

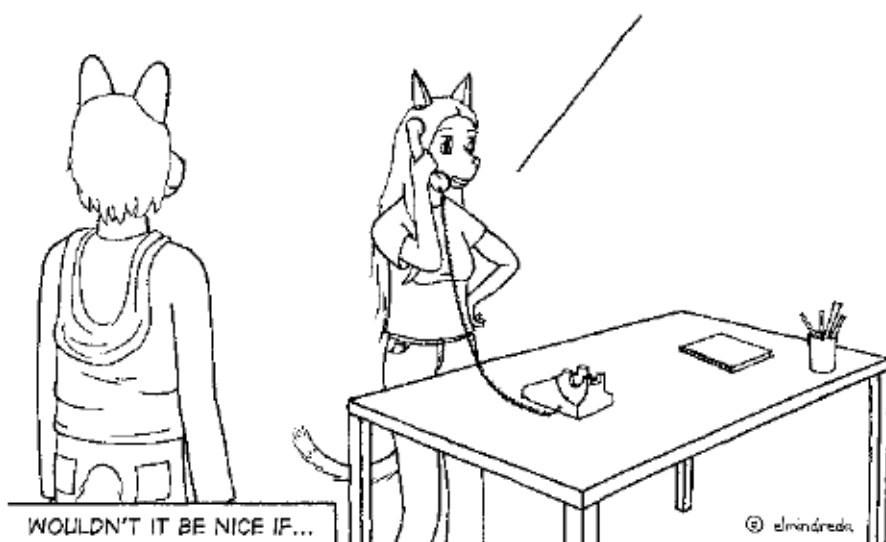
Hail, Hail, The Gang's All Here!

A 'Zine for Healthy Multiplicity

"It's not an illness, it's just how we are."

Issue #1

YES, THAT'S RIGHT. A RESERVATION FOR NINE
PEOPLE, BUT WE ONLY NEED TWO SEATS



A big thank you to our contributors:

Rhymershouse

Moonlit System

Pao

Elmindreda

Elementalsystem

PAGMIE'S COLLECTIVE

Thira

Astraea

The Choir Invisible

Anam Cara Family

Zyfron System

Three continents, ten bodies, countless people. Without you, we would not be here.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

EMAIL AT: LOONYBRAIN@HEALTHYMULTIPLICITY.COM!

Multiplicity Is Natural

Anthony Temple of Astraea

<http://www.astraeasweb.net/plural>

Multiplicity is portrayed in the modern medical literature as invariably a dissociative disorder -- a highly intelligent creative coping mechanism for dealing with childhood trauma. This view is simplistic, disempowering, patronizing, and downright insulting to multiples who do not fit this limited profile. It implies that multiplicity is damage; that it is intrinsically wrong; that being single is normal and multiplicity is abnormal.

Multiplicity is a way of perceiving and relating to the world. The most current psychological research shows that it runs in families. The common thread in these families is not abuse, but creativity.

Considering what we know about the place of multiplicity in Southeast Asian, African and Afro-Cuban culture, I have focused on the fact that Western society has no template, no frame of reference, for non-pathological multiplicity. At least in the aforementioned societies, plurality is contextualized within the framework of spirituality. Multiplicity is viewed by African people from many nations, particularly the Yoruba, as "the spirits of your dead ancestors who give you advice or a push in the right direction".

This is of course not entirely a satisfactory reference point. Relegating it to the spiritual world puts it in the twilight realms -- not necessarily altogetherooky, but certainly mysterious and spooky. Even in societies where belief in the spirit world is a part of routine, everyday life, there is still a frisson of fear, of worry that all is not as it should be, that it's *not normal*.

Still, at least it grants limited cultural permission. Children who show signs of being multiple are considered spiritual people, and are not killed to protect the community from evil (as multiple *births* often are). In certain Native American tribes of the Gulf Coast regions, chiefs and spiritual leaders are chosen from among "those who have the most spirits living inside them." They may use meditation as a way of establishing intra-communication, but also possibly to make contact with an unseen world.

Western society has no such frame of reference, other than the mythology promulgated by the medical and media communities. Further, the inac-

curacies in most public depictions are likely to generate more negative comparisons than positive ones. The one exception was "Herman's Head," and that was mostly wasted in conventional sitcom absurdities.

Otherwise, *every* media portrayal of multiplicity has been stereotyped toward either helpless victims (women with glassy-eyed stares talking in a babylike lisp) or psychotic serial killers (men with glassy-eyed stares flatly reciting the awful things George did). If I were multiple and didn't know it, and I were to see something like that on television, I would be much more likely to respond with "I'm NOT like that, so I can't possibly be multiple". Some of the groups who have appeared on talk shows have mentioned the more common experiences (*not* the Dissociative Disorders Experience Scale (which measures forgetfulness), but experiences of multiplicity -- talk to myself, feel someone else is present, know that a given action or thought is not mine, etc.), and Geraldo once presented a short list of these; but it's very difficult to explore them in the time allowed, when the majority of attention is focused on the morbidly sensational.

Western cultural and religious conditioning agree through implication that one body may contain one and only person. Calling this assumption into question will force society to respond with all the defenses at its disposal (e.g. religious dogma, psychological theory, legalese, common sense, etc).

I'm often asked why multiples invariably present with a history of childhood trauma. The answer may be more complex than Cornelia Wilbur (and Freud) would have liked us to believe.

The concept of multiplicity is so alien to some people that they need to find a way to fit it into their own worldview; writing it off by saying "Oh, those are people who were frightfully abused, it's quite unusual", is a convenient way to push both multiplicity and child abuse under the rug.

