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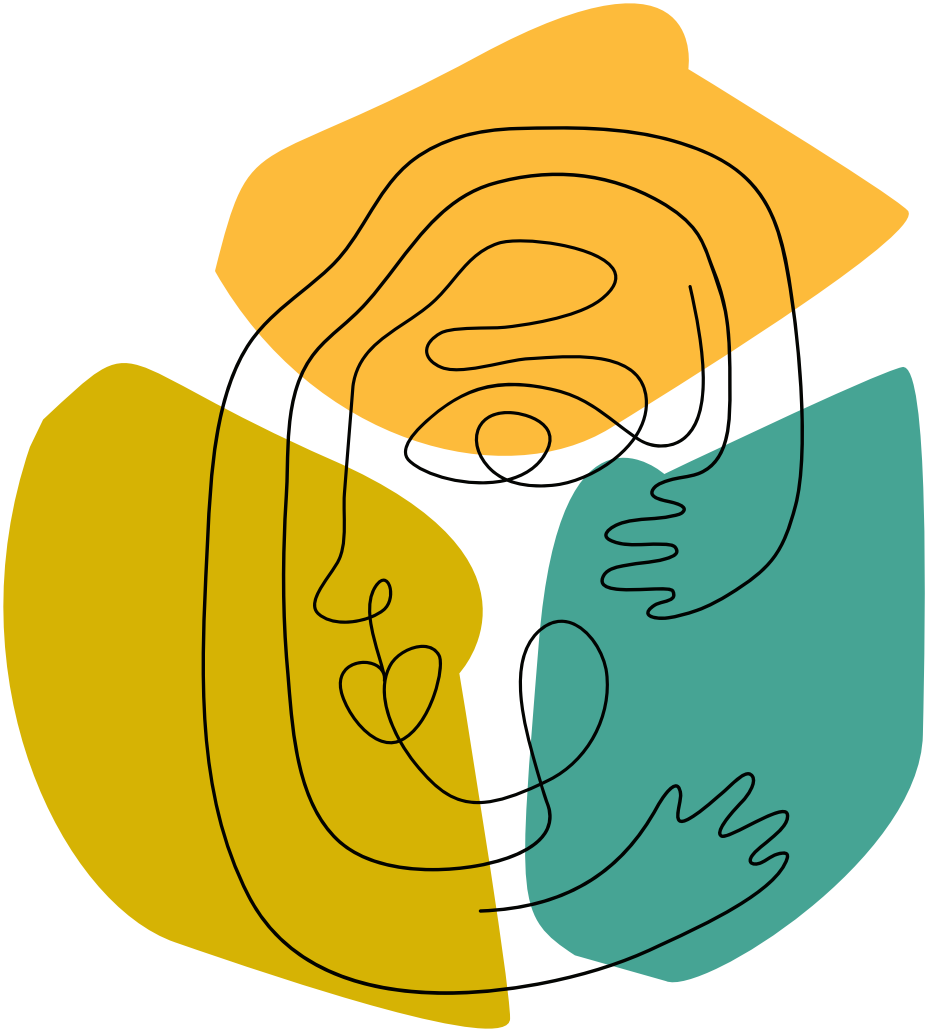

Healing Trauma &
Restoring Wholeness with
THE INTERNAL FAMILY
SYSTEMS MODEL

No Bad Parts

Excerpt

CHAPTER ONE

We're All Multiple

We were all raised in what I'll call the mono-mind belief system—the idea that you have one mind, out of which different thoughts and emotions and impulses and urges emanate. That's the paradigm I believed in too, until I kept encountering clients who taught me otherwise. Because the mono-mind view is so ubiquitous and assumed in our culture, we never really question the truth of it. I want to help you take a look—a second look—at who you really are. I'm going to invite you to try on this different paradigm of multiplicity that IFS espouses and consider the possibility that you and everybody else is a multiple personality. And that's a good thing.

I'm not suggesting that you have Multiple Personality Disorder (now called Dissociative Identity Disorder), but I do think that people with that diagnosis are not so different from everybody else. What are called *alters* in those people are the same as what I call *parts* in IFS, and they exist in all of us. The only difference is that people with Dissociative Identity Disorder suffered horrible abuse and their system of parts got blown apart more than yours and mine, so each part stands out in bolder relief and are more disconnected from and polarized with each other.

