

TRANSCRIPT CREATED BY AI

00:00:10 - Heather

Welcome to Braaains, a podcast exploring the inner workings of our brains and how film and television portray them. Hosted by me writer/director, Heather Taylor.

00:00:18 - Sarah

And by me film and television editor Sarah Taylor. Before we begin, we wanted to acknowledge that the lands from which we recorded this podcast are part of territories that have long served as a gathering place for diverse indigenous peoples. And we are thankful, as guests on this land, to be able to live, work, and gather here.

00:00:34 - Heather

Jenna and the system of altars together, known as the Gianu System, join us today to talk about Dissociative Identity Disorder, or DID. This complex disorder, which occurs in 1.5% of our population, is a covert survival mechanism specific to each individual. We discuss what Dissociation is, how identities and ego states exist, and how alters can hold different parts of trauma.

00:00:57 - Sarah

We also talk about the accurate DID representation in What If It Works, an Australian film by Romy Trower, and discuss how shows like the United States of Tara and the film Split have impacted people's perception of DID.

00:01:09 - Heather

A quick reminder to our listeners that this interview should not be taken as medical advice, and it is for informational purposes only because everyone's brain is different. Please consult your healthcare professional if you have any questions. And now, Jena.

00:01:27 - Sarah

Jenna, thank you so much for joining us today on Brains. I am so excited to meet you and talk to you in real life. Before we dive into all things Did, I love for you to just tell us a little bit about yourself.

00:01:38 - Jenna

My name is Jenna. I am 41, wife, mom, writer, and I've been diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder. So among the constellation of things that I am, that is one of them. I spend a lot of time trying to educate on social media because while having a prevalence of about the same as OCD, it's so stigmatized and so much less known. I do a lot of work just trying to make people aware of what it is, what it looks like, and what it's not.

00:02:14 - Sarah

Well, that's how I discovered you, was via Instagram, and I've never really ever seen a person in real life who has DID. I learn so much. Every video you post, I'm like, this is so fascinating. It's just really great what you're doing. But before I gush too much because I'm your fan, can you just tell us what exactly is Dissociative Identity Disorder?

00:02:38 - Jenna

We'll start with Dissociation because that can be a hard term, and I didn't understand what it was. Dissociation is something that's totally normal. All brains do it in a neurotypical brain. It's kind of like your brain's low power mode. So, like, if you're driving home and all of a sudden you realize you're home, but you don't really remember the drive because your brain was like, I've got better things to worry about and checked out. That's Dissociation.

00:03:06 - Sarah

I've definitely done that right?

00:03:08 - Jenna

All brains dissociate. What happens though is that when there's trauma involved, the brain can take it to a disordered level. And there's several disorders that have dissociation as a large component of what's problematic about them. Because if your brain checks you out of an activity, then you're not fully present, not fully aware, maybe not laying down good memories of the circumstance. And we'll take that dissociation knowledge now and just kind of put it over here. So the identity component, we all talk about our identity and personality. It's a well-understood thing. And neurologically and psychologically, it's not what makes up a personality.

The current theory, structural dissociation says that children don't have a unified stream of consciousness until a certain age. They exist kind of in ego states. And if you've ever seen a toddler ever, you've seen this because they go from like a total meltdown, like the cookie fell in the dirt, their world is irrevocably ruined. And then the next minute they're like bubbles. Like that never even happened. Yes, because they don't have this unified stream of consciousness. They have these ego states that they exist in. Now, if repeated trauma happens while that child is still growing and has not unified those ego states into a single the brain in order to protect, not only will keep those separate, but put amnesiac dissociative barriers between them. So that play and learning these ego states can go to school and be unaware that at home need for security, need for comfort from caregiver is not happening. Those ego states are not having like there's trauma happening, but these ones totally unaware. So in this way, it's wildly protective.

The child can grow up and have a relatively normal existence not even aware that stuff is happening. And if this child grows, the brain continues to grow. These ego states continue to grow with what they're informed by. So a trauma state might stay in that trauma. They might

not even know that anything exists outside of that trauma state. Whereas, like, play and learning can grow along with the body, can socialize. And so when something triggers one of these other states, it can be a very different shift because if you were never informed of the kindness of friends, of what it's like to sit in the sun, if all you were, were the worst parts of your life, what would you be like? How would you interact?

And so people with DID have these personality states that have grown with them as they've grown to protect them originally from trauma. But it becomes disordered and maladaptive as the person grows. So what most people think of when they think of DID is the wild shifts in personality. They're not realizing that it comes from this background of protection from trauma. And we can heal. We don't stay in the states that we are when we're getting out of trauma.

00:06:40 - Heather

So how did you and kind of when did you discover that you had DID?

