

## **Total Otherness in Dissociative Identity Disorder**

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### **1. Introduction**

Dissociation can be defined in three distinct ways: (1) a disintegration of normally integrated mental modules or systems (compartmentalization); (2) an altered state of consciousness (detachment); and (3) a defense mechanism. The last definition basically reflects the function of the first two definitions, as in the face of intolerable and inescapable stress, compartmentalization of adverse experiences and detachment from both body and environs, can be effective emotional buffers against traumatic experiences. To be less formal, however, dissociation is a situation in which one tends to feel a stranger in one's world, one's body and often, a stranger to oneself. Clearly then, dissociation as a phenomenon can tell us much about what it is like to be *the other*.

In this paper we will describe the dissociative experience of being-in-the-world. In doing this we will explore the phenomenology of *Otherness* as experienced by Gal - an eloquent sixty year-old woman who suffers from DID. DID is a mental disorder characterized by at least two distinct and relatively enduring identities, or dissociated personality states, which alternately control a person's behavior.

Gal was interviewed in four open interviews, lasting a total of eight hours. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and then analyzed, with grounded theory as our guiding method. We followed data analysis guidelines outlined by

Glaser and Strauss (1967), remaining true, as far as possible, to the interviewee's terminology and expressions, on which we based our inductive reasoning.

In the first section of this article, Gal's experiences of childhood abuse and neglectful rejection will be presented. The implications of the dialectics of abuse and neglect will be examined in the second section, and will be followed by a description of Gal's dissociative features and splintered identity. A discussion of Gal's desperate need for control will follow and, finally, we will theorize the experience of being *the total other* by deducing knowledge from Gal's dissociative experience of *being-in-the-world*. Therapeutic challenges will be discussed in the last section.

## **2. Gal's World**

### **2.1. The home environment**

#### **2.1.1. A reality of captivity**

Gal felt that she was a sub-human in her childhood, subject to the mercies of her parents, compelled to love those who abused her:

‘Those are the people that you believe in, but it’s horrible. And it’s not a day, and it’s not two days, and no-one comes to save you. The whole family knows what is being done to you and no-one says a word. It’s a secret. You are this secret. It is like being a captive. He sits in a hole. He is in captivity. He doesn’t know that they will take him out, he doesn’t know that they will save him, he doesn’t know anything, he is at the mercy of those who are sometimes good to him and very very bad to him, until they turn him into a sub-human, and then suddenly they are good to him, and then he is theirs. And you can’t not love your parents! You can’t understand. So you love those that do terrible things to you’.

Notably, Gal describes her childhood experiences in the present tense; the sense of horror is still present in her life. Her life revolves around those same initial feelings that were impressed upon her in her childhood. Yet, Gal must preserve

attachment to her parents; to that end she has to contain, simultaneously, two opposing emotional patterns towards her parents that are difficult to integrate: love and horror. Under such duress, dissociative changes in one's personality are likely.

As a child Gal could not comprehend the logic of her maltreatment, which she struggled to infuse with meaning: 'a war to explain what is happening to me'. As a result, an interpretive dimension became part of the experience itself, 'I always explain', Gal emphasizes. Gal's refuge from her suffering and from the insufferable conflict of the connection with her abusive parents was to divide the burden of the pain into several alter identities. From a young age Gal describes a situation in which 'there is something sitting on me here that tells me, that talks to me'. The multitude of identities created new survival abilities for Gal that improved her coping with the suffering and the despair.

### **2.1.2. Terror**

Gal testifies that she was born into an experience of 'terror, hunger, no love, a battle for existence'. When considering the connection between terror and otherness in Fanon's (1968) philosophy, Gal's choice of the term *terror* is particularly interesting. She always perceives her existence in the world as a place in which no-one wants her; not even her own mother: 'And when she bore me, already in the birth process she didn't want this. She stopped the birth and they could not get me out, and when I came out she didn't want to look at me at all'. The narrative of her life starts with the experience of lack of belonging and existential rejection. From the moment of her birth she experiences herself, within her home, as *the total other* – a sense of the uncanny (*unheimlich*).

Her childhood was in the shadow of maternal ostracism: 'My mother is the kind of woman that no-one would choose for a mother ..... she hated me with a violent hatred.' Neglect was part of daily life: 'She would never get up with us in the morning. We had to manage by ourselves'. Moreover, in her childhood Gal was never touched in a supportive or nurturing way: 'My mother does not touch at all. Not for good and not for bad. A statue'.

