

# Disorganized VIT Attempts and YOUR Parts

What's standing in your way of healing connections?

Spring 2023

## Polarized brain programs v. your attempts at relationships

We want (and need) what we fear. Relationships.

It's a complicated issue from the outside. We say we want one thing, we act in a way that suggests another. Relationships tend to be all or nothing. And they almost necessarily come with intensity and chaos.... Or, such a distance and detachment that it's barely even a registered "relationship" at all.

But those aggressions? Start within each party. And cascade outwards from there.

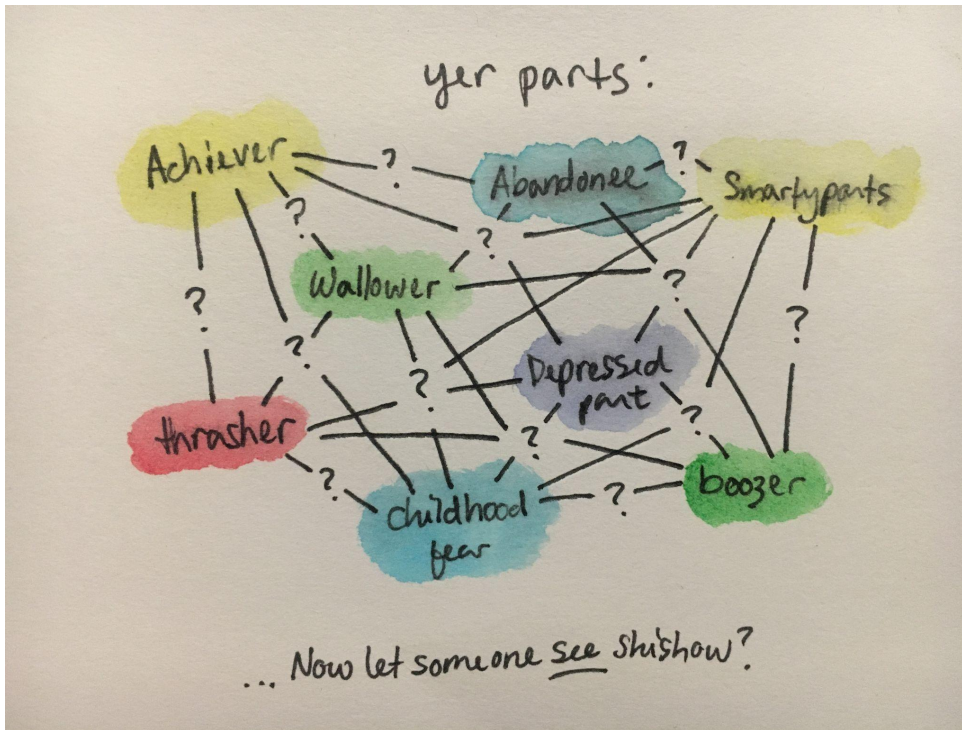
Too bad, most of us are unaware of our "parts." Or, we're ignoring them as best we can and just hoping for the best. Then wondering why we feel out of control, especially when others are thrown into the mix.

If we don't know who and what is riling us up from *inside*, we surely can't expect to engage with other people and experience peaceful, supportive, connections on the *outside*.

So let's talk about understanding our own parts - specifically the ones that are getting in the way of forming the relationships we really want. The ones that give us conflicting signals when it comes to forming relationships or being fully engaged in them without self-protective measures getting in the way.

And, ultimately, how to form better relationships in US, before we bother trying to bring that knife fight into our external interpersonal dynamics.

Let's look at parts, playing games that decompose our attempts for real VIT. And then discuss how it's largely because we have none of those relationship standards going on within our own brains.



“Parts can be differentiated by their position in the internal system and their roles in relation to one another. Protective parts, of course, protect. Exiled parts—the objects of protection—are the vulnerable ones that have taken direct hits in traumatic situations, often early in childhood with caretakers and other attachment figures. I call the meaning that children imbibe from these traumatic events, and the stories they go on telling themselves about themselves thereafter, *relational burdens*.

