

Self and Parts: Unity and Multiplicity

Conceptual Overview of Internal Family Systems

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Greg Kolodziejczak, PsyD

-Multiplicity and Unity

-Parts and Self

-IFS History

-IFS and Spirituality

“a singular and unique specific
cohesive structure”

Ernest Wolf

“I am large, I contain multitudes.”

Walt Whitman

One and Many



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRUazGQ3nSY>



Exiles

- Wounded inner children
- Isolated for their own protection, or the protection of the system
- Carry heavy burdens
- Sadness, grief, shame, worthlessness, powerlessness, loneliness, neediness, fear, terror, and so on
- Become extreme in their desire to be heard and cared for



Managers

The best way to understand managers is to think of them as striving to preempt anything that might touch our exiles. . . . Like sentries, they're always on guard for events that might trigger exiles and are always strategizing ways to avoid such events.

Richard Schwartz (2001)

Managers

These strategic, task-oriented parts strive to keep us organized and safe. They may push perfectionism, worry obsessively, exhaust with care taking, or more passively avoid, deny, discourage and devalue.

Ironically, as they become extreme in the pursuit of safety and exile our injured parts to protect the system, they inflict more harm.

Jack Engler (2013)



Managers

Managers are responsible for our day-to-day safety. . . . They try to control your relationships and environment so you're never in a position to be humiliated, abandoned, rejected, attacked, or anything else unexpected and hurtful. They try to control your appearance, performance, emotions, and thoughts for the same reason.

Richard Schwartz (2001)

Inner Critic



All Parts Have Good Intentions

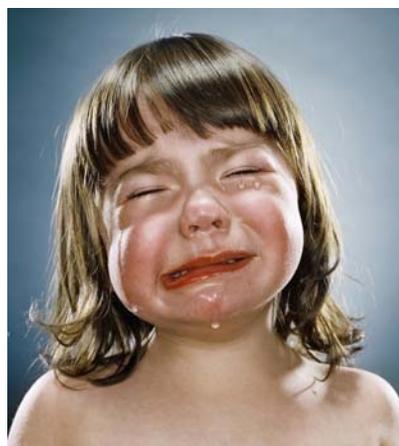
We all have parts and there are no bad ones—
just ones who are hurt or protective.

Richard Schwartz (2013)



Common Managers

- Inner Critic
- Avoider
- Controller
- Caretaker
- People pleaser
- Overachiever
- Perfectionism
- Self-righteousness
- Planner
- Grandiosity
- Pessimist
- Hope Basher
- Mild substance use
- Stoic
- Intellectualization
- Ruminator



Vicious Parts

Some parts attack exiled parts, disgusted with their fragility, which the attacking parts believe weakens and endangers the entire system. Sadly, exiled parts may even welcome the familiar attack, a known danger that permits the part to feel redeemed or forgiven, since dues for her sins, whatever they may be, have [then] been forgiven.

Goulding & Schwartz (1995)



Blending

When exiles override managers with emotional pain, they take over us, literally become us. IFS says they are now *blended* with us. Before we realize it, we identify with our exiles and take them to be who we are. We see ourselves and the world through their eyes and believe it is “the” world.

Jack Engler (2013)

Firefighters

When exiles blend with us, another set of protective parts called *firefighters* are activated. Their role is to put out the emotional fire at any cost, often by starting backfires. This is the heavy artillery: alcohol, drugs, eating disorders, promiscuous sex, pornography, self-mutilation and suicidality, exacting a steep cost in collateral damage.

Jack Engler (2013)





Common Firefighters

- Bingeing
 - Alcohol/Drugs
 - Food
 - Spending
 - Gambling
 - Sex/Pornography
 - Video games
 - Exercise
- Addiction
- Restricting
- Dissociation
- Fantasy
- Rage/Violence
- Distractions
- Compulsions
- Pre-emptive strike
- Self-harm
- Suicide



Self

- Calmness
- Curiosity
- Compassion
- Connectedness
- Confidence
- Creativity
- Courage
- Clarity

IFS Components

- Exiles – vulnerable, need protection
- Managers – protect proactively
- Firefighters – protect reactively
- Self – the core and center of the person

IFS History

Richard Schwartz, PhD in MFT, Purdue
Systemic Family Therapist, Chicago



Observations

- Family interventions weren't curing the patients
- Family constellations existed inside the patients
- Every patient had an innate (though well-hidden) Self

IFS History

As I helped clients separate from their extreme emotions and beliefs, they would immediately and spontaneously shift into their Self. . . . In several cases, they would suddenly demonstrate a kind of ego strength I never suspected they had. Some of these clients not only hadn't had good enough parenting when they were very young, but also had been tortured and depreccated on a daily basis.

Richard Schwartz (2001)

IFS History

Some had never been held or comforted in their lives. Their childhoods had been nightmares of fear and degradation. So where could they have gotten these qualities that were springing forth? There was no way they could have absorbed these qualities from the abusive people on whom they had depended when they were children.

Richard Schwartz (2001)

Spirituality

Since I could find so little in Western psychology to confirm these optimistic observations, I began looking elsewhere. I learned that the kind of Self I encountered in my clients was described by various spiritual traditions around the world.

Richard Schwartz (2001)

Spirituality

If we enter into ourselves, finding our true self, and then passing "beyond" the inner "I," we sail forth into the immense darkness in which we confront the "I am" of the Almighty. . . . Our inmost "I" exists in God and God swells in it. . . . Hence the Christian mystical experience is not only an awareness of the inner self, but also . . . it is an experiential grasp of God as present within our inner self.

Thomas Merton, quoted by Schwartz (2001)



Self

The Self may be buried under layers of defensive protection, it may be “out of the body,” it may have to be repeatedly and painstakingly differentiated, . . . but it *is* present, a well-hidden resource, buried under layers woven together by creatively protective parts. The Self is present, naturally competent, a “born” leader, and a valuable asset to the entire internal system.

Goulding & Schwartz (1995)

Blending

Blending describes a condition in which the Self over-identifies or over-empathizes with a part. It is the opposite of differentiation and healthy boundary-making. There is a leakage of feelings, a blurring or merging of boundaries between parts and the Self.

The danger in blending lies in the Self’s inability to maintain a leadership position and an extreme part’s taking control of the system.

Goulding & Schwartz (1995)

Unblending

They now understood that a part of them, not all of them, was upset, so rather than blending with the part, they would notice it and then try to comfort it. . . . Just the awareness that they were not the part helped them remain more centered. They could wait until the storm blew over, secure in the knowledge that their Self would reemerge—that the sun would shine again.

Richard Schwartz (2001)

Summary

- Release parts from their burdens and extreme roles
- Restore the Self to leadership
- Harmonize the inner system