This childhood deprivation of warm love forms Gal's attitude to the world as illustrated in Gal's interview when she states that she is unable, even (and perhaps mainly) at times of real crisis, to create warm contact with those close to her. Rather than being-in-the-world, she remains a stranger-in-the-world, maintaining a fundamental distance from her fellow humans.

Contrary to the cold and estranged relations with her mother, her relations with her father were violent. Twice during the interview Gal reported that her brother and sister told her that their father repeatedly beat them. Disregard and apathy on the one hand, and violence on the other, led Gal to create a separate identity in her head. The pain was transferred to the other inside to relieve the inescapable and intolerable pain.

## **2.2. Pain**

### **2.2.1. Pain and Indifference**

#### **Gal's Father**

As seen in the previous section, Gal does not remember that her father beat her. Reports by her siblings are her source of information on the physical abuse by her father. This memory might have been compartmentalized in one of the alternate identities that she created. Indeed, dissociative amnesia involving the compartmentalization of trauma memories has been recognized as an independent psychiatric diagnosis causing distress or impairment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), and has been well documented among trauma survivors (e.g., The Holocaust, Somer, 1994; child abuse, Freyd, 1994) in general, and among sufferers of dissociative identity disorder in particular (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). We therefore believe that Gal's traumatic memory might have been compartmentalized in one of the alternate identities that she created.

### **Gal's Mother**

Notwithstanding, Gal remembers well the one and only time that her mother beat her: 'Let's say that once my mother hit me. Once'. And although she was beaten, she interpreted this positively. It was contact, albeit painful contact:

'The nicest pain in the world. I once said to her 'mom, you don't understand'.....she said to me 'yes, once I hit you and I'm very sorry', I said to her: 'don't be sorry, it was the best thing you did to me in my life ... you touched me, you touched me...' '

This was a crucial moment in which the pain was associated with calming attention (i.e., conditioning), and contrasted the abandoning indifference. Any kind of attention was better than her mother's despair-causing apathy. For Gal, there was no existence under indifference. However, the pain anchored her, and for a moment she was (bodily) in-the-world, experiencing the present moment in its fullness. Furthermore, her mother's rare violence allowed Gal to feel sorry for herself, to cry and consequently to get some rest: 'The first time that I felt sorry for myself, as though I had cried my entire life, my soul, as a small child I cried my life and fell asleep. One of the nicest sleeps'.

### **Gal's bipolar world**

Betrayal trauma theory (Freyd 1994) suggests that blocking memories of parental abuse is an adaptive response that allows victims to remain unaware of their torment in order to maintain attachment with the caretaking figure. Thus, repeated ongoing abuse can compartmentalize the entire abusive relationship into an ego state that remains outside central awareness, and serves a basis for the later formation of dissociative identity disorder (Ellason, Ross & Fuchs 1996). It is, therefore, apparent that painful violence on the one hand (from her father) and abandoning indifference on the other (from her mother) constituted a bipolar dialogue, the only kind she had ever known. As a result, Gal has grown into an adult who lacks the flexibility necessary for adaptive encounters with people.

#### **2.2.2. The attempt to stay in the current moment**

When her pain became intolerable, Gal faced two options: to stay in the current moment, or to disconnect from both her body and the world. These driving mechanisms were active in her, simultaneously, in times of distress. In order to be in the current moment the child had had to resist her tendency to flee from the hurting body. To do this she had no choice but to strengthen her sense of ownership, that is, 'the sense that I am the one going through an experience' (Gallagher 2000, 15). According to Martin (1995), however, the sense of ownership can be reduced to one's sense of boundaries, hence, it is only natural that in order to rehabilitate her sense of ownership, Gal must find a way to re-sense (reconstruct) her own boundaries by grounding herself (or 'wallowing on the ground' as Gal put it):

'It's a matter of understanding your physical boundaries. When the pain goes over the limits, you feel that you cannot contain it any more, as though it is crossing all boundaries, you have to stop it, as it is already external. Your body swells up and the inside becomes outside and the outside becomes

inside... No one hugs me because I am scary – I need to take care of myself.  
Then I think that wallowing is part of having to feel it with your skin’.

For Gal, *wallowing* is a means to draw the boundaries of the body in order to differentiate between the world that is inside and that which is outside. This delineation of boundaries is a fundamental characteristic of the sense of ownership. The more severe her stress is, the more she needs to hurt herself, as if to physically mark a concrete sense of boundary: ‘I start to wallow on stones. I fall on the ground, injured and hurting all over, covered in bruises and bangs. I still go to the ground, and into the stones! More pain’.