A relational burden goes like this: “I am unlovable, I’m not good enough, I’m bad, and I’m worthless.” In all my years as a therapist, I have yet to encounter a human being whose core pain doesn’t revolve around such a belief.

Exiles are usually young children who live in the past. They long to be rescued and redeemed, and so are at risk of gravitating toward people with traits similar to those who hurt them in the first place. But in any case, whomever the exile chooses, he or she seeks a redeemer.”

Toni Herbine-Blank

“When we start to fall in love, such mixed feelings are not unusual. The prospect of new possibilities, new beginnings, new worlds opening up causes our soul to expand. The doors of our one-room flat swing open and we feel excited about the possibility of reinhabiting the larger palace of our being. Yet something stops us at the threshold. There are no lights on in the neglected rooms and corridors of the palace. There are cobwebs in the corners and who knows what else? As we expand in love, we start to encounter closed-off parts of ourselves, with which we are not on friendly terms. This feels dangerous and threatening.

If I have shunned and denied my need for love, for instance, then when this need arises in a relationship, I won't know what to do with it - how to feel it, how to express it, how to handle it. It seems like a black hole that could engulf me and swallow me alive. What will happen to me if I acknowledge this need? Will I lose all my strength? Who will I be? My very survival appears to be at stake.

Standing on the threshold of this long-neglected part of myself, I feel raw and shay. I'm not an expert here. As my conscious identity - my facade of self-sufficiency - is undermined, a deeper unconscious identity threatens to emerge. I fear that I will become like a dependent, needy child, at other people's mercy. Demons appear, trying to discourage me from crossing this threshold. “Get back!” they say. “You closed off that room for good reason. Do you really think you can handle what's in it? Watch out! You might really lose it if you go in there!”

It's true: I might really “lose it.” But that's what makes love so intriguing: losing it - letting go of old, confining identities - is totally exciting AND totally frightening. This makes for a most interesting situation. I am pulled in opposite directions: expanding and contracting, wanting to go forward and wanting to maintain my defenses at the same time.

This is why intimate relationship can be such a potent vehicle for wisdom and awakening. It allows us to experience both sides of our nature - the call of our larger being and the fear and insecurity of our false self - at once, right next to each other. On this threshold, where part of us wants to expand and part of us wants to pull back, we stand on a razor's edge - the boundary of the unknown, and the frontier of a whole new way of being.”

John Welwood

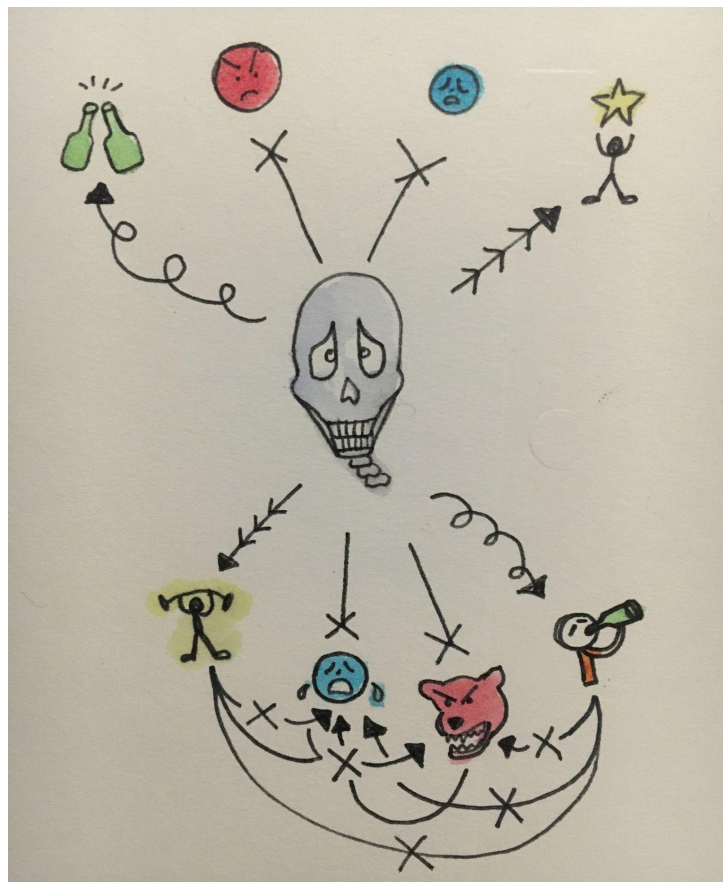
*We're polarized in our views on relationships between our own parts.*

