

TMFRS

LET'S MAKE SENSE OF YER STUPID FUCKING BRAIN

Parts between Partners & self-Defense

What's standing in your way of healing connections?

Spring 2023

Internal system vs. internal system in relationship pt 2



Major Points:

Assessing our partner as “one-whole-unit” leaves us (and our therapists) baffled & frustrated.

Seeing the parts underneath allows for naming individual wounds, fulfilling our own needs, and healing our relational obstacles.

Our parts are activated by other people's parts.

When one partner goes “Protective” (Managers) or “Wounded” (Exiles), the other person will respond accordingly with THEIR Protector warriors or Wounded bunnies.

We replay old dynamics through our parts. Exiles recreate their original wounds to prove them right. Protectors attempt to overcompensate for these hidden pains and force validation of egoic correctness. Distractors keep us spinning in

numbed-out circles, like we learned in the family home.

When Protectors are dominating, communication is very difficult. They aren't great listeners for a variety of self-defensive reasons, birthed from experiences of dismissal and rejection.

These dynamics keep us stuck in cycles of unfulfillment and abuse. Unable to make progress, because we've shut out authentic connection through our self-protective cognitive programs.

Transcript:

We're back! And ready to start talking about the hangups and methods for overcoming relational parts battles, as defined by the experts who tackle couples counseling through IFS.

Last time we confronted the fact that we connect as one version of us - the Self with a capital S - and we present our most preferred face in relationships for as long as we can. Projecting our "best self" onto the scene and hoping that it's continually confirmed by our partner.

Only to find out... we lost our Big S Self energy somewhere along the way, and our conscious, egoic, cognitively based "best self" isn't always available, either. Instead, a lot of personality programs tend to crop up as we continue the relationship and mutual triggers get involved - both from inside and outside the relationship.

We dip into our self-protective strategies (Manager parts), our long-ignored wounds (Exiles), and our strategies for drawing attention elsewhere (Distractor parts) to keep ourselves afloat. No longer appearing to be "ourselves" to our partner or us. And they respond by doing the same. Activating THEIR corresponding parts to deal with what we're throwing at them.

Or, flip this conversation around, and say "THEY start showing up with Managers, Exiles, and Distractors, and WE unconsciously feel we have no choice but to engage the same way back at them." Let's not pretend that all the issues originate in YOUR system, they can and do come from both parties.

The point is, somewhere along the way OUR inauthentic, reactionary, parts are just reacting to THEIR parts. And vice versa.

No one is showing up as their true, authentic, connective Self anymore. Instead, protective strategies and the pains of unmet needs start to dominate the partnership until we're in a state of strangerdom and resentment. Being confronted by our least favorite aspects of ourselves, which are rearing up to keep us safe in the ways we learned earlier in life.

And at that point, considering our histories with aggressive, dismissive, unregulated humans... it becomes a hellish battle and no one knows how to strike a long-lasting treaty.

Maybe some parts desire peace and relationship - but others have the exact opposite programming and react defensively once again. Then, with many attempts of "refinding our real selves" so we can perform better in relationship that fail... distrust brews in the partnership and resentment for our unmet needs grows.

We feel as though they're choosing to withhold themselves from us - true vulnerability, intimacy, and trust - but the reality is that historical brain programs and secret sufferings are making those behaviors impossible for both people.

So we're here today to talk about the practitioner-defined methods for breaking this parts on parts cycle. For acknowledging and working on our own unmet needs, without hiding them or waiting for others to do it for us. And for healing our subconscious, shitty, shameful parts *through* relationships. Including those that have already been sent spinning down the toilet.

There *are* ways to overcome the reactive instincts to self-defend that rot out our relationships, with an IFS framework that really gets into the depths of our brain reactivities. And we're here to learn about them.

To get started, let's hear some overview words on this issue. What are we looking for from relationships? How does IFS make this a clear issue with clear resolutions, when it certainly wasn't ever before? And what are the realistic goals we should each have?

This is from **Parts and Self in Relationship: IFS with Couples** | Toni Herbine-Blank, MS, RN, CS-P

She says:

"I am a couples therapist with extensive training, and I love my work. Nevertheless, for years I struggled when working with couples. Despite exquisite mentoring and support, I worked much harder than I wanted to, and I was more invested in outcomes than I should have been. Over time, I became overwhelmed and exhausted. (That)... began to change as I learned the Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS) Model.

IFS views multiplicity of mind as the human norm and imports systems thinking, which was developed in various modes of family therapy, into the intrapsychic realm. The IFS approach altered my understanding of how human beings grow and have the capacity to transform, both internally and in relationship.

When we fall in love and commit to someone, most of us have no clue about love and intimacy. But we all want to feel safe, secure, and unconditionally loved. We all get disappointed with our partner at times; we all know that our partner can get distracted, preoccupied, disconnected, and unavailable.