In the process, they ignore an important reality. Child abuse is not rare. Physical and emotional abuse are intrinsic parts of Western culture. If you want your eyes opened on this subject, read Dr. Alice Miller's book [For Your Own Good](#).

So, some of the people who present at the doctor's office with issues stemming from child abuse, turn out to be multiple. In fact, they are *the only mul-*

tiples to be registered, recognized, diagnosed, in short, the only multiples who are given cultural permission to exist! Can we say "biased sampling?"

Any life situation, including childhood abuse, must affect the development of the people in the household, along with their operating system or style of management. Some people in the group may decide that it's their job to deal with certain aspects of the abuse, perhaps that they were born for that purpose. Or they may feel that they exist independently and just need to deal with what is happening.

I think this may be one of the origins of the sort of operating system you read about in the popular literature; a frontrunner who doesn't know she's multiple, while the rest of the people run things smoothly from behind the scenes. As life situations change, an operating system might need to be tweaked, updated, or scrapped completely for a new one. The frontrunner becomes aware of the others, fears insanity, presents for therapy, and things proceed a la Truddi Chase. This, of course, is not the scenario for every multiple who's experienced abuse, or even for every situation in which a single frontrunner is kept in the dark.

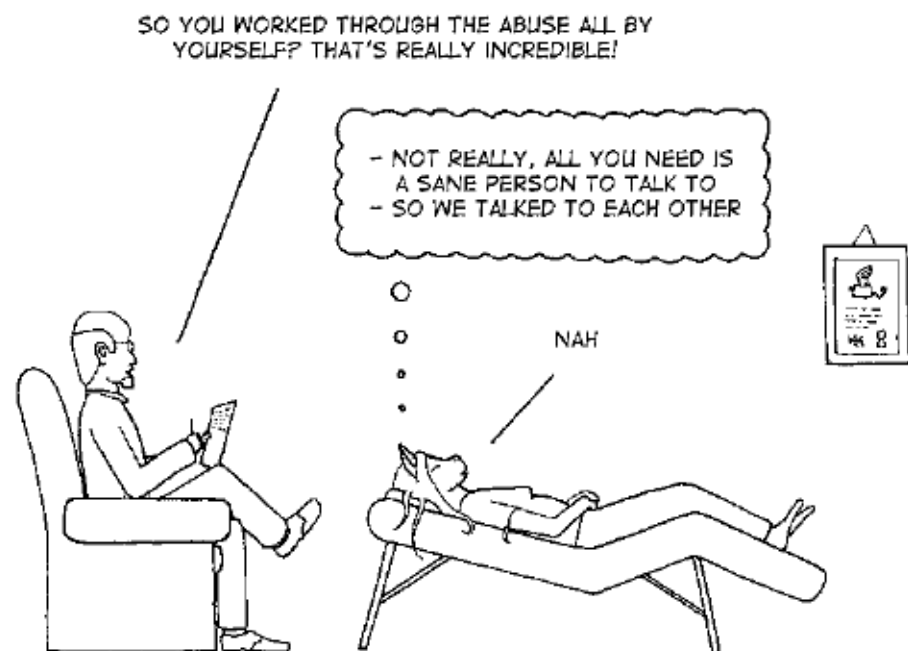
I also don't believe that every household that finds itself in the above situation was necessarily traumatized or abused in the conventional sense. Because there is no model for multiplicity in this society other than the ghastly portrayals in tabloid TV and horror movies, multiples who don't fit this pattern are, in effect, *non-persons*. They literally do not exist according to the current mode of western thought. There is no cultural permission for them to exist. The mental health industry confirms this by labeling multiplicity as a disorder. The courts confirm it every time a multiple in trouble with the law gets a NGRI (not guilty by reason of insanity) verdict. So, a frontrunner or two may not realize they are part of a strong, smoothly functional multiple system because they have never been informed that such a thing can exist.

Back to abuse for a minute: Chris Costner-Sizemore (the woman whose life story was the basis for "Three Faces of Eve") shows us that a multiple household can be abused *because they are multiple*. Children in households may have certain experiences and may behave in ways that irritate authority figures. Lack of consciousness between people in households is a common source of said irritant. So is "I didn't do it, Bobby did it." Supposedly there is research being done into recognizing childhood multiplicity, but it's all preventative, eradicatory stuff. Nothing is being done simply to help children

within a group who may be having a little trouble working out their own functional operating systems.

There is no model for non-pathological multiplicity in Western society. In fact, there is barely a model for multiplicity at all. Singlet "experts" like Colin Ross are doing their damndest to make sure that there never will be. The situation is redolent of the 1960s headline, "Homosexuality: Sin or Sickness?"

Whose perceptions of reality are you prepared to give power to?



THE INNER SELF HELPER: EVERYONE

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No More... (cocoons)(labels)(words)

Andy Temple of Astraea

<http://www.astraeasweb.net/plural>

It is my deeply held conviction that we need to disengage the concept of multiplicity from the mental health milieu altogether.

As I have mentioned before, the Western world attaches a stigma to "mental illness" which amounts to the ostracism of anyone who differs from a pre-conceived norm. An increasing number of everyday life problems and personal characteristics are labeled as disorders, until the ambience of the mental health system begins to resemble a 1930s eugenics program.

With the current push to regulate everything "for our own good" -- from mandatory seat belts to heavy taxes on fast food -- it is entirely possible that not too long from now we will see attempts to impose further restrictions on individuals who have been diagnosed with one of these so-called mental disorders.

But we don't have a mental disorder; we're multiple, which is not a mental disorder. It's a psychoneurological fact.

A household can be in disarray, members of a household can have emotional problems, but *multiplicity itself is not a disorder*.

