

## Section 1

### What is Internal Family Systems?

Internal Family Systems (IFS) was developed in the 1980s by Dr. Richard Schwartz. The approach originally emerged out of Schwartz's work with family therapy, specifically his observations that the same systems of interaction that exist among family members also exist internally within each individual. Over time, it evolved into a comprehensive form of psychotherapy that is used for treating a variety of mental health conditions, including trauma, depression, and anxiety.

### Key Concepts of IFS

1. **Parts:** The core idea of IFS is that the individual mind is made up of multiple "parts," or subpersonalities, each with its own characteristics, viewpoints, memories, and ways of interacting with the world. These parts are not viewed as pathological but as natural.
2. **Self:** In addition to parts, IFS identifies a core Self, which is described as the essence of an individual that is separate from their parts. The Self is characterized by qualities such as curiosity, compassion, and calmness. The aim of IFS is to help individuals access this Self to repair and integrate their parts. This concept intersects with the "self as context" notion in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).
3. **Managers, Firefighters, Exiles:** IFS categorizes parts into three major types:
  - *Managers:* These parts try to maintain control and protect vulnerable or injured aspects of the psyche ("Exiles"). They often attempt to manage interactions and events to prevent perceived harm or shame. Refer to Section 4 for common types of managers.
  - *Firefighters:* These parts act quickly and impulsively to douse emotional "fires." They might employ coping mechanisms like substance abuse, binge-eating, sex, or other impulsive behaviors to numb feelings or divert attention.
  - *Exiles:* These are parts that carry emotional pain, trauma, or shame. They are often isolated or hidden by Manager and Firefighter parts to prevent their emotional burden from overwhelming the system.
4. **Non-Pathologizing:** IFS is a non-pathologizing model, meaning it doesn't see parts as disorders or malfunctions. Instead, every part has a positive intention, even if the methods they use can be destructive or counterproductive.
5. **Integration and Unburdening:** The primary aim of IFS therapy is to foster a collaborative relationship between the Self and the parts. By doing so, individuals can heal and "unburden" the Exiles, leading to a symbiotic integration where the Self leads and the parts contribute in healthy ways.

6. **Mindfulness and Self-Compassion:** IFS incorporates mindfulness techniques to help individuals become aware of their parts and create a compassionate space for rehabilitation. This is a crucial step towards achieving the kind of internal leadership required for integration.

## Section 2

### Underpinnings of IFS Concepts

The concept of subpersonalities, as used in IFS therapy, has significant parallels and intersections with earlier psychological theories, notably those of Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. Both Freud and Jung introduced the notion that the human psyche is not a monolithic entity but is partitioned into different aspects or elements. For further reading about the multiplicity of the mind, I recommend the book *Your Symphony of Selves* by James Fadiman & Jordan Gruber.

#### Sigmund Freud:

Freud's structural model of the psyche divided it into three main parts: the Id, the Ego, and the Superego.

- **Id:** Represents instinctual drives and desires. In IFS terms, these could be likened to "exiled parts" that hold extreme feelings or desires and are often suppressed or managed by other parts.
- **Ego:** The rational, reality-oriented part of the psyche. It balances the demands of the Id and the Superego. In IFS, the "manager parts" could be likened to the Ego as they try to control the situation and protect the individual from harm.
- **Superego:** The moral or ideal self, full of "shoulds" and "oughts". This can be compared to some of the "manager parts" in IFS that internalize societal expectations and norms, striving to meet them at all costs.

While Freud's model was more rigid and less oriented toward healing through integration, the notion that there are differing aspects of the self – some of which are in conflict with each other – is a foundational idea that is shared with the concept of subpersonalities in IFS.

#### Carl Jung:

Jung's theories are perhaps more directly in line with the concept of subpersonalities. He introduced the concept of "complexes," which are emotionally charged networks of ideas and relationships, and the notion of "archetypes," which are universal, recurring symbols or themes that reside in the unconscious.

- **Complexes:** These are akin to what IFS would term as "parts" – they are subpersonalities governed by a core emotion, memory, or theme. Complexes can seize control of the

individual under certain circumstances, much like how "parts" in IFS can take over when they are triggered – a process called “blending” in IFS.

- **Archetypes:** The Self, the Shadow, the Anima/Animus are some of Jung's archetypes that bear resemblance to the types of parts discussed in IFS. For example, the "Self" in Jungian terms represents the unifying principle of the psyche, much like the "Self" in IFS serves as the compassionate core that can repair and integrate the various parts.
- **Integration:** Both Jung and IFS focus on the idea of integration – for Jung, it's the process of individuation where all aspects of the self are integrated. In IFS, the goal is to unburden and harmonize the different "parts" to allow the "Self" to lead effectively.