00:06:44 - Jenna

I was always the, quote-unquote, high functioning, very smart. And so I was like, I'm just scatterbrained. And I had lots of workarounds, like sticky notes everywhere when phones came about, like alarms on my phone just to keep me regulated and really strict routines, so that way I always kind of knew what was going on. I drove stick shift because sometimes I would space out while driving. And that helped me. I didn't know the word grounded, but it helped me stay grounded while I was driving. So I had all these workarounds to hold my life together. And I knew I had trauma. I remembered a significant chunk of my childhood trauma and I thought I was healing from that. Like, I did a bunch of self directed reading and stuff and I thought, oh yeah, I've healed. And what I had done was just avoided triggers like a boss. I married an amazing, safe person. I structured my life around safety and avoiding all triggers. And that worked for a good while.

But then in my mid-30s, it caught up with me and I had what I know now is a major dissociative episode. I didn't know that's what it was at the time, but it was the first time I was really aware that I had lost time. I couldn't remember what had happened for the several previous days. And I had no emotions. I was just very flat and logically. I was aware that it was distressing, but I didn't feel distressed, I didn't feel anything. And Jonathan, my husband, was like, are you okay? What's going on? And I was like, I don't know. I think I need therapy. And that was the beginning of my discovery journey.

00:08:37 - Sarah

I remember listening to one of your videos and you mentioned how you started going through therapy and then you're like, I did then recognize there was a voice that wasn't quote unquote, my voice. So how did through was it through therapy that you were opened up, I guess, to know that there's these alternative identities within your mind.

00:08:59 - Jenna

So I had a really good therapeutic experience, and I know not everybody has, but my therapist when I came in and I was wildly unregulated, did what a good therapist should. And they spent about a year just working on what they call safety and stability, which was teaching me how to be in my body, how to tolerate my own emotional responses, which I didn't even know I couldn't do that. I didn't realize that I shut off and dissociated immediately from any kind of hard emotion. And toward the end of that year, we hit Christmas, which is a high-trigger season for me. It's normally when I would have my most issues.

And so I had what I learned as an emotional flashback, just this wave of emotions that I didn't know why I was feeling. It wasn't anything I was aware of from the situation. And so because I've had all this therapy, instead of shutting off like I normally did, I called my hubs, and I was like, hey, I've been crying all morning and I can't stop. And I just wanted to let you know I'm going to try and stay with the experience. So he came home and just was a grounding presence, which what all this does in psychobabble is you can't really process through trauma.

If you are outside of your window of tolerance, your brain can't do it. So him just being a safe presence and me learning how to stay in my body kept me enough in this window to process some of the trauma that I was experiencing, to hold myself in that space. And after that experience, I had just this cache of memories drop. And you would think that repressed memories would be like I don't know. I thought it would be more dramatic. It just felt like I had forgotten to remember. But it was me as a kid, but stuff that I hadn't remembered, like me playing by myself in my room, and I had no compass for who I was as a child. I would look at pictures and go, I know that's me, but I don't recognize me. I don't know what I was like, who that girl is.

And all of a sudden, there were all these memories, and it was like, oh, that's this little girl me. And I felt at the end of it this teenage presence. And it was really strange. And I told my husband, I was like, I feel this female teenage presence, and that's weird, but if therapy taught me anything, it's you just lean into. But then a little bit later, the presence got a little stronger and started yelling at me, which I did not tell for several days, because, like, there's a voice in my head yelling at me. And I was like, oh, I think this means I'm crazy now. Yeah, that's clearly what this means. But finally, I was like, hey, there's this angry teenage girl in my head yelling at me. And Jonathan, who had been very much a part of my therapy process, was like, well, did you ask her why she's mad? I'm not trying to encourage the voice in my head, but he was right, and that's what I needed to do.

And that was my first connection with an altar and going into therapy saying the same thing, like, I'm hearing an angry teenage girl in my head. The therapist was like, is this an audible voice or an internal voice? And I was like, oh, it's internal, but it's not like she's saying stuff I've never even thought of. It's very not my own thoughts. And so that was the beginning. And the therapist was real good to not be reactive. She was like, I think this is part of your healing journey therapeutically. I don't think she'd ever come across the idea in practice before. She was very open about doing research about it after that. But it's a lot it's a complex disorder.

00:12:56 - Sarah

Yes.

00:12:58 - Heather

With the knowledge of the altars, and as I'm assuming, more altars came to be more present. How do you work in your day-to-day life? You'd created all these structures and boxes for yourself to exist in. So then how did that shift once you started to have more recognition of the entire system that is you?

00:13:18 - Jenna

At first, it was really disruptive. These people had been suppressed, had been locked away, and they had a lot of opinions about our shared life. And I had to realize that this was a shared life. This wasn't like my show here. I try and tell people it's like a puzzle with a bunch of pieces. Maybe one maybe you've completed a section of pieces and it's bigger than the rest, but it's still just a piece of the puzzle. It's not the whole puzzle. People are like, oh, so you're the original? I'm like, no, no, we're all aspects. I was just the one who was running the day-to-day at the time when we became aware.