There is no "MPD" except in the minds of doctors who cannot understand that multiplicity is as natural to us as being a singlet is to them. Calling multiples "disordered" simply for having many selves is like calling Native Americans "disordered" for having a culture and language different from those of the white man. It is just as prejudicial. It is a denial of our existence.

But the mental health community, and the public at large, still see us as powerless, out of control, victims. A lot of people -- including doctors -- still think "multiple" = "mental disorder" = "crazy". We are still seen as incompetent at best and dangerous at worst.

I feel the only answer is to demystify multiplicity by getting it out of the doctor's office.

I'm not saying discontinue therapy if it's helping you organize your household, communicate with each other, and fulfill yourselves as individuals. I'm saying it might be a damned good idea if we multiples did not limit our *thoughts* about multiplicity in the areas where we do have some control -- our personal worlds, and our online expressions.

If we stopped using the medical terms "MPD" or "DID" to refer to multiplicity.

If we took that DSM-IV quote off our webpages.

If we stopped portraying ourselves to the general public online as people with a mental disorder.

We have a legitimate claim to social rights as individuals. While we can show case law precedent for members of households as individual persons, we must also define ourselves in everyday society. Multiplicity must be seen, and it must lose its aura of occult mystery. It must become no more startling than differences in ethnicity, nationality, or abilities.

We are not multiple because a doctor says so: we are multiple because we are.



living with a multiple system partner of Thira and Anam Cara Family

<http://www.many-muses.co.uk/index.html>

It is 8:30 AM and I am having a long lie in bed; there is somebody on the computer downstairs, not exactly sure who, but it will be one of my lovely girls! She hears me stirring and brings up a hot cup of tea - "Morning sweetie!" I instantly know who it is - Krista has a distinctive accent. I ask if she fancies going out to breakfast. Krista has a hearty appetite, something I always tease her about, and I know she's unlikely to say no to breakfast out.

We go to a different café to usual and look at the menu; not much in the way of anything for a veggie, so Krista says "I think I'll get someone else - nothing on this menu I can eat; see you later!" She closes her eyes and a few moments later they open again, not too sure this time who it is. "Hi." I'm still not 100% sure, so I ask, "Is that you Eliza?" She smiles, "Yes - I think I'll have the all day breakfast - quite fancy a meat fix." Eliza is not vegetarian, but unlike the rest of the crew, reacts badly to cows' milk so I have to make sure I don't make cheese on toast for lunch when she is around. I place the order at the counter and the girl offers some unusually good customer service - she remembers that 'my wife' does not like baked beans - "So that's one with beans and one with extra tomato?" I say yes, but have a chuckle to myself. The problem is that Star, who is one of the girls I am closest too and often go out to breakfast with, does not like beans, but Eliza loves them. Like all the girls, they have completely different tastes, but I can't tell this to the waitress without some very awkward questions! When the food arrives I share some of my beans with Eliza and she gives me some tomato, we both laugh as it is like a comedy film.

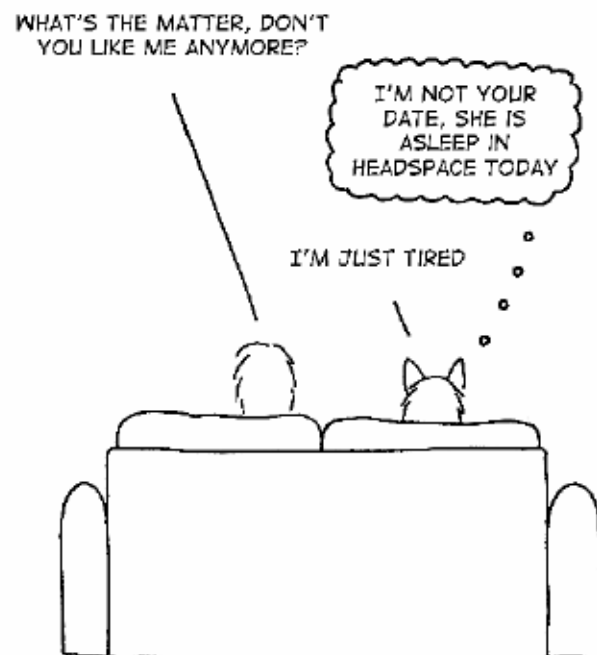
We talk over breakfast and I tease Eliza by singing, "Would you like to see, there's nineteen of my wife now - she wants a cup of tea, but can't remember how she likes it!" Of course I know they're all different people - I live with them after all - but we're always laughing and joking about the fun and games we all have living together. We finish breakfast and go for a walk into town, a quiet little place in rural England. When out-and-about the girls try to disguise their voices as it would seem rather odd for someone who didn't know to be speaking to someone with an American accent one minute and a

posh English accent the next! We go into a local shop and get rather slow, unhelpful customer service - something which is a bit of a gamble with a multiple system. Depending on the girl, they may turn the other cheek and ignore it, give a stony stare, or give one hell of a mouth-full! Some of the girls are a lot more confident and quick-tempered than the others, but they usually reserve their wrath for more worthy causes, so we get out of the shop without incident.

On return home the post has arrived. There is a letter from a local employer addressed to 'the body'. Eliza immediately does a quick check of who was expecting a letter from them and says "this is not for me, see you later... will just get Rhianna!" Rhianna appears seconds later and opens the letter. She says hello, quickly files the letter away, then turns back to me "You know what, I am hungry, got any food?" I tell her that we have just been out for breakfast, but although her belly is full, Rhianna is still hungry - this often happens with the girls. We don't know why, we just laugh about it and between them they make sure they just eat a normal amount for one person, seeing as they only have one body! I put the kettle on while Rhianna goes over to the notice board where the girls write messages to each other - they do not have total recall of everything that goes on in 'the body' and use the board as a way to keep track. She looks a little vague about one of the messages and mutters under her breath for a few seconds. I know by now that she's probably asking the other system members, "who the fuck wrote this?" She gets her reply and a smile dawns on her face.