Some of them agree. Some of them long for that experience. Some of them want to give everything in pursuit of the human relational experience. To fill the holes that were left agape from early experiences.

Others are giving it a hard "nay." What are you, dumb? Keep these assholes away.

And others, still, just pop up to distract us from all the confusion and mixed inner messages. Not solving anything in the relationship, but conveniently providing additional fodder to keep the thing limping along and the related pains hidden.

And wouldn't it be great to understand all those programs better, before you try to patch them up concurrently *in the process* of engaging with the most triggering situations for a CPTSD brain? Relationships?



**Exiles.**

The parts of us that we push away for a sense of internal safety - the ones that contain our childhood hurts leading up to the modern day - are probably screaming out for VIT.

They're the younger versions of us that either 1) never had VIT in relationships (including those foundational ones that set a brain on its relational course for the rest of its life) and still desperately long for the experiences - for the needs to be met. Or 2) they're parts of us that DID have VIT in relationships before, at some point, and desperately long for the experiences again. Even though other parts of us might not agree.

These parts desire VIT. They scream for connection. They believe that humans aren't always all that bad. In fact, they're excited about the idea of connection. Probably a little too much. They have very naive perspectives on social lives equating safe and fulfilled lives.

But they also carry the wounds imparted by failed relationships, abandonments, rejections, abuses, and disappointments. They want what they didn't receive. So they reach for that star and fear the eventual burn of finding out they're still too unacceptable to interact with other humans, all at once. A desire and a fear both sit in these parts.

These exiles are often extremely young pieces of our brains that still have the biological programming necessary for those stages of development - so if they're extremely young, they seek out relationships for safety and comfort, by mammalian design. They have inherent drive to meet these needs. And they may be haunted by past memories of having those needs and desires dashed in early experiences.

On the other hand, Exiles can also largely believe they're "unfit" for social engagements, thanks to the shitty lessons they've taken away from all of these events. Neglect and abuse are easily rewritten into logical tales of "us being at fault." Always gotta find a way to blame ourselves for what doesn't work out in the aftermath. It's the only way to exist without holding discrepant, discombobulating views of caregivers - THEY aren't bad, WE are.

And then we hold those judgments, at some level, in some parts, forever.

Meaning, these exiles can deeply want and need the same thing that they fear and shame themselves for.

All of it leads to a confusing mix of pains inside.

So, the short and skinny is simply that Exiles are already confused and polarized about their social strategies. Wanting, longing, and somehow also having perpetual nightmares about the very same things... either all at once or cyclically, when circumstances and thoughts change.

As complexly traumatized people, we've been neglected of basic human needs - connection, love, trust. We want to fulfill them. We NEED to, on an emotional level. But we've also deemed those behaviors as off-limits.

Bringing in the...

### **Protectors / Managers.**

The parts of us that aim to keep us safe from what could cause further injury.

These parts are probably prettttyyyyy sure that VIT are out of the question. At least, for those of us who opt into the lone-wolf strategy sometimes.

These Managers have picked up on the hurting messages of the Exiles - they feel the unfulfillments, rejections, and abuses. They don't want to experience those things again. They realize that social failures come with heavy burdens on the whole system - maybe months or years of lamentation and self-flagellation when things don't work out - and they don't want to put the host in danger of repeating those events again.

