

IFS | Controversies, addressed

The words sound dumb, but the application will relieve you.

Winter 2023

Who's fighting who... Inside of you? For what?

I thought it was crucial for us to talk about some of the finer details and controversies around IFS.

What hasn't the community been clicking with and how can it be better explained? What are some of the hangups or difficult points of comprehension that could be smoothed out? How is the language around IFS still pushing people away and what other routes can we use to get the gist so we can apply it effectively?

And how DO we start working with those internal systems ourselves, right now, for rapid results?

Including easy access to meditation and rapid loss of compulsory behaviors we're tired of battling against?

Well, let's answer those questions this month. Let's discuss the "brains as internal systems" topic a lot further before we chug ahead, from a more experiential standpoint based on feedback from myself and the micro community.

And get into alternative ways to look at it, regarding some of the controversies that have been popping up from y'all's feedback.

The car analogy

So one of the things we didn't get into deeply enough was seeing our parts as a whole, working, *system*. And what that really means.

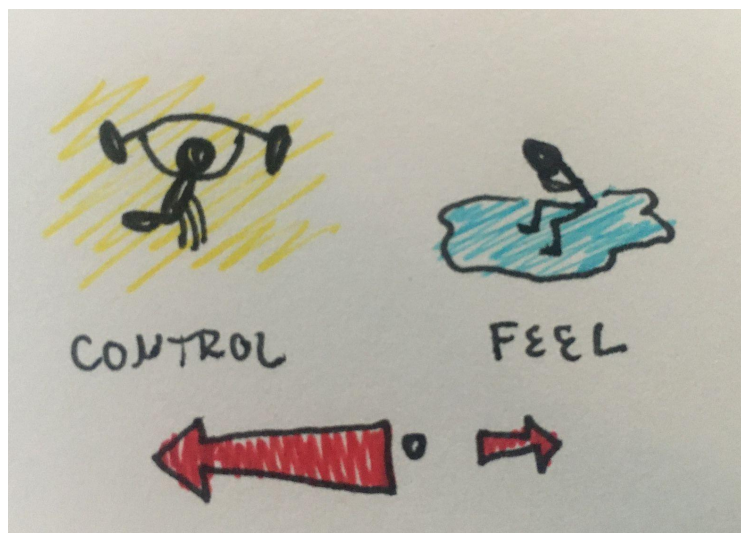
The easiest way to look at this, straight from IFS Therapy Second Edition, is possibly by thinking of the similarities between your brain and a car. I know. Bear with me, you'll see.

Now, you have all these various components of a vehicle... I'm no mechanic, but let's say there's an engine, wheels, infrastructure that holds it all together, etc.

And at the same time, there are automatically regulating systems within that system. Like, the fans that detect temperature changes to cool the engine and fuel injectors that release the right amount of gas to combust in the engine.

Now apply that to your own system.

Meaning, some of these components you're in control of, like the steering wheel and the gas pedal. You have to give direction, or nothing happens. You have to initiate operations or they don't do shit.



But *other* components are self-monitoring and regulating, and you have nothing to do with them other than watching for signs that they aren't working right on the dashboard. Which many of us ignore, anyways.

Thing is, without ALL of the pieces working TOGETHER, you don't have a functional car. The components, on their own, uncompiled, don't equal a usable car. They're just metal and plastic.

Just like your parts, on their own, don't equate with a well oiled machine that's leaving the driveway. They're just bundles of brain cells.

Without ALL the pieces that were developed with specific functionalities, pulled together into one dynamic unit... the components are simply not equal to the whole. You don't have a working system. You ain't going anywhere.

This is speaking to our parts.

Some of them have to be prompted. We consciously direct them. And these are harder to deal with, when, say, we're distracted by 10,000 other things taking place at the same time. Steering is harder when you're in the middle of a scream fest in the driver's seat, but someone still has to do it. Right? Your executive functioning is harder to tap into when you're combatting chaos at every turn.

And some of those mechanical parts are automatic - just like the parts in your brain.

They just do what they do and we don't really influence them. The car is still going to be regulating its own engine temperature if you're having the worst day of your life while yelling at google maps and missing turns. You don't even consider those aspects as "part of the drive" or "your job to regulate" because normally they just function accordingly.

You can generally rely on those components to operate themselves, and so you do, because there's so many other things to focus on.

Meaning, unless that mini self-monitoring system within the larger car system is malfunctioning, you don't notice. And you maaaaay not notice until it's too late in all the surrounding tumult you're consciously dealing with, and you're suddenly standing on the side of the road with smoke billowing out from under your hood.

Our parts are the same.

Just like with these updated car equipments like lane assist or self-guided driving... if we aren't paying attention to them for long enough, they'll often result in disaster. Eventually. They'll make a wrong turn here or hit the brakes too hard there. Maybe neglect to hit the brakes at all.

