

DID Research

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DID, or dissociative identity disorder is a psychological disorder that affects 1.5 to 2% of the global population. It was known as multiple personality disorder, but then changed name in 1994 to be more accurate. It is added to the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders from the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. It is caused by severe childhood trauma for the age of 7 before the personality is fully developed.

DID, where and when did it start?

The first documented case of dissociative identity disorder was in 1584 when 25-year-old Dominican nun called Jeanne Fery was exorcised as they then called it in Mons, France between the years of 1584 to 85. Her exorcists wrote detailed accounts describing identity fragmentation and past history of childhood trauma. Jeanne Fery herself also wrote about her experience, both show symptoms of modern day DID. Later on, a 109-page description of her treatment was published in France. Other studies show identity fragmentation and possible childhood trauma from this era. For example, in 1623 there was an investigation into Sister Benedetta who was from a convent in Italy. She was said to be possessed by 3 angelic boys who would beat out, causing chronic pain. They would also sometimes take over her body, each speaking a different dialect with specific facial expressions and various tones of voice. She had amnesia for acts done by each of them, for example the sexual relationship one had started with one the other nuns. Like Jeanne Fery, Sister Benedetta suffered from self-harm and eating disorders. She said that one of her angels was frozen at nine years old, which was the same age that Benedetta had lost her father when her symptoms got uncontrollable she was then sent away. Later in 1886, a woman was diagnosed with doubling of the personality.

What's the difference between DID and other disorders?

Unfortunately, there have been a lot of misconceptions by DID. For example, it is important to note that the DID, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and borderline personality disorder are not the same bipolar disorders are mood disorders. DID, however, has nothing to do with mood. Change in attitude in DID is caused by switching so they are nothing alike. Schizophrenia is a spectrum of disorders and while both people with DID and people with schizophrenia often hear voices. People with DID are not hallucinating their alters. Schizophrenia also does not involved dissociation. However, DID and borderline personality disorders do share a handful of traits. Both are caused by her childhood trauma but DID is described as an experience where there are multiple distinct parts, Whereas BPD has been described as poorly

defined and possibly fragmented personality. None of these disorders are the same and it is very important to distinguish the differences.

Alters. What are they and how do they work?

Many alters in a body is called the system. Systems can be made of anywhere between 2 and hundreds of alters. Switching is when an alter takes control of the body. There are many roles that an alter fills. Since all systems are different, there may be more than one or even no alters of a particular role. There are 9 main roles, the core, the host, the protector, the prosecutor, the memory holder, the introject, the gatekeeper, the internal self-helper, and fragments. An alter can be any age, sex, gender, sexuality, nationality or even species. Each alter plays a key part in keeping the system running, but most systems have at least one alter that's actively damages the system, usually one that is holding a lot of trauma. Non-human alters work quite differently to the rest since they are, as the name suggests, not human. They're most often formed when a child is very young and first starts to form alters before they have a firm grasp on what is and isn't possible. These alters usually symbolise something, for example if it's young child is constantly told that they're going to hell, or that their possessed, some other religious trauma, then they may have a demon alter. Similarly, if a neglected child sees the parents giving a lot of affection and care to the family pet, they might also form an animal alter. These altars can front in many ways. They might be completely like an animal or only have certain animal traits. Some non-human alters can also less commonly be fantasy creatures. That the child has deemed strong enough to protect them from further abuse and even less common are alters that aren't living creatures at all. They can be robots or even see themselves as dead. Some non-human alters can also be hybrids.

Overall DID is a quite a rare disorder that isn't talked about enough. Many individuals DID are told they are faking it or hallucinating. There's also a lot of stigma and misconceptions around it. DID was only officially recognised in 1980s so not many people know anything about it. I think this needs to change.