

The Practice of Disidentification

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We are all identified with our self image, view of the world, specific beliefs, attitudes, feelings, sensations and so on, identifications that change as we go through life. What is important at one time, for example, a particular relationship or religious belief, may become less important at another time of life. This is because we have disidentified, are no longer attached in the same way (you might still care for the ex-partner but you are no longer obsessively in love; you cannot imagine how you became so caught up in that religion, and so on.) Whatever we are identified with controls us and so, conversely, whatever we disidentify from we have choice about. The purpose of disidentification is to create the right conditions for this to happen, that is, to be able to separate from the contents of the personality (albeit temporarily) and take a separate position from where we have not only a clearer perspective but also from where better choices can be made. If we don't disidentify, in the words of Ferrucci (2000, 63) our identifications "can submerge us, control us, limit our perceptions, and block the availability of all other feelings, sensations, desires and opinions."

We are all identified, primarily with our subpersonalities (the different, fragmented parts of us that hold often conflicting needs and who clamour for their needs to be met.) There is nothing wrong with being identified, the problem arises when we become stuck in an identification and the needs of other parts of us are not met. A businessman, for instance, needs to be identified with his job to do it effectively, but is failing in his role as husband and father if he cannot shift identification to these different roles when at home. An overly-identified mother is in trouble when her children are ready to leave, causing conflict both with them and inside herself.

It isn't always so easy to become disidentified, especially when the identification is particularly strong, and yet it doesn't have to be too difficult to disidentify from one role and move to another, at least in theory. Then, as Firman and Gila report (1997, 59): "Disidentification brings liberation from this unconsciousness, a breaking of the trance, a waking up of the 'I'." For example, a middle manager had financial issues that over-ran other areas of his life, with anxieties affecting his marriage and making him less effective at work. In therapy he learned to disidentify from his anxieties; it's not that he no longer had financial concerns but now he held them in perspective; as we say in Psychosynthesis, he now had his problems rather than his problems having him!

Usually we shift from one identification to another, more or less unconsciously. The job of disidentification then is to make this process more conscious and this is achieved through various simple but profound techniques which takes one of two different approaches: either to state these identifications are not who you are or that you are more than any of them. Both ways can be effective depending upon the individual and their circumstances. There is a difference, and not just of degree, between saying 'I have a body and I am not my body' and 'I have a body and I am more than my body'. The first involves a denial which (although Assagioli didn't intend it that way) many people who work with body energies find difficult. For instance, compare it with the Bioenergetics model where to say you 'have' a body is an error; more correct is: I am a body. Generally, the 'I am not my body' version, as found in Assagioli's books, has been superseded by the 'I am more than my body' version which doesn't involve any kind of exclusion or denial, and concurs better with the psychosynthesis principle of growth through

inclusion, that is, you grow and heal not through excluding or removing anything, but through becoming more than you were before.

Of course, Psychosynthesis is not saying that identifications and attachments are always or only negative. We have to identify ourselves so we can experience the world (whether through feelings, sensations or thoughts.) "A sense of identity is crucial to the feeling of being alive." (Whitmore, 1991, 51). Identification can be a rich source of pleasure to the soul. There is a great difference between this identification, however, and those where we feel stuck, unable to make choices about what we want. The ability to both disidentify and re-identify enables us to feel stronger in our personal identity, to recognise ourselves, create order and have more choices available to us.

The psychosynthesis principle that we have to identify before we can disidentify is vital, though. If you are not fully identified with something, how can you truly disidentify from it? What then passes as disidentification might just be a form of avoidance. For real change to be effected, a psychosynthesis therapist will find out first if a client has sensation, feeling and thinking functions developed (and experienced) fully enough. The client who doesn't like to be in his body is not going to get anywhere using the disidentification exercise until he has fully come into incarnation, has fully experienced being in his body first. That may (and probably will) involve facing pain, fear, hurt, wounding. The excitement people experience when they find they do have sensations, feelings and thoughts at the very least equals the excitement they might then subsequently experience when they find they are more than this.

Who are we when we disidentify? The personal self, the conductor of the orchestra of subpersonalities is the obvious answer, and the 'clear space' created through disidentification certainly puts us in touch with this central, choosing aspect of our psyche. On a deeper level though, we may also come to realise that beneath this we are in reality more than the personal self as well, that we are the composer, the Self, something we have always been and always will be beyond all forms of identification. At the very least, however, through deliberate disidentification from the contents of the personality, we gain freedom, and the power to choose either attachment to or disattachment from any aspect of life, according to what is most appropriate for any situation. Thus we may learn to master and utilise our whole personality in an inclusive and harmonious synthesis.

Ferrucci, Piero (2000) *What We May Be*, Tarcher, USA

Firman and Gila (1997) *The Primal Wound*, SUNY Press USA

Whitmore, Diana (1991) *Psychosynthesis Counselling in Action*, U.K.