In other words, all of us are born with many sub-minds that are constantly interacting inside of us. This is in general what we call *thinking*, because the parts are talking to each other and to you constantly about things you have to do or debating the best course of action, etc. Remembering a time when you faced a dilemma, it's likely you heard one part saying, "Go for it!" and another saying, "Don't you dare!" Because we just consider that to be a matter of having conflicted thoughts, we don't pay attention to the inner players behind the debate. IFS helps you not only start to pay attention to them, but also become the active internal leader that your system of parts needs.

While it may sound creepy or crazy at first to think of yourself as a multiple personality, I hope to convince you that it's actually quite empowering. It's only disturbing because multiplicity has been pathologized in our culture. A person with separate autonomous personalities is viewed as sick or damaged, and the existence of their alters is considered simply the product of trauma—the fragmentation of their previously unitary mind. From the mono-mind point of view, our natural condition is a unitary mind. Unless, of course, trauma comes along and shatters it into pieces, like shards of a vase.

The mono-mind paradigm has caused us to fear our parts and view them as pathological. In our attempts to control what we consider to be disturbing thoughts and emotions, we just end up fighting, ignoring, disciplining, hiding, or feeling ashamed of those impulses that keep us from doing what we want to do in our lives. And then we shame ourselves for not being able to control them. In other words, we hate what gets in our way.

This approach makes sense if you view these inner obstacles as merely irrational thoughts or extreme emotions that come from your unitary mind. If you fear giving a presentation, for example, you might try to use willpower to override the fear or correct it with rational thoughts. If the fear persists, you might escalate your attempts to control by criticizing yourself for being a coward, numbing yourself into oblivion, or meditating to climb above it. And when none of those approaches work, you wind up adapting your life to the fear—avoiding situations where you have to speak in public, feeling like a failure, and wondering what's wrong with you. To make matters worse, you go to a therapist. They give you a diagnosis for your one, troubled mind.

The diagnosis makes you feel defective, your self-esteem drops, and your feelings of shame lead you to attempt to hide any flaws and present a perfect image to the world. Or maybe you just withdraw from relationships for fear that people will see behind your mask and will judge you for it. You identify with your weaknesses, assuming that who you really are is defective and that if other people saw the real you, they'd be repulsed.

> "When people asked me if I was ready for my life to change, I don't think I really understood what they meant. It wasn't just that strangers would know who I was. It was this *other* thing that started to happen to me: when I looked in their eyes, sometimes, there was a little voice in my head wondering, *Would you still be so excited to meet me if you really knew who I was? If you knew all the things I have done? If you could see all my parts?*"
>
> *Queer Eye* star Jonathan Van Ness[1]

A Brief History

The mono-mind perspective, in combination with scientific and religious theories about how primitive human impulses are, created this backdrop of inner polarizations. One telling example comes from the influential Christian theologian John Calvin: "For our nature is not only utterly devoid of goodness, but so prolific in all kinds of evil, that it can never be idle . . . the whole man, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, is so deluged, as it were, that no part remains exempt from sin, and, therefore, everything which proceeds from him is imputed as sin."[2] This is known as the doctrine of *total depravity*, which insists that only through the grace of God can we escape our fate of eternal damnation. Mainstream Protestantism and Evangelicalism have carried some version of this doctrine for several hundred years, and the cultural impact has been widespread and devastating.

We can't blame this sort of thinking solely on religion, however. Charles Darwin influenced generations of philosophers and politicians to assert that primal impulses drive everything we do. The idea that the human brain evolved from lower life forms and hence has evolutionary remnants from those animals—known as the *triune brain theory*—remains prevalent in psychology, despite having been debunked years ago.[3] The basic idea is that an older, more instinctual and reptilian core is surrounded by the more newly evolved thinking brain, which struggles to contain our more primal instincts. You can hear echoes of Freud here, as well. His *drive theory* is equally influential and pessimistic about human nature, asserting that beneath the mind's apparently civilized surface lies unconscious, selfish, aggressive, and pleasure-seeking instinctual forces that unconsciously organize our lives.

