

**A CASE STUDY INVESTIGATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT
AND TREATMENT OF ALTER PERSONALITIES IN
DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER**

By

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Being a report of an investigation submitted in 2006 as a partial requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Psychotherapy) in the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences at Edith Cowan University.

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ABSTRACT

Progress in the study and treatment of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) has been hampered by ideological debate regarding its validity. This is particularly the case when patient's suffering from DID also report ritualistic abuse. Part of the difficulty has been that past studies have not established independent checks to assess whether alters are artefacts introduced by therapeutic bias. This study addressed this issue by using independent judges to test the validity of a patient being treated for DID who claimed ritualistic abuse. The judges were 16 clinicians with an average of 21 years experience in their respective disciplines. The study also examined the development and treatment of alter personalities through a detailed examination of case material. The patient had been in continuous therapy with the author and treatment had been conducted using the self psychology model. The study involved three phases.

In the first phase inter-rater reliability between the judges was assessed. Each judge received a written transcript and tape of a particular session, which they were asked to assess on two Likert-type questionnaires. One questionnaire assessed therapeutic bias and the other alter validation. The criterion for inter-rater reliability was met and the study proceeded to phase two.

In phase two the hypothesis that the DID manifested in this patient was the result of iatrogenic biasing was empirically tested. Each judge rated two tapes, one tape in which an alter appeared for the first time and a second tape in which there was evidence of switching and dissociation. Each judge received different tapes. An appropriate design methodology was used and it was concluded that the DID evident in this patient was not the result of therapeutic bias and that the presentation of alter personalities could be validated by independent judges.

In the third phase the traumatic events described by the patient and their relationship to the development of her alter system are detailed. The material is examined from the perspective of theories that consider DID to be a development response to trauma and those that consider it to be the result of iatrogenic bias. Questions regarding the development of the alter system over the patient's life span are investigated as is the development of specific types of alters and their function within the patient's life.

The process of treatment and integration is described and evaluated against the existing literature. Self-harm and attempted suicides by the patient are examined in the context of treatment. Two main alter sub-groups, home and cult alters, were identified and the difficulty involved in integration between these two sub-systems is discussed. The importance of attachment to the main abuser who in this case was the father and the impact this had on her development is considered.

The study concludes with a discussion of the reasons for the continued development of some alters as opposed to others. Some consideration is given to the difficulties presented for the treatment of this patient in a public setting and the influence the debate regarding iatrogenic biasing has upon this.

DECLARATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A CASE STUDY INVESTIGATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND TREATMENT OF ALTER PERSONALITIES IN DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER.....	I
<i>USE OF THESIS</i>	II
<i>STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION</i>	III
<i>ABSTRACT.....</i>	IV
<i>DECLARATION</i>	VI
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....</i>	VII
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	VIII
TABLES.....	XII
FIGURES.....	XIII
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
<i>Overview.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Background to the Study.....</i>	<i>2</i>
1.1 DISSOCIATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISSOCIATIVE DISORDERS.....	6
<i>Overview.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Development of Dissociation.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Classification of Dissociation.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Definition of the Dissociative Disorders.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Function of Dissociation.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Dissociation as a Defensive Response to Overwhelming Trauma.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Summary.....</i>	<i>14</i>
1.2 DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER	15
<i>Overview.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Diagnostic Criteria for Dissociative Identity Disorder</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>A Brief History of Dissociative Identity Disorder.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Dissociative Identity Disorder and Trauma</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Dissociative Identity Disorder and Ritualistic Abuse</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Trauma and Memory</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Aetiology of Dissociative Identity Disorder.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Summary.....</i>	<i>33</i>
CHAPTER TWO	35
2.0 ISSUES PERTINENT TO THIS STUDY	35
<i>Overview.....</i>	<i>35</i>
2.1 DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER AND IATROGENIC BIAS.....	35
2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF ALTER PERSONALITIES	44
<i>Structure of alter systems.....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Structure of alter systems in ritual abuse</i>	<i>48</i>
2.3 DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT	50
<i>Diagnosis.....</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Treatment.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Treatment of ritualistic abuse.....</i>	<i>55</i>

