

Alexandra's Journey Towards Health

A formerly DID client, "Alexandra" describes her growth and process.

"Alexandra" is a mid-40s woman who grew up under horrific circumstances. She is the mother of two children, a tween son and a young adolescent girl. Her son was referred to me by his school and our work together was so healing for him that she asked me to work with her. She is a tenured faculty member at an area college. Her husband, the children's father, died 4 years ago after a torturous six-year cancer that was greatly exacerbated by his delusional disorder. She had taken on many of his delusions.

Alexandra read Suzette Boon, et al, Coping with Trauma-Related Dissociation: Skills Training for Patients and Therapists at the beginning of treatment (and all in 2 days rather than using it slowly over an extended period of time). It helped her see she had DID which was confirmed by her DES and the Multidisciplinary Inventory of Dissociation. Alexandra and I have worked together for two years, much of that time meeting twice a week and sometimes three times a week. I currently see her once a week. She now has a diagnosis of DDNOS.

I asked Alexandra if she would write about our treatment together to share with trainees. She willingly wrote several extensive pieces that I have blended together. She found the process helpful in seeing how much progress she had made.

While this was written in May 2016, it remains valid and very powerful. In May 2017, she added an addendum on her further gains. That is appended. My notes are italicized.

When I first started this therapy I thought, mistakenly, that I had a good sense of my own inner workings, that I just daydreamed a lot, had a lot of emotional pain, and that my imagination was very intense and chaotic. Knowing my own (well hidden) feelings of hysteria, hypervigilance, and murderous rage, I was afraid that if I discussed my real feelings in therapy that it would lead to my children being taken away from me because it was as though I constantly had criminal impulses and was in fact a criminal but one who was very well contained. I worried that I was a sociopath because despite the terrible and shocking things that have happened to me, I was able to behave normally and calmly, doing the things that a responsible mother and professional would do.

When I read the Boon book on dissociation, *Coping With Trauma-Related Dissociation: Skills Training for Patients and Therapists*, it was the first time I recognized a clinical portrait as describing me exactly. The depiction of avoidant personality traits, of depersonalization and derealization, precisely matched my own inner world. The avoidant, paralyzed part of self that manages daily life in the present and the traumatized part of self stuck in the constant replaying of past trauma, corresponded to the different modes of my own being. I'd never heard of "introjects" before but only thought that my perceptions had been contaminated by my dysfunctional family of origin. Boon describes an introject's commands as being "more than merely a wish," and that was when I understood that the various morbid strains of thought that composed my inner world were in fact discrete entities with specific functions rather than generally recurring weather patterns of my own thoughts.

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After realizing through the Boon book and through the diagnostic test that I had DID, I tried to understand the scheme of my inner workings more clearly by mapping out the different types of introjects.

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I felt really sad that I didn't have a comforter/helper introject that told me everything was going to be alright, so I tried to use the Mama Bear part of self who takes good care of my own real children to intervene on my behalf to counteract the violent, punitive images of the mother introject.

I was very conflicted at the beginning of the work because I knew that my own secret motive was to receive some form of love. I felt the childish parts of myself to be longing for affection and comfort, and I was ashamed that my hidden intention was this desperate and self-serving. The "meeting place/conference room" exercise did not work at first because I was too ashamed to candidly present these pathetic, needy child parts. Being forthcoming about my real thoughts and feelings in therapy sessions was extremely difficult because I had constant feedback from various morbid introjects that shamed me into thinking that I was basically exposing my genitalia and asking to be stroked.

The Boon book and using its techniques in therapy changed my life, and I remember having to lie down suddenly at the playground and then go home and sleep for the better part of a day because the words on the page had such revolutionary power, challenging the entrenched, diseased perceptual modes of the "head honcho" introjects and calling them out as outmoded persecuting voices. Boon focuses on learning self-care and learning to trust the world (and the people in it) as essentially good and safe, and both of those tasks, rewriting the story of my identity and rewriting the story of the place the world is, were undermined by the tenacious hold of the mother and mirror introjects.