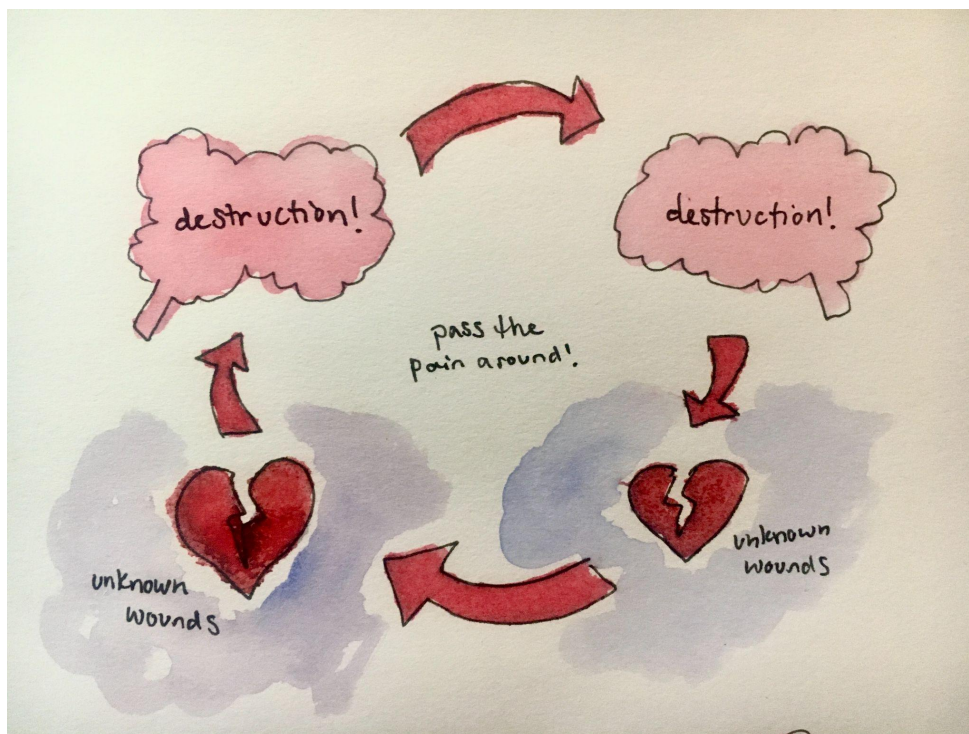
In IFS therapy, our aim is to help each client access the Self (big S) that will provide continual love and care to our inner family—a profound and transformative love. As a client once noted

after witnessing his partner fall deeply in love with her inner wounded child, *Finally I can really love and feel empathy for that little girl, knowing it isn't entirely mine to fix and heal.*

The IFS approach to couples therapy is a mode of treatment that aims to help couples develop a deeply satisfying relationship between many parts and two spacious Selves, letting our partner become an important—but not the only or primary—source of love.

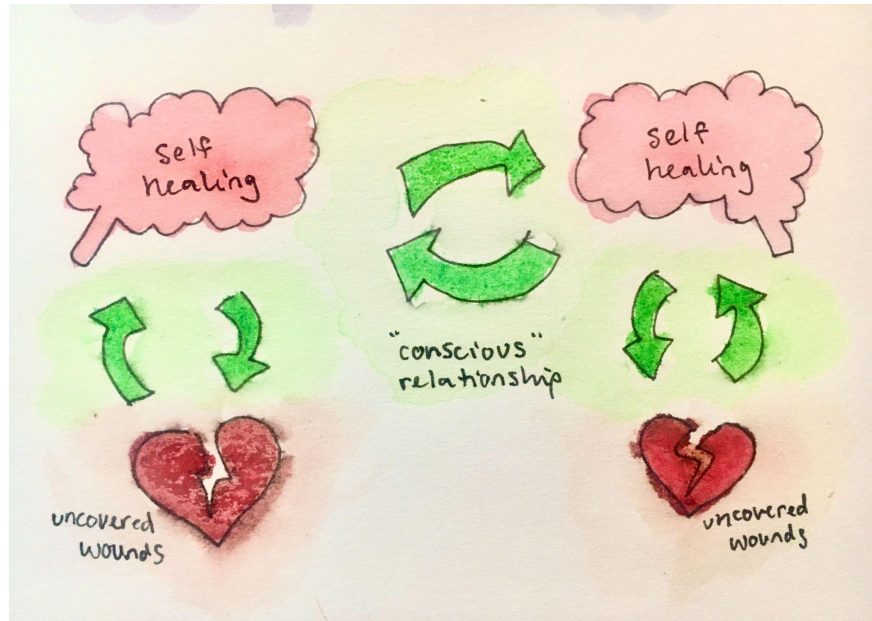
In this process of differentiated attachment, we learn to be the constant source of love and care for ourselves that we have always longed for. When our beloveds are no longer called upon to meet all our needs, they are free to notice the crucial role they *do* play in loving and supporting us. In this way, we learn to receive the care that is offered, while remaining present to ourselves when that care is not available.”

So, again, we hear 1) that relationships are overwhelming, even to practitioners trained to heal them. But 2) understanding individuals as being many parts that create a whole, we can understand how those smaller units are interplaying and attend to them instead of letting them undermine the attempts at reconnection. 3) understanding the wounds we still carry in those segmented parts is the key to understanding relationship dynamics. And 4) we can't foster healthy engagements if we aren't able to healthily care for ourselves. If we're denying our parts and expecting others to fill in the gaps, we're doomed to fail. We have to be knowledgeable and responsible for ourselves, first, to take the load off our relationship associate.



And that last point brings to mind Esther Perel's well known assertion: we can't expect one person to be EVERYTHING for us. We've developed high expectations for relationships that put too much pressure on another person to successfully fill. Especially, if we're anticipating that they'll remedy our hidden pains.

So, we either need additional relationship partners to get the support we need in all the ways we need. Which is still setting us up for lives of codependency. Just spreading it around, rather than focusing it all on one person.



OR we need to be able to provide some of the healing resources for our damn selves. Which, spoilers, we do.

That would be a lot easier if you weren't a blackhole of unknown personalities and memories, continually fist-fighting each other, now wouldn't it?

So, we can't heal by expecting someone to make us. We go into relationships having no idea what we're fucking doing, but expecting a fake, stand-in parent to show up and nurse our wounds cuz we haven't figured out how to do it so far.

It's normal to find out this is too lofty of a goal... but we don't tend to take their distraction or attentional limitations lightly. Our subconscious parts get all butthurt about it, expecting to have been saved by a new white knight in khaki colored jeans (if that's your vibe, it is not mine, send me the dirtball knights please). And then retaliates when it doesn't come true.