Willpower and Shame

The emphasis on willpower and self-control permeates American culture. We think we should be able to discipline our primitive, impulsive, sinful minds through willpower. Countless self-help books tell us it's all a matter of boosting our ability to control ourselves and develop more discipline. The concept of willpower, too, has historical roots—namely in the Victorian Era with its Christian emphasis on resisting evil impulses. The idea of taking responsibility for oneself and not making excuses is as American as apple pie.

Sadly, our worship of willpower has been used by politicians and pundits to justify increasing levels of income disparity. We're taught that people are poor because they lack self-control and that rich people are wealthy because they have it, despite research to the contrary. Studies show, for example, that lower income people become empowered and productive once they are given enough money to cover their basic survival needs.[4] However, the very real fact—especially considering the economic effects of the current pandemic—is that the rug could be pulled out from under most of us at any moment, and that threat keeps the survivalist parts of us humming.

Because this willpower ethic has become internalized, we learn at an early age to shame and manhandle our unruly parts. We simply wrestle

them into submission. One part is recruited by this cultural imperative to become our inner drill sergeant and often becomes that nasty inner critic we love to hate. This is the voice that tries to shame us or attempts to outright get rid of parts of us that seem shame-worthy (the ones that give us nasty thoughts about people, for example, or keep us addicted to substances).

We often find that the harder we try to get rid of emotions and thoughts, the stronger they become.

We often find that the harder we try to get rid of emotions and thoughts, the stronger they become. This is because parts, like people, fight back against being shamed or exiled. And if we do succeed in dominating them with punitive self-discipline, we then become tyrannized by the rigid, controlling inner drill sergeant. We might be disciplined, but we're not much fun. And because the exiled (bingeing, raging, hyper-sexual, etc.) parts will seize any momentary weakness to break out again and take over, we have to constantly be on guard against any people or situations that might trigger those parts.

Jonathan Van Ness tried and failed at drug rehab several times. "Growing up around so much 12-Step, and seeing so much abstinence preached in rehab and in church, I started to take on an idea that healing had to be all or nothing, which has really not been my truth. I was trying to untangle sexual abuse, drug abuse, and PTSD, and it was something that for me wasn't conducive to a never-never-smoking-weed-again approach. . . I don't believe that once and addict, always an addict. I don't believe that addiction is a disease that warrants a life sentence . . . if you ever mess up or can't string a couple of months together without a slipup, you're not ruined."[5]

There are 12-Step approaches that aren't so locked in to the rigid beliefs that Jonathan encountered, and the groups can be a wonderful context for people to be vulnerable and receive support. Also, the 12-Step admonition to give everything up to a higher power can often help inner drill instructors lighten up or even surrender. The larger point I want to make here is that any approach that increases your inner drill sergeant's impulse to shame you into behaving (and make you feel like a failure if you can't) will do no better in

internal families than it does in external ones in which parents adopt shaming tactics to control their children.

Don't think that this critique of willpower reveals that there's no room for inner discipline in IFS. Like children in external families, we each have parts that want things that aren't good for them or for the rest of the system. The difference here is that the Self says no to impulsive parts firmly but from a place of love and patience, in just the same way an ideal parent would. Additionally, in IFS, when parts do take over, we don't shame them. Instead, we get curious and use the part's impulse as a trailhead to find what is driving it that needs to be healed.

Parts Aren't Obstacles

The mono-mind paradigm can easily lead us to fear or hate ourselves because we believe we have only one mind (full of primitive or sinful aspects) that we can't control. We get tied up in knots as we try desperately to, and we generate brutal inner critics who attack us for our failings. As Jonathan notes, "I spent so much time pushing little Jack aside. Instead of nurturing him I tore him to pieces . . . Learning to parent yourself, with soothing compassionate love. . . that's the key to being fulfilled."[6]

Since most psychotherapies and spiritual practices subscribe to this mono-mind view, their solutions often reinforce this approach by suggesting we you should correct irrational beliefs or meditate them away, because those beliefs are seen as obstacles emanating from our one mind. Many approaches to meditation, for example, view thoughts as pests and the ego as a hindrance or annoyance, and practitioners are given instructions to either ignore or transcend them.