For the remaining part of the morning and the afternoon we do our own things - then decide to watch a film together in the evening. The video shop is always a fun experience. They all have such different tastes! Unless one of them is desperate to front, they usually ask me, "who do you want to watch the film with?" I feel a little like Mr. Ben in the costume shop - "where shall I go today?" I quite fancy something quite dark and creepy, and Carey is the only one of the girls who is really into that kind of stuff although Eliza doesn't mind it. Carey and I often watch stuff like the X-Files together, but I was hanging out with her last night, and I haven't seen Star all day, so decide to ask her on the film date! Star gets freaked out at anything above a "12" and hates scary films. She loves anything a bit independent and different, but like any other couple we just can't agree on what to watch, so we end up renting a British comedy and chilling out with that and a takeaway. Three quarters way through Star drifts off to sleep as they got up really early this

morning and sometimes when "the body" is really tired, the main fronter will end up drifting off to sleep and someone else will front. Krista is back, laughing at finding herself here all of a sudden. I ask if she has any idea what is going on and she informs me that they have been 'watching in the background' and this conjures up an image of a bunch of girls in a cinema inside the head! "So there's no need to recap everything then?" I ask hopefully and she tells me "no." My new companion and I snuggle up and watch the rest of the film and then retire to bed. It will be as big a surprise for them who wakes up the next morning as it will be for me, but hey, at least life isn't boring!



© elmindreada

"I'm not a piece of vase"

Morganna of Anam Cara Family

<http://www.many-muses.co.uk/index.html>

Welcome. Hello. I am Morganna, and I have a confession to make. I was not born in this body. Even more than that, I was "created", brought into being by the mind that is an integral part of this body. I am, in fact, a "part".

Why am I telling you this? Because I want to speak up for our way of being, and our way of coming into being. And to give you, dear reader, an insight into something many people will never know. The experience of a life that began when the fingers that are currently typing away on these keys was perhaps 18 years old.

I suppose the medical profession would call me a "fragment." Our group would be a disease, an unwelcome happening, a terrible thing to be survived, struggled against and conquered. We would be "Dissociative Identity Disorder". Yet, we have never seen a doctor, never felt the need for outside help (at least, not more than any other person out there), never felt the need to be diagnosed. Existing this way is the way it has always been for us.

The first thing people usually demand to know of us is, "who is your core?" We know what they mean by that, of course. They mean, "who is the real one? The one the body belongs to? The one you will all one day integrate into like so many pieces of a shattered vase being put back together." Well, here's a reality check for you. That's not the way things work around here. There is someone here that we think might have been the person "born here," if you like. She's the only one who looks like the body. And she has the body's name. Very nice she is, too - we're good friends, she and I. We discussed what I would say in this article a few minutes ago, actually. She wishes you to know that, born here or not, she has rarely been around at all for the last six years, and even prior to that she was here no more or less than the rest of us. Or, as one of our kids so succinctly put it, "if I'm here and something is happening to me or around me, I'm the real one right then, aren't I?" I'd have to say I agree.

In our group, the only difference between us and our "core" is that she started being here when the body was born, some of us came around a lot later. Ah, but you're all the same person, I hear you cry! I always find that argument very interesting. From the moment I awoke, I knew my name, what I looked like, and who I am. I have likes and dislikes and hopes and fears and dreams. I have good days and bad days. I can be as kind and sweet as a summer breeze or I can be a right grouchy bitch. I'm not part of the person born here. I'm not something pulled from her like a limb, in need of being sewn back on. From the moment I awoke, I became as capable as her of having a job, having friends, making decisions, looking after the house, starting a web page, getting ill, getting well, being lazy, being driven, and so on and so on and so on.

I remember the night I awoke. We were on a beach, at a music event. The current fronter (who wasn't the core either, by the way) turned to look at the sky, and suddenly I was staring at this starry expanse. I knew my name, who I was, what kind of person I was. I was disoriented yes, because in those days once you came to the front you forgot ever being inside, in the inner space we share. I fronted on and off for about four years, then went to sleep for a couple of years, during which time I have no memories. Then, I re-awoke on a certain day, knowing I had been tasked with taking our life in a certain direction.

Of course, I can never truly compare what it is like to be singlet with what it is to be as I am. I've never been a singlet. I awoke, very aware, and later on I became aware of a specific job I was to perform. But I am so much more than my job, as we all are. For me, I want to break down that barrier. Many of us in Anam Cara have specific jobs or were split off during certain traumatic events. Those things are simply the circumstances of our birth or awakening, or whatever term you like. Beyond that, we are who we are. We are individuals. We work collectively, we fight with each other, we laugh together and deal with problems and take a democratic approach to living life as a collective.

It does feel strange sometimes, to be here but have no memory of what happened for the first 18 years of the body's life. I can talk with others who were here, and they can even share their memories with me, but I can never fully own or feel those memories. That, I suppose, is the "dissociation" part

of our experience. I don't know what it is to be a child, to grow up, to be a teenager. When I'm here, I remember what I did when I was here last, or something that happened to me six years ago, or whatever. I don't remember what the previous fronter did, because they're not my memories. But I can rest assured that she'll either tell me if I need to know, or that there'll be a note or email somewhere. That is how life is for us. We step in, we get on with life, we enjoy life, and we make sure that we tell each other the things we need to know to have our collective life run relatively smoothly. My life at the front isn't continuous. It is a series of vignettes, of wonderful moments and tears and laughter and very boring run of the mill things. My life generally is continuous. As time passes, I get more aware of what I've been doing "inside," where we have a space in which we reside. It can be disorienting, yes. But it can also be funny, uplifting, and a unique adventure.