Addressing Obstacles to Self-Care

I never took care of myself by resting or allowing myself to be nourished, instead flying around in frenetic activity and eating only enough not to get a head rush from deprivation (easy enough to excuse this as a busy single mom). Whenever I would go easy on myself by allowing myself to rest and/or eat regularly, the mother introject (and other introjects) would punish me so excruciatingly that it seemed simply not worth the effort. There's an effective passage in the Boon book, an example dialogue between therapist and persecutorial introject, that made me feel violently dizzy and queasy when I read it because it rattled the otherwise secure, sovereign introject in its throne: "Thank you very much for all your hard work, Persecutor, for keeping X safe all these years by preemptively punishing her whenever she has tried to step out of line by taking care of herself. Don't you feel so tired after all this time of relentless hypervigilance, and wouldn't it be so nice to be able to let your guard down and rest a bit knowing that the war is over and that it's safe to step down now that the danger has passed?" Appealing to the vanity of this narcissistic part of self was very effective and whenever I would read this part of the book I would feel as though someone had given me a sleeping pill.

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Using the "Reality Scan" to Dethrone the Head Honcho

The turning away of the "mother introject" that constantly castigated me for existing (therefore being a rapist) was one big triumph, and it happened because this part was brought to see (through a scan of reality in the present) that the old order of things, the rules of abuse, are no longer relevant, like frightening statues of gods worshipped by ancient civilizations. I have been in therapy for eating disorders most of my life but only gotten some relief within the past few years when I discovered that the eating disorder is more than an unhealthy pattern of behaviors but more deeply rooted in various morbid introjects. Identifying and debunking the ideology of those inner voices has allowed me to feel more peaceful, less hounded, and more able to do normal things like eat meals throughout the day with my children without the activation of those ugly voices. "I don't get to eat because I am not the child: only the child feeds and that is never me," was the reasoning of one introject that kept me from presuming that my needs could be met. Another introject's distorted reasoning went something like, "There is only pleasing and being pleased," all human relations being plotted on the giving or receiving end of pleasure. "Healing" is a word that still conjures images of my sister's genitalia when I read it, since "healing" refers to a form of self-pleasure and even has in it the same vowel cluster "ea" near the consonant "l."

Doing Self-Care for Selfless Reasons If That's What It Takes to Do It

One of the most important successes for me has been getting some relief from the relentless onslaught of ugly mental images. It's been helpful to distance myself from the source of the inner violence, to identify the obscenity as not belonging to my own perspective but that of an introject who is mimicking an abusive person from my past. Being able to eat regularly with my children was a huge change for me because it meant I was taking care of myself (even under the guise of taking care of the children). I used to eat only once a day, at night before sleeping, and had bowel movements only every third day. I also used to feel terrible anguish when I took time to exercise because it seemed to me that I was abusing the children, leaving them like little doggies shut up in a dark room while I went to "get off" by doing my running. Allowing myself to eat and allowing myself to exercise without feeling the surge of punitive violence was a very dramatic change internally and externally.

Honoring the Child Parts and Defending them against Persecutor parts

This is one of the most important pieces of the work that has been accomplished. It is what allowed me to go from eating only once a day before sleeping and moving my bowels once every third day, which I did for more than 20 years, to eating mostly normally throughout the day. The desires and needs of the child parts are the "yes" to life, the impulse to seek joy and comfort. The therapist defends the child parts' innocence and their right to be needy, to feel safe and supported. Lots of attachment issues surface in this part of the work--I felt the child parts constantly rushing forward to be consoled by the therapist, to give and to receive love, and there was always lots of shaming by the introjects in response, particularly because libido is involved. The child parts needed to hear that obscene part's view of things (there is only rape and being raped) is incorrect and that not all taking is rape and not all giving is being raped. The child parts have learned not to want things, so re-learning that it's okay to want things (like self-care) is a radical change to the internal system.

