

Dissociative Disorders

Dissociative Amnesia

Dissociative Identity Disorder

Depersonalization-Derealization Disorder

What is a dissociative disorder?



- Someone with a dissociative disorder **escapes reality** in ways that are involuntary and unhealthy.
- The **sense of self has become separated** (*dissociated*) **from previous memories, thoughts, or identity**

- The symptoms of dissociative disorders range from amnesia to alternate identities depending on the type you have.
- Symptoms usually develop as **a reaction to trauma** and help **keep difficult memories at bay**. Times of stress can temporarily worsen symptoms, making them more obvious.



- There are **three major dissociative disorders** defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), published by the American Psychiatric Association:
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- **Dissociative Amnesia**
- **Dissociative Identity Disorder** (formerly known as *Multiple Personality Disorder*)
- **Depersonalization-derealization disorder**

What is Dissociative Amnesia?

- A dissociative disorder in which memory loss is **more severe than normal forgetfulness** and that **can't be explained by a medical condition**.



Symptoms of Dissociative Amnesia

- You can't recall information about yourself or events and people in your life, especially from a traumatic time.
- Dissociative amnesia can be specific to events in a certain time, such as intense combat, or more rarely, can involve complete loss of memory about yourself.



What is a dissociative fugue?

- Symptoms may sometimes involve **travel or confused wandering away from your life** (known as a dissociative fugue).



Fugue State



- In a fugue state a person may form a new identity, new friendships, even a new line of work.
- An episode of amnesia **may last minutes, hours, or, rarely, months or years.**

What is dissociative identity disorder?

- This disorder, **formerly known as multiple personality disorder**, is characterized by "switching" to alternate identities.



What are “alters”?

- You may feel the presence of **one or more other people**(sometimes called “alters”) **talking or living inside your head**, and you may feel as though you're **possessed by other identities**.





- As a patient switches from one identity to another, each alter/personality has a **unique name** and personal history. They **usually differ in age, gender, voice**, and even such physical qualities as handedness (left or right) or the need for eye glasses.

- Sometimes these personalities are aware of each other and sometimes they are not.
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- People with dissociative identity disorder typically also have dissociative amnesia and often have dissociative fugue.



On the rise?

- Before the 1970's there were **fewer than 100 cases** diagnosed

- During the 1980's alone **more than 20,000** cases were diagnosed
 - almost all in the United States
- The average number of personalities has also increased from 3 to 12 with some people reporting dozens of personalities



Is it real?



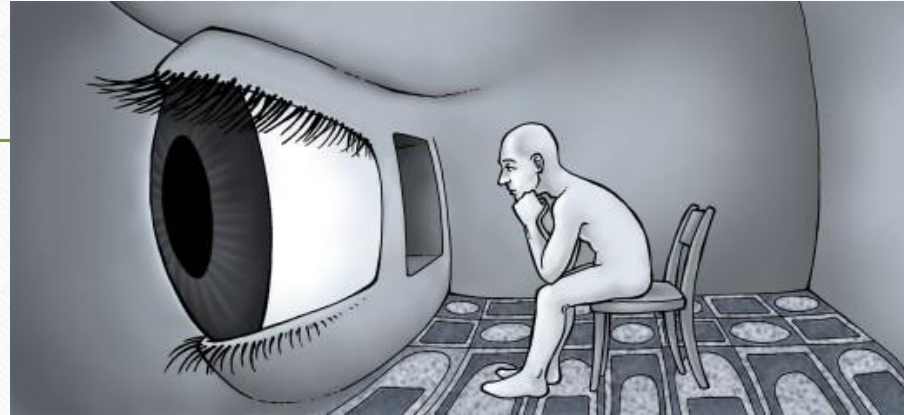
- This is a **rare and controversial** disorder and psychologists disagree as to whether or not it is even real.
- Some believe that **psychiatrists may be unintentionally suggesting** multiple personalities to their clients.

How is it different from schizophrenia?

- People with DID experience many personalities living in the same mind. Schizophrenics do not. They are always the same person.
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- **People with DID do not experience the delusions and hallucinations that schizophrenics do.** Schizophrenics may hear or see people, but they do not *become* these people.

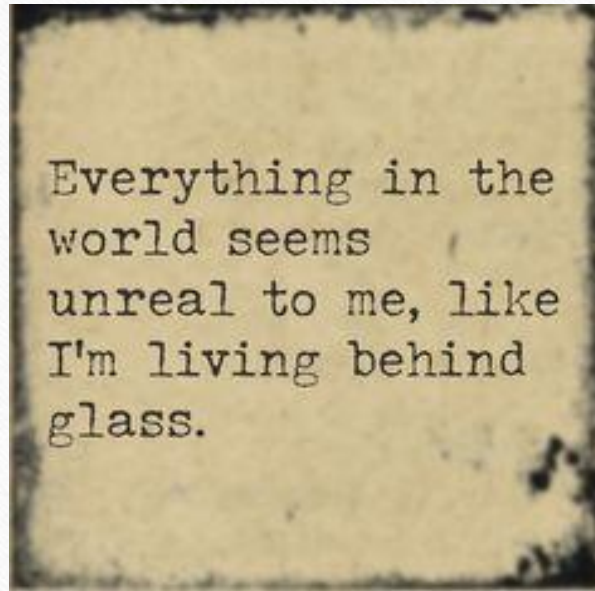


What is Depersonalization-derealization disorder?



- This disorder involves a sense of detachment or **being outside yourself** — observing your actions, feelings, thoughts and self **from a distance as though watching a movie** (depersonalization).
- This feeling can either be ongoing or episodic.

- Other people and things around you may feel **detached and foggy or dreamlike**, and the world may seem unreal (derealization).
- Symptoms, which can be profoundly distressing, may last only a few moments or come and go over many years.



What causes Dissociative Disorders?

- Dissociative disorders usually develop as **a way to cope with trauma.**
- The disorders most often form in children **subjected to long-term physical, sexual or emotional abuse** or, less often, a **home environment that's frightening or highly unpredictable.**
- The **stress of war or natural disasters** also can bring on dissociative disorders.

Learned in Childhood

- Personal identity is still forming during childhood. So **a child is more able than an adult to step outside of him/herself and observe trauma as though it's happening to a different person.** A child who learns to dissociate in order to endure an extended period of youth may use this coping mechanism in response to stressful situations throughout life.

Negative Effects

- Self-harm
- Suicidal thoughts and attempts
- Alcoholism and drug use disorders
- Mood, Anxiety or Other disorders
- Severe headaches



Other Problems

- Dissociative disorders are also associated with **major difficulties in personal relationships and at work.**
- People with these conditions often aren't able to cope well with emotional or professional stress, and their **dissociative reactions** — from tuning out to disappearing — **may worry loved ones and cause people at work to view them as unreliable.**

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- **Psychotherapy** is the **primary treatment** for dissociative disorders.
 - Although there are **Treatments** that **specifically treat dissociative disorders**, doctors may prescribe *antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications or antipsychotic medications* to help control the mental health symptoms associated with dissociative disorders.

Sources

- MayoClinic.org
- Thinking About Psychology, 2nd Edit.