In summary, both Freud and Jung offered models of the psyche that included differing aspects, drives, or subpersonalities, although the terminology and specific mechanisms differ. Jung's ideas, in particular, resonate closely with the concept of subpersonalities in IFS. Both aim for an integration of these disparate elements into a harmonious whole, achieved through a deep understanding and healing of these internal dynamics.

## Section 3

### Scientific Support

IFS therapy, while grounded in clinical observation and practice, can also be appreciated from a scientific perspective.

#### 7. **Neuroscientific Support:**

Research in the field of neuroscience has found evidence that the brain often operates in a modular fashion, with different regions or networks activating for different kinds of tasks or emotional states. The notion of "parts" in IFS, or different subpersonalities or aspects of the self, can be related to this modularity of brain function. The "Self" in IFS, described as the compassionate core consciousness, could be seen as a balanced state of neural integration.

#### 8. **Evolutionary Psychology:**

From an evolutionary standpoint, it makes sense for the human mind to develop different "parts" or modules optimized for various tasks or situations. For instance, one might have a protective "part" geared towards danger response (fight, flight, freeze), while another "part" might be focused on social bonding. These different modules or "parts" could have evolved to handle the diverse challenges faced by our ancestors.

#### 9. **Consistency with Other Therapies:**

Many principles of IFS align well with other evidence-based therapies. For example, the emphasis on non-judgmental awareness and acceptance can be found in mindfulness and acceptance-based therapies, which have a strong scientific backing.

10. **Concept of Multiplicity of the Mind:**

The idea that the mind is made up of multiple, semi-independent processes or subpersonalities is not unique to IFS. It echoes in various psychological theories and has been explored in research, such as in studies on Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) or in the more common experience of ambivalence.

11. **Attachment Theory Alignment:**

IFS also aligns with attachment theory, which has a robust scientific foundation. In IFS, the mending relationship between the "Self" and the "parts" mirrors a secure attachment relationship, wherein the "Self" offers understanding, care, and compassion to the "parts."

Essentially, while IFS has its roots in clinical practice and draws from various therapeutic traditions, it can also be framed and understood from a scientific perspective.

## **Section 4**

### **Types of Managers**

In IFS, "Manager" parts are those subpersonalities that work proactively to maintain a sense of control and safety within the internal system. They often employ various strategies to manage day-to-day life and protect the individual from emotional harm, especially from the pain held by "Exile" parts. Managers are often the parts that we identify as our everyday "self," the aspects of our personality that help us function in the world. Here are some common types:

1. **The Critic:** This part often uses self-criticism or perfectionism as a way to motivate the individual to avoid failure or disappointment, which it fears would lead to shame or ridicule.
2. **The Organizer:** Highly focused on efficiency, organization, and planning. This part aims to keep life running smoothly to minimize stress and avoid unforeseen problems.
3. **The Caretaker:** This part is often focused on taking care of others, sometimes at the expense of the individual's own needs. It may believe that worth is derived from being needed or from pleasing others.
4. **The Achiever:** Driven by goals, accomplishments, and performance metrics. This part often pushes the individual to excel in different areas like work, academics, or sports.
5. **The Pleaser:** Seeks to maintain harmonious relationships by being agreeable, avoiding conflict, and meeting the needs and expectations of others.
6. **The Intellectualizer:** Uses logic, rationality, and intellectual analysis as a defense mechanism to distance oneself from emotional experiences.

7. **The Worrier:** Always alert to potential risks and dangers, this part is constantly in a state of worry or anxiety as a way to prepare for any negative outcomes.
8. **The Detached Protector:** Disconnects the person from difficult emotions to prevent vulnerability.
9. **The Controller:** This part seeks to control both internal and external environments to minimize unpredictability and protect against perceived threats or chaos.
10. **The Optimist:** Maintains a positive outlook and suppresses negative emotions or thoughts as a way to cope with challenges and disappointments.
11. **The Doubter:** Questions the individual's abilities or choices as a way to prevent potential failure or embarrassment.
12. **The Planner:** Always needs to have a plan or strategy for what could happen, attempts to foresee all possible outcomes to mitigate risk.
13. **The Taskmaster:** Pushes for constant productivity, often leading to burnout but aims to prevent laziness or underachievement.
14. **The Rationalizer:** Justifies or explains away feelings, behaviors, or events to avoid facing emotional pain or confusion.
15. **The Minimizer:** Downplays issues or feelings to make them seem less significant than they are, thereby avoiding dealing with them.
16. **The Nurturer:** Seeks to provide emotional support and care for the self but can sometimes smother or inhibit growth.
17. **The Perfectionist:** Drives the individual to strive for unattainable standards, often causing stress but aiming to avoid failure or criticism.