

Self Identification and Disidentification

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What is Disidentification?

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 (there's a practical

example in Chapter 20) 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 superceded 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.

The Disidentification Exercise

based on the original by Roberto Assagioli

To connect with the Self behind all identification and attachment

*We are dominated by everything with which our self becomes identified. We can dominate and control everything from which we dis-identify ourselves.
(Roberto Assagioli)*

The following exercise is a tool for moving towards and realizing the consciousness of the self. This procedure, called the 'self identification' or 'disidentification' exercise, is of vital importance, and should be done with the greatest care. If you feel at all tired do not read on from here until you have at least taken a break. You will enjoy this exercise more if you are fresh when you first try it out.

Relax yourself in the best way you know how, putting yourself in a comfortable but alert position. Take a few deep breaths, and let go of any tensions from the day. Follow the instructions slowly and carefully.

Affirm to yourself the following: 'I have a body but I am not my body. My body may find itself in different conditions of health or sickness, it may be rested or tired, but that has nothing to do with my self, my real I. I value my body as my precious instrument of experience and action in the world, but it is only an instrument. I treat it well, I seek to keep it in good health, but it is not myself. I have a body, but I am not my body.'

Close your eyes, recall what this affirmation says, then focus your attention on the central concept: 'I have a body but I am not my body.'

Attempt to realize this as an experienced fact in your consciousness.

Now affirm to yourself: 'I have feelings, but I am not my feelings. My feelings and emotions are diversified, changing, and sometimes contradictory. They may

swing from love to hatred, from calm to anger, from joy to sorrow, and yet my essence - my true nature - does not change. I remain. Though a wave of anger may temporarily submerge me, I know that in time it will pass; therefore I am not this anger. Since I can observe and understand my feelings, and can gradually learn to direct, utilize, and integrate them harmoniously, it is clear that they are not my self. I have feelings, but I am not my feelings.'

Close your eyes, recall what this affirmation says, then focus your attention on the central concept: 'I have feelings but I am not my feelings.'

Attempt to realize this as an experienced fact in your consciousness.

Now affirm to yourself: 'I have a mind but I am not my mind. My mind is a valuable tool of discovery and expression, but it is not the essence of my being. Its contents are constantly changing as it embraces new ideas, knowledge, and experience, and makes new connections. Sometimes my thoughts seem to be independent of me and if I try to control them they seem to refuse to obey me. Therefore my thoughts cannot be me, my self. My mind is an organ of knowledge in regard to both the outer and inner worlds, but it is not my self. I have a mind, but I am not my mind.'

Close your eyes, recall what this affirmation says, then focus your attention on the central concept: 'I have a mind but I am not my mind.'

Attempt to realize this as an experienced fact in your consciousness.

Next comes the phase of identification. Affirm clearly and slowly to yourself: 'After this disidentification of my self, the 'I', from my body, my feelings, and my mind, I recognize and affirm that I am a centre of pure self consciousness. I am a centre of will, capable of observing, directing and using all my psychological processes and my physical body.'

Focus your attention on the central realization: 'I am a centre of pure self-consciousness and of will.' Realize this as an experienced fact in your awareness.

When you have practiced this exercise a few times, you can use it in a much shorter form. The important point is to keep to the four main, central affirmations:

I have a body and sensations, but I am not my body and sensations. I have feelings and emotions, but I am not my feelings and emotions. I have a mind and thoughts, but I am not my mind and thoughts. I am I, a centre of pure self-consciousness and of will.

Some people find it difficult to follow the affirmations in this exercise that say you have but are not your body, feelings or mind, objecting that this may cause a disassociation from these functions. A suggested alternative way of using the

exercise, if this bothers you, is to change the disidentifying statements to 'I have a body and sensations and I am more than my body; I have feelings and I am more than my feelings and emotions; I have a mind and thoughts, and I am more than my mind and thoughts.' This is almost as effective, but the original as designed by Assagioli uses the principle of affirmation through negation which can have a particularly powerful effect on creating the required conditions for Self Identification.

You may have to repeat the exercise a few times to start with to get its full flavour, but then you will be able to do it daily from memory. The effort will be well worth it. All the influences that try to capture your attention and demand identification will no longer have the same hold over you.

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