I don't think a single one of us feels great about the idea of ending up heartbroken and stuck in a cycle of inner criticism mixed with rumination about what went wrong and why. Or, the ongoing aftermath of that experience in which we're more hypervigilant and self-scrutinizing for (maybe) years. Stuck in a cycle of depression and social fear.

So... what do the managers and protectors do? They shut that shit down. They harden against the idea of relationships. They harden against other humans.

They form extreme, black and white views of our own species. Or of OUR place in the species. Either elevating ourselves above the rest of the herd, or burying our self-concepts deep in the manure piles they leave behind.

And to do so, to keep us away from other homo sapiens... they harden against our Exiles. They have to, or else the security of the host is at risk.

The Protectors tell the Exiles that real connection isn't going to happen, so shut yer mouth and sit back down. Relationships are more pain than they're worth. Yes, we have human needs... but unfortunately other humans don't meet them (whether that's their fault, ours, or a conglomerate of the two), so I guess we'll just keep to ourselves then. Get in line with the plan, because it's what's happening around here.

This, of course, doesn't make the exiles go away or feel better. It just keeps them stuck in their condition of longing and hoping, without the option for having their needs met.

Meanwhile, we create hardened exteriors and interiors to keep the safety plan working.

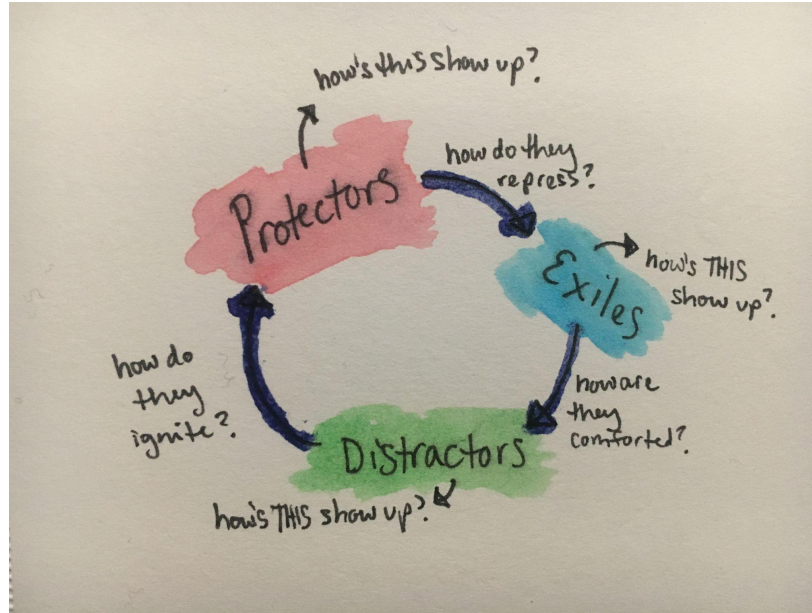
"DON'T feel. DON'T consider these sides of yourself. DON'T show your neck, ever, or you'll surely suffer a fatal wound. And DON'T dip into those softer pieces of you that still want to give relationships the ole college try, because once they're activated, you're going to feel the old familiar sting of loneliness until you wind up in another shit situation trying to amend it."

Instead, they insist that you just stonewall parts of your own psyche and biology. And hope that somehow keeps you safely protected from any potential stings.

Womp.

Not great. But it gets worse.





### ***Polarizations and cyclical parts activation patterns***

So just looking at Exiles and Managers, we can see problems arising.

The differing narratives and instinct to hunker down from danger create an even more polarized environment inside. So you can enjoy that sensation of your brain being put through a blender while you're wondering why the fuck you get out of bed every morning, too.

Fun!

Our exiles may already have oppositional wants and fears amongst themselves. Some reaching out for the comfort of human hands, and some - even closely related exiles - cowering from those same meaty appendages.