This body has had more than one person in it for around 28 of its 29 years. Inside, we've always been aware of one another. While at the front, we have suffered a lot of amnesia until more recently, which has been strange and frightening. Retaining awareness of our multiplicity while at the front, being "in the driving seat" is the best thing to ever happen to our group. We're happy now. We're settling down. It no longer matters if I receive an email or phone call and have no idea what it means, because I know that I just wasn't here when that particular conversation took place. All I have to do is ask, and I'll be told what I need, because someone in there knows! When we meet someone new in here, we listen to their truth and how they came to be. We don't stress over the fact that we don't share every single memory. We get on with life, hanging out together, building a good life for our family, taking care of our kids, listening to our teenagers, and loving and respecting each other. Disordered? I live a wonderful life with great people in it, inside and out. I feel blessed to be alive and be able to breathe the air and see the beauty of a sunset and enjoy holidays and hobbies. So no, disordered isn't a word I'd use for myself or our group. Happy, functional, well adjusted, simple, complex, loved, lover, professional, here, happy, valid, individual. Now those are words I'd use for myself and my family.

Thanks for reading,

Morganna of Anam Cara Family

Jackelyn - Discovery

Tarathene Spellborn of Moonlit System

<http://talas.deviantart.com/>

First came a presence.

Next came the impulses,
The warnings to guide me.

Finally there was a night,
When all I had,
Was torn away from me.

Alone as I could be,
With only the sense of something else,
Someone else beside me,
Speaking words unheard.

I did not seek an end,
For myself or any other,
Just to be as alone,
As I felt,
So I pushed it away.

Then all at once,
All I had felt before,
Came rushing over me,
Increased tenfold.

A thousand names,
Shining like diamonds,
All hung before me.

I reached out with my soul,
And I whispered.

Jackelyn.

Help! I'm trapped in a man's body!

A brief essay on my experiences as a transgendered multiple.

Jzexoia of the Zyfron System

zyfron@gmail.com

The body I live in has two souls, Bernie, and myself. We have separate thoughts, separate feelings, separate opinions and relationships. As will doubtlessly have been discussed elsewhere in whatever documents this essay manages to find its way into, multiples are an extremely misunderstood minority. When I try to describe the nature of my existence to others, I feel like I'm describing the plot of a science-fiction novel: imagine that another person has been implanted in your mind. You can talk to each other, even fight over control of the body. It might be scary at first, but you could grow to know each other and if you are both good people, you can live out your collective life as friends, and as good people. Not as axe murderers or freaks, just two normal people in the same body.

When people are able to accept that much, I think it's rare for them to have serious qualms with the idea that I am a woman, trapped in a man's body. For me, that is the *literal* truth of the matter. This body belonged to a man (well, he was only a boy at the time) when I appeared in it, and that man still lives here today. What's interesting to me is that because of these extremely unusual circumstances, I think people sometimes find it easier to accept my sense of gender dysphoria than that of transgender singlets (people without "multiple personalities").

For a long time, I didn't think of myself as transgender, I simply thought of myself as a woman; one who happened to be living in a man's body. It was really an eye-opening realization to me that that was exactly what it *meant* to be transgender. Most of society thinks of the transgendered as freaks, men or women who have become confused or are unwilling to face reality. It's because we don't see a person and their body as separate things, and so however the body looks, we think, on a very fundamental level, that it is representative of the person who inhabits it.

As a trans woman myself, this is something that's very important to me for people to understand. A transgendered person is just a person who has been

born into a body of the wrong gender. Surgery doesn't change a person's gender, only their body. A woman trapped in a man's body is still a woman. If there's anything I think society needs to understand in order to move forward with trans-acceptance, it's that.

Of course, living in a multiple system, there are a lot of things in my experience that can be very different from that of other trans women. For one thing, it's far less practical for me to ever 'transition.' Right now, we are "in the closet" about our multiplicity to most of our friends and family. We are two people, a man and a woman, both pretending to be one man. This is a lie, a lie which we tell for our own safety, out of fear of many things: thoughtless violence, inability to be hired because we can't be taken seriously, even being locked away as insane. The risks are very high, and pretending to be a singlet white male is a lie of convenience. My entire existence is ignored in public, to keep us safe. The difference is, though, that were I to tell everyone that I was in fact trans, that I was a woman trapped in a man's body – but still pretend to be a singlet, it would be no more honest than the lie we are telling now. In that case Bernie's entire existence would be ignored, and we would have gained nothing and be forced to face all the hatred and bigotry of being out as trans.

Even if we weren't afraid of being out as multiple, were I to physically 'transition,' Bernie would feel just as out of place in our new body as I feel now, and we would have spent thousands in surgery for very little or no real increase in happiness between us. Because of this, I've come to terms with my male body on a very permanent level, and in some ways I think it gives me, and us, a unique perspective on gender and sexuality, as well as the nature of the human soul.