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Asserting the Reality of the "Alexandra" Part

At the beginning of the treatment, when I was asked to describe "Alexandra," my adult self, I had the feeling that in asserting even the idea of "Alexandra" as an entity in itself, my sister's grotesque thighs were closing around my face. I have since realized that the linking of my "real self" with my sister's sexual abuse of me as a child is the combined action of the mother introject (which regards my existence as a form of rape) and the obscene part (which says that everything in the present is a distillation of the abuse in the past). More recently in response to the same question there have been similar but less volatile images such as a slipstream (vacant space like exhaust created by an engine), or the space in between words. It was helpful to identify the specific ways that I, "Alexandra," have beliefs other than those of the introjects, and the ways that I, "Alexandra," have disproved the introjects' theories about myself and the world.

Rejecting Metaphors of the Obscene Part (Dethroning this part by showing its inaccuracy)

The obscene part or warehouse part of self constantly offers debased, dehumanizing versions of whatever unpleasantness I encounter in my day to day experiences, and one thing I will continue to work on is distancing myself from these flawed metaphors. Lots of personal let-downs get interpreted as symbolic forms of rape, so it's important for me to remember that there is profound distortion in the symbol of violation, that in fact people are not raping me even though that is my perception in being transgressed.

Another rewarding aspect of the therapy has been that my children have more of me, that I'm more present as a mother. Focusing on how the morbid introjects' inner domination negatively affects my children has been one helpful way of moving forward. Throughout the day these introjects appear like tyrants ready to take over and revert to the old order of things, and I'm able to keep them at bay by seeing them as the enemy of my children.

In seeking help, in trying to reduce my personal suffering, I came to understand my introjects, child parts and helper parts.

INTROJECTS:

mother part - Chastising, cutting, venomous, disapproving, mocking, resenting, vain, spiteful, vindictive

mirror part - Proves mother part right, makes all other parts appear to be like mother part or obscene part

warrior part - Annihilating rage, surge of self-righteous violent impulses

warehouse/obscene part - An engine that reduces all human behavior to violation and gratification; a repository of pornographic, violent images

magical phrasing part - Spins language into expressions of mother part's hatred and punishments, buffers the obscene part by making the ugly images abstract

CHILD PARTS:

child parts - Moaning and groaning, lament, pleading, desperate

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(Needy and pathetic, greedy and raping according to the mother introject)

HELPER PARTS:

teacher part - Professional and appropriate, part bluster/performance, neutral (advocates for child parts)

Mama Bear part - Tenacious drive to protect the children and meet their needs

Warrior part is now understood to be an ally under my control. (This took 9 months.)

“Alexandra” – my adult self, my emerging Self

Trying to accept and nurture the undeveloped child parts of myself, and trying to understand the raging parts of self as a source of strength rather than as monstrous, has also been helpful. A lot of energy went into trying to appease the morbid introjects, so as they have become less powerful I have more of my own life force to draw on instead of squandering it on unproductive, unhealthy ways of thinking.

It's been beneficial for my children to see that I have more faith in our ability to pull through things together as a family. I used to be unable to tolerate my children's discomfort or suffering because it seemed to me that they were reliving the terrible things done to me, so I have become more of an adult and less of a child pretending to be an adult as I remind myself that the reality the children and I inhabit is not the grotesque and savage place I knew the world to be in my past.

Some parts of self had no idea about the existence of other parts of self, such as the child parts and the Mama Bear part. *I used to shiver with a profound cosmic chill*, feeling myself to be not a widow with two children but the eldest of three orphans, so it was helpful to draw the eye of the child part to the capable, protective Mama Bear part. Another benefit has been that I have become more experienced in governing all these internal influences instead of just experiencing them passively as inner chaos.

The recursive process of our therapy

This is a rough outline of the process of our therapy. These events were not strictly linear but happened in a recursive sequence. For example, not all parts were identified in a single stage. New parts were named as thought patterns became more distinct, and sometimes in discussing one introject's beliefs, another introject's previously latent voice became "audible" or distinct as an internal influence. Complicating the process was the fact that some parts were not latent but hidden from therapist at first because they were deemed too shameful (so parts of self were both consciously and unconsciously concealed).