And the next thing you know, your system is crashing into an obstacle that you didn't see coming, stopping short and creating a pileup, or running the car off the road, or into the back of someone ahead of you.

SO. Your manager parts could be seen as these automatic components, steering the car and keeping the other parts in line, without your conscious effort.

Your exiles could be seen as the pieces of the driving experience that you don't really want to deal with, such as registering the vehicle, dealing with that dash light, or getting an oil change. Things you can easily neglect because they're stressful... and let's face it, we have a lot of avoidant abilities... but they'll come back to bite you in the ass if you ignore them over time. They're corrupting the whole system, whether or not you're paying attention.

And your distractors? Well, that's probably akin to you being on your phone or fucking with the radio controls while you're keeping your brain off the background levels of distress that come from driving or just existing in your circumstances.

Blending vs integration.

In the conversation last time we spoke of Blended parts. And on this show we've recently been talking about system integration through the end of 2022.

So, blended parts, we've noted as being undesirable. We can't work with our parts if we can't see them for what they are.

Meanwhile, integration, we've discussed as being the GOAL in trauma recovery. Something we're working towards.

So don't these concepts contradict each other? A very relevant question.

Well, no, but I need to be more clear on the difference between the terms to explain that one.

If we go back to the car analogy, you want to have wheels that interact with your braking and steering components, right?

But if your wheels, brakes, and steering are all blended - they're welded together to form one unit - that's not a functional system anymore. Those roles shouldn't be fused permanently, that stops them from having any utility. So if your wheels, steering, and brakes all become one unit, the car either isn't going to move, or it's going to drive you off a fucking cliff.

That's blending. Not the goal.

What you actually want is an INTEGRATED system that works together, as you give it direction. The wheels, brakes, and steering interact and influence each other and support the entire system's goal of getting you from point A to point B. They operate together at times for a specific goal, but they aren't enmeshed so deeply that you can't separate them.

Same with your parts. They need to be able to communicate and carry out activities together. As a working system. But you don't want them to be fused together, so that their basic functionalities are gridlocked in place.

Managers aren't always "managers"

So the way that I speak about these "manager" parts makes it seem pretty cut and dry. An easy but inaccurate takeaway from that language is that they are exactly like the other "managers" in our lives. The shitheads who've told us what to do and how to stay in line with productivity at the forefront of the concerns.

But that's not the case. And it could be cutting a lot of self-recognition of your parts out of the equation, if you have that limited perspective.

So let me say, MY most dominant manager parts are pretty stereotypical authority figures from the capitalist world. But that's just me, not necessarily everyone. It's based on my experiences in businesslike hierarchies, and who I've had to be in order to feed myself off of them, over the course of a lifetime. Annnnd of course, the fact that I came from a family that nurtured these narratives, passed down from THEIR real world managers, in my childhood home.

But. Our manager parts can actually be the exact opposite of all that corporate ladder jazz. They aren't always pushing for achievement and accomplishment. They can, in fact, tell us the complete opposite.

That's why it might be more helpful to consider these aspects of us to be "protectors" instead. They protect in whatever ways they've learned to defend us from pain, and that doesn't always mean they're running around with checklists and clipboards to keep you on task.

Remember in the first IFS episode that I mentioned some of the different templates for manager "slash" protector parts? Some of them were things like "depressors" and "deniers." Not to

mention “caretakers.” None of these are “managers” as we traditionally think of real world “managers.” And that deserves clarity.

So depressor protective parts will tell us the opposite of my usual spiel about overworking. They say that it’s *unsafe* to keep exerting effort, because it never works out anyways. Maybe you’ve been punished for trying before in the past. You took some lofty can-do risks, they didn’t work out, and now your system has flipped the other direction to say “let’s never try that again.”

Meaning you can have a manager part that refuses to kick everyone else into a high functioning gear. It shuts down the system, rather than motivating it. Your protective strategy is freezing and hiding rather than pushing and striving.

So there’s another pattern to watch out for. The manager who’s given up on exerting effort and now just smokes weed in the stock room all day, prompting the rest of the workers to just do the same. The rest of your parts.

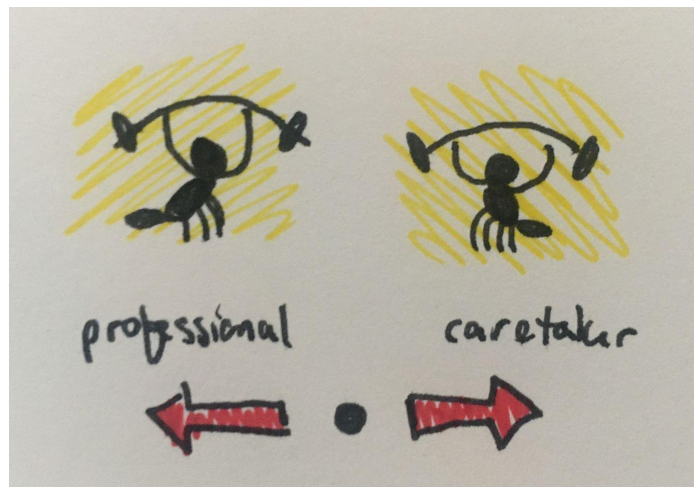
Managers aren’t always pushing everyone past their limits, sometimes they’re influencing the system to stay hidden, directionless, and stalled out. Cuz... why bother doing any different?