It's been good in a lot of ways because I had no access to anger. I had not felt the emotion of anger. It was locked away because anger was unsafe. And so anger is a self-protective mechanism. You get mad when something threatens you or the space around you. And not to have access to that is actually dangerous. You need to be able to protect yourself, to say, hey, no, that's not okay. So meeting E, meeting Jenna, having altars who will come out and be like, no, you don't treat us that way, has been amazingly helpful.

Has it been like a ride? Having to process so much trauma, having to learn what is safe and unsafe as an adult, like, learning how to navigate emotions as an adult. Most people learn this at two and three when it's safe to have fits and roll on the floor and cry. But when you're in your 30s experiencing anger, going, what do you do with this huge emotion? It's difficult.

00:15:08 - Heather

Yeah.

00:15:09 - Sarah

Oh, wow. Yeah.

00:15:10 - Heather

Can you explain a little bit more about the relationship within your system is I know you said accessing anger, but kind of how do you look at yourself in terms of the relationships between everyone within the system?

00:15:23 - Jenna

Yeah, so there's about ten of us, and every person with did is very individual. The brain does this as a child, and it creates these alters accordingly, like shapes them according to what the child needs at the time. So it varies based on trauma, based on individual. What that person thinks is safe, what that person has experienced is dangerous. So for us, anger was dangerous, and any anger we felt was very much so kept within alters.

We have E, who is our gatekeeper, not all systems have one. She is able to kind of keep parts from fronting when it's not okay, when it wouldn't be a good time for them to front. And also kind of keeps information, like, not safe information, if this information would overwhelm, like, oh, no, you don't get that. You are not ready for that information.

00:16:22 - Sarah

Wow.

00:16:22 - Heather

Interesting.

00:16:23 - Jenna

It's very helpful. I'm very grateful for her. But she also has access to that anger. She was the teenage girl. She has since aged up as she's processed some of the trauma that she's held. Not all the ultras age. Aging is weird. Like, it's not a linear thing, necessarily. So I have Lil who appeared as a little so I think the first time she showed up was about six, and then she aged to eight. And we call it age sliding. She will slide up and down. Typically, right now, she'll front, around 16. And fronting means, like, take control of the body, be the one making the decisions, using our voice, just in control. And so she was the part that was protected. She had no awareness of trauma, was absolutely secure of being loved.

And so E held anger, was very protective of Lil. I have JA. And Caleb. Who J. A. Caleb and Debbie actually all hold three different aspects of one single trauma, the auditory, the physical and the visual. So that event is like segmented between each of them. Which means I didn't understand because Hollywood gives us flashbacks of PTSD, where the person is absorbed into the memory. And that can happen 100%. That can happen. But flashbacks can be just auditory. They can be just visual. They can be physical sensations or emotional sensations. And so processing trauma when it's segmented can be disorienting, like, what's happening? Why am I hearing this? Why do I feel this way and not knowing what is attached to?

Because not everybody fronts a lot, so not everyone is always active. It depends on kind of what they hold and what they do. We have Anthony, who usually likes to exist fused. So that's combined with another altar, but sometimes he is separate again, and he holds, like,

attraction and sexuality because those weren't safe things to feel or to experience, and especially not as a female. So our brain said, oh, we will package that in male form because females are vulnerable and this is not safe, but it'd be fine if that was felt by a male. So it's really where it's complex. It's also kind of fascinating the way the brain does this to survive.

00:19:05 - Sarah

You recommended the film. "What if it works?"

00:19:07 - Jenna

Yes.

00:19:07 - Sarah

And it's a film that's from Australia about a couple. The male partner has OCD and the female has DID. I just want to hear from you. Why did you feel like that was a film that represented DID in the way that we never see? Really? I've never seen it explained or shown on camera. Like this?

00:19:27 - Jenna

Yes. I loved it so much. So what if it works? And just for the audience out there, totally. It's great. But also it's adult content and there's referencing trauma, so just be aware of that. I loved the way one, that it wasn't sensationalized. So when she switches, there's just this like a breath and then someone else is in the front. Switching between alters can be difficult. Sometimes it can be drawn out, but a lot of times there's a trigger and it's instant.

And so I loved in the movie, she'll just up and then somebody else is out. And the very abrupt body language, very abrupt vocal changes. The actress did an amazing job of it. I also really appreciated how the people in her life would call her by the name of who's out. So, like the the artist altar was g. And so they'd be like, oh, that's g's work. And she would say, oh, I don't really know what g. I don't have great memories, so I'm not sure what she's working on.

And the people in my life who know me and know my altars, if they know who's out, they'll talk to them by name and it's not like this big. Oh, so and so is out now. It's just a very, oh, hey, G, want to come over and give your opinion on this? If E is out, Jonathan, they'll be like, oh, I have a fashion question. Does this shirt go with these pants?