Then you add on the layer of the Protectors and Managers... now affirming that our fears of humans are correct. And furthermore, they must dictate our behaviors to keep us from falling into the line of fire again.

So, while they shut down Exiles, they also strengthen the concerns of the Exiles. They state that they're keeping those pieces of us shielded from potential harm. And in doing so, they solidify our self-protective strategies to stay distant from others.



If the managers shut out humans for safety, we end up in isolative conditions that could make the exiles feel very lonely. We don't really have human connection, period, because we keep others at a distance.

Alternatively, if we have the "socially oriented for safety" manager parts raging inside of us, we end up in a condition that isn't isolated - there are other people around....

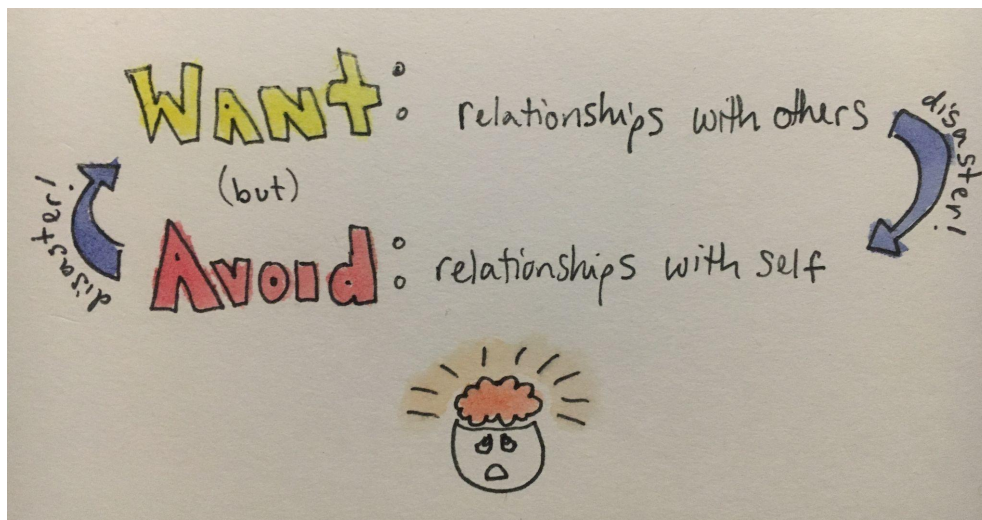
But it still might be as *lonely* as ever. We might feel as unseen as ever. We might have Exiles screaming as loudly as ever - saying "stay away from this situation, it isn't actually good for us." While the protector parts insist "but we have to stick around, because the alternative of leaving this relationship or abandoning this caregiving strategy is even scarier."

This means, we aren't REALLY capable of experiencing vulnerability, intimacy, and trust, so long as the parts aren't in agreement.

We're either purposely setting ourselves apart from it, putting up high walls to keep ourselves separate from potential hurts. Or, we're trying to force it into existence, when pieces of our psyche are screaming out that it is not the right fit or just not the right approach, considering what we've seen before.

Either way... we're polarized in our approach to relationship. All parts are not on board. So we're not truly letting people get close, opening ourselves fully to relationships that expose our soft underbellies, or believing in the intentions of the other party.

*We have unclear and unhealthy internal relationships, and then bring them outwards.*



**Distractors.**

Let's also talk about the role of Distractors (AKA firefighters).

So, if you're full of Exiled parts that have conflicting feelings and desires for relationships. And you're full of Manager parts that shut down your Exiles while also having their own polarized strategies for dealing with people. You're going to have a lot of inner strife.

Relationships are probably going to be very stressful for you. And you're going to feel unpredictable in the ways that you respond to them. Your insides are going to be disorganized. Lit up in oppositional directions. Confusion, running amok. Fear, following alongside.

And the system's response will be?

Distractors, rushing in to provide some comfort to the thoughts and emotions that are plaguing you.

Distractors in the context of relationships could definitely still be substance and addiction related. You might notice that you eat more, drink more, smoke more when you're in a socially oriented time period. And it might feel like it's inexplicable. Automatic. Compulsive.