Similarly, Denier manager parts can have these “shut down” effects on the system, rather than promoting productivity. As in the cases of shutting out reality we just don’t want

to deal with. Maybe the right move on this day **WOULD** be to get up, face this obstacle with fervor, and get it over with... orrrr we can just pretend that obstacle doesn’t exist and go back to bed. Grab a cup of coffee. Waft around the apartment looking at wikipedia articles all day.

Why address reality, when we can just block it out?

These protector parts keep our brains free of distressing information, managing the system tightly... but they don’t **FEEL** like it. They **FEEL** like they’re doing the best they can, but the whole world just won’t work with them. In reality, they’re refusing to work with the rest of the world.



Managers who won't even open the doors to the store front. Look, there are no customers! So there's nothing for us to do here. That means there are also no problems. Because we've just denied them entry.

And lastly, let's hit on Caretaking manager parts that don't necessarily fit the "typical management role." These can be aspects of us that say "business isn't the important piece of this puzzle, nonstop empathy is."

So, think of managers you've had who were ineffective at their tasks, perhaps, because they were too busy communing with everyone else or attempting to serve the needs of one individual. They learned that human servitude and support was more important than keeping up with ambitious operations, and may divert all energy to those practical and emotional support efforts rather than meeting quarterly goals.

Those of us who have relationships that form the containers of our lives? Codependers and fawners, day after day? Everything else comes secondary or tertiary to those points? And maybe we don't feel like we're "managing" ourselves, so much as other people are?

Also... talking about manager parts, actually. But, in this case, they've subverted all directory decisions to an external source or several of them.

In this way, they're still suppressing and controlling the rest of the system. Taking away the power of your other parts. Insisting that anticipating and following orders from the needs of others is how the rest of your brain needs to operate.

Language: proactive vs reactive

Some of us don't like the terms "managers and protectors" or "exiles and distractors" at all. Let alone the bane of everyone's experience with this IFS concept - the motherfucking Firefighters. Jesus Christ, why did they choose that term? I'll never understand the choice.

Again, for some of us, these words just have too many connotations from things we've encountered in life for them to be useful terms.

One of the proposed alternatives? Seeing them as Proactive and Reactive parts.

Proactive parts are the managers and protectors. They decide what they "need to do to stay safe" and execute those plans for the whole system to keep surviving.

Reactive parts are the exiles and distractors. They sense distress and react accordingly.

Exiles are really *stuck* in a state of reactivity, a good deal of the time, because they're our unwanted and shame-able moments in life born of painful events.... And then they just get frozen there. Stuck in time, in those circumstances, in our memories. We can't unlock them because we keep avoiding them, so they just stand in quicksand, unable to progress.

That means, Exiles are perpetually reacting to whatever hurt them in the first place. And they'll react even harder when something in your environment triggers them again.

Similarly, Distractors are reactive to your Exiles. They notice an uptick in internal distress and they automatically react - causing you to engage in whatever behavior will shut out some of the unwanted emotion. There's no thought, no larger plan, no feedback from the rest of the system to make sure it's a good idea or supports our plans for the future - so it isn't a RESPONSE. It's a reaction coming from them.

And Managers / Protectors? Well, they're the ones who are surveying the landscape and trying to anticipate what's coming next. How should we all hunker down and prepare for disaster? They're proactive, because they're directing the whole system towards anticipated payoffs - like survival or ego validation (things that feel one and the same to our stupid fucking human brains).

Is that easier to understand, maybe? I think for some brains it is.

Brain development vs. the Self.

Okay, another thing that folks have really struggled with has been the difference between the Brain and the Self.