### **2.2.3. The need for an external object**

Gal must find an external object on which to project her mental pain, otherwise she risks collapse of her internal world:

‘There is pain and anger, and you want to rebel against them, and when there is no external object on which to cast this negative energy, you cast it inwards .... And inside you it is even greater, like cancer, like an arithmetic progression’.

Following a scene in which she hurts herself, as soon as an external object appears that can absorb the pain, it is diverted to it: ‘When Yossi arrived the energy became external’. However, when the pain becomes too intense to be diverted, it metamorphosizes into an uncontrollable desire to hurt herself, as the only available object: ‘Within this loneliness this even greater loneliness, and the pain that is inside that has nowhere to go... and this voice said: 'now go and die. You have to die now' ‘. It, therefore, appears that if Gal does not manage to control the situation, she herself becomes the object of the unbearable pain in her internal world, a process that is expressed in suicidal urges - the epitome of *Total Otherness*.

### **2.2.4. The metamorphosis of indifference to destruction and death**

Every instance of perceived disregard is experienced by Gal as a reconstruction of the experience of nothingness that devastated her childhood, leading her to suicidality: 'When I feel that someone is ignoring me, my first reaction is to commit suicide'. When faced with disregard Gal turns into nothing: 'I experienced great loneliness ... he does not respond with what I need to hear, or a kind word. When people ignore me it is actually consciously killing me'. From Gal's point of view, not acknowledging her is the ultimate rejection: 'This insult that grows and grows and grows...Because there is no acknowledgment, because he is not there for me ... as though there is this wall that pushes you, humiliates you more and more'. Gal's response is reflexive and mechanistic: 'He ignored something. Me. And then it is as though shouting starts inside the body'. To ignore Gal is to execute her:

'I adopt his maniac voice in his indifference that tells me to die, adopt it. He is not present but I adopted his voice that will send me to hang myself ..... I felt that I was going mad. He empowers that voice. Yossi actually becomes this voice of you will die. He is actually the one that tells me to die from the start! From the start, from the start of the event he told me to die – because he ignored me'.

The pain of abandonment, the indifference and the silence take on the punitive perspective of the abandoning parent: 'And then self-punishment starts inside me, inside my body'.

### **2.3. Masking**

As an abused child Gal learned to hide her internal world from her parents in the same way that an underground movement hides from the oppressing police: 'they did not notice, because I don't show it'. She is aware of the huge gap between the ways in which she is perceived by others and what she is actually going through inside: 'There is something very deceiving in me that makes it very hard to discover that this woman has great difficulties', always 'covered with a mask, so



convincing that it is impossible to believe that she stinks...a disaster'. Gal has become an expert at hiding and deceiving: 'my internal world is something totally chaotic. And that's it. This is an expertise. To hide is simply an expertise'. The labor of hiding consumes cognitive and emotional energies: 'I am tired of hiding'. Nevertheless, from Gal's point of view there is no other way to exist in the world, hiding becomes a way of being:

'I cannot show my depression. I was born depressed, all my life I have been depressed, and all my life I battle to hide this, so as not to be troublesome. Because in any case no-one is interested in what I really feel. I never get the answers that I want. In my whole life I will never dare to express what I am feeling'.

Because her childhood neediness became a subject of humiliation, she is unwilling to expose her weakness, unable to receive support: 'Look, I think it is also a matter of pride. A kind of pride. That they will not catch you .... Not show that it is difficult for you'. This fear of being hurt for her neediness ultimately leads to a final paralysis of her craving to be soothed: 'I cheat. I protect myself, so that I will not be hurt. Because if I do not get the response that I want, and I never get this response, then I will feel even lonelier'.

Gal hides herself to the point of complete exhaustion: 'Sometimes there is this calm of total defeat'. Just that no-one should see what I am going through:

'I never know how to fully express what I am feeling, I don't know how to really tell myself, to honestly admit, disaster, that I feel like shit, that I'm sad. There is always something else that takes me away from this emotion. If I am caught despondent, it's the end of the world. If someone dares to accurately judge my feelings, his sentence is death'.

Gal suppresses her suffering in an attempt to hide it from others and herself: 'I am seemingly a very candid person, and I come to tell about myself, and that this and that happened. But it is always in retrospect. Online I don't let it out'.