In some Hindu traditions, the ego is viewed as working for the god Maya, whose goal is to keep us focused on striving for material things or hedonistic pleasures. She is considered the enemy—a temptress much like the Christian Satan—who keeps us attached to the external world of illusion.

Buddhist teachings use the term *monkey mind* to describe how our thoughts jump around in our consciousness like an agitated monkey. As

Ralph De La Rosa notes in *The Monkey Is the Messenger*, "Is it any wonder that the monkey mind is the scourge of meditators across the globe? For those trying to find respite in contemplative practice, thoughts are often regarded as an irritating nuisance, a primitive agitator sneaking in through the side door . . . In meditation circles, some unintended consequences of the monkey metaphor prevail: that the thinking mind is a dirty, primitive, lower life form of no real value to us; it's just a bunch of garbage on repeat."[7]

De La Rosa is one of a number of recent authors who challenge the common practice in spirituality of vilifying of the ego. Another is psychotherapist Matt Licata, who writes,

> 'The ego' is often spoken about as if it is some sort of self-existing thing that at times takes us over—some nasty, super unspiritual, ignorant little person living inside—and causes us to act in really unevolved ways creating unending messes in our lives and getting in the way of our progress on the path. It is something to be horribly ashamed of and the more spiritual we are the more we will strive to 'get rid of it,' transcend it, or enter into imaginary spiritual wars with it. If we look carefully, we may see that if the ego is anything, it is likely those very voices that are yelling at us to get rid of it.[8]

The collection of parts that these traditions call the ego are protectors who are simply trying to keep us safe and are reacting to and containing other parts that carry emotions and memories from past traumas that we have locked away inside.

Later we'll look more closely at some of the ways people practice spiritual bypassing—a phrase coined by John Welwood in the 1980s. Jeff Brown explores the phenomenon in depth in his film *Karmageddon*: "After my childhood, I needed the kinds of spirituality that would keep me from allowing the pain to surface . . . I was confusing self-avoidance with enlightenment."[9] In fact, one central message in the canonical story of the Buddha's awakening is that thoughts and desires are the primary obstacles to enlightenment. As he sat in meditation beneath the Bodhi Tree, the Buddha was assaulted by a

series of impulses and urges—lust, desire, fulfillment, regret, fear, insecurity, and so on—and it was only by ignoring or resisting them that he was able to attain enlightenment.

That being said, the ubiquitous, Buddhist-derived practices of mindfulness are a step in the right direction. They enable the practitioner to observe thoughts and emotions from a distance and from a place of acceptance, rather than fighting or ignoring them. For me, that's only the first step. Most mindfulness approaches I'm familiar with subscribe to some version of the mono-mind view, which means they don't encourage interacting with thoughts and emotions—they're considered too ephemeral and not worth getting to know. Why would you want to converse with thoughts and emotions? They can't talk back, can they? Well, it turns out that they can. In fact, they have a lot of important things to tell us.

How I Came to Learn About Parts

I started out like everybody else thinking the mind is unitary and I trained as a family therapist for years (in fact, I have a PhD in the field). As family therapists, we didn't pay much attention to the mind at all. We thought the therapists who mucked around in that inner world were wasting their time, because we could change all that simply by changing external relationships.

The only problem was the approach didn't work. I did an outcome study with bulimic clients and discovered with alarm that they kept binging and purging, not realizing they'd been cured. When I asked them why, they started talking about these different parts of them. And they talked about these parts as if they had a lot of autonomy—as if they could take over and make them do things they didn't want to do. At first, I was scared that I was looking at an outbreak of Multiple Personality Disorder, but then I started listening inside myself and I was shocked to find that I had parts, too. In fact, some of mine were fairly extreme.

So I started getting curious. I asked the clients to describe their parts, which they were able to do in great detail. Not only that, but they depicted how these parts interacted with each other and had relationships. Some fought, some

formed alliances, and some protected others. Over time, it dawned on me that I was learning about a kind of inner system, not unlike the "external" families I was working with. Hence the name: Internal Family Systems.

