

Dissociation and Sexual Healing

By Selah Martha, MA

First, let me say that the term dissociation usually gets a bad rap. We think of it as a negative, a departure from our body or from being fully present which signifies that we are afraid, even to the point of mental illness. In sexuality, people often experience dissociation as an inability to feel body sensations, an inability to “get into it” or to speak up about their needs, and they typically feel cut off and frustrated, as if they are the “failure” in the sexual situation.

Remember that in most indigenous cultures, dissociation is courted, through various methods, as a state of revelation, a means by which information necessary to the survival and wisdom of the tribe is gained. A person skilled in travel through many dimensions will cultivate a dissociated state in order to free their consciousness from their body and bring back knowledge which serves everyone. Dissociation can be purposeful, and life-giving, bringing strength from other realms of existence. Obviously, when you are forced into dissociation, you have to create it without the context or life-long education you would have in a shamanic tradition, and it therefore becomes a very isolating and confusing place to dwell.

On the other end of the spectrum, in our culture, dissociation is going on constantly, albeit unconsciously. There is a continuum of ways that we disregard our bodies and our feelings and fixate on ideas or images, everything from daydreaming to television to addiction. I have often thought it would be fun to write one of those little boutique books called “A Thousand Ways to Dissociate” - I bet you can think of a few good ways right now. On this level, dissociation is a very ordinary coping mechanism that we all use when we need a break.

When I work with people interested in healing sexual dissociation, I first honor the extreme intelligence and creativity of their dissociative pattern; this ability to “numb out” undoubtedly saved their hearts from breaking, if not their sanity. Dissociation was THE best option to preserve the self and thereby stick around for the journey. It can be regarded as a positive, incredibly agile decision to go toward the safest space available, to go where life is possible.

At a very basic level, a dissociative pattern is like an underground security system which was installed a long time ago, and then forgotten. I find that when I can support people in touring the security system with a curious attitude, they begin to have more insight and choice about how their bodies are operating. There is often a Guardian who has been running the system for a very long time, and who is overjoyed to have the terms of the contract renegotiated, or to be relieved of duty. When the body does not have to be fully dedicated to the high-security system, it organically develops more options for sexual sensation and communication.

Becoming conscious of dissociation is not for the faint of heart – there are many emotions which can surface, and a spirit of truth which insists on liberation. The good news is that the body naturally seeks to live and love in a state of pleasure, and knows how to move in that direction with the right invitation and support. By approaching dissociation with respect and even celebration, we can allow the teaching held there to unfurl as a gift of new life.

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