## **2.4. Dissociation**

### **2.4.1. A defense mechanism**

Gal's ability to dissociate turns out to be a life-saving strategy: 'in order to survive this life I would become cut off, erased, not relate to the reality as is and jump into some bubble or alternate reality, and that's it. It's a technique'. Dissociative amnesia explains her inability to remember her father's physical abuse: 'He beat me for many years. I remember only once or twice. And my brothers remember it online, all the time'. Her benevolent amnesia helps her elude the intolerable present by compartmentalizing it. This rewarding mechanism became her default style of coping with pain as an adult: 'The birth of Y....I look at the experience itself, from outside, totally out of body...I don't remember Y's birth at all, I chose to disconnect'. Gal describes her dissociation as deliberate, although the degree of choice exercised during this survival reflex is debatable. All that is apparent is Gal's choice to define the act, during reflection, as a willful part of her obsession for control.

### **2.4.2. Split Identity**

Gal's early attempts to dissociate from the experience of the abandoned and exploited child later developed into Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). However, what began as an adaptive mode of coping, later developed into a disorder characterized by a battle over the control of her consciousness and behavior: 'A flashing starts and then my consciousness starts to split online, like when you turn on the television and you see everything on the screen? That is what happens in my head. Two realities online, simultaneously'. The feeling is of a simultaneous existence in two places: 'I am here and now, facing and talking to society. And here there is another Gal, on the fence. Talking to other people, but not [registering] in her memory. Right here! As though there she is, you hear it as if she were here, touching you!'

Gal is concerned that all will be forgotten in the alternate world, the other world. 'It is shocking. It is scary. You say, 'what?', but I am here, will I be in both worlds? But how will I come back from there? Maybe they will forget me there?' Gal's

greatest fear is the ultimate abandonment. To be cast out of the space of the present time again, to another dimension, to a state of total otherness; an unwanted exile of one that people would prefer to forget.

From within the desire not to disappear, not to be forgotten or to be nullified, Gal describes how she tries to hold on to reality. She calls her partner, and when he refuses to answer she looks for someone else to talk to: 'I started to feel it coming on and I said to myself I will call Dorit'. However, it appears that the process of alteration in her identity confuses her, and she is no longer sure to whom she is talking: 'I say to myself, who is Dorit for me?' Gal continuously attempts to exercise some control over the situation, to calm down. However, identity change seems inevitable: 'I am lying in this, and then suddenly, instead of calming down, it gets worse. The reality actually splits'. Gal is in two separate realities: in the 'actual' reality (hereinafter reality 1) she is aware that her identity is split; and in the other reality (hereinafter reality 2) she is convinced that she is only there, that is, that reality 2 is the real and only reality: 'There are bursts of panic because you are not sure what is, what is the reality and what isn't'. Both realities bring duplication of the position of the self with them:

'This is another reality that is not related to what is going on. It is an image, it is me. I am talking to someone else! It is so frightening .... It always bothered me that it sounds the same! I am totally there. You are in two places simultaneously, you say dear Lord, who will bring me back to here?'

The duplication of identities brings total uncertainty:

'Here is not there. Here is here. It's here, here! Everything, the sound, is so real, you seem to hear it. Like there is no difference. Like you do not know that this is not the reality, you are confused, you don't know who is really there? Total uncertainty'.

In this situation the sense of executive control dissipates completely, and only panic and fear remain: 'There is no authority there anymore. It is panic. You don't know where you are, what is true and what is not, this is my greatest fear. That I no longer know what is going on, and what is right'.

## **2.5. Alter identities**

### **2.5.1. The nature of the alter identities**

Gal's alter identities have distinct functions. They constitute different ways of being Gal, or Gal's different way of *being*: 'They are not actually people who have an image and character, they have their roles'. Often it appears that the gap between Gal and the identities dissipates and Gal herself is no more than another identity, equal, among her alter personality identities: 'They are people who go with me. They are me'. And another time: 'They are not voices. They exist!'.

The alter identities are not a thought or fantasy, but a tangible emotional reality: 'They are present, you cannot see them... You know they are with you. It is something that you feel'. Furthermore, from Gal's point of view if 'the significance of these people is eliminated, without the images in my head, I have no life'. She understands that her identity alters are an integral part of what she is, essential organs of her personality. Gal's relationship with her alter identities is close and she is constantly aware of their inconspicuous presence. For example, she says 'She is going to hang herself, and they accompany her ... what do I care about them?' At other times she expresses a sense of identity and ownership of them - 'they are also her', or an awareness of their benevolent nature: 'They also care about how she looks'. According to Gal, her alters are an outcome of her childhood misery: 'I invented an internal world that would allow me to survive ....Otherwise how is it possible'.