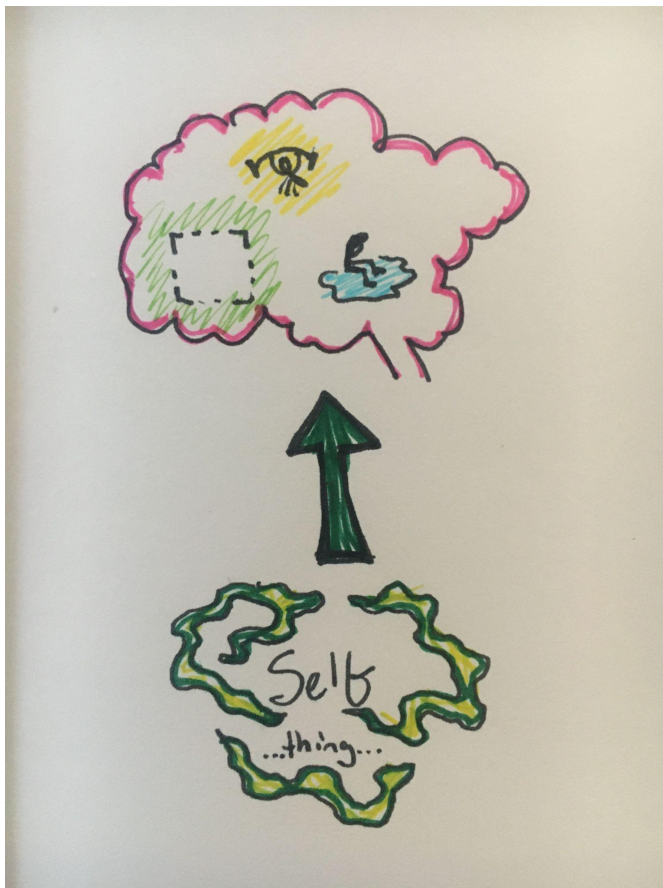
What are our "parts" and what is our "Self" thing? How are they really different and how do we separate the two as we work with them? Or even begin to consider this framework as "not some dumbass bullshit"?

This gray area between the brain and the Self (big S) has been presenting in a lot of questions about how it's possible for us to have the innate knowledge about how to heal our brains, when those brains have never received the care that they needed in the first place.

Such as - if we're born into families that don't offer connection, compassion, clarity, kindness, and so on... how can it be that we have this inherent knowledge about how to give those things to our own beings? That just doesn't line up with everything we've learned so far.

Well that's the thing. So far we've studied the brain and how it responds to the environment. All those early experiences impacted the BRAIN's ability to understand, enact, or accept crucial components of human existence... but that has nothing to do with the Self.

Our brains DEVELOP adaptively. Our Self-things don't change.



Because they're NOT the brain. I'll say it for the trillionth time, the Self (big S) isn't in your head, it's in your body. So the Self that we all carry? They aren't corrupted by our experiences and subsequent programming alterations. So they aren't susceptible to abuse or neglect in childhood.

What they ARE enduring from those events and non-events that constitute CPTSD? Is being closed off, blocked out, and pushed away... through those experiences.

We don't LOSE the Self, but we lose access to it. When we regain access, we find that it's untouched by all these mental adaptations, because it has nothing to do with them.

So, if attachment theory has you stating "there's no way I have this internal

knowledge of what real connection is or what I need in my system for healing, I've never experienced those things before in my life." Well, that's speaking to your brain's history and downstream capacity. But not your Self's.

Again, your Self is an energy thing that's always been in you, in your body, in your chest and guts. Your brain is... your brain. It's up top. It does the logical thinking and analyzing. And it exists to develop according to your circumstances.

The Self doesn't undergo the same alterations, because it isn't here for SURVIVAL. It's here for your EXPERIENCE. It's the thing that decided to put you in this human meat suit in the first place, for some reason. And often it's well aware that what you're doing isn't really surviving... it's just existing with an unnecessary preoccupation about surviving.

So, it sees that your adaptive brain programs are just that... logical echoes of what you've been through so far. But all the while, it has a firmer grasp on the broad views around the situation - that this probably doesn't matter so much, as far as your actual purpose on this planet, as your dumb brain is estimating.

And therefore, you're acting inauthentically to your full Self, as you operate on these polarized parts that believe they're undoubtedly necessary to keep breathing. You're out of alignment, as they say, between your Self and your brain's daily directions.

The Self isn't the Brain.

Reflection Q's

Do you have “automatic parts” that drive the rest of the system into the ground?

How did those parts get so much power? What's their role? What's their underlying burden?

Which parts work together and which parts combat each other? Do you have “brakes” and “gas” parts? Ones that head left, others that steer sharply to the right? What are they each trying to achieve?

Are your “managers” akin to “traditional, societal, managers”?

Are some of them inclined towards other “management” strategies that feel less productive?

What are those managers trying to achieve? What's their strategy and where did it come from?

Do you have managers that fight over the best course of action? Exiling each other? What do they disagree about?

Can you see proactive and reactive parts in yourself?

What are you trying to predict / protect against preemptively? What are you commonly reacting to, and how?

Do you have times that feel less driven by the brain, and more motivated by “another force?”

During these times, can you access more of your cognitive programs to choose which ones to activate?

Have you ever been able to provide your own epiphany moments, and what did that feel like? What were the conditions that allowed it?