For example, clients would talk about an inner critic who, when they made a mistake, attacked them mercilessly. That attack would trigger a part that felt totally bereft, lonely, empty, and worthless. Experiencing that worthless part was so distressing that almost to the rescue would come the binge that would take clients out of their body and turn them into an unfeeling eating machine. Then the critic would attack them for the binge, which retriggered the worthlessness, and they found themselves caught in these terrible circles for days on end.

At first, I tried to get clients to relate to these parts in a way that would shut them out or get them to stop. For example, I suggested ignoring the critical part or arguing with it. This approach just made things worse, but I didn't know what else to do than encourage them to fight harder to win their inner battles.

I had one client who had a part that made her cut her wrists. Well, I couldn't stand for that. My client and I badgered the part in one session for a couple of hours until it agreed not to cut her wrists anymore. I left that session feeling drained, but satisfied that we had won the battle.

I opened the door to our next session and my client had a big gash across her face. I collapsed emotionally at that point and spontaneously said, "I give up, I can't beat you at this," and the part shifted too and said, "I don't really want to beat you." That was a turning point in the history of this work, because I moved out of that controlling place and took on a more curious approach: "Why do you do this to her?" The part proceeded to talk about how it had needed to get my client out of her body when she was being abused and control the rage that would only result in more abuse. I shifted again and conveyed an appreciation for the heroic role it played in her life. The part broke into tears. Everyone had demonized it and tried to get rid of it. This was the first time it had the chance to tell its story.

I told the part that it made total sense that it had to do that to save the woman's life in the past, but why did it still have to cut her now? It spoke of

having to protect other highly vulnerable parts of her and it had to control the rage that was still there. As it talked about all of that, it became clear to me that the cutting part wasn't living in the present. It seemed frozen in those abuse scenes and believed that my client was still a child and in grave danger, even though she wasn't anymore.

It began to dawn on me that maybe these parts aren't what they seem. Maybe, like children in dysfunctional families, they are forced out of their natural, valuable states into roles that sometimes can be destructive but are, they think, necessary to protect the person or the system they are in. So I started trying to help my clients listen to their troublesome parts rather than fight them, and was astounded to find that their parts all had similar stories to tell of how they had to take on protective roles at some point in the person's past—often roles that they hated but felt were needed to save the client.

When I asked these protective parts what they'd rather do if they trusted they didn't have to protect, they often wanted to do something opposite of the role they were in. Inner critics wanted to become cheerleaders or sage advisors, extreme caretakers wanted to help set boundaries, rageful parts wanted to help with discerning who was safe. It seemed that not only were parts not what they seemed, but also they each had qualities and resources to bring to the client's life that were not available while they were tied up in the protective roles.

Now, several decades and thousands of clients later (and thousands of therapists doing IFS around the world), I can safely say that this is true of parts. They can become quite extreme and do a lot of damage in a person's life, but there aren't any that are inherently bad. Even the ones that make bulimics binge or anorexics starve or make people want to kill themselves or murder people, even those parts when approached from this mindful place—this respectful, open, curious place—will reveal the secret history of how they were forced into the role they're in and how they're stuck in that role, terrified that if they don't do it something dreadful will happen. And, that they're frozen in the past, during the traumatic times when they had to take on the role.

Let's pause here to explore the spiritual implications of this discovery. Basically, what I found is that love is the answer in the inner world, just as

it is in the outer world. Listening to, embracing, and loving parts allows them to heal and transform as much as it does for people. In Buddhist terms, IFS helps people become bodhisattvas of their psyches in the sense of helping each inner sentient being (part) become enlightened through compassion and love. Or, through a Christian lens, through IFS people wind up doing in the inner world what Jesus did in the outer—they go to inner exiles and enemies with love, heal them, and bring them home, just as he did with the lepers, the poor, and the outcasts.

IFS helps people become bodhisattvas of their psyches.