The REAL goal, according to this IFS practitioner, is to allow both parties to heal their own shiiiiit. But, unfortunately, this means having to know about one's own problems in order to start

the healing process. And, ideally, it's done through relationship with the Self thing, which puts them back into an expansive mode that fosters innate healing.

Now let's touch a bit further on the issue, looking at a little case study about unhealed parts perpetuating the unhealing of other parts, in two relationship partners. And the ways that relationship reveals our wounds, so we can target them and help ourselves.

Back to our friend John Welwood, *Love and Awakening* - what can I say, this book is gold. He tells us:

"Since we originally lost touch with ourselves in our relationships with others, that is where we often seek to find ourselves again. In truth, a good relationship CAN help us become more whole, but not in the magical way we often imagine. Instead, by calling forth deeper qualities of our nature that we have lost touch with, love also brings us up against confining identities that normally cut off your access to these qualities.

And this provides a special opportunity: we have to be pushed right up against our prison walls - which are made out of old self-images - before we can start to break through them and discover who we really are. Once we are up against these walls, the need for a conscious relationship becomes more apparent, and also more imperative.

Jill was a classic "woman who loved too much," who had spent three years trying to work out a relationship with a man who withheld his love from her. Even though Terry provided little in the way of emotional availability or commitment, she kept hoping he would finally come around, see the light, and open up to her at last. All these years her main focus had been on Terry: what he gave her and what he didn't give her. If only Terry would love her, she imagined she would be magically healed. Then at last she would feel whole and at ease.

Jill had been extremely close to an older brother when she was young, sharing with him a loving connection that she lacked with her parents. However, in later years when he came home from college, he would mostly ignore her, while she kept trying to win a few crumbs of affection from him. The bittersweet relationship reinforced an earlier setup with her father, where she saw herself as small and unlovable, and the Other as all-powerful and remote. Although she longed to win over a man and have him recognize her beauty, her inner setup made her choose men who rebuffed her.

What kept Jill's hope alive with Terry were times when the ache of her longing became so intense that her heart would break open and temporarily sweep away all her fear and insecurity. In these moments she became so lucid, present and sweet that he could no longer resist her,

and would briefly open up to her. These breakthroughs, though fleeting, strengthened her resolve to hang in there with him.

The situation only began to change when Jill realized that she was acting out with Terry what was essentially an inner drama. Having internalized the rejecting attitudes of her father and brother, she had grown up regarding her softer, feminine qualities as a deficiency. Only in occasional moments of closeness with her brother, when she temporarily won his affection, had she been able to appreciate herself fully.

And so when her heart would break open with Terry and her sweetness overflowed, she experienced what it was like to be fully present, fully herself once more. Gradually Jill began to realize that what she really wanted was her own wholeness which she could have only by embracing all of herself, rather than chasing madly after Terry - which only kept her trapped in an old identity. As she learned to give herself the deeper recognition she needed, her compulsion to win him over began to diminish.

Until this point, Jill's enslavement by an unconscious identity - as someone who only deserved crumbs - had allowed Terry to keep hiding out in his conscious identity - as someone who was too good to have to attend to others' needs. He maintained this stance as a defense against a much more threatening, unconscious self-image - where he saw himself a slave to others' expectations. As the oldest of five boys, Terry had come to believe that he had to hold the family together by doing his mother's bidding, or else she and the whole family would fall apart. Given this constricting sense of duty, the main way he had found to feel free and powerful was through refusing to give himself to a woman. When Jill would act like a "slave of love," this allowed Terry to avoid feeling his own inner sense of bondage.

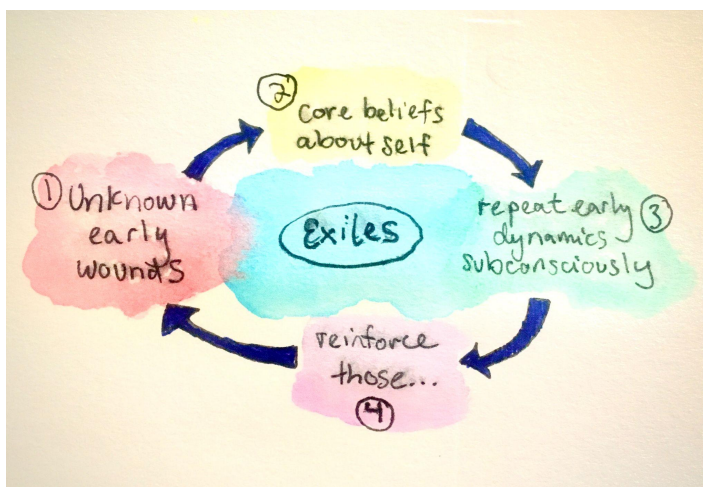
As Jill woke up from the trance created by her deficient self-image, and withdrew her fixation on Terry, he could no longer maintain his old position of power. This forced him to feel his own inner sense of deficiency, which he had been avoiding by letting Jill carry it for him. Though he was angry about this, he eventually began to respect her in a new way. Somewhere deep within he recognized the changing situation as an opportunity to face his own demons and loosen the inner shackles that kept his soul imprisoned. In this way, Jill's work on freeing herself helped to free Terry as well. Though they still had a long way to go, they were finally starting to see each other as real human beings.

Even in the best of relationships, two people's unconscious setups inevitably create a mutual entanglement that causes them both suffering. Yet, this suffering is also a call to wake up from the mistaken identities in which they are trapped. Some couples fail to recognize this call or reject it outright, succumbing to the entanglement instead. Others simply end the relationship. Not realizing that their own conditioned patterns form their prison, they see their partner as their jailer, someone who prevents them from feeling alive and free.

If a couple can respond to the call to wake up from their mutual trance, they can become powerful allies. Any step either of them takes will help the other. When one of them is no longer willing to play out an old identity, such as victim or pursuer, the other can no longer maintain the matching identity, as oppressor or distance. In bringing greater consciousness to these setups, two partners help each other loosen their attachment to the false self, so they can begin relating to each other more fully in the present moment, as who they really are.”