00:20:56 - Sarah

I love it.

00:20:58 - Jenna

So I loved how the people around her knew what to expect. It wasn't like oh, no. But also the way she talked about her altars, the way they interacted with themselves. For me, it was very true to my experience. And even when she says, inside us there's a house and there's many rooms, and the inner world is not something you see talked about or represented a lot in media. And so we have a house with rooms for each of us. And so I was like, yes, this is what it's like for me.

00:21:33 - Sarah

Yeah, when that line came up, I made note of that because that was such a great way of understanding what is. And even with there was like a clock at the top of the house, she said, and certain times certain rooms will open up and the person comes out and it made it make so much sense. And it was just brilliant the way they did that. It was so great.

00:21:54 - Heather

Yeah. I have a question, kind of relates a lot of it with her and her therapist is around integration and how integration is that way to heal, but not everyone feels that way. So how do you feel in terms of working within the system that you have and the alters you have, but also this idea of what is healing?

00:22:14 - Sarah

Yeah.

00:22:15 - Jenna

So the current definitions that I hear going around, because they used to go by different terms so currently when a therapist is talking about integration, it will refer to the integration of information and trauma knowledge and the lowering of barriers between altars. But what it used to mean was fusing altars together.

00:22:38 - Sarah

That's what I assumed. That's what it meant. Okay, that's good to know.

00:22:41 - Jenna

Okay, yes. And it's probably what it was referring to in the movie. But there's two schools of thought on what two approaches rather, in healing with did, and one is called functional multiplicity and the other is final fusion. Final fusion being the fusing of all parts together, and functional multiplicity being the healthy day to day life, including all the parts with integration of memories and understanding. So there's very little amnesia. Everybody

working together. Cooperating so there's research to suggest that not everyone can fuse. Like they attempt to set out. That is their therapeutic goal and their system never fuses. And that some people who do not want fusion, it happens spontaneously. So for us, we chose not to worry about that. We were like, we will just pursue health, whatever health looks like, if we end up fusing. And that's what health looks like for us, fantastic. If we don't and functional multiplicity is it also fantastic.

Honestly, the hubs is like, I would miss them if you all use and we're like, we know, but we can't also for you, just remain. We're committed to our health, no matter what it looks like. But his complete acceptance has been very helpful and a safety. My therapist has frequently been like, you've been healing and progressing quickly. And I think a lot of it is because I have a stable home life and a very safe person who is just accepting wherever I'm at, whoever is out wherever they're at. And because there's acceptance, dissociation is pushing away from yourself, from your trauma, from what is happening. And having that acceptance is just part of the environment is so helpful in healing.

00:24:39 - Heather
That's amazing.

00:24:40 - Sarah
I think that comes with anybody going through a therapy healing journey. For myself, I started to really heal some of the things I was dealing with when I found my husband, that my home was safe. And then I could process all the stuff that maybe wasn't so safe.

00:24:55 - Heather
It's interesting because I hadn't heard of this film and I thought, how brilliant is this? Because the representations I've seen of DID are The United States of Tara, which was a lot about a woman in her family, and then Split, which is very controversial, I think can be as seen by the community. And I don't feel like this is very realistic. And statistically it isn't because I have the stats. I always have stats. But before I reveal stats, I'd love to hear if you have any thoughts of what that misrepresentation, the impact of that kind of misrepresentation.

00:25:31 - Jenna
I try and keep up on the DID media because I always have people asking, have you seen this show? What are your thoughts on it? And so we try and keep up. The United States of Tara did so many things right, and I was very excited as they were rounding toward the final season. I thought, oh, we can really see the way they've set things up. We can really see healing and the coming together, because she at first was very resistant of altars, which is not uncommon. There was truth in that. Like, oh, no, these people are ruining my life.

And then we see they write like a kind of a system rule book, which, honestly, we have rules in my system that's also helpful and good. They didn't necessarily stick to those, but then we

get to the final season. And the part that broke my heart was the psychiatrist tells her husband she will never get better. It will always be like this. And I thought you had so much opportunity to show just as disruptive as it can be and then show that it can get better, that we heal. Like, you don't stay in this disruptive state.

And they did that about face, and I was like, no, there is healing, there is coming together, there is cooperation. Can it be where you're at odds? Absolutely. And I've seen very frequently that the more people try and suppress their altars and not listen to them, the more those altars will escalate to be heard, to be seen, to have their needs met. So, yes, that sort of thing can happen. But that's when you realize you have to come together. You have to listen to each other. You don't have to agree, but you at least have to listen and know why. Like, why Jenna is so against men. When I understood that, did I agree with her that all men were no. But when I knew where she was coming from, then we could walk together.

00:27:45 - Sarah
Yeah, right.