<i>Summary</i>	57
2.4 AIMS OF THE STUDY	58
CHAPTER THREE	60
3.0 PROCEDURE EMPLOYED IN THIS STUDY	60
<i>Overview</i>	60
3.1 THE CASE STUDY AS A FORM OF INVESTIGATION	60
<i>Advantages of the case study</i>	60
<i>Disadvantages of the case study</i>	61
<i>Reasons for the case study in this investigation</i>	62
3.2 TREATMENT MODALITY: SELF PSYCHOLOGY	63
<i>Self Object</i>	64
<i>Mirroring</i>	65
<i>Idealizing</i>	65
<i>Twinship</i>	66
<i>Constituents of Self</i>	66
<i>Therapy</i>	67
3.3 THE PARTICIPANT OF THIS STUDY	69
<i>Overview</i>	69
<i>Setting</i>	69
<i>Initial Presentation</i>	69
<i>Previous Treatment History</i>	72
<i>History of Participant</i>	74
3.4 INITIAL COURSE OF THERAPY LEADING TO DID ASSESSMENT	79
3.5 THERAPIST’S TRAINING AND ORIENTATION	94
CHAPTER FOUR.....	97
4.0 METHOD	97
<i>Overview</i>	97
4.1 VALIDATION OF DID	97
<i>Development of Questionnaires and Rationale for their Use</i>	97
<i>Relationship between Treatment and the Development of DID</i>	101
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	102
<i>Research Questions</i>	102
4.2 PROCEDURE.....	103
<i>Phase One: Reliability Study</i>	103
<i>Materials: Questionnaires</i>	104
<i>Process</i>	105
<i>Phase Two: Evaluation of Iatrogenic Bias and Alter Validation</i>	108
<i>Participant</i>	108
<i>Judges (15)</i>	108
<i>Materials: Questionnaires One and Two</i>	108
<i>Process</i>	108
<i>Phase Three: Treatment/Aetiology</i>	111
<i>Participant</i>	111
<i>Materials</i>	111
<i>Research Question Three</i>	111
<i>Process</i>	111
<i>Research Question Four</i>	112
<i>Process</i>	112
CHAPTER FIVE.....	114
5.0 RESULTS: PHASE ONE AND PHASE TWO.....	114
<i>Overview</i>	114
5.1 PHASE ONE: RELIABILITY STUDY.....	114
<i>Experience and Specialty of Independent Judges</i>	114
<i>Inter-rater reliability</i>	115