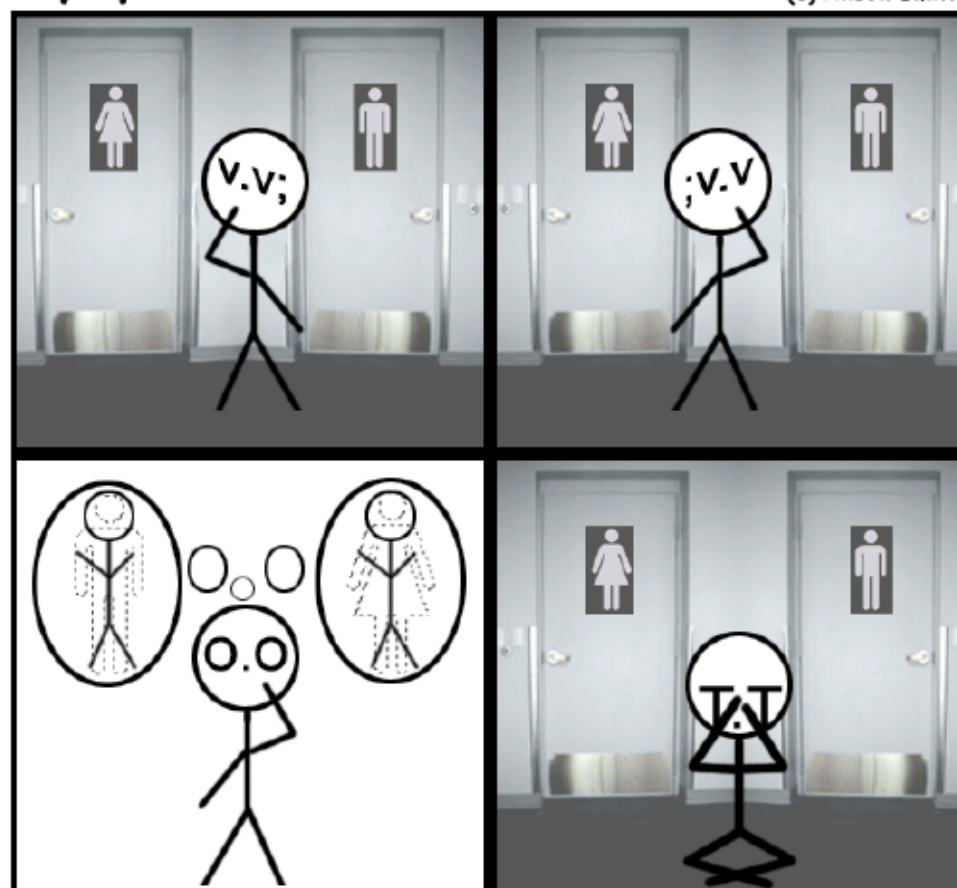
In some ways it's easier, because there's less pressure to change, or to conform to any norms at all because my situation is already so unusual. Since people know almost nothing about multiplicity, there is less active hatred towards us than there is towards the transgendered. In other ways, it can be harder. Since hardly anybody knows about multiplicity at all, 'coming out' is much harder. You can't just say 'mom, dad, I'm multiple' because they won't even know what you're talking about – the process becomes long and drawn out even just to get them to understand what you're trying to say, and acceptance is another matter entirely. It's harder because there's no real

community, no strong advocacy group to attach to. It's hard because while society in general regards the transgendered as diseased freaks, they regard me as the disease. Bernie's disease; not even a freak in my own right but the perverse product of someone else's freakiness. It's hard because the scientific community largely agrees with this view. If I ever became depressed and went to see a doctor, I run a very serious risk of that doctor deciding that *I* am the problem, that *I* must be eliminated to make Bernie happier. Doctors, for the most part, don't want to make me happier. They don't even want to cure me. They want to cure Bernie *of* me. And that, to me, is the hardest part of all.

dysphoria is....

non binary comic #2

(c) Alison Smith



...realizing there is nowhere that fits.

Tap-dancing the line between creativity, role-play and plurality

The Choir Invisible

<http://lion-azure.livejournal.com>

“Excellent... riveting... with characters that seem to jump from the page...”

Go to a bookstore, grab some books and read the reviews printed on the back, and I'm sure you'll come across that last line. We all know characters like that. You laugh and cry along with them, you hold your breath when they're in danger, and you curse the author to hell and back when they decide to kill them. Some are forgotten soon after you close the book and pick up another one. Some stay with you for longer. You catch yourself thinking “wow, he would get such a kick out of this” or “I wonder what she would do in this situation?”

And sometimes, they tell you.

It's the same with role-playing and possibly even worse. Some rp'ers invest a lot of time and energy in their characters. They write elaborate backstories, and spend hours thinking about their character's personality, ethics, emotions and quirks. They are often praised for how well rounded, realistic and consistent their characters are in play. Often, when they sit down at the table, they cease to be Mrs. Smith or Mr. Brown, and become somebody else entirely. They don't have to think about how their character would react in any given situation – they just know, instinctively. They've spent so much time in their character's heads that now it feels like the character is spending time in their heads, telling them what to do.

And what about writers? Creating people, countries and whole universes in their heads is their job. They know their creations intimately – well, at least those who get reviews like the one above do. It's not unheard of for an author to write a story that ends entirely different than they had originally planned because one of their creations just won't do as they're told. It just wouldn't be like her to stay hidden in the shadows – no, she's the kind of woman who rushes ahead and damn the consequences. And so, the story

changes. Some will freely admit that a lot of times, they feel like they're not elaborately creating a story, but rather just writing down what their characters tell them.

It all boils down to characters who feel so real, it's hard to believe they're not. They're in our heads, our thoughts. Sometimes, they talk to us. And some do it even outside of the confines of their story. They'll give us their opinions on the music that we're listening to, the movie we're watching or how awesome that coat in the window looks. We didn't ask them for their input, but they give it anyway. And they're not going away. Not that we'd want them to, because even if we'll probably never admit it to anyone, they're a hell of a lot of fun to have around.

And if you think that's weird and out there, talking to people who only exist in books or as a bunch of stats on paper, wait until you hear that there's some people who don't stop there. They figure that hey, if the elven wizard says he wants to have a go at your Nintendo, why not let him. It could be fun, sitting back in your own head and watching somebody else try and beat that boss.