So, lots to take away from this excerpt.

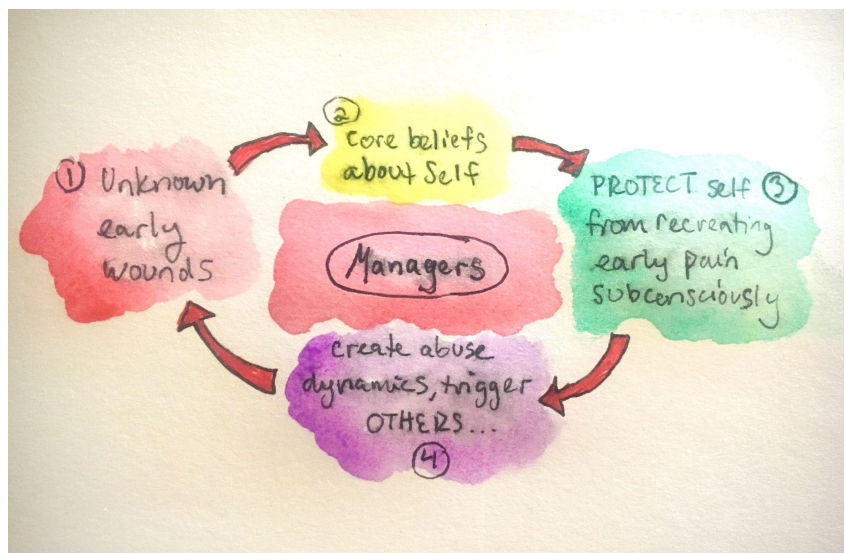
Jill's parts were drafted after her experiences with her father and brother, just like IFS said it would happen. She took clues from their behaviors and INjected (introjected) them. Internalized them to define her worthiness and identity on earth.



THEN, not seeing these parts inside of her, she entered relationships that repeated the same treatment. Jill, an overworking anxious attacher, endlessly trying to connect with her partner. Her partner, seeing these exiles, projected his own experience and identities onto the situation. His exiled caretaker parts and all their assumed pains didn't want to be dragged out of their caves. His protectors didn't want to become over-responsible for anyone.

So he showed up with rigid, emotionally closed off, dismissive parts of himself. Which only further validated his partner's unconscious beliefs about herself. And this drove the cycle to start all over again.

Terry, comfortably sitting in his Protector identities. Feeling safe by shutting his partner down. Jill, painfully stuck in her needy and neglected Exile parts, which may have been under the management of her own



Protective parts - the ones that say "a relationship IS safety, it WILL heal you if you just keep trying."

Neither party, able to see themselves accurately or make positive changes, because both were keeping each other frozen in their past identities. Until, that is, Jill escaped from the pattern. Got help in finding out where that original pain was coming from that drove the relational behaviors. Confronted fucked up core beliefs and re-programmed what she believed about her worthiness. Healed herself.

She took some pressure off Terry by doing all of this... but also threw the ball in his court.

If SHE changes, the dynamic HAS to change. If you aren't giving someone the behaviors that they expect and routinely respond to, that response has to change. And that, in turn, forced Terry to get real with what was happening for him internally and historically. HE couldn't ignore his own historical pains or the modern day relationship tactics that were developed to protect against those pains anymore. And had to take a hard look at himself, his partner, and the relationship to decide how he wanted to proceed, now that the usual engagement pattern was off the table.

Then, and only then, with both parties treating their hidden wounds - their unconscious identities - were they able to make any progress.

Now, the issue (to me) seems to come down to... yeah, the burdens contained in Exiles. The needs that aren't being recognized or self-fulfilled.

BUT, I would point the blame finger at Protectors for keeping all of this information out of our conscious minds. AND for popping up in reaction to the other person's pains, as those Protector parts attempt to manage the situation without getting burned.

It turns out, Protector programs are some of the biggest problems we face in relationships. Listen back to the past few shows and hear how many times I mention self-defense and self-protection. Things we don't immediately recognize as playing huge roles in our connective, non-obligatory, relationships... but it seems that they're pulling the strings all along.

So, as we talk about ways to quit fucking our connections up, Protective strategies are obviously a smoking gun.

Let's spend the rest of today talking about this issue, in particular. The Protector problems that emerge between two psyches that just want to stay safe, and how they shut down all intention for communication.

Returning to: **Parts and Self in Relationship: IFS with Couples** | Toni Herbine-Blank, MS, RN, CS-P. She says:

“Many couples who seek help have difficulty staying open and curious as they speak to me and to each other. They may have hyperaroused parts; or angry, defensive, or hypoaroused withdrawn and collapsed parts that make them inarticulate.

Noticing these patterns tells me about a couple’s ability to separate, or *unblend*, from reactive parts. If a couple chooses to remain together (and not all do or should {that’s a note I really appreciate her including}), the ability to have a loving, connected relationship with their parts while staying connected with their partner, even in moments of conflict, will be at the core of their work together.

I want couples to understand that conflict is inevitable and that their process during difficult conversations is much more important than the content of their arguments.”

And woah. Didn’t that just stop you in your cognitive tracks?

Conflict is inevitable. Yeah, I mean, seems like it. “Lol.”

The process during conflict matters more than the conflict. Yeah, sure, heard it before and it makes sense. Yet... it doesn’t have any applicable basis in my life, since all I’ve ever seen is shitty conflictual habits.

But, all of this comes down to our Protective parts? Fuck me, that’s something I can actually chew into.

Let’s bite down together.

