

What is alterhumanity?

If you're reading this, you probably have a client or patient who is alterhuman. Alt+H defines the word 'alterhuman' as follows:

You are alterhuman if you decide to call yourself alterhuman. You may decide to call yourself alterhuman if you experience an internal identity that is beyond the scope of what is traditionally considered 'being human'.

- adapted from the Alt+H website

Why do people identify as alterhuman?

There are lots of phenomena that might lead someone to identify as alterhuman. For example:

- ★ a nonhuman or media-based self-perception
- ★ supernumary phantom limbs
- ★ "shifts" in mindset aligning with an alterhuman identity
- ★ species dysphoria
- ★ past- or other-life memories
- ★ a connection to the idea of alterhuman identity
- ★ plurality (the experience of having more than one consciousness in a single body)

Having these experiences often leads people to identify that they feel different from their culture's idea of what a human should be. Many explain their feelings as being spiritual or religious in nature; others cite psychological origins (Leisk, 2016) for their experiences. Some people mix approaches (Meiyr, 2016) or refuse categorization entirely.



Alterhumanity and Mental Health

*A guide for therapists and
other mental health professionals*



Where can I find more information?

You can find some further information, history, and studies in these places:

[Alt+H
https://alt-h.net/](https://alt-h.net/)

The official Alt+H website, which has a glossary of common terms, an alterhuman FAQ, articles, resources, and more.

[Between Forest and Sea
https://houseofchimeras.weebly.com/](https://houseofchimeras.weebly.com/)

A personal website maintained by a plural system called the House of Chimeras that has personal articles, a collected history of different alterhuman communities, and links to academic sources.

[Healthy Multiplicity
https://healthymultiplicity.com](https://healthymultiplicity.com)

A directory of books, sites, and other resources on plurality and living as plural maintained by LB Lee.

Citations

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- Meiyr, (2016, April 14). Otherkin & Therian Theories of Cause or Origin. Retrieved from <http://project-shift.net/otherkin-therian-theories-of-cause-or-origin/> Originally written 2006
- Silver Elves, T. (2018). "Elven Psychology: Understanding the Elfin Psyche and the Evolutionary and Esoteric Purposes of Mental Disorders." Middletown, DE: The Silver Elves.

I've always felt out of place in the world and felt as if a part of me was missing. Until I discovered alterhuman identity, I had no way to explain it, but once I did I finally started to understand myself and where those feelings came from.

- ghostspace, Alt+H Discord server user

Nonhumanity

Some alterhumans express a different species identity. They feel partially or entirely nonhuman. They could feel they're an earthly nonhuman animal or a mythical beast; part of a mythical race such as elves or faeries; an alien; a plant; an object such as a doll; or even something conceptual like a glitch or a piece of music.

Some nonhuman identities are based in recognition of involuntary and persistent experiences. Other experiences may allow for some choice or be entirely chosen. Identities may fluctuate in how prominent they are or how they present.

Fictional and Media-Based Identities

Some people express feelings of being, or being connected to, a specific character or species from a work of fiction. These can come with memories of the source material and homesickness for people or places from a work of fiction. They can appear before or after one recognizes the identity.

For some people this is their only identity and who they are as a whole. For others, it could be one of many held alongside their 'real world' identity. Like nonhumanity, fictional identities can vary in how and why they manifest; how much choice a person has in the experiences; and how prominent they are.

Plurality

'Plural' is an umbrella term for any experience of having more than one person/consciousness/self in one body. Plural collectives may or may not meet the criteria for Dissociative Identity Disorder or OSDD-1a/b - it depends on the level of internal communication, and any distress or dysfunction related to their plurality.

Many plurals desire to live as separate and choose not to fuse or 'integrate'; to learn to live together; and to be treated as different and individual beings instead of "parts." However, every system is different and should be asked how they prefer to refer to themselves. Plural identities very often overlap with fictional and nonhuman ones.

Are these identities and experiences harmful?