### **2.5.2. The identity that wants to kill Gal**

From a very young age Gal was aware of an authoritative, tough male voice: 'Something says to me ...' Go to vomit, you must vomit'. It shouts at me inside my body. I hear words: 'Go and vomit'. The voice tries to control the body but it

does not seem to see itself as sharing the body with Gal. This is a punishing, humiliating and commanding voice: 'You are not worth the air that you breathe. You are crazy, you are not normal, do humanity a favor and die'. This voice irritates the most sensitive point in Gal's experience; the sense that she is a repulsive outcast. The use of the idiom 'do a favor' alludes to her parents' perceived wish to be rid of her. This voice apparently constitutes a parental introject, an internalization of a parental object. Like an obedient child, Gal is unable to resist this commanding voice: 'It shouts at me, and I have to do these things' because it is a 'bad figure', a figure that is going to kill me; and while this voice is active the other voices are quiet ... there is no war between them. The other figures do not appear together with this one'. The threatening alter says: 'you are superfluous in this world, you are not worth anything. Commit suicide'. Gal 'does not respond' only 'listens and obeys', like the helpless child who does what she is ordered to do: 'I only see what I need to do. I am like a robot, complying without feelings, without crying and without feeling sorry for myself. I simply go and do it. Like I go and brush my teeth.' Phenomenologically speaking, a strong sense of agency – that is the sense that I am the initiator or source of the action (Gallagher 2011) – can be activated independently of the sense of ownership. Consequently Gal feels that she is in control of her body, yet she is not the owner of her body, thus, her body acts and feels more like a robot, acting on 'automatic pilot' (on this issue see: Ataria 2013).

### **2.5.3. Multiplicity of voices in times of crisis**

Gal's daily life is an exhausting battle with the identities on the very management of life: 'I often find myself tired of the work of my life. Listen, most of the day there is not just one Gal. And it is really difficult for me that I have to listen to all these things all the time, to everyone. All this time I am with the voices'. In times of crisis all the voices talk simultaneously and make it even harder for Gal: 'When this happens there are a lot of voices, not just one. You really don't know who and what it is. It is very scary, really frightening'. Under stress the sense of a disintegrated self is extremely strong:

‘...there is usually one figure out there, unified, dominant, and the small ones wander... now they are all your friends, they are at your level. They all got taller and stronger. This is the part of my feeling of madness... part of this is that you don't know who you are, where you are, what you are and ... you have no unification.’

## **2.6. The need for Control**

### **2.6.1. The yearning for control**

The yearning for control is the central axis in Gal's life. The only way open to her to achieve this is to convert her body into an object; that is, to shed the subjective dimension from her body, to cancel the minimal sense of self that is responsible for the subjective feeling (Zahavi 2006). In this sense Gal becomes an object among other objects and stops being what Merleau-Ponty (1964, 2002) and Husserl (1989) define as a subject-object, namely, an object and a subject at the same time – that is the dual structure of us humans, ‘double way...double status’ (Thompson 2007, 251-2). Accordingly, by losing her subjective dimension Gal ceases being human.

Gal is preoccupied with being in control: ‘Have you ever been drunk? No! Have you ever been drugged? No! You have never been in the state that I am in, say in a state of dancing without control.... I have never been in a state of total nullity. NEVER. I have never fainted, never lost consciousness’. This excessive preoccupation is ironic in light of the personality splits and the ensuing co-control by her alter identities. The understandable need for control stems from the chaos in her internal world, ‘this need to always be with the complete lack of control’. From her point of view: ‘Where I have no control and the emotion truly floods me, I am done for’. Emotions are planted in the physical experience (Damásio 1999), and thus it is clear that emotions and sense of ownership arrive in one package (Simeon and Abugel 2006). In other words, emotion comes together with the experience that *this is my body*, namely, it is me that is going through the event

(a sense of body ownership). Therefore, emotion, in its essence, threatens Gal; spontaneous emotion can surprise Gal, forcing her to be present in the here and now and, thus, endangering her with an intolerable loss of control.

### **2.6.2. To see everything from an external perspective**

The need to control every situation drives Gal to utilize a depersonalized perspective in times of crisis; one that observes everything from the outside and helps by adopting a detached, levelheaded outlook:

‘I cry and shout, and everyone tries to contain me, David too. From the corner of my eye I see David standing next to me all the time, terrified by what he sees with all my loss of control. I see everyone, and see what they are doing, and see how they react. I don’t follow this through to the end, I only *seem* to follow it through to the end, but all the time there is someone looking and observing what the others see, even while I am screaming I see him and I wonder what he thinks of me’.