Herbine continues:

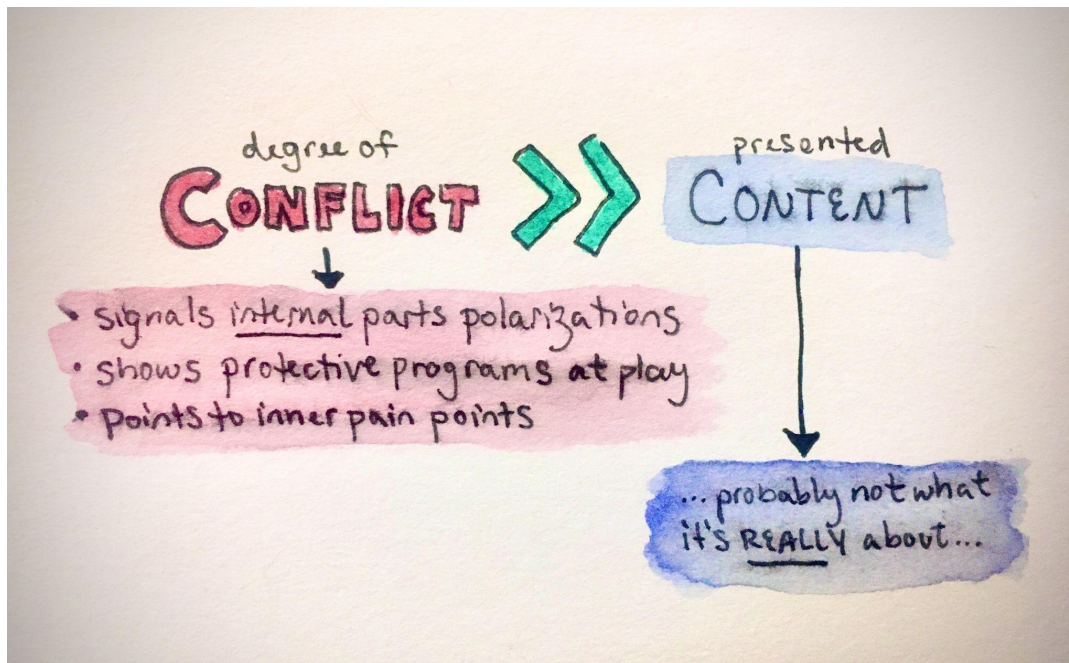
“To gauge an individual’s level of comfort with their internal system, I observe them looking to their partner for affirmation or invalidation in any given moment.

Some seem to say, I cannot be okay if you don’t think I am okay. If my experience of me is different from your experience of me, I feel anxious.

Upon discovering that they hold different opinions, many couples believe that one of them must be right and the other wrong. To cope with this threat, they try to convince the other to see, or at least to confirm, their perspective.

If this tactic doesn’t work, they might collapse, deny, or invalidate their own experience to recover the illusion of *sameness* and a temporary, but false, sense of safety. Or they might move toward being *right*, which immediately shuts down any shared experience and severs

connection. As I am paying attention to all of the above, I listen as well for the hopelessness and despair that spring up with the recognition that this person, their partner, is not the source of constant security they long for, but has instead become a source of pain.



Protective parts that developed out of relational rupture earlier in life gradually grow less vigilant and more trusting. With a healthy dose of Self-love, we develop more tolerance for other perspectives and loosen our grasp on the need to be *right*. Our hearts become less guarded. With an open heart, differences are not a threat to survival.”

Well, this hit me hard. With Protective parts in charge, the need to be right predominates the conversation, rather than the need to maintain the relationship or sense of trust within it.

So our relationships are reactive parts boxing matches for (perceived) survival.

In particular, as we heard in different words last time, Managers - generally our conscious identities, our egoic selves (small s) - need to be seen in the ways that they see themselves.

One tactic is to change our own assessment of self to match the assertions of the other party. Allowing ourselves to be gaslight as we abandon our own experience and adopt theirs. Hey, we're still technically safe, because everyone is in agreement about what happened and who that makes us.

The other option is that our Protectors put a halt to earnest communication trying to save face, to control the impressions of the other party, without the assessed option to forfeit. They shield

their experience, down to thoughts and feelings being unquestionable “correct.” They can’t step down, or the individual feels at risk of destruction.

“There will always be internal protectors whose job is to prevent vulnerable young parts from flooding the system with unbearable emotion.” They say.

So the very least we can do is to understand what they’re trying to do - what they’re trying to protect us from - so we can understand what we’re doing to others when we’re trapped in these rigid, dismissive, stonewalling parts.

If we can drop the need to be “right” and to be “safe,” we can start to actually speak to each other. Hell, before that interpersonal exchange even happens, we can start to actually speak to our own brains without the self-defense strategies overshadowing our cognitions. Then, we can figure out what wounds we’re trying to protect from being panged again by the other person. Which means we can work through the pain ourselves, to some extent, and relate honestly to our partner without all the flexing.

Until that happens, we have little chance of trauma-healing relationships. We’ll just keep knocking heads, trying to prove ourselves “right” to both them and us. (Read: “right” doesn’t only refer to accuracy here. It also means “worthiness, acceptability, capacity, lovability” and all the other fears we CPTSD-ers hold about ourselves.)

So Manager parts are a big deal.

They might often be on a shining pedestal, compared to all the subconscious parts they’re hiding from sight... (at least they keep us alive, somehow)... but they’re not allowing us to fully engage with our partner. Or, to even fucking listen to them. Or, to really hear ourselves, either.

Remember how we spoke about Protector projection last month? Well, the conversation is far from over.

Let’s hear what some familiar experts have to say about this relational Protector issue. The common tactics of protective parts, in detail. What to expect if someone’s hidden hurts are getting pinged, and defense strategies start emerging to ward off the shared pain. Coming back to their favorite move of all... shutting shit down.