5.2 PHASE TWO: EVALUATION OF IATROGENIC BIAS AND ALTER VALIDATION.....	116
<i>Questionnaire One: Evaluation of iatrogenic bias</i>	117
<i>Questionnaire Two: Alter validation</i>	118
<i>Summary</i>	120
CHAPTER SIX.....	121
6.0 RESEARCH QUESTION THREE:	121
WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTER PERSONALITIES IN THIS PATIENT?	
.....	121
<i>Overview</i>	121
6.1 TRAUMATIC EVENTS DESCRIBED BY THIS PATIENT.....	121
<i>Traumatic Events within the Home</i>	122
<i>Traumatic Events within the Cult</i>	126
6.2 THE ALTER SYSTEM OF THIS PATIENT.....	130
<i>Presentation of Alters</i>	130
<i>The Alters of this Patient</i>	134
6.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRAUMATIC EVENTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIFIC ALTERS	151
<i>Development of Alter System</i>	152
<i>Development of Specific Alters</i>	171
6.4 DIFFERENT MODELS OF DID.....	191
<i>The DID Model</i>	191
<i>Trauma Model</i>	205
<i>Therapist Bias</i>	207
6.5 SUMMARY.....	211
CHAPTER SEVEN.....	212
7.0 RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR:	212
WHAT INDICATIONS ARE THERE FOR A PROCESS OF THERAPEUTIC INTEGRATION WITH THIS	
PATIENT?	212
<i>Overview</i>	212
7.1 TREATMENT APPROACHES.....	212
<i>Treatment of DID Patients Reporting Ritualistic Abuse</i>	216
<i>Marker Events of Integration</i>	221
<i>Self Psychology as it Applies to the Treatment of this Patient</i>	223
7.2 SELF HARM AND ATTEMPTED SUICIDE DURING THE COURSE OF TREATMENT.....	228
<i>Overview</i>	228
<i>Hospital Admissions</i>	229
<i>Attempted Suicides</i>	231
<i>Factors that Contributed to the Patient's Self-Harm and Attempted Suicides</i>	233
<i>Overview</i>	233
<i>Summary of Patient's Suicide Attempts</i>	279
7.3 PROCESS OF TREATMENT WITH THIS PATIENT.....	282
<i>Overview</i>	282
<i>Presentation of Alters during Treatment</i>	282
<i>Sharing of Affect between Alters</i>	287
<i>Self-Harm Between Alters</i>	293
<i>Conflict between Home and Cult Alters</i>	298
<i>Process of Joining with Marcie</i>	307
<i>Summary Process of Treatment</i>	333
7.4 SUMMARY.....	335
CHAPTER EIGHT.....	339
8.0 CONCLUSION.....	339
<i>Overview</i>	339
<i>Research Question One</i>	340
<i>Research Question Two</i>	340
<i>Research Question Three</i>	346

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	352
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	353
SUMMARY	355
EPILOGUE	356
REFERENCES	357
APPENDIX A	383
APPENDIX B	386
<i>Phase One: Reliability</i>	386
<i>Overview of study</i>	387
<i>What I would like you to do.</i>	388
DEFINITION OF TERMS	390
<i>Questionnaire One</i>	390
<i>Questionnaire Two</i>	393
QUESTIONNAIRE ONE: TAPE ONE	396
QUESTIONNAIRE TWO: TAPE ONE	399
DEMOGRAPHIC DETAIL	402
APPENDIX C	404
<i>Phase Two: Evaluation of Iatrogenic Bias and Alter Validation</i>	404
<i>Overview of study</i>	405
<i>What I would like you to do.</i>	406
APPENDIX D	408
<i>Summary of Greaves' indicators for integration</i>	408
INTEGRATION MARKERS	408
AMBIGUOUS MARKERS	410
<i>Greaves regards the following markers as ambiguous for integration:</i>	410
NEGATIVE MARKERS	411
APPENDIX E	412
<i>Judges' General Comments made in response to sessions that they had been asked to evaluate</i>	412
APPENDIX F	414
<i>Selection of drawings and clay model produced by patient during therapy</i>	414

TABLES

Table I Independent Judges Specialty.....	115
Table II Analysis of variance: Questionnaire One.....	116
Table III Analysis of variance: Questionnaire Two.....	116
Table IV Frequency of item selection.....	118
Table V Frequency of item selection.....	119
Table VI. Name of Alter and Frequency of Presentation.....	132
Table VII. Frequency of Hospital Admissions.....	230
Table VIII. Frequency of Attempted Suicides Requiring Admission to Emergency Department.....	232
Table IX. Frequency of Alter Presentation in First and Second Attempted Suicides.....	237
Table X. Frequency of Alter Presentation in Third Suicide Attempt.....	248
Table XI. Frequency of Alter Presentation in Fourth Suicide Attempt.....	251
Table XII. Frequency of Alter Presentation in Fifth Suicide Attempt.....	258
Table XIII. Frequency of Alter Presentation in Sixth Suicide Attempt.....	270
Table XIV. Frequency of Alter Presentation in Seventh Suicide Attempt.....	275

FIGURES

Figure 1. Dissociative phenomena.....	9
Figure 2. Iatrogenic bias: Judges' mean responses to tape one and tape two.....	117
Figure 3. Alter validation: Judges' mean responses to tape one and tape two.....	119
Figure 4. Organizational Chart of this Patient's Alter System and its Development.....	153