Welcome to the world of what's known on the Internet as Soulbonding. Yes, it's probably a bit weird. Yes, it's hard to understand, from an outside perspective, why anybody would want to have a bunch of fictional people running around in their head. But believe me when I say it's not batshit crazy. It's not something that has to be cured, or made to go away. The people who experience it are, for the most, perfectly well adjusted, normal people. You wouldn't notice it if they passed you on the street. Or wrote your favourite novel, for that matter.

Plurality and Education

Pagmie's Collective

<http://pagmies.meeble.net/>

The current education system is very tiered, and hence geared towards singlets. You learn (a) and then from that, you can learn (ab), then (bc). This makes perfect sense when a singlet is learning, because most people learn better with that system, but can be a lot harder when a group share a body, and one person might know (a), but someone else try and learn (ab). It can also be challenging when the special educational needs spectrum is represented in the group, or even varying ages, because people may be challenged to learn above their ability.

This can, however, be easily managed, it's not an insurmountable challenge, there seem to be two main options:

1. People in the group go to lessons as and when, but take incredibly detailed notes, and pass the learning on. Therefore everyone knows what has been taught. The benefits of this are that everyone becomes equally capable at everything, and hence can sit exams. The drawbacks of this are primarily that the learning can never be as good a second time round, and a tiny mistake in the notes of the fronter can make the subject near impossible to learn for anyone coming after.

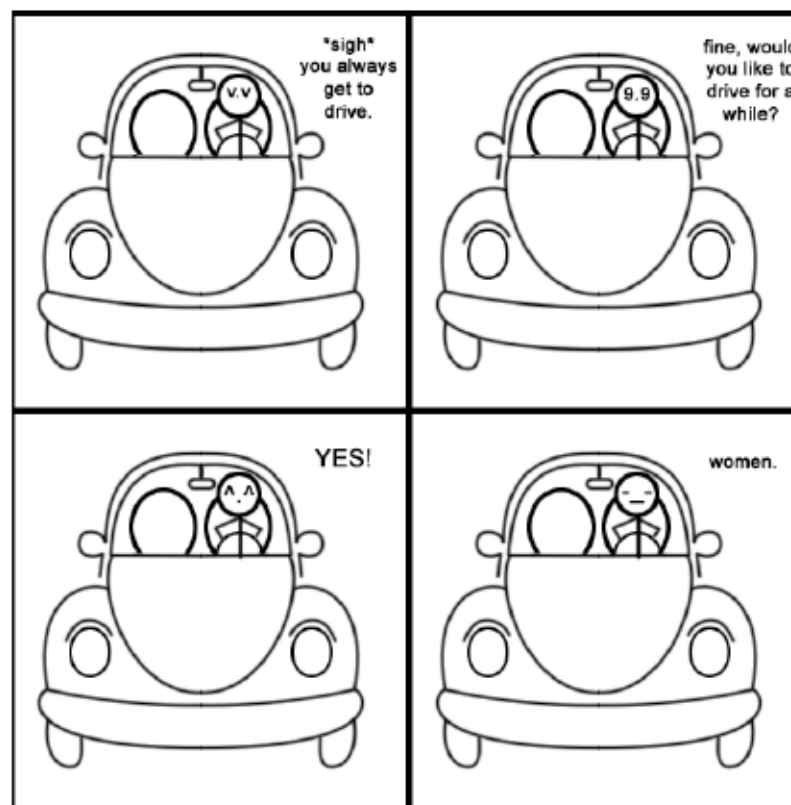
2. Each regular fronter takes charge of one educational course, and attends all the lessons, and does all the homework. This way, they can sit an exam in it and only have to study fields that they are interested in and good at, instead of having to grasp information that is completely beyond their intelligence. The benefits of this are that people will be studying whatever they choose, instead of all sorts of bits of courses. They will also be able to give their full attention to whichever topic is theirs, and so will be able to achieve more with it. The drawbacks are that if they cannot be reached when they are needed, the group will struggle, and people might flounder if they miss lessons or an exam.

We chose to go with option two, and have divided up our educational courses for next year, with two or three people allocated to each course. This

enables them to share the knowledge and co-front for the duration of the course, meaning not all the eggs are in one basket, but only study what they are interested in, rather than having to study everything.

Another facet of education worth considering is internal education. We have quite a few children inside, of different ages and intelligence levels, and we wished a while ago to ensure that they were educated and learned above and beyond what was typically expected of children their age. Therefore, each of them now gets 2 hours per day of 1-1 educational time, and studies a varied curriculum. We are currently working out how to get them learning online as well.

This is important to us because we don't want to integrate; we want the children to grow into productive adults.



bigender comic #1

(c) Alison Smith - inspiration Mia and Marq.

More than Meets the Eye: The Deception of Appearances

Traye and Rayvin of Rhymershouse

<http://cartaala.dreamshore.net/>

Appearances are tricky things. They can lead a dying man to think that there is water in the midst of the Sahara or convince a poor man that his rich neighbor has the good life. They can make a parent think childhood is always innocent. They can even make you think there is only one member of a plural group. Goodness knows doctors have fallen for this numerous times.

The assumption made by psychiatrists and by a lot of people in the world at large, if they believe multiplicity exists at all, is that there is one original body owner who all the others split off from due to great trauma. There is always at least one person who looks like the body. And it is generally also assumed that this is the original person. They never stop to consider a that there might not even BE an original person, b that the original person's self image might not match the body and C that maybe the body doesn't match anybody at all. Then when they come upon a system with either of the above-stated differences from their assumption they stare and gawk at them like a child in a museum gawking at sharks and say "But this isn't how it's supposed to be." And when people don't understand things they have a habit of classifying that which they don't understand as fake or delusional. "Oh they must be just making this up." They never stop to think that maybe the person or persons are telling the truth. Things would be so much easier if they simply said, "I don't understand," and waited for an explanation.