Few if any alterhuman experiences are inherently harmful or clinically distressing. Most are simply a part of one's identity, whether something deeply meaningful to them or just a regular aspect of their life.

Sometimes a problem may be mistaken for an alterhuman experience (e.g. dissociation being mistaken for cognitive shifts to a ghostly identity). However, it might be framed as an alterhuman experience on purpose (e.g. a ghost identity helping someone cope when dissociating.)

Most alterhumans function well in their daily lives and find community and meaning in their identities. Those who struggle often have other factors contributing to their issues, such as a poor home environment, poverty, discrimination for other identities, or mental health problems. In all cases, symptoms and condition

of living should be treated instead of alterhuman identity alone. In fact, it can be harmful for a person to suppress their alterhuman experiences.

The awareness in such difficult times when the elves live lives of conformity and are not being their true selves haunts them ... leaving elves both depressed and boiling inside to radiate their elven spirit in the world around them.

- Elven Psychology, the Silver Elves (Silver Elves, T. 2018)

Why might this come up in treatment?

In most cases, alterhuman identity is disclosed as part of a patient's personal identity or background. It is not typically reported as an issue itself. However, there are cases where a person might want to talk about alterhuman experiences that they struggle with and need support for. These can include species dysphoria; distressing memories attributed to another life; time loss or poor communication in a plural system; forming a purposeful alterhuman identity; or struggling with harassment for one's alterhumanity.

Many alterhumans are reluctant to bring up their experiences and identities in therapy, or face negative reactions and harmful treatments from professionals who don't understand. Therefore, disclosure should be treated with respect and as a sign of trust.

Therianthropy is one identity that can qualify as alterhuman - your client will likely use more specific terms than just 'alterhuman' too, depending on their specific experiences and the communities they've found to discuss them in.

Since seeing a therapist I could disclose in and trust, my mental health has improved considerably, I've gotten better at managing my inconsistent sense of self, and I've learned to get more out of the coping skills previous therapists had tried to teach me because I can better apply them to all of me, not just the parts that are easiest to share.

- Marron, Alt+H Discord server user

Mental health and identity

While alterhumanity is not a mental illness or symptom of one on its own, a notable amount of alterhumans are neurodivergent or experience mental health problems. For many, there will be little, if any, overlap between their mental health and their identity. However, it's worth considering where there may be intersections between the two.

For example, someone with Borderline Personality Disorder who has a shapeshifter identity might frame this as a natural result of being a shapeshifter, and learn to cope through that lens. Conversely they might think of their shapeshifter identity as a result of their BPD.

Some even adopt identities specifically because of the way they experience these things. They often do this to cope with symptoms and build self-esteem or a self-concept.

Intersection with other identities

Alterhuman identities can sometimes overlap with other important, and often marginalized, identities. A 2013 census (Cheetah, 2013) of the therian community shows a high number of LGBTQ+ therians, a trend which shows itself across other alterhuman

communities, too. There's also a diverse range of beliefs among alterhumans, the given census showing a range of neopagan faiths being prominent. One's alterhuman identity may relate to the social 'dehumanization' many marginalized groups face. For those whose identities intersect with others, both should be taken into account.

Simply put, it is that the sum of my experiences pushes me further away from the average person. It goes beyond simply 'feeling different'. It is that I am different in very concrete, basic way. A lot of it ties into being neuroatypical; some other parts revolve around being transgender ... It's many aspects that add up until it is impossible for me to envision myself as human, or to relate to being human.

- Ahkila, "Near-Human" (Ahkila, 2013)

How can I respect these identities and experiences?

- ★ Pay attention to and use the language that your client uses for themselves as well as their personal goals for therapy -- it's different for everyone!
- ★ Respect beliefs you may not personally understand
- ★ Don't ask your client to repress or otherwise dismiss an identity or experience they can't - it's often harmful and distressing.
- ★ Assume experiences and identities are healthy unless clinically significant dysfunction or distress is clearly expressed.
- ★ Find ways to help clients within the scope of their experiences instead of working against their identity as the core issue.