00:27:46 - Heather
Oh, I love that.

00:27:46 - Sarah
It's really great.

00:27:48 - Jenna
One of the big things that I got a lot of questions, one of the misrepresentations from the United States of Tara is she says that she's off her meds and that's why she's hearing the altars. Medicine helps with schizophrenia because it's hallucination. But with Altars, it's not a hallucination. It is another part of you. It's your own brain originating these thoughts. So medicine can quiet altars voices if it's going to really just depress everything. I've had another friend who has DID say, when I was on this medicine, I couldn't hear my ultrasound. It wasn't that they weren't there, but it so suppressed all of my emotions and thinking that I couldn't hear them, but it doesn't make them go away. So people are like, why don't you just take medicine? And I was like, that's not how that works. Why don't you take medicine to make a part of you disappear? It's not how that works.

00:28:45 - Sarah
Yeah, I never thought about it that way.

00:28:48 - Heather

I have ADHD and I take medication. It's very helpful, but it doesn't change the way my brain is. I was born this way. My brain will always be this way. It's going to just help in terms of, like, yeah, it makes the loud less loud, but doesn't mean it's still not there.

00:29:02 - Sarah

I have generalized anxiety disorder, so I take anti-anxiety medicine, but I still experience anxiety. It's just at a different level. Right.

00:29:10 - Heather

But then we look at some representation in a film like *Split*, and this is the stats that I have here may represent over 1% of Americans, rarely violent, more likely to hurt themselves and others. And movies are tending to portray the most extreme aspects of disorder, but then misrepresents something that public don't know a lot about, which this is why we do this podcast. It's exactly why we do this podcast.

But I think the study said there's a new study, this new, as in 2017. So, I mean, not new now, but new. At the time, the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation did research with people with DID, and they found that only 3% were charged with an offense, 1.8% were fined, and less than 1% were jailed over a six-month span. And this is a quote from activists that said, *split* represents yet another gross parody of us based on fear, ignorance, and centralization, only much worse. So it's just that idea that it's really demonizing people who really need to get the help that they need and then feel even more fear.

00:30:11 - Jenna

Yes, very much so. I would say that that movie has done the most in terms of stigma of any media representation. When people hear, oh, you have DID, one of the first things is, oh, so who's the altar? That's the scary murder one. But with DID, where I was saying there's the segmentation of parts, if you were in parts, would any part of you be a murderer part?

00:30:39 - Sarah

Yeah, exactly.

00:30:40 - Jenna

So people with antisocial tendencies can also have DID, and then, sure, perhaps all their antisocial tendencies are in, but that's a different disorder. That's not the segmentation of identity. That's not the problem there. And people with the DID, because trauma causes maladaptive coping mechanisms, can have maladaptive coping mechanisms 100%, but very often they're turned on the self as just a way to try and cope.

So Split has been just really damaging with stigma. I tried to do one of my TikToks, was like, okay, do a slot experiment with me. If you knew 100% that you would not remember doing it. Now, it doesn't absolve you from consequences like on your psyche or in real life, but if you knew you wouldn't remember it, what would you do? Because in our experience, what happens is we buy snacks. I will come and go, oh, my gosh, who bought us all these snacks? And it was Lil. Lil bought a bunch of snacks because you're not going to go out and. Just commit crimes because you don't remember what you did doesn't change that you're inclined to do something or not.

00:32:02 - Sarah

Yeah, that's a really good example, because I was like, I can't think of anything that I wouldn't do if I couldn't remember, like, bad and bad. Quote unquote bad. But, yeah, getting snacks, that's totally what I would do.

00:32:12 - Jenna

Right?

00:32:13 - Sarah

That's amazing.

00:32:14 - Heather

Yeah. I don't think anything else, really. I mean, I don't think I have murder in my mind.

00:32:19 - Jenna

Exactly. Snacks. And what a delightful surprise, too, to be hungry and open the cabinet and go in the background like, I did it.

00:32:30 - Sarah

Thank me. Oh, I love it so much. Are there any other stigmas that come up for you? Like, common ones? Other than Is there a murderer? Ridiculous, right?

00:32:43 - Jenna

That's the most common one.

00:32:44 - Sarah
Oh, my goodness.

00:32:45 - Jenna
That people are automatically then on guard, like, that I could be criminal. Like, no, I'm just traumatized. And the stats show that people with DID are more likely to be the victim of crime. Because we've been through trauma, people who are predatory tend to have a good vibe for people who've been traumatized. And because our brain that's familiar to our brain, we tend to end up in the situations that are retraumatizing.

00:33:10 - Sarah
Right.

00:33:10 - Jenna
So rather than being violent, we're more likely to have violence recommitted upon us. But another one of the big things that I see is people going, oh, one, that that's a fake disorder. I was like, oh, that multiple therapists have diagnosed me with.

