

*I felt a cleaving in my mind,  
As if my brain had split,  
I tried to match it seam by seam,  
But could not make it fit.*

*Emily Dickinson (1890)*

## **Abstract**

When working with trauma survivors in integrative psychotherapy it's fascinating to know more about experiences of dissociation within the therapeutic relationship and the impact of these experiences from a clients' perspective.

Dissociation; a loss of connectedness and often a defensive strategy employed in childhood to protect against overwhelming affect or unbearable trauma. Kluft says "Dissociation is mental flight when physical flight is not possible" (Sanderson, 2006). These strategies can continue to be employed into adulthood and present themselves within the therapeutic relationship.

Employing a qualitative heuristic methodology using the stages of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990) this study explores experiences of dissociation within the therapeutic relationship of five participants, including the author using semi-structured interviews.

From the research findings three main themes emerged connected to dissociation; shame, safety and sadness depicting the essence of dissociative experience along with physical, somatic and experiential descriptions of dissociative experiences in the therapy. A composite depiction was developed and a process of creative synthesis resulting in comprehensive representation of personal development and participants experiences culminating in a list of aspirations for therapists working with clients who dissociate during therapy.