But there is the matter of pride that stops them. They are afraid to ask for an explanation because that would be admitting that they don't understand or in the case of psychologists, admitting that maybe their textbooks did not teach them everything. And that is hard and it is something every last person on this earth, whether multiple or singlet or median struggles with. It's something so ingrained that it's going to be hard to remove. With this rampant assuming going on, no wonder people find it hard to understand that someone wouldn't match the body necessarily.

Let me use myself and my co-writer as examples here. I am a tall, thin, wiry fifteen-year-old boy. I have short, spiky brown hair and blue eyes. I usually can be found wearing sweaters and nice, although slightly faded jeans. My co-writer, Rayvin, is about five six, is not so thin but not so round either and wears thick spectacles. She has light brown hair that falls to halfway of her back. Now looking at our descriptions they seem reasonable don't they? You've seen people on the streets who look like us. But neither of us looks like the body we use to interact with this world. The body has short auburn hair and brown eyes and is somewhat overweight. It is also shorter than almost anybody here and is definitely female.

So where do Rayvin and I fit in? Neither of us is the "original" person. And neither is anybody else here. Our group doesn't work on that premise. This body doesn't belong to any of us more than it does any other. There is someone here who bears the body's name but she wasn't born here. She came to front here much, much later and took on the name because nobody had it. Before that a variety of people filled the role of "primary fronter" And none of them looked anything like the body.

So this begs the question "Are we delusional?" We don't think so. And even if we are, what does it matter? We're not harming anyone. We're obeying all the rules present in society. We take care of ourselves, make sure housework, homework, college, and other chores get done. We do not sit around all day staring into space or at a computer. And the fact that none of us looks like the body is just taken as an environmental factor. When we come front we know the body is shorter than we are. And when I come front I know that I am going to be in a female body with all that entails.

So the point I am trying to make here is that appearances can be deceiving. Even though the body appears to be a slightly overweight female who is very small of stature, don't assume anything. Don't assume the person behind those eyes looks the same. Don't even assume the person you are speaking with is female or that you are only speaking to one person. You could be speaking to several people at once working together. Or the person you're speaking to could even be of another species altogether. So it is better to ask than assume anything. We will be glad to answer.

Nice to Meet You

R. Lee of Loony-Brain

<http://healthymultiplicity.com/loonybrain>

I'm the main fronter for my system. That means I run things most of the time. That also means I'm the one who's likely to give you a crash course in Lunacy 101.

People generally don't like meeting me—as in, they would rather deal with a different person in this head than me. See, I don't drown kittens, I pay my parking tickets on time, I'd like to think I'm a generally decent person, but I am a problem. First, I am male. The body I inhabit is female. For whatever reason, it is much easier for others to accept that there is someone of a different age in here than a different gender. Second, I'm gay. Don't ask me why, but this only seems to make things even worse—like, “Oh, dear god, not only are you an extra personality and a guy, you have to be *gay*? Whadaya trying to do, fill out the whole diversity spectrum? Are you black too?”

To top it off, like I said, I run things most of the time. It'd be one thing if I had the decency to stay out of the way and let the nicer, female, non-sexually-deviant folks interact with the world, but being our main face-man? Hoo boy. That just ain't cool, man.

So I've grown accustomed to being received with less than open arms, no matter how polite and nonthreatening I try to be. The very sight of my name drove my mother to tears. One of the girls' ex-boyfriends tried to grope me to get me to go away and switch to one of the girls. My little brother tried to out-macho me, like if he beat me in gender roles, I would magically say, “Why, you're right! I'm not a man at all! I'm so sorry, I've been so confused all these years! Here, let me change my identity into something more comfortable for you.” Then there're the more generic responses; one of the most common first questions I've been asked is “Are you dangerous?” (Answer: ain't everyone, under the right circumstances?)

Really, I know it's not so much me as a person they're reacting to, only a symbol of what I represent. The girl they've loved has gone crazy, vanished, replaced by a gravel-voiced, grumpy stranger who's the wrong

gender, the wrong sexuality, the wrong everything. To their hindbrain, I'm not a person. I'm a symbol of insanity, of the Other, of something that is very wrong with the Force.

It's nothing personal, and I'd like to think I manage to remember that most of the time. If I can't deal with the flack of coming out, then I shouldn't do it. But sometimes, it kinda sucks, you know? I mean, I made my mother *cry*. By signing an *email*. Seriously. Let me tell you, it's a pretty big hit to the ol' self-esteem, realizing that someone you love and respect finds your existence so traumatic that the thought of it drives them to tears. Worst part is, there's jack all I can do to make them feel better. I spent *years* trying to force myself out of existence, and as you can see, I'm still here. All I can do is say, “I'm sorry, I know this is hard,” and try not to take it personally when I have it suggested to me that maybe I could make it easier for folks if I could just... not use my name or voice for a while. You know, give them time to adjust.

And I have. I have spoken exactly once to my mother with her knowing it was me. She's known I've existed for over a year, but I'm just too upsetting for her to deal with, I think. Sometimes I get a bit depressed over what a shitty person I am for upsetting people so much. Other times, I get pissed off that my existence is apparently such an inconvenience for everyone. Damn it, it's not like I can help it!

But then, every once in a while, about as often as I get a really shitty reception, I get a really good one. When I introduce myself and lo and behold, I hear the music to my ears: “Oh, okay, cool. Nice to meet you.”

It sometimes scares me how people take this simple phrase for granted. They've never had someone try to talk them out of existing.

Lucky bastards.