00:33:27 - Sarah
Yeah, really?

00:33:28 - Jenna
Okay. And then on that, people go, oh, that's the thing that the teens are doing for attention on TikTok. And I'm like, okay.

00:33:40 - Sarah
Wow.

00:33:41 - Jenna
Just because people are being open about their mental illness, just because they're able to make entertaining or comedic videos about their mental illness doesn't negate it. And just because some people will fake an illness doesn't mean that it's not real and happening. Like, people fake cancer, too, and cancer is very real and happening.

00:34:00 - Sarah

Exactly.

00:34:01 - Heather

Wow. Yeah. I feel like that exact stigma is the same thing. ADHD and other disorders or you don't look autistic. You don't look this way. That's not real. That's just a thing that kids have because there's so much misrepresentation. People are like, Well, I can say that I don't think it's real, because I hadn't really thought of experience it before.

00:34:21 - Sarah

Never heard of it before.

00:34:22 - Heather

Thought about it.

00:34:22 - Jenna

Right. They have this predisposed idea of what it looks like. Like you said, with autism. I have a friend who is just lousy with autism, like, who they're very symptomatic, and they had a doctor tell them, oh, you don't look autistic. And they were like, oh, okay. So do I need to come in stimming? And is that what autistic looks like to you? And that's part of the reason I work hard to educate online, is because people have an idea of what it looks like, usually from media representation. That is not helpful and that's not how it looks.

00:34:55 - Sarah

So what made you decide to go on that journey of having the social media channel and sharing so much information? Because I'm sure you're not getting all positive comments. I'm sure there's probably moments where it's not great. Right?

00:35:09 - Jenna

Right. People are like, oh, you want attention? I was like, oh sweetie, I can put on a swimsuit to get attention. It would not be putting my family at risk of stigma and myself at public ridicule. Like a swimsuit is a better venue for attention. But when we were very early in the process, one of the altars, Jenna, was having trouble speaking verbalizing, anything at all. So we set up the camera and we're like, okay, since you're having trouble talking to people, maybe try talking to the camera. And that worked.

So Jenna would then make videos and I would watch the videos and it helped me to understand where she was coming from, what she was thinking, and I recommend that to

other people with did. External communication does help start to bridge internal communication.

00:35:59 - Sarah

Really cool, what a good idea.

00:36:01 - Jenna

So we had these videos and then other altars would then make videos. So we'd have videos back and forth on our phone, what they're thinking, what they're feeling. And after about a year, as we started to cooperate, as things started to be less constantly difficult, like, oh, it gets better. And Jenna was like, you know, maybe it would be helpful for people to see the beginning to now to know that it gets better. And I was like, no, but Jenna was like the most private of the altars, was very protection minded, and she kept saying, I think this would help people to see that it can get better, that we can come together. And so after about two years and we were still making videos, we started to put them on YouTube, like a Vlog, just all the videos we had made and then the ones that we continued to make.

And then when TikTok came around, I think I was on Reddit and someone was like, hey, I hear people with did are hanging out on TikTok. And I went, OOH, I want to hang out, I want other system people, friends. And I didn't even know really what was going on on TikTok. I didn't know how it worked at all. So I got on there and I started following some people with DID and I was like, okay, I'll make a video. So I made a couple of videos and I was totally just playing, like letting the altars make videos because it felt like, oh sure, it doesn't matter, go ahead.

And then a video went viral and I was like, but that was the start of us gaining more of a platform and really trying to educate, because the algorithm brought in people who had never encountered it. They were asking great questions and I was like, this is an opportunity.

00:38:03 - Heather

Yeah.

00:38:04 - Sarah

How has it helped with your healing?

00:38:05 - Jenna

Journey on several different fronts? One of the fronts that's been helpful is we still mask some. We live in a town that's conservative, that's religious, and there's a lot of stigma around did being demon possession. And even though we're like, hey, we believe in Jesus, and they're like, it's still a demon, but that's not how that anyway, so just not safe.

To be open so that they could be themselves openly online, have people recognize them was so affirming. To not have to mask, to have an environment that they could just be themselves was fantastic. It was fun. It was like taking a deep breath when you've been shoved in and holding your breath for so long. But then the trolls and the comments have absolutely taught us we're more resilient than we thought, that we can extend kindness in situations where we thought we would be hurt or saddened or made afraid.

And that sometimes not always, but sometimes what people need is some kindness and some more information. And so it's been largely positive. Not always. There's definitely instances where it's like, okay, I need to step back and take a break for mental health. But overall, it's been a positive experience.

00:39:38 - Heather

Having this experience and having questions from people. What would you like to see represented more on film and television that can maybe help address some of these things that you were addressing yourself?