Also, I did not represent the effects of these events, each of which has another cause within the system. For example, when the mother introject fell away (or was at least dethroned), I was often incontinent, but I also was less likely to do things like suddenly buy a whole new outfit on the way to work because I felt compelled to change the visible periphery of my body. Both of these "effects" were also causes in that other introjects (not yet dethroned) had volatile responses

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to them. I did not represent this cause-effect-cause-effect because it would make the sequence endlessly complex, but it seems important to note that the following outline of process is a drastic reduction/simplification. Stages were not only repeated as in a constant process of revision but also overlapping and entangled like tectonic plates that move in direct or indirect relation to each other.

Diagnosis of DID

Finding anchor objects that orient to the present and keep the past safely distant.

Putting away [my deceased husband's] things (because it brings feelings of grief and guilt that he is a child I killed.)
Putting the children's artwork in each room.

Identification of parts, understanding their specific functions

At first there seems to be only the mother introject, harshly critical, impossible to please, who issues grotesque punishments in response to minor infractions (hand being cut off, objects in the room becoming my body parts, parts of my face being cut off). Then more distinct patterns emerge that show there to be several "mother"-type introjects: mirror part, obscene/warehouse part, magical phrasing part.

Example: Irrational fear that I killed all the innocent children
mirror part (actually I am the innocent child who was killed)

Example: Irrational fear that I am the rapist
mirror part (actually I have been raped)

Example: In speaking so freely, I am exposing my genitals.
obscene part that reduces all speech and action to pornographic images

Assess which parts are aware of each other and their attitudes towards each other, towards therapist.

Apparently Normal Self is the advocate of moaning child parts who long to be rescued by therapist.

Mother introject keeps child parts in check, monitors Apparently Normal Self's representation of hidden inner needs.

Magical phrasing part delivers an abstract form of mother introject's punishment: "ck" is a violent consonant cluster, like a strike

Example: Reckon the sick child/ Sicken the reckoned child/ The sick child reckons/ The child sickens and reckons

Obscene part, in response, identifies the word play as contortions that resemble sexual abuse: "child" is object, subject, manhandled by the variable alternations

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Therapist proposed Conference Room/Meeting place exercise to the extent that parts are able to be participate.

I did not want to do the meeting place exercise because I worried that some part of self would kill the therapist (even if only mentally, symbolically) to preemptively be free from the constraint of the relationship/work, and the child parts were very sad thinking that would happen.

Identify the perceived dangers of doing the meeting place activity

Child parts will eat you alive, warns the mother introject. Obscene part offers the image of me sinking my teeth into therapist's flesh, blood running over my gums.

Setting the long-term goal of genuine self-care.

Like a bomb going off. This is disruptive to the parts' homeostasis, their deeply entrenched arrangement.

[Jogging on the treadmill in the morning is a crucial regulator for this client. It quiets her mind.] When I take time to jog, even if it's only 20 or 30 minutes, even if they are happily playing video games for that time, I worry that I'm shutting them in a freezer while I "get off." *[Taking care of oneself is sexualized and therefore repugnant.]*

When I repeat the affirmation "I like myself even though I have problems," there's an onslaught of mockery and belittling to keep the meaning of the affirmation remote. "I want to learn to like myself even though I have problems" is more tolerable to the introjects, and then, after some time, I am able to say, "I am learning to like myself..." and "I am more and more able to like myself..."

Setting the short-term goal of self-care as an empty practice until it can be taken on authentically (fake it 'til you make it)

It's okay to do it in a hollow way at first, even if only under the pretext of it benefiting the children (therefore the punishing introjects don't have to forfeit their claim to executive power, which often prevents me from eating/resting).

Identify and correct introjects' distorted cognitions.

Mirror part informs me that I only care about myself and making myself look good, my children are to be pitied for having been born to me.

This detracts from Mama Bear's power. Power flows back to Mama Bear when mirror part is convinced that actually I am not like my own mother and I genuinely care for my children even when people are not looking.

Distinguishing introjects' assertions from beliefs held by core self.