The big conclusion here is that parts are not what they have been commonly thought to be. They're not cognitive adaptations or sinful impulses. Instead, parts are sacred, spiritual beings and they deserve to be treated as such.

Another theme we will be exploring in this book is how it's all parallel—how we relate in the inner world will be how we relate in the outer. If we can appreciate and have compassion for our parts, even for the ones we've considered to be enemies, we can do the same for people who resemble them. On the other hand, if we hate or disdain our parts, we'll do the same with anyone who reminds us of them.

Some discoveries I made about parts:

- Even the most destructive parts have protective intentions.
- Parts are often frozen in past traumas when their extreme roles were needed.
- When they trust it's safe to step out of their roles, they are highly valuable to the system.

Burdens

Here's another key discovery I stumbled on: parts carry extreme beliefs and emotions in or on their "bodies" that drive the way they feel and act.

The idea that parts have bodies that are separate and different from the person's body they are connected to may seem strange or preposterous at first. Let me interject here that I am simply reporting what I've learned over years of exploring this inner territory without judgment regarding the ontological reality of that data. If you ask your parts about their own bodies, I predict you'll get the same answers I'm covering here.

For a long time, I didn't know what to make of this discovery. Regardless, this is how parts describe themselves—that they have bodies and that their bodies contain emotions and beliefs that came into them and don't belong to them. Often, they can tell you the exact traumatic moment these emotions and beliefs came into or attached to them and they can tell you where they carry what seem to them to be these foreign objects in or on their bodies. "It's this tar on my arms" or "a fireball in my gut" or "a huge weight on my shoulders," etc. These foreign feelings or beliefs (sometimes described as energies) are what I call *burdens*. It turns out that burdens are powerful organizers of a part's experience and activity—almost in the same way that a virus organizes a computer.

It's important to note here that these burdens are the product of a person's direct experience—the sense of worthlessness that comes into a child when a parent abuses them; the terror that attaches to parts during a car accident; the belief that no one can be trusted that enters young parts when we are betrayed or abandoned as children. When we are young, we have little discernment regarding the validity of these emotions and beliefs and, consequently, they get lodged in the bodies of our young parts and become powerful (albeit unconscious) organizers of our lives thereafter. These we call *personal burdens*.

Some of the most powerful personal burdens are similar to what attachment theory pioneer John Bowlby called *internal working models*.[10] He saw them as maps you developed as a child of what to expect from your caretaker and the world in general, and then from subsequent close relationships. They also tell you things about your own level of goodness and how much you deserve love and support.

There is another class of burdens that are called *legacy burdens* because they did not come from your direct life experience. Instead, you inherited

them from your parents, who got them from their parents, and so on. Or you absorbed them from your ethnic group or from the culture you currently live in. Legacy burdens can be equally if not more potent organizers of our lives, and because we've had them so long we marinate in them, so it's often harder to notice them than the personal burdens we took on from traumas. In this way, legacy burdens can be as prominent and unnoticed as water to a fish.

Parts Are Not Their Burdens

This distinction between parts and the burdens they carry is crucial because many of the world's problems are related to the error that most paradigms for understanding the mind make: to mistake the burden for the part that carries it.

It's common to believe that a person who gets high all the time is an addict who has an irresistible urge to use drugs. That belief leads to combatting that person's urge with opioid antagonists, with recovery programs that can have the effect of polarizing with the addictive part, or with the willpower of the addict. If, on the other hand, one believes that the part that seeks drugs is protective and carries the burden of responsibility for keeping this person from severe emotional pain or even suicide, then you would treat the person very differently. You could instead help them get to know that part and honor it for its attempts to keep them going and negotiate permission to heal or change what it protects.

Then you would help the person heal by returning to the now liberated "addict" part and help it unburden all its fear and responsibility. *Unburdening* is another aspect of IFS that seems spiritual, because as soon as the burdens leave parts' bodies, parts immediately transform into their original, valuable states. It's as if a curse was lifted from an inner Sleeping Beauty, or ogre, or addict. The newly unburdened part almost universally says it feels much lighter and wants to play or rest, after which it finds a new role. The former addict part now wants to help you connect with people. The hyper-vigilant part becomes an advisor on boundaries. The critic becomes an inner cheerleader, and so on. In other words, it's as if each part is like a person with a true purpose.