Same thing with food. Relationship pains lead to Exiles throwing fits. That lonely, empty, void appears in the guts.

And in order to fill the cavern deep down inside... I guess we'll push a bunch of snacks into that space. Instead of feeling the pains in my guts, let's numb it out... and instead put ANOTHER feeling into that space. An unquenchable emotional hunger attempted to be filled through literal, physical, sustenance.

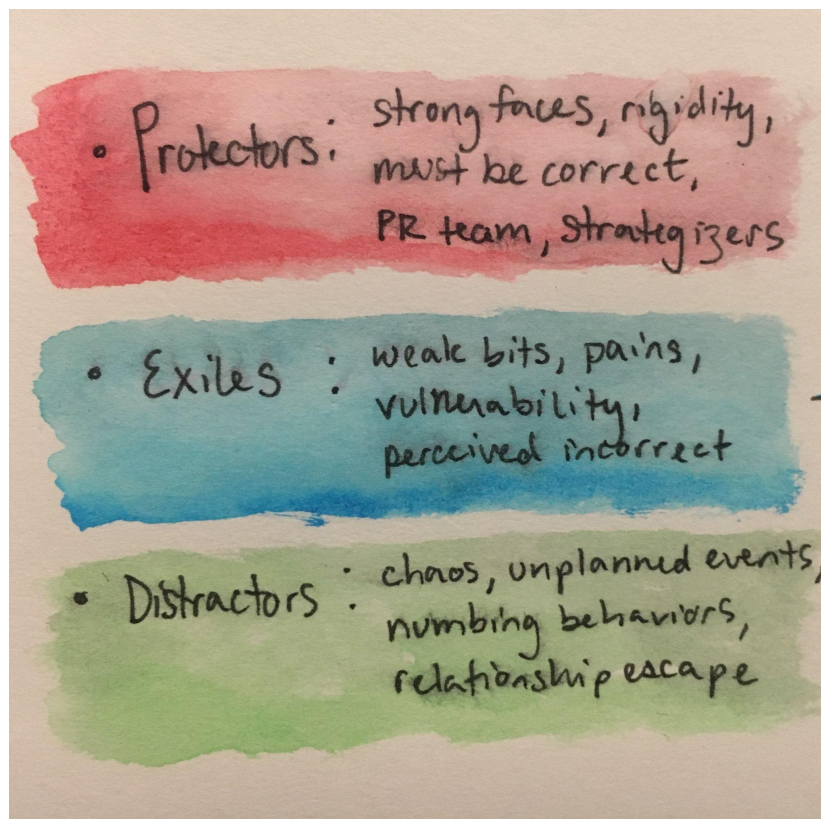
Just saying. Bad relationships lead to bad habits, leading to even worse brain spaces when your managers are chiding you for your decisions. Especially when you feel unable to end either source of distress and maladaptive coping.

You could also experience greater pulls towards disassociation from your Distractors in parts-driven and -sabotaged relationships. Just trying to "escape" from the social situation that's sparking your parts to activation. Trying to detach from it. Trying to ignore the triggers and "get through each day."

So, you might be more prone to freeze responses. Full system shutdowns. Days when you're unable to get out of bed or to respond to outside attempts at engagement. The system inside is just too riled up and split in its opinions to take in or respond to more information.

You might also be finding yourself on the internet more often; streaming your way to forgetting about the world or scrolling through garbage to give your brain something else to think about. Being in the same room, perhaps, as your unfulfilling relationship partners... but ignoring the stress those situations impart by keeping neurons busy with unrelated thoughts and behaviors.

*And, I have to say, I think another common Distractor tactic is to impart chaos into the situation.*



Rather than the Managers and Exiles working their shit out together, or dealing with our historical traumas that are influencing things to this day...

