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Dissociation: Clarification of the Concept and its Implication for EMDR Therapy

The term 'dissociation' is subject to various definitions. In contemporary literature, dissociation refers to specific symptoms (peri-traumatic dissociation, emotional detachment ranging up to depersonalisation and derealisation, and changes in personality states in patients with dissociative identity disorder), to the possible causes of these symptoms (such as defence mechanisms or structural dissociation), or even to normal or pathological alterations in consciousness (absorption, split attention, hypnosis). Such a broad and multiple definition leads to confusion, with repercussions for both research and clinical practice, and at the end no one knows what we are talking about when we use the term 'dissociation'. This keynote wishes to propose a strict and narrow concept of dissociation that differentiates between aetiology and consequences. We will then address the implications of a clarified concept of dissociation for EMDR therapists, how they can better understand and assess their clients' symptoms and reactions, and what it implies for EMDR therapy.