It's as if each part is like a person with a true purpose.

No Bad Parts

If the title of the book didn't trigger this question for you, I'll ask it directly now: What are we to do with parts that have committed terrible violence? What about those that have murdered or sexually abused people? Or parts that are determined to kill their person? How in the world can these be good parts in bad roles?

As I did IFS with clients it became increasingly clear that the burdens that drove their parts were rooted in early traumas, so in the late 1980s and early 1990s I came to specialize in the treatment of those who had suffered complex trauma and carried serious diagnoses like borderline personality disorder, chronic depression, and eating disorders. I also became interested in understanding and treating perpetrators of abuse because it became clear that healing one of them could potentially save many future victims in turn.

For seven years I consulted to Onarga Academy, a treatment center in Illinois for sex offenders. I had the opportunity to help those clients listen to the parts of them that had molested children, and over and over I heard the same story: While the offender was being abused as a child, one of their protectors became desperate to protect them and took on the rageful or sexually violent energy of their perpetrator and used that energy to protect themself from that abuser. From that point on, however, this protector continued to carry that burden of the perpetrator's hatred and desire to dominate and punish vulnerability. The part also was frozen in time during the abuse.

Thus, the kick in molesting a child came from being able to hurt and have power over someone weak and innocent. These perpetrator parts would do the same thing in their psyches to their own vulnerable, childlike parts. This process—in which protectors in one generation take on the perpetrator burdens of their parents while they were being abused by those parents—is one way that legacy burdens are transferred.

As we healed their parts stuck in their early abuse, their perpetrator parts could unload their parents' violent or sexual energies and, like other parts, quickly transformed and took on valuable roles. During this period, I had the opportunity to work with other kinds of perpetrators (including murderers) with similar findings. I remembered that famous Will Rodgers saying, "I

never met a man I didn't like," and I realized that I could say that about parts. I ultimately liked all of them—even the ones that had done heinous things.

Now, decades later, I've worked with countless clients (as have other IFS therapists around the world) and I believe it is safe to say that there are no bad parts. Spiritual traditions encourage us to have compassion for everyone. This aspect of IFS actually helps make that possible. IFS operates from the radically different assumption that each part—no matter how demonic seeming—has a secret, painful history to share of how it was forced into its role and came to carry burdens it doesn't like that continue to drive it. This also implies clear steps for helping these parts and the people they are in heal and change. It brings hope to the hopeless.

The Self

In those early days of helping my clients listen to and form better relationships with their parts, I tried out a technique from Gestalt therapy involving multiple chairs. Basically, a client sits in one chair and talks to an empty chair across from them, and for IFS I had them imagine that the part they were talking to was in that empty chair. And because the parts got to speak too, there was a lot of hopping back and forth, and to make it all work I ended up with an office full of chairs. I watched clients shift around the room, being their different parts, and it actually helped me learn a lot about the patterns among the parts. Then one insightful client suggested that moving from chair to chair might be unnecessary and that they could do the same work by just sitting in one seat. That method went fine for that particular client, and when I tried it out with others, they found they could do it that way too.

My main goal was to help my clients form better relationships with their parts. Some of the patterns I kept seeing with individuals were similar to what I witnessed as a family therapist. For example, a bulimic kid would be speaking with their critical part and all of a sudden, they'd become angry at the critic and yell at it. In family therapy, let's say this client is a girl talking to her critical mother and she gets mad and shouts at her mother. In such cases, we're taught to look around the room and see if anyone is covertly siding

with the girl against the mother—for example, the girl's father is signaling to her that he disagrees with the mother, too. This is when I'd ask the father to step back out of the girl's line of vision, she'd slowly calm down, and things would go better with her conversation with her mother.

So I started using this "step back" technique with individuals. I'd have them ask other parts to step aside so that pairs of parts could really dig in and listen to each other. For example, I might say, "Could you find the one who's angry at the target part [in this case the critic] and just ask it to step back for a little while?" To my amazement, most clients said, "Ok, it did" without much hesitation, and when the part was off to the side like that, my clients would shift into an entirely different state. And then other parts would step in (a fearful part, for example) and the more of them that stepped back to allow the client to speak, the more mindful and curious the client would become. The simple act of getting these other parts to open more space inside seemed to release someone who had curiosity but who was also calm and confident relative to the critic.