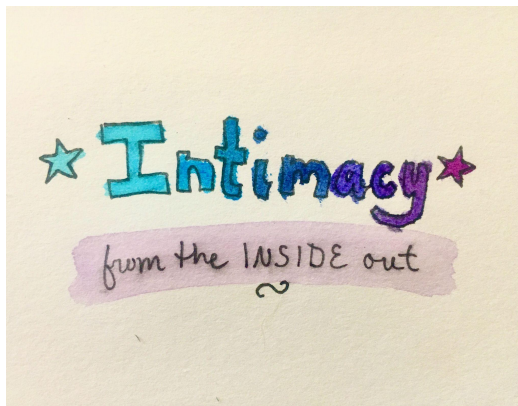
Including, if that person using the protective strategies, is... you.

I’ll be honest, it’s me. You’re going to hear all about how it’s been my own shitty playlist for years. Okay, let’s get into the dish.

To do this, let's go to **Internal Family Systems Couple Therapy Skills Manual** by Toni Herbine-Blank, MSN, RN & Martha Sweezy, PhD.

Yeah! That's right! We're taking Herbine-Blank, who we've heard great shit from several times now in the past few episodes... and Martha Sweezy, who literally co-wrote the book on IFS that we spoke about in February. And checking out the book they wrote together on therapeutic practices for couples conflicts using IFS.

Now, let me tell you first and foremost, that they lead with a framework known as "IFIO" - Intimacy From the Inside Out.



Hahaha, remember all that shit I rattled off about needing to know and accept your parts, offering them VIT, before you can possibly do it with others?

Now, let's take that idea of self-intimacy and use it to better our relationships, externally. Starting with... understanding how our own Protectors are keeping us from fully relating. Especially, as they relate to healthy communication - or, the obstacles that prevent us from doing it, to be more precise. They say:

"...Speaking about the other's impact truthfully without attacking, collapsing, or panicking also takes courage. Good communication requires both partners to stay in the conversation until everyone feels heard and understood, but when protectors feel threatened by differences, they can behave in ways that are far from ideal.

For example, a protector may refuse to listen because it:

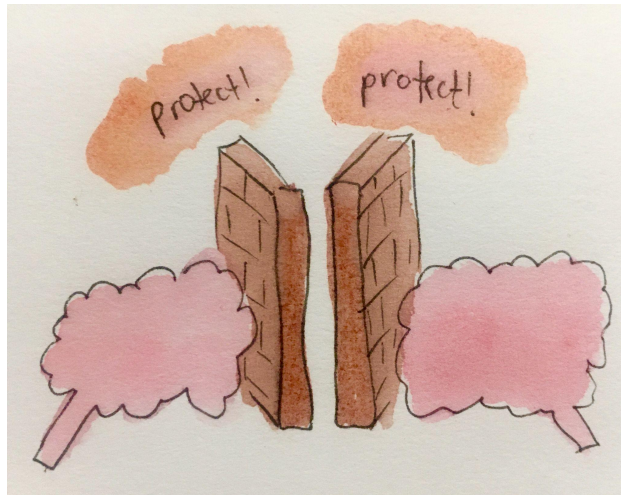
- Fears being infected by the other person's perspective
- Believes listening signals agreement
- Believes they will not be treated fairly and will not have a chance to rebut

Fearful protectors often:

- Move quickly to find a solution to the perceived problem
- Shut down the conversation by "agreeing to disagree"
- Stop listening and focus on formulating a counter-response because they believe listening signals agreement."

Okay, can we already stop there? Have you heard this list? I mean, yeah I just read it, but let's read it again. Because this just explained a billion things I've seen in relationships AND done wrong in relationships, myself.

I don't think I know anyone who DOESN'T do these things. So, thinking of the relationally traumatized? Maybe Protectors are the largest part of the parts party when we're trying to connect with others.



So they say:

A Protector may refuse to listen because it:

- *Fears being infected by the other person's perspective*

Hell to the fucking yeah. My brain has to be real careful about what information it takes in, because my cognitions can turn on a dime if someone else's perspective takes over. And my head seems to be programmed to take others' words as, by default, more reasonable than my own.

Introduce a new thought? My parts are prone to think and think and think about it. Often eclipsing my own views. Hey, hit up that whole like four month long perspective series from this time last year - that's what I was struggling with and trying to reason my way out of. Perspective infestations.

So. Protector parts at work, shutting out "infection" of other people's views? Yeah, it happens. Especially after they've already, finally, made up my mind about something and don't want to get stuck in an endless thought loop, reconsidering it all, to the possible detriment of my own views.

And thinking about it, this sounds like a lot of people I know, too. Rapid subject changers and disassociators when they just don't want to hear what you were halfway through saying.

Next one!

- *Believes listening signals agreement*

Been there, too. If you even entertain their idea, you're clearly letting them "win," my Protectors say. Better roll your eyes or demonstrate that you're tuning out somehow, so they realize you're not "falling for it." It's behavior reserved for the really shitty stage of relationships, when we're basically enemies who live to demonstrate disrespect for each other.

Don't encourage them. Don't let the conversation drift too far away from MY points, listening to theirs.

But let's also not forget that these parts have learned and projected onto every situation that I won't be listened to back. The same courtesy has... maybe never(?)... been extending in MY direction, the Managers say (accurately or not? Not sure), so why would we let them have this extra room for uninterrupted listening?

Not proud of these Protector admissions, but I can't deny these tactics being parts of past arguments. Especially around my family. All of these sound like my family, to a tee.

So, thinking of the ways that they argue and generally communicate in a one-sided way... maybe they are kindof valid fears. I WASN'T ever heard back then. Just not fair to project them onto everyone else. Note to parts.

Next point!

- *Believes they will not be treated fairly and will not have a chance to rebut*

(Hey, this one is similar to the last one for me. I'm not going to get to speak up for myself... so why would I let you bear your brain to me? I'll be spoken over, gaslit, interrupted, and led down unrelated rabbit holes - assumedly, just to exhaust me into submission - so no point I try to make is ever spoken or absorbed.