Gal’s so called ‘rational identity’ (the one that explains and comments) is ever-present: ‘the need to always explain saves me’. The alter sees everything from outside, creating the illusion of control. These are actually dialectics of control and its loss. The utility of this depersonalized experience is illustrated in Gal’s description of immediate rebound from crisis:

‘There is another dimension in which there is another figure standing and watching from the side and seeing how David reacts and seeing how it all seems...So I stop and get up. Get up, as though nothing happened, no drama occurred here, you did not see me on the ground, you did not hear me screaming. Now I am functioning’.

Gal developed an over-awareness that shields her from the stressful present moment: 'This is the awareness that is with me all the time'. There is always an additional part of her personality that is cognizant of the situation and facilitates control:

'There is no way that I am sitting with you now and that there is not someone else sitting with us, watching, with comments. He will always be on the right side. Yes. And he examines the conversation and makes comments all the time: Now say this. I think he is wearied down...when I talk...I am also talking to me; I am also talking to my thoughts. Everything is going on simultaneously...all the time, and I have no peace. This will go on in every situation in which I will ever be'.

Essentially, Gal is unable to tolerate episodes of control loss. She defines them as moments of 'show' or 'drama', possibly creating an illusion of mastery. She never collapsed, she just 'acted'. Gal seems to portray herself in a ridiculous light rather than admitting her diminished sense of control. This is how she describes her attempted suicide: 'What? Isn't it a *joke*? All this drama...She smashed some sculptures, wallowed in the pieces...wanted to die...did not see any point to her life. I enjoyed it...that's it, now I can go and party. This is drama'. It is only an act and, therefore, she is in control.

It is not certain that this reflective perspective, possibly representing the mocking view of the abusive parent, verily represents the actual event. Gal shows no self-empathy. She portrays these situations as overly emotional in a desperate attempt to infuse them with a false sense of body ownership ('it is my body'), and a minimized sense of agency (by controlling): 'Everyone who is exposed to this eccentric behavior is in shock. If I ever see someone in this condition, I have no empathy for him. This annoys me, disgusts me, you are humiliated by over-emotion'.



By observing the scene from the side, Gal protects herself from what she defines as the surplus within her: 'I see myself doing it all the time. I see it. From the side. From behind me, in front of me. There are people that accompany me. That go with me and see what I do. They are quiet. But they see me.' The internal figures that accompany Gal through her life mediate between her and the world: 'You can say that I am never actually anywhere, because I am actually always looking at everything from the side, and the only experience I have is all these figures together'. In addition, Gal always sees the world from the multiple viewpoints of her alter identities: 'I describe the experience in words, like a news caster who sees a scene, and describes it'. Gal is also the director of her own life, she is never carefree: 'I am on the floor, yes. But I also see what H. sees, I also see what Yossi sees – each from his own angle. This is a theater scene, I am not busy crying, I am now also busy producing the scene'.

### **2.6.3. Unable to be supported**

Although Gal needs a supportive acknowledgment of her suffering, it seems that the seeds of poison planted by her parents do not allow her to feel worthy of support: 'And then he came to hug me, and I didn't want him anymore'. He comes and says to me 'enough, enough, Gali (a nickname), enough! Now he remembers?! Gali?' She feels that this is too little too late: 'I cannot calm down ... he's too late, he's already missed the opportunity to be good to me. I still think that everyone is bad'. For *the other*, it is always like that, too-little-too-late, that is indeed a state of mind. This miss dovetails the anguish of the missed opportunity to be nurtured when she most needed it – during her childhood. This deprivation stunted her development and damaged her capability of being nurtured by those who love her. Gal's emotional deprivation left her terrified of her neediness and incapable of tolerating support: 'I don't know if I would allow someone to touch me; I can't stand it when people get too close to me with unnecessary hugs'. Therefore, to avoid pity, even during panic attacks, she prefers to be taken care of by the cold and indifferent, rather than by the compassionate:

‘No-one can save you in a panic attack, only a doctor. A doctor and a nurse, I would invite every time. But I don’t know who to invite – not those who are hysterical and not able to contain me, but rather the coldest people in the world, that will not join me in the experience, and pity me. I cannot bear being taken care of and I cannot bear being pitied’.