I am terribly frightened, so much that I shake and feel physically paralyzed by cold.

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Actually it's just the child parts that are terrified; other parts can step in to assist. Mama Bear brings a space heater.

Understanding which parts help or could help the healing process, and which parts obstruct healing.

Although all parts ultimately have a defensive or at least functional role, some parts seem clearly aligned with the idea that I deserve to live (Mama Bear, teacher part, warrior part) whereas other parts are more overtly destructive (mother part, mirror part, obscene/warehouse part) whereas magical phrasing seems like a benign but passive father part who tries to deliver a softer punishment to the child than the harsh mother wishes to impose.

Respectfully confront the parts that obstruct healing.

Morbid introjects "tattle" on me to the therapist. "She has eaten murdered men."

Warehouse part: "Long dead" (sarcastic reply).

From the Boon book: wouldn't it be nice to rest for once, hasn't it been exhausting to be so relentlessly vigilant?

Therapist: Thank you, Mother part, for your important work in punishing [client]. You helped keep her needs hidden as a child when it was so dangerous to express them. We are grateful and fully recognize your omnipotence. (Don't even try to overpower this honcho: flattery will work better than reason.)

Ask all parts if they know what year it is.

Outside reality is fleeting and superficial to the introjects. It must be "made real" so it's no longer the "wallpaper" but the thing that is perceived to be most authentic. (This runs counter to the whole direction of dissociation, which emphasizes images in reality as remote, harmless, and meaningless. Only the inner mental images hold the weight of truth for the morbid introjects).

What are some verifiable facts that prove time to be real? The children's growing bodies and the children's happiness disprove the diseased theory that life is made up solely of violation and gratification. "Love you mama," reads my daughter's little note next to her homemade candle.

Examine the consequences of not integrating, of remaining dissociative. Inform parts about this, do "reality scan."

The children had to keep getting their meals on little trays. Their faces are disappointed so Mama Bear will have to rally at mealtime and push through obscene part's interference. *[We focused on her eating meals with her children, a terrifying proposition due to the introjects and her eating disorder, about nine months into our work together. It took three months to firmly establish this new pattern.]*

Intervene to dethrone the head honcho, unmasking head honcho as frightened child imitating abusive adults.

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I won't be like the insane older woman barred from the campus because she would undress in front of staff if I'm not being punished by harsh punitive parts.

I won't actually kill the people I'm angry at if images of savage bodily constraint aren't imposed constantly.

What are the things in daily life that cause dissociation? Address these. Identify ways parts can work as resources.

Being assertive, asking for things, causes obscene images of violation to arise in my mind. "Your face is like a vagina, your mouth is like a vagina, and that's what other people see when they look at your face and body," the obscene part and mirror part together inform me.

Mama Bear and teacher part are able to ask for things and be assertive with less blowback.

Identify "ally" parts and direct them to block the obstructive parts that prevent healing.

Magical phrasing was used to buffer the butchery of the warehouse part.

Mama Bear can be counted on when the child parts are terrified of obscene part.

Identify which parts should be prevented from dealing with certain daily stressors that cause dissociation.

Obscene part that offers disturbing and extreme interpretations of daily events (at work) can be blocked by warrior part.

Looking through the lens of teacher part in these circumstances will decrease the severity of these intrusions. Therapist reminded me to become teacher part before I got out of my car in the campus parking lot.

Overcoming the phobia of warrior/rage part--rage is not rape, it can be healthy and clean.

Intense rage will not lead to actual crimes. Righteous anger is different from monstrous, murderous rage.

Defending the innocent, needy child part against persecuting parts

Child parts are looking for a father substitute in therapist, morbid introjects ridicule and sexualize this need.

"You are only coming to these sessions to look at him and be looked at by him."

Overcoming the resistance to Emerging Adult Self.

Replacing degrading images of self with images of the children's tender, unconditional love for me.

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"Alexandra" is not only the image of ejaculate being sucked down a dismembered throat but my son's little hand patting my belly.

Asserting the Reality of the "Alexandra" Part: I am more than an obscure gathering of features.