We can just create circumstances that are reminiscent of past patterns, because our parts know how to deal with those. Or, at least, they feel more comfortable with conditions that feel familiar. And our familiar feelings are... tumultuous. Emotionally unregulated. Aggressive or passive aggressive.

Plus, we don't have to address our lack of vulnerability, intimacy, and trust with the other party if we're both distracted by something else, together. We can trauma bond over the event, which puts a very temporary bandaid on all the relationship ailments we didn't know how to fix.

We can bring our Manager parts together to scheme and strategize together.

We can let our Exiles cry and scream with each other, as they're being activated by current day events that set off our old wounds.

We can let the Distractors pump more and more energy into the relationship dynamic, giving us a shared problem to focus on. Personal illness, substance dependency, mutual enemies, and helplessness definitely fit the bill.

Or we can just duke it out, using conflict as a Distractor from larger issues externally and festering problems internally.

If we don't want to feel what we're feeling inside ourselves in this moment, because "sad and confused" isn't a comfortable experience we want to deal with... well, we can transmute that into "rage and conflict." A much more comfortable experience for a lot of us. And one that we probably saw modeled in our families of origin on the regular.

*Of course, none of these Distractor strategies help us in our goal of having a close, connective, authentic, reliable relationship. In building vulnerability, intimacy, and trust. All they do is build codependency.*

They continue to rot away the foundation of the connection, while we focus on more convenient and comfortable problems - together or separately. We can be codependent together, or you can be codependent with your own Distractor parts, to keep everything necessarily tethered in place.

All the Distractions do is keep the relationship "technically" afloat. While keeping us "technically still alive and functional enough to get by." While they perpetuate the same system polarizations and conflicts internally, causing our parts to get more and more extreme over time. The inner turmoil only increases, and in my relationships at least, the external chaos builds, as well.

And those are your unhealed parts, undermining your attempts at relationships, in a nutshell. Erasing your ability for true VIT. Negating your ability for lasting, authentic, fulfilling, connection.

**The big point of the day is...**

*If we can't be vulnerable, intimate, or trusting by ourselves, within our own brain, how can we be with others?*

*And furthermore, if we're too internally hardened to even understand our own needs, how can we expect others to fill them?*

“Hell is other people.” Yet it would be much more accurate to say, “Hell is how we see ourselves in relation to other people.” Relationship conflict becomes a hellish struggle or deadlock when it re-evokes and snags us in some constricting identity from the past that is associated with profound psychic pain. And the conflict can go nowhere as long as we continue playing it out with our partner instead of addressing its source - the negative view of ourselves that has been activated, and that is undermining our basic sense of existence, validity, or worth.”

John Welwood

**Reflection Qs**

Which parts of you want relationship? Which ones are horrified by the idea?

Why? And why? What memories come up? What ideas start tickling your brain? What physical responses do you notice?

Do you feel prone to “unhealthy / untrustworthy connections?”

Where (which parts) are those initial social connections coming from?

What parts are showing up, pushing for those original engagements? How do they value themselves in relationships? What are they seeking?

What are they triggered by on an interpersonal basis? What signifies “betrayal of VIT” to you? How does that relate to your core wounds?

Which parts are NOT playing an active role in the formation of the relationship?

How are they going to influence things down the line when their concerns have been pushed aside? (i.e. protectors aren't onboard, but eventually they're calling all the shots & projecting like mad)

How do all of your parts within the system respond to each other once the connection is flowing?

Which parts believe you don't deserve to be fully seen? Which parts believe you'll be rejected? What pain points are they speaking to?

Which parts rise up to placate your whole system when relationships get rocky, often by causing chaos? What's the common outcome? Do they create more barriers to VIT? Or do you fall into trauma bonding, with false VIT?

How are these cyclical parts activations playing a big role in your relationship problems? Do they explain any of your disorganized, anxious, or avoidant attachment?



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How have your own unseen parts and failures to get vulnerable with them cascaded into relationship problems?

Are any of your parts willing to change their perspectives on relationships? Aim for gray tones between the extreme Black and White views.