00:39:49 - Jenna

I would love to see did normalized in a character where it is just part of who they are, like OCD being just part of who they are, anxiety being just part of who they are. There have been a couple of TV shows where there's an episode or two where you see something like that. The Golden Girls actually has an episode where the handyman has did. And I was so pleased. I was like, Golden Girls can get that's amazing.

00:40:18 - Sarah

I got to find right.

00:40:21 - Jenna

It's in there, but I would love to see more of that. Where the problem isn't that there's alters. The problem is that the PTSD, the trauma, the flashbacks, the dissociation is disrupting life and those things can be addressed, those things can be healed. And that would be like the chef's kiss.

00:40:43 - Sarah

I love it. Oh, that's a really great way of putting it. It's the trauma, it's the dissociation, and that stuff can be fixed. That's brilliant. What would you recommend for resources, for people who are listening that want to learn more curious about how this all works?

00:40:59 - Jenna

So if you're wanting to learn more from perhaps a trauma perspective, my favorite book to recommend is *Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors* by Jennanina Fisher. It's phenomenal. It covers PTSD on up through very poly fragmented did and all the things in between. So if someone has experienced trauma and the dissociation that causes within self, that book is wonderful. And is so well-resourced. I could not recommend that one enough.

I'm trying to think. I try and read a lot of books and there's once like no, a lot of people read and recommend *Win Rabbit Howells*, which is a first-person, like, autobiographical book from someone with DID. And it's actually I have it now. I have bought the book, I just haven't read it yet. What if it works? As far as representation in media, *What if it Works?* is my all time favorite.

00:42:04 - Heather

Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like people to walk away with when they're thinking about did?

00:42:11 - Jenna

Yeah, absolutely. Just a couple of things to put in people's minds. It is one, it's rare medically, but that's not the same thing as what we think of rare. So it's around 1% depending on the prevalence measure. The study that was used, one to 1.5% of a given population, which is about the same as natural redheads. Yeah, when you're like I've never encountered that. You have. It's a covert survival mechanism. We're not going to be out there presenting vulnerable parts of self to you. But you have 100% encountered somebody with did. It's not scary and dangerous. It's a neurodivergence brought about by trauma to help a child survive. And if people would just understand that this is not just super duper rare, like if you've met a natural redhead, you have met somebody with did.

00:43:12 - Sarah

Wow, that's a really great that's really great.

00:43:15 - Heather

That's good contextually. It's hard to contextualize 1% as a number. Anyway, so now I have that.

00:43:22 - Sarah

That's a great way of putting it. Where can people find you read the books that you write, you're an author, you can tell us a little bit about that.

00:43:29 - Jenna

Absolutely. So, yeah, I'm an author and you can really see our distinct styles in our books. So we have a dark and gritty vampire thriller. I love it. And then we have a really light and sweet book about a rescue cat whose family gets a puppy and it is just adorable and heartwarming and so my writing runs the spectrum, just like the altars do. Great.

00:43:56 - Heather

Sarah's going to go for the puppy. I'm going to go for vampires. So we're covered.

00:44:01 - Sarah

So I have a rescue cat and many rescue dogs.

00:44:05 - Jenna

Oh, yeah.

00:44:06 - Sarah

That's amazing.

00:44:06 - Jenna

You'll love it. We really tried to put in animal body language so that we could educate young people, but do it indirectly. So when Kit the cat is mad, he does certain things with his tail and with his ears and just to help kids understand animal body language without having a lesson.

00:44:23 - Sarah

Oh, that's brilliant. On the list.

00:44:25 - Jenna

Yes. So I'm sure you'll link it in the bio, but my writing website is J E Craft with a K, like the cheese kraft.com. And you can get my books there. You can find me on Instagram, on TikTok, on Twitter, if it hasn't burned to the ground. By the time it's aired. YouTube Gianu system, which is Gianu and then system. And if you're curious about the name, we have a video about why we have that name on our YouTube. It's a fun story.

00:45:01 - Sarah
Awesome.

00:45:01 - Heather Well, amazing.

00:45:02 - Sarah
Thank you so much for everything that you're doing with your social media platforms, for taking the time to sit with us and share your story, and it was wonderful. Thank you.

00:45:13 - Jenna
Thank you so much for having me on and for just doing this in general, because there is so much misrepresentation out there, we don't even realize that we're getting wrong ideas. So I love what you all are doing.

00:45:27 - Sarah
Thank you so much.

00:45:28 - Heather
Thank you.

00:45:31 - Sarah
I'm really grateful that Jennana responded to my Cold Call DM on her Instagram to see if she'd be interested in coming onto the show. And I think I followed her for over a year now. And I just like I mentioned many times, I've learned so much from her. Like we mentioned every episode, we learned so much, but I really didn't know much about DID, and I realized how very little I knew until I started following her. And it's like, yeah, it was great.