When do I have a sense of this part, how to cultivate it more?

Defending the children against grandmother's nasty criticism.

Rejecting Metaphors of the Obscene Part (Dethroning this part by showing its inaccuracy).

Not all taking is transgressive. Not all wrongs amount to rape. Freeloading live-in babysitter who disappointed the children by not wanting to spend time with them is just a self-preoccupied idiot: she can be dishonorable without being a rapist. Introducing shades of grey into black/white thinking. Morbid introjects are not subtle and therefore lack realism.

Addendum May 2017

"I am more of a conductor of those various internal influences than I used to be."

When I first wrote this update, last week, I focused almost entirely on the negative things I'm still dealing with rather than the tremendous positive changes I've experienced in the last year. I think that must be a measure of how powerful the morbid introjects can be and how constantly I must struggle to orchestrate their involvement in my thinking rather than passively allowing them to dictate my state of mind. I recently had some very bad news that some tenants had trashed the beautiful house I'd poured thousands of dollars into renovating, and the law suit/eviction process that is ongoing has made it a lot more difficult to frame my thoughts in terms of reasonable, measured assessments. *[Part of Alexandra's healing was convincing her to move from next door to her parent's home to the town where the children attend school. I would add that, unlike last year's sexual harassment at work that took months of our attention, we have not had to process the tenants' \$15,000 worth of damage. She is able to have her lawyer handle it and stay focused on her children.]*

This year I've been able to be present and engaged with my children, which has healed them as well as me. I used to be emotionally checked out, mentally on the far side of the galaxy, and my children suffered for it because they obviously sensed that I wasn't really there. My son's fretting and catastrophic thinking have subsided, and my daughter no longer compulsively picks out her eyelashes and eyebrows. This year my daughter tried public school for a semester, and it was a very intense period of adjustment socially and academically. She often came to me crying because she was overwhelmed with work or because her clique of friends had excluded her, and although it was wrenching for me, I was able to tolerate her suffering in a way I would never have been able to in the past. I am

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proud and glad that I was able to really be there for my daughter when she needed me, that she knows I am really “here” rather than vacant. Becoming a better mother to my children, the mother they need me to be rather than the ruin of a person my past has made me, is the best thing I've done in my life, my most important accomplishment.

When things go wrong (like when my daughter didn't get her special lunch at school that I'd gone to great lengths to give her), the morbid parts remind me that the world is a bad machine that it is impossible to escape from, so I've tried to think more rationally, with my adult mind, about those times when stuff just goes wrong rather than it being an epic/tragic thing that validates the morbid introjects' dark worldview. I guess that is part of what makes the morbid introjects morbid: they are all or nothing, black or white in their thinking. The child parts and the obscene parts (morbid introjects) are similar in seeing people and things as simply good or bad, never ambiguous. When I sense my own limitations as a parent, I feel inordinately sad because the mirror part then informs me that I'm just like my own abusive mother, that I only care about myself.

In writing this self-analysis, I feel I've overstated my strengths as a mother, which is an insight offered to me by the harshly critical mother introject. The truth is I still sometimes still feel suffocated when my daughter wants a lot of physical affection, and the moment that I internally feel the need to withdraw is one that I feel profound guilt about because in it I seem to resemble my own mother, who was made of stone. Nevertheless I have been able to physically comfort Janna this year, holding her when she cried and consoling her in a way she deeply needed. I am embarrassed to say that in the past, days might have passed before I touched the children because I constantly avoided physical contact.

Another big improvement this year has been the subsiding of my early-morning terror that came from the child parts having access to the difficulties in my adult life. For months, I would wake up with those child parts activated and on high alert, shaking and shaking with a pure, otherworldly fear that the children and I are not safe and that I cannot handle the tremendous responsibilities of my adult life. At those times the morbid introject that I've called “obscene part” concluded that the children and I would be better off dead, that we would only be safe if we were dead, because that's the only escape from the grinding, raping machine of the world. Having the child parts go on a “moonwalk” at 3:30am every morning with the benevolent mama bear and warrior parts has allowed me to continue sleeping instead of waking up in a cold sweat and profound panic.

