actually the Greek word used in the Bible is neither *oppressed* nor *possessed*, it is the word *demonized*, in every Biblical account. So we tell people to call it whatever they want to call it, lets just get rid of it!

The place that Satan attacks us more often than any other place is in our soul area. The soul consists of the *mind*, the *will*, and the *emotions*. When a child is abused, they are opened up to demons through the trauma. We see this over and over again. The sheer nature of trauma opens a person, especially a child who has no idea how to handle that trauma either mentally or emotionally. So they stuff all that pain and trauma down somewhere deep inside, in the soul area. However, it is in the emotional aftermath of the trauma that the enemy builds his strongholds. The natural response to being abused, is to get angry because of the injustice. Consequently, whenever we find demons of Abuse, we almost always find that demons of Anger, Rage, and Hate are there also.

About 90% of deliverance is about inner healing, and of the people who are hurting badly enough to seek deliverance, probably 98% of them experience some degree of dissociation. We need to bring those traumatized parts where the pain is buried, to Jesus so that he can heal them. Jesus is the only one who can heal these kinds of wounds. As Christians, we usually know that holding onto bitterness and unforgiveness is a sin, and that it opens up a doorway for the enemy to attack us. It gives him a legal right to access our lives. So what is it that happens when the person we are ministering to has forgiven, but they have these child parts on the inside that nobody even knew were there? Nobody ever asked *them* (the alters) to forgive, and in most

cases they have not forgiven. Very often, the enemy's legal right to be there is hidden in the alter personalities. So as we take the alters through the forgiveness process, we are taking away Satan's legal right to be there. Then we can get the demons out, often without much of a struggle at all.

So the deliverance process is a process of bringing the alters to Jesus for healing, and getting them to forgive, thereby taking away Satan's legal right to be there; and then we cast out the demons. If we try to cast out the demons before dealing with the legal rights, we can scream at demons all day long, and they aren't going to go anywhere. And if somehow we do get them out, they will soon be back, because they still have a legal right to be there.

Co-Consciousness

In deliverance we see many cases of DID, where the alters are very separated from the core personality, completely amnesiac. But what we see far more often, is what is called co-consciousness. Co-consciousness is when some of the different parts share memories and/or emotions. There can be co-consciousness between some of the alters, or between the core personality and the alters. There can be co-consciousness between the core and some of the alters but not all of them. Every *system* of demons and alters is different.

When the core person remembers the traumatic incidents that have happened, the dissociated parts are usually there, but they are not as separate. Many people experience this degree of dissociation, though this would never receive a clinical diagnosis of DID. Usually this person thinks that the emotional turmoil they are struggling with is normal. They may think they are just moody. The emotional response of the alter feels like them, and so they may never think of it as a response that is coming from a wound from their past. In deliverance, this person must learn to separate what is them, from what is the alter. With DID the alter sort of just comes up and takes over. With co-consciousness it is more a process of getting in touch with the emotions of the trauma, and just speaking out of that place of intense pain or emotion. We call this, *going to the point of the pain*.

Conclusions

Certainly there are times when we all have to deal with strong emotions. What I am talking about is a sudden flood of strong, usually negative emotions, that may seem to come out of nowhere, and can sometimes feel overwhelming. Feeling emotionally stirred up most of the time is not normal. It is an indication that there is something there that needs to be dealt with. The same is true for the person that seems to have no emotions at all, or someone who finds it difficult to express their emotions.

We cannot and *do not* diagnose anyone with DID, or with anything else. This is simply the approach that we use in ministering to hurting people, because we have found it extremely effective. We have found that the inner healing process in general, and this method in particular, gives us better results and more lasting results when we cast out the demons, than the other methods that are more commonly used today.