Gal’s discourse with the world is aggressive, violent, and cold; a discourse of pain that is rooted in a deep sense of shame. Although she cannot tolerate indifference, it is indifferent people she wants as caretakers, in repetition of the familiar maternal pattern. She asks to be serviced like a robotic machine. She feels endless shame and, thus, wishes to be distanced from the situation, as though it is all happening to the other. Not to her. The following is what Gal says about her wallowing in the ground, a behavior that mobilizes her partner to a supportive response:

‘The shame of what he says to me, and that he relates to me like a baby makes me run to the closet and hide from the disgrace of what I have done, from this whole scene. This little girl behaves as if she were a moron, a lunatic, she got what she got, and it’s not worth doing anything anymore’.

A warm response arouses shame in Gal because it transforms her into an uncontrollable ‘moron, a lunatic’. An empathic reaction forces her to be present - the most frightening proposition of all. Cold treatment, on the other hand, fosters her dissociation, a means to maintain composure when most needed.

### **3. Discussion**

According to the Merriam dictionary, otherness is defined as ‘the quality or state of being other’. Gal appears to be the personification of this characteristic. Her case can, therefore, teach us a lot about what it is like to be *the other*.

### **3.1. Loss of the First-Person Perspective**

Gal has lost her first-person perspective on the world and her body has ceased to be her point of reference to the world, what can be defined as bodily-egocentric perspective (Maiese 2011). She is incapable of seeing the world from within her body. At the same time, this distancing process provides her with a sense of directorship of her life. It would appear that one of the features of *the other* is the loss of perspective of the first-person point of view. When lacking a bodily-egocentric perspective one can become more detached and numb, resulting, in turn, in a down-regulation of a spiraling emotional crisis.

### **3.2. Automaton**

Rejected by both her mother and her father, Gal's childhood vacillated between exposure to maternal indifference and paternal violence. This condition precluded the development of a clear sense of self, adequate self-regulation, or a sense of belonging. To survive a childhood of such inescapable duress, these children must learn to distance themselves from their selves (Somer 2004). Gal's childhood circumstances compelled her to create a dissociated reality in which she was less alone and more protected. Under duress she learned to disconnect from her abused body by becoming disembodied. That is, Gal gave up the subjective dimension of her body and accordingly lost her sense of body ownership. Gal's body ceased being what Husserl (1989) defined as the lived body (Leib), and rather developed into a robot-like entity: body-as-object (körper).

*The other* is depersonalized and acts mechanically, like an automaton. The ability to be an automaton, devoid of feeling or consciousness, makes *the other* a potentially unsafe individual (Lianos 2013). In times, the *total other* executes commands mindlessly, without reflection or doubt. This is probably why Kafka's world, for instance in his book 'In the Penal Colony' (2007) is so horrifying; it represents a state of mind of *total otherness* characterized by automatism and governed by arbitrary rules.

### **3.3. Loss of flexibility**

Gal, *the total other*, cannot tolerate being in-the-world, and for this reason she uses emotional anesthetizing, among other ways, to become disembodied. Emotions associate with the world through the body (Damásio 1999), therefore, by being disembodied and deadened, Gal can reach a higher level of control over her menacing milieu. Blocking her emotions diminishes the risks of being taken by surprise and, consequently, the risk of emotional crisis is also reduced.

Under stress, effectively 'blocking out' the world can become an immense challenge. Indeed, when Gal confronts the stressors of the real world her boundaries collapse and her very sense of self seems to 'leak' out of her body. To prevent this, she tries to rebuild her boundaries as a defense mechanism. However, to this end she must feel something. Given that *the other* is emotionally frozen, she remains resistant to most feelings (Simeon and Abugel 2006). In this context, *the other* is prevented from feeling anything except extreme pain.

Therefore, as expected, in times of crisis Gal wallows on the ground, yearning for some pain. The sense of boundaries of herself becomes more distinct and rigid only after this act. In other words, as the resistance to any kinds of feelings increases, so does the corresponding need for pain to fortify the protecting boundaries of the self. The implications are fairly straightforward: to be *the other* is to confront the world painfully. It becomes a state of mind. In fact, there are only two ways for the *total other* to live: either in *apathy or in pain*. It appears, thus, that *the total other* lacks the flexibility required to be in-the-world and is faced with two dreadful existential options.

### **3.4. Neither here nor now**

To be in the world is to be in the present moment, in the here and now. Gal has rarely, if ever, experienced the world in the present moment, as though she has never been online. One of her basic psychological defenses is an avoidance of any direct dialogue with those around her. To this end, Gal creates powerful filters that prevent her from being absorbed into the world. This seems to be a key feature of *the other*, who is unable to be in the present moment, thrown out of the domain of

time. Furthermore, it appears that *the other* does not exist in only one dimension of time.