00:45:55 - Heather
Our mum was in a psychology class, and I remember just being so fascinated with kind of all the different disorders and things that she was studying, and one of them was multiple personality disorder, because that's what it was called at the time. And language is always changing how things are defined or changing. The DSM is not in a solid state. It continues to change. And I feel like it was just so fascinating. I realized I'd only heard of this and thought of this in a very abstract way. And to have a conversation with someone and really understand what it means in a very, I think, tangible and practical way, totally. To me, it just

made sense, as, of course, this is something like this idea of, like, this is the brain is so incredible that it can protect us in such a way.

00:46:44 - Sarah

Yeah, she really broke it down and made it very understandable.

00:46:48 - Heather

Yeah.

00:46:49 - Sarah

Thanks, Jenna.

00:46:50 - Heather

Okay, what do you got?

00:46:51 - Sarah

What do you got? Anything awesome happening?

00:46:54 - Heather

This is something factual to me.

It can be awesome. But the WGC, which is the Writers Guild of Canada, recently came out with a study that was essentially their 2022 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion report. And it's with data updated to December 31, 2021. And as you dig into their information, it was fairly depressing to see that only in live action rooms in Canada, there was 1.7% of the room were disabled writers, 1% in animation, and in fact, only 0.6% of writers in the WGC are classified as disabled.

00:47:33 - Sarah

Wow.

00:47:34 - Heather

Now, I put that out on Twitter because I was obviously do better. The statistics at the moment are one in five Canadians have disabilities. One in four Americans have disabilities. Someone

said, is it because of disclosure and fear of disclosure. I'm like, that could be it. They've just changed the definitions on the WGC site that you can when you self declare there's more options because there used to not be an option for anyone who is neurodiverse. So I'm like, well, I don't have an intellectual disability. So I wrote to them and said, you don't have my classification of disability on your site.

So there could be some things where people are feeling more open about it or people are adding that information, which would be amazing. But I think more so there is a thing that's happening for any kind of marginalized community is that the opportunity to even get in the door is so difficult. So unless you're doing active recruitment and they start to do that with certain communities, but it's still like lagging in some communities. And so I think there needs to be continued effort and the continued effort that we have people continuing to advocate for that. It's like we need to have more voice in the room to craft more potential stories, not just maybe the stories that you're currently thinking about.

So by having people of differing abilities in the room or differing experiences in the room, that you will get kind of different future stories and it may be unexpected stories. So I'm really hopeful that by seeing these numbers and talking about these things, that we can start to hopefully create more access, create more inclusive spaces like we talked about last episode. And so I'm really hoping that these numbers are not a reflection of what is to come, but rather a place to start from.

00:49:21 - Sarah

Yeah, here that wasn't so awesome, but.

00:49:24 - Heather

Needed to be discussed.

00:49:26 - Sarah

Totally. Yeah. No, I agree. It made me think about some of the associations that I'm involved with and I think I need to go and check what checkboxes are in their things and start sending emails as well. Yes, check your inboxes organizations, make some.

00:49:40 - Heather

Changes for you we're coming from.

00:49:42 - Sarah

And for you. Well, I have something awesome that's actually awesome. I feel like everything's pertaining to work right now because everything is just like arriving at the same

time. But I'm excited to announce that one of the feature docs I cut last year called The Lebanese Burger Mafia is having its world premiere at Hot Docs in May in Toronto.

00:50:04 - Heather

Yay.

00:50:05 - Sarah

So if anybody's in the Toronto area and would like to come and watch a film about the meaty saga of a rogue fast food train with mysterious origins, occult following, and a secret pathway to the immigrant dream, maybe come prepared to feel hungry before you leave because there's lots of tasty footage there. But yeah, I'm going to be there. I think my sister is going to be there.

00:50:27 - Heather

I'm going to be there, and our.

00:50:28 - Sarah

Siblings are going to be there.

00:50:29 - Heather You come see Sarah's documentary. Meet the brains behind brains. Go support Canadian cinema for those of you in Canada.

So anyone who's listening to this on the day that it's come out, if you're interested, on Wednesday, April 12, at 08:00 p.m.. Eastern Standard Time or 05:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time, and every time in between, Sarah and I are going to be featured in a talk with Harvard Wood around ethics and storytelling, mental health and disability representation in film and TV. If you are wanting to come and hear us talk and ask questions, I think in a live setting, please come and join us. The website is harvardwood.org ethic storytelling and there you can register for the event. And so please do join us. We're really excited to be talking about this subject that is so dear to us and is also the subject of our podcast, something we love to talk about. So join us, ask us questions.

00:51:34 - Heather

So I just want to say thank you to everyone for listening to today's episode of Brains. Brains is hosted and produced by Heather and Sarah Taylor and is mixed and mastered by Tony Bau. Our theme song is by our little brother Deppisch, and our graphics were created by Perpetual Notion.

00:51:49 - Sarah

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00:52:07 - Heather

And I'm your host, Heather. Bye