So... with all of that being considered, nah, I can't say I'm game to hear your story, if mine isn't considered "real" or "valid" or "of concern." If I'm not shown any consideration, care, or respect... the same kindness won't ever be extended to me, but I'm bending over backwards to give it all to you?

Nah, again, Fuckler, been through it too many times. There's no equality in that game. I know better.

That's what the Protector parts say with confidence. Told you, this was a revealing list.

Next set of bullets:

Fearful protectors often:

- *Move quickly to find a solution to the perceived problem*

Ohhhh yeah, is that bringing anyone to mind in your life? My mom comes right up, again. There's no talking about the actual issue - or, god forbid, the *emotions* behind it. Her kryptonite.

Instead, there's just this jump straight to simple solutions that obviously have already been considered, attempted, and proven ineffective. They're commonsense on a 5th grade level, but that's what she's going to suggest now to avoid actually engaging.

And that's it. That's what you're going to get from her.

A protective strategy, so she doesn't have to be too empathetic. She tries to jump that shark and get straight to "here's what you SHOULD do about it."

Have to admit, I've caught myself starting to do the same thing with others, in my later years. My Managers say "there's no time for this, #1. And I can't throw myself off an emotional cliff edge with this empathy I can't really control.... So instead I control the informational input to my system to limit the damage, #2. And just give my best advice to make the stream stop."

So I think I've probably also fallen into patterns of giving reductive solutions to problems at times, rather than being present WITH the problem, with others. Really, all from a place of trying to spare myself from overload in two different ways. But no matter what, those aren't strategies that lead to positive interactions or the room for VIT.

Shame on my Protector parts. I've been working with them to knock this behavior off. I try to only engage when we DO have the capacity for it, so we're not being assholes to save ourselves.

And to make that a consistent boundary for others, to lessen the confusion on their part.

It's a step in the right direction, at least, from my fearful Protectors outwards.

Onto the next!

- *Shut down the conversation by “agreeing to disagree”*

Yeahhhh, I do this. “I don’t have time for this and the conversation is going nowhere, we’re at a stalemate with no possible conjoined outcome... so... let’s just run off in different directions, with this massive trench in between us that we “just don’t agree on.””

I mean, are there times when this really does seem like the best strategy? Say, again, with family members? Oh fuck yeah. Do I believe wholeselfedly that it’s the WORST option in those cases? Nah, I really don’t.

But I agree that it isn’t fostering VIT. It’s more like agreeing on a reduced level of VIT and connection, because no one can lay down their side of the story to hear someone else’s.

So, it’s not serving larger relationship goals to take this strategy. It’s just trying to prevent digging out even larger holes in what’s already broken between the parties.

But... I understand why my Protectors get frustrated and exhausted enough at times to just walk away and accept the reduced relationship dynamic. Just easier that way. Especially, again, when you’ve already partially given up on the whole thing. As I do.

One more point!

- *Stop listening and focus on formulating a counter-response because they believe listening signals agreement.*

Hoooohohoho yeah. You’re goddamn fucking right they do. I’ve often been on both sides of this point - giving and receiving this shit behavior.

You aren’t really listening if you’re already planning what you’re going to say. But that’s the common human pattern of communication, isn’t it? I don’t know how many conversation partners I’ve had or currently have who actually turn down their own brain chatter in order to absorb the words. Seems like most people drift off halfway through a sentence to start formulating the way they want to front back.

And, again, in the midst of arguments, I can’t say that I’ve often behaved very differently.

I've spoken of "gotcha! Moments" before, as the medium of my family interactions, essentially. And I have to say, that pattern has wormed its way into my brain when I'm in disagreements with others.

"How do we shut this the fuck down, or what obvious logical point are they missing within the first 6 words out of their face?" And, that last point isn't always incorrect, btw. A lot of time you're combatting logical fallacies and mental heuristics that leave you going "what the fuck, I can't even let this sentence proceed without mentioning the fact that..."

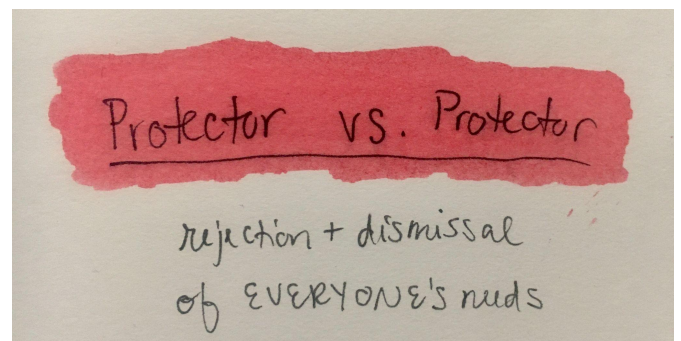
#triggered into reacting before you've even heard them out. All to save your own perspective. As though it's a fragile piece of glass that can't stand on its own.

... well... sometimes, mine *is* particularly fragile. And my protectors are very riled, trying to keep it safe.

BUT, it's still neglecting the relationship. Leaving your interaction partner alone, talking to a wall, while your brain has already moved on. Not great for the health of the dynamic or the connection between you.

And you got me there, this book.

You called my Protectors right out with the rundown on the ways they misbehave. But thanks to this trip down memory lane, I also realized where I learned those behaviors. Spotting them in my history really pointed out how I repeat them, myself, and how often I've chosen relationship partners with the same tactics.



Gotta keep that dynamic familiar and comfortable, right? Plus, then I could also project all my worst parts onto them, without seeing them in myself.

And that's the whole self-defensive pattern we're here to unravel.

I hope it's started pulling at some threads for you, too.

But I think it's well-past time for us to...

