

Abstract

This dissertation explores the phenomenon of dissociation through a humanistic and integrative lens, focusing on its roots in relational and developmental trauma. Drawing on personal and clinical experience, I examine how dissociative processes emerge as creative adaptations in response to unmet relational needs. Using a single case study, I reflect on my therapeutic work with Sarah, whose presentation highlighted the impact of trauma on the developing self. Central to this piece is the therapeutic relationship, how attunement, presence, and the co-creation of safety can support integration and healing. Theoretical influences include; Erskine's relational needs model (2015), Stern's developmental theory (1985), Rogers' attitudinal conditions (1957), and Clarkson's five-facet relational model (2003). I reflect on the use of self, countertransference, and embodied responses as part of the relational process, particularly in moments of dissociation, rupture, and repair. This work also considers how endings in therapy, when experienced with awareness and care, can offer a new relational experience, particularly when previous endings have been abrupt or traumatic. The dissertation draws together theory, clinical practice, and personal reflection to deepen understanding of dissociation not as pathology, but as an embodied, relational response deserving of compassion and presence.