

# Dissociative Identities and Healing

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Nearly a year ago, I wrote in [this post](#) the following:

*We heal when we begin to view ourselves as whole beings who are constantly changing. We heal when we take ownership and responsibility for our actions, even if we used to blame them on a personality. We heal when we view ourselves as a little less special and a little more like everyone else.*

In fragmented personality systems such as found in those of us with dissociative identity disorder, I think it is fair to say that, as a general rule, different parts tend to operate autonomously.

Of course, I am not denying that there are connections between the parts of the system. The connections are generally either loose or strict; rarely are they moderated and balanced. An example of a loose connection would be parts who do not know about other parts, or will do anything to push away other parts. Strict connections are usually the reverse, where parts will have strong alliances for the purpose of emotional protection, even if that means the body gets hurt through self-harm.

There are always very valid reasons for both types of connections. For example, in many systems, parts need to not know about other parts because behaviors or beliefs or feelings of some are intolerable to others.

The seeds of change are sown when one becomes aware that such a dissociated approach to living is getting in the way of living, let alone living well, or is putting us at risk of dying. Every dissociatively disordered person who attempts to heal, I believe, has learned that the coping that has governed their life has become a problem. In healing, we celebrate our ingenious coping strategy which without doubt saved our lives and our sanities. But we also accept that our remarkably adaptive strategy has become a disorder. I know this may bother some; that I am perhaps devaluing what was originally achieved. But, I really am not. My experience is that holding onto both is a crucial step in healing.

Why does this brilliant solution have to lead to a disorder? I know there is a group of multiples who are perfectly content living as multiples. But most dissociative systems do not evolve and lead to that destination. My belief is that as the dissociative child ages, internal connections become more rigid. On the one hand, alliances become stronger. But, on the other, some parts can become more antagonistic. This is, to my mind, a more common evolution. Parts were created for a purpose. They serve their purpose well. They keep doing what they do well. And, low and behold, habits form (if you want to use that word) and a way of navigating the world becomes firmly established.

One can easily say such an evolution can be applied to almost everyone, and they are probably right. But for the dissociative, the cost is usually a little higher, and the structure is a bit different.

Learning to break down dissociative barriers—and undertake the process of healing—is monumental work. I have written many times here about what the elements of that healing are. Some that come to mind are acceptance, responsibility, overall safety, balance, feeling, intellectual understanding, and love. I have also written about concrete steps to achieve each, chief among them is cultivating awareness through journaling, drawing, and any other form of internal communication, as well as increasing tolerance to emotions.

I thought I would share something I wrote many years ago and came across this past weekend—the motivation for this post. This letter was one of the first steps I took on the road to healing. I wrote it to "My Anger," but in reality it was a specific part with a specific name and I don't feel so comfortable sharing that here.

*Dear My Anger,*

*Why can't you express yourself in a more socially acceptable way? Why do you always involve yourself in self-harm and aggression? Why can't you be tempered by love or joy or even sadness? Why are you so separate?*

*The separateness is a great divide. It keeps us from becoming whole. It has always been this way, I know. But life is open to change. That's what makes life so special.*

*I'll tell you what: If I make the first step, will you walk towards me? I pledge to understand you more, to comfort you, to not put you down.*

*You have to pledge to be more open, to not be so rigid, to not destroy.*

*If we do these things, I know life can be better than we had ever imagined.*

Maybe this was not the kindest or even the best letter I could muster. But it was a start. And I have not looked back since.