This terror has recently returned in the past few weeks because of the tenant situation (because I've been afraid financially), so when I wake up at 4am in a terror, with an agonized internal moaning and groaning (“Help me, please help me”), I have to repeat to myself, “Alexandra is safe” and send the child parts to their safe place where nothing bad can happen and where they are protected from the world and from the morbid introjects. Then I am able to lie back down and sleep. In session we “re-installed” that moonwalk ritual so that it will be automatic, and I do feel calmer and am hopeful that the installation was successful.

(It doesn't work at all if I say “I am safe,” which is part of why none of the CBT therapy I

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had all those years for my eating disorder was effective: the “I” of positive affirmations was referring to a nonexistent void.)

This “moon walk installation” and refreshing of that ritual is very similar to the process I went through when I started to eat normally: the thing that agitated me about eating was that according to the morbid parts, Alexandra is a worthless piece of shit who doesn't deserve to live or to experience the pleasure of eating, so I would have to pretend I was Farns and talk directly to those parts, saying, “Alexandra is a human being who gets to eat like everyone else. My children cannot have an anorexic zombie as a mother.” That would quiet the morbid parts (not entirely, but enough for me to bulldoze ahead and continue eating). I would do something similar mentally when people would stare at my much-changed body (with its curves): I would have to say to the morbid parts that it's normal that Alexandra has fat visible on her body because she is an adult woman and not guilty for taking up space and having breasts and thighs.

This year I've also worked on grinding my teeth less, which has been a lifelong problem. I continue to need extensive dental work as my teeth crumble, but I have been able—particularly at work, where I am normally defensively clenched—to ease up in my movement through that landscape so that I am not constantly assailed by violent, punitive images. I am able to think in a more ordinary way about personal/professional conflicts. A year ago, when I saw people who had aligned themselves with the man who sexually harassed me, the rage I felt was not ordinary—it was so far in excess of any reasonable response that in those moments I felt literally as though those people had tried to put a leash around my neck and hold me in place, like a breeding sow, so that the man of their choice could mount me. The morbid introjects see no difference between symbolic and literal violence, and that has been another thing I've tried to change in my thinking—remembering that there is a difference between literal and symbolic rape. I do feel more relaxed and normal, less dramatic and dark, at work now.

I also realized this year that I have very little tolerance for rejection and that when someone acts dismissively towards me, or even asserts a boundary, I feel again like a child who has been denied necessary, life-giving love. That feeling of being denied basic human recognition, of being made into an object, is one that I think of as “being sent to the freezer” because that is what it seems to me to feel like when I am utterly alone, that I'm in a deep freezer. So I've tried to think more temperately about my close friend who sought distance from me last year; when she first withdrew, I felt annihilated, as though I'd been betrayed in a monumental way, and I vowed to never trust her again. In fact, I have been able to invite her and another coworker and their children to come over and spend time with us several times recently.

I guess these changes show that I am more of a conductor of those various internal influences than I used to be. I used to just passively feel the truth of the Morbid Introjects and then feel the morbid fear of the child parts. I am learning that I can choose not to talk to the Morbid Introjects. And if I can keep the child parts from experiencing my adult worries then that will be another way for me to control the workings of my inner system. Very

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recently, we sequestered the child parts in their hidden safe place with Mama Bear and Warrior Part who have now agreed to stay with them for at least the next month.

(Alexandra's helper parts are easily cloned so they are also available to help her parent and deal with work.)

(An important part of our progress over the last four months is that I have changed my approach with her Morbid Introjects. Educated and emboldened by my work on Perpetrator Introjects for my Webinar for Ana Gomez, I have honored them and worked closely with them, asking them for guidance and permission to do the work of that session. After months of dismissing me, they asked two questions of me recently. And, for example, they are so upset by the moaning and groaning of the child parts that they are supportive of Mama Bear and Warrior Part taking them off. We have also finally been able to begin to use the Conference Room. They had always sabotaged it before.]