In fact, any experienced rejection throws Gal out of the current framework of time and space and into her childhood reality, rekindling a death wish instilled in childhood by her abusive parents. Gal lives in two parallel time dimensions: a dimension of the present moment, in which she allegedly exists; and an underlying layer of a time capsule in which she still is the unwanted child. The latter is actually a protracted posttraumatic flashback, an involuntary recurrent memory in which an individual suddenly, usually powerfully, re-experiences a past experience or elements thereof (Bernsten and Rubin 2002). Hence, when Gal is ignored or feels rejected in adult reality, she is simultaneously thrown back into her tormented childhood. That is, another characteristic of *the other* relates to the simultaneous existence in two different time dimensions (Pedaya 2011 ): Under the surface of the present reality *the other* is permanently locked in the moment of trauma. Time is a totally different dimension for *the other*. Expectations for the future, if there are such, are often twisted and are sometimes apocalyptic in nature. Typical cinematographic illustrations of traumatic heroes in film are Tyler Durden in the 'Fight Club' (Fincher 1999), Nick in 'The Deer Hunter' (Cimino 1978) or Kurtz in 'Apocalypse Now' (Conrad 1979). The above examples all represent *total otherness*, they all suffer from dissociative characteristics, and they all exist simultaneously in different time dimensions (Ataria in press).

### **3.5. Non-Integrated Person**

Gal is a non-integrated person. She testifies that there is not just one Gal, but several. It appears that *the other* may not be an integrated person, but rather an amalgamation of different identities simultaneously vocalizing in the other's mind. Unable to peacefully share the same body, the different identities perpetuate a continuous conflict in the inner world of *the other*. Gal is not any particular one of her identities, but a sum total of all her personality alters. To avoid total mental and behavioral chaos, she can only experience herself one identity at a time.

However, when she is only one of her identities she is incomplete, observing her other identity parts as alien.

The internal chaos of multiple voices and identities represents the state of mind of *the other*, who exists in unbearable inner conflicts that sometimes result in the desire for self-injury, to use Kafka's words in his diaries(1948): 'This tremendous world I have inside of me. How to free myself, and this world, without tearing myself to pieces. And rather tear myself to a thousand pieces than be buried with this world within me'

### **3.6. Second order otherness**

To alleviate her suffering Gal needs an object in the world on which to cast her pain. In the absence of this object, Gal herself becomes the object. This leads to the creation of a second order *other*: *THE OTHER*. When there is no object available to Gal, she becomes the target object for her anger and frustration. This process also allows her to identify with her perpetrator caretakers by adopting their perspective. This so-called 'Abuser identity' in DID generally feels rage and contempt for the victimized or 'unwanted child' parts. It is often responsible for self-injury and may, at times, be homicidal toward other personality alters (Howell 2011).

In a way Gal becomes *the other* within *the other*, that is *THE OTHER*. In this situation Gal becomes both perpetrator and victim simultaneously. This process seems to be the most treacherous and complicated situation for *the other*. We define this situation as *total otherness*.

This being the case, in a situation where the other completely adopts the viewpoint of the 'normal/controlling' one, it adopts a type of self-loathing that is intolerable. Without skilled psychological intervention, the only possible outcome is the destruction of the self, as a person cannot contain both images; i.e., be *the other* and despise herself for this. In this situation, the other fulfills the 'normal one's' fantasy, which is to destroy itself. This is the type of situation in which the other becomes the total other, an other in his own eyes as well as those of the surroundings. To once again use Kafka's words that are, in a way, a prophecy of

this age; this time from his Letters to Milena(1953): ‘At times I'd like to stuff them all, simply as Jews (me included) into, say, the drawer of the laundry chest. Next I'd wait, open the drawer a little to see if they've suffocated, and if not, shut the drawer again and keep doing this to the end’

#### **4. The challenge of helping *the other***

Untreated, *the other* is very ambivalent about receiving help because being helped implies an exploitable vulnerability. This limitation is further complicated by the constant sense of having to be on-guard against malevolent human predators. From the *other's* perspective, the damaged, disintegrated inner-world must, therefore, be defensively concealed.

This in-limbo stance represents a phobic avoidance of tender loving care for fear of feelings that might result in control loss, on the one hand; and the mortal aversion of deadening indifference, on the other hand. The only way out of this torturing purgatory is depersonalization and derealization. Only effective dissociation from one's tormented and conflicted inner world can create a temporary sense of relief by providing the illusion of control. Without proper psychotherapy, however, dissociative respites provide only momentary and imperfect delays of the inevitable eruption of emotion.

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