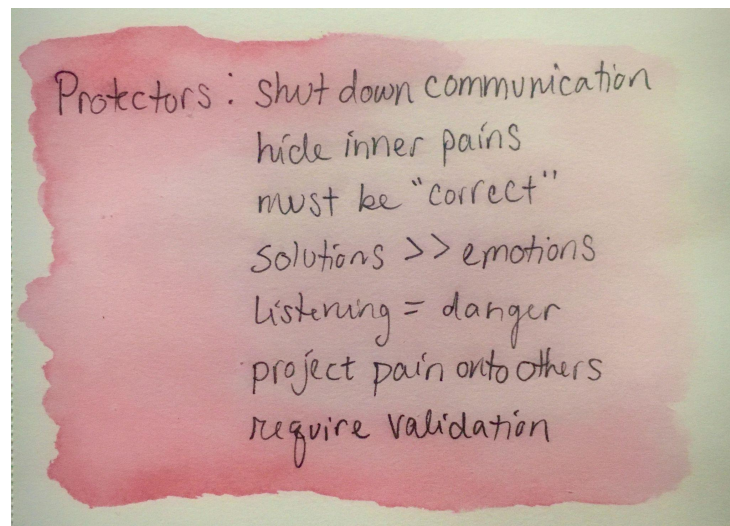
WRAP

Uh, if you're like me, you might have a hangover from this episode, as your brain starts rapidly reflecting on a billion and one examples of Protector parts misbehaving in relationships. From both the giving and receiving ends.

So, today, we learned that everyone shows up with their parts. Those parts can't be healed THROUGH another person, if their holder doesn't even know they exist or what they're hurting about. But if ONE party starts healing, the dynamic changes, and the OTHER person has to change gears in some way. Either the relationship ends or it continues in a way that allows healing for everyone.

But if both parties keep showing up as their unhealed, protective identities... the relationship is doomed to be stagnated. Trauma reactions will continue to beget trauma reactions. Both people will be trapped in versions of themselves that were developed in response to prior events.

We also learned that our parts will activate other people's parts in unknown ways. What are they holding inside of them that they're still over-relying on, avoiding, or recreating? No fucking clue from our perspective... but we'll try to force the "right" response out of them to validate our prior beliefs. We'll keep creating self-fulfilling prophecies to validate the old ideas we hold about ourselves.



Then we found out, again, that Protectors are projectors. AND cause a litany of other relationship problems. They keep us shut down, shallow, self-protective, and maybe not acting in everyone's best interest, because that could signify danger to our OWN best interest. (At least, as we understand it without doing any inner work ourselves.)

Protectors have a lot of destabilizing communication tendencies, meant to alleviate their own fears. Those fears are: being infected by the other person's perspective, believing that listening signals agreement, and believing they will not be treated fairly and will not have a chance to rebut. So these parts move quickly to find a solution to the perceived problem, shut down the conversation by "agreeing to disagree," and stop listening and focus on formulating a counter-response because they believe listening signals agreement.

Put together, we never listen to each other. We only try to prove ourselves "right" - in regards to accuracy AND acceptability.

And at that point... what chance DO we have of working with our parts together? Of working out any bugs in our relationship?

You know the answer by now, shout it out.

NONE CHANCE.

But what chance do we have if we accept that relationships have a greater purpose, like we learned back in VIT month number one? That we can use them to increase our own self-exploration and expansion, together? That they can be methods of healing a lot of messes we weren't trying to look at directly?

And we can both be better humans, for ourselves and for each other, throughout the (admittedly, very difficult and inevitable) process?

Well, let's come back next time and talk about the methods and outcomes of working with IFS between couples to find out.

I'll see you there, as we dip further into couples counseling on IFS.

Til then, ya already know.

Hail your Self! It's how we form connective relationships.

Hail your stupid fucking protector parts, which ruin everything if left unchecked. But they have their historical, outdated, defensive, learned reasons.

Hail Archie.

And cheers, y'all.

Reflection Qs

Have you ever found yourself at a “stalemate” with a relationship partner?

Was it impossible to understand their behaviors while viewing them as one continuous, cohesive, personality? Would it make more sense to assess them as multiple parts with diverse views/tactics under one skull? Does that better explain their changing reactions, emotions, opinions, and long-term plans?

Did you ever notice that when you “got strong,” they either “went weak” or flexed with dominative strength, in return? How did those interactions look, sound, and feel? Did they bring up any memories of prior situations, perhaps from childhood?

Did you find yourself feeling either much older or much younger in the relationship? Tapping into your childhood fears and insecurities OR “becoming the adult for everyone”?

Do you think these changes could be related to your parts being triggered? Can you pinpoint times that they fronted with an energy that seemingly “pushed” you into one of these corresponding templates? What did that feel like and what triggered the shift? Can you track those internal changes to similar events in your life history?

Have your relationships ever corresponded to feeling more wounded, in the same ways you were pained in childhood? Have your partners ever said the same?

Has your relationship history been plagued by battles centered around “being right”? (Not only in factual accuracy, but also in overarching feelings of worthiness, acceptability, and perceptions of goodness?) Do you have a version of yourself that you want/need others to validate?

When one partner insists on being “correct,” how did the other respond? Did they defend their own righteousness? Or did they change their own opinion to stay in agreement? Did either tactic lead to positive relationship dynamic changes long-term? Or did the conflict continue to fester?

Have you ever noticed unhealthy communication patterns, such as: refusing to listen, demonstrating unwillingness to engage, rejecting the other’s viewpoints, agreeing to disagree, prematurely seeking solutions, or disengaging to formulate counter-responses?

Would you say self-defense is a prevalent part of past relationships? From one / both parties?

What do you think could happen if self-protection wasn’t at the forefront of everyone’s mind? Would communication become more effective? Could your needs actually be revealed and met? Could you find real acceptance?