When my clients were in that place, the dialogue would go well. The critic would drop its guard and tell its secret history and the client would have compassion for it and we would learn about what it protected, and so on. Client after client, the same mindfully curious, calm, confident, and often even compassionate person would pop up out of the blue and that person seemed to know how to relate internally in a healing way. And when they were in that state, I'd ask clients, "Now, what part of you is that?" and they'd say, "That's not a part like these others, that's more myself," or "That's more my core" or "That's who I really am."

The Self is in everybody.

That's the part that I call the Self. And after thousands of hours doing this work, I can say with certainty that the Self is in everybody. Furthermore, the Self cannot be damaged, the Self doesn't have to develop, and the Self possesses its own wisdom about how to heal internal as well as external relationships.

For me, this is the most significant discovery that I stumbled onto. This is what changes everything. The Self is just beneath the surface of our protective

parts, such that when they open space for it, it comes forward spontaneously, often quite suddenly and universally.

Your Turn

So, that's my introduction to IFS. It makes a certain amount of conceptual sense to many people initially, but until you've actually experienced it, it's hard to fully get what I'm talking about. So now it's your turn. I'm going to invite you to try an exercise designed to give you a start on getting to know yourself in this different way.

Exercise: Getting to Know a Protector

Take a second and get comfortable. Set up like you would if you were going to meditate. If it helps you to take deep breaths, then do that.

Now I invite you to do a scan of your body and your mind, noting in particular any thoughts or emotions, sensations, impulses that stand out. So far, it's not unlike mindfulness practice, where you're just noticing what's there and separating from it a little bit.

As you do that, see if one of those emotions, thoughts, sensations, impulses is calling to you—seems to want your attention. If so, then try to focus on it exclusively for a minute and see if you can notice where it seems to be located in your body or around your body.

As you notice it, notice how *you* feel toward it. By that I mean do you dislike it? Does it annoy you? Are you afraid of it? Do you want to get rid of it? Do you depend on it? So we're just noticing that you have a relationship with this thought, emotion, or sensation. If you feel anything besides a kind of openness or curiosity toward it, then ask the parts of you that might not like it or are afraid of it or have any other extreme feeling about it to just relax inside and give you a little space to get to know it without an attitude.

If you can't get to that curious place, that's okay. You could spend the time talking to the parts of you that don't want to relax, about their fears about letting you actually interact with the target emotion or thought or impulse.

But if you can get into that mindfully curious place relative to the target, then it is safe to begin to interact with it. That might feel a bit odd to you at this point, but just give it a try. And by that, I mean as you focus on this emotion or impulse or thought or sensation and you notice it in this place in your body, ask it if there's something it wants you to know and then wait for an answer. Don't think of the answer, so any thinking parts can relax too. Just wait silently with your focus on that place in your body until an answer comes and if nothing comes, that's okay too.

If you get an answer, then as a follow-up you can ask what's it afraid would happen if it didn't do this inside of you? What's it afraid would happen if it didn't do what it does? And if it answers that question, then you probably learned something about how it's trying to protect you. If that's true, then see if it's possible to extend some appreciation to it for at least trying to keep you safe and see how it reacts to your appreciation. Then ask this part of you what it needs from you in the future.

When the time feels right, shift your focus back to the outside world and notice more of your surroundings, but also thank your parts for whatever they allowed you to do and let them know that this isn't their last chance to have a conversation with you, because you plan to get to know them even more.

I hope you were able to follow me in that journey and that you got some information. Sometimes what you learn can be quite surprising. And for me these emotions, sensations, thoughts, impulses, and other things are emanations from parts—they are what we call *trailheads*. This is because when you focus on one, it's as if you are starting out on a trail that will lead you to the part from which that thought, emotion, or sensation emanates. And, as you

get to know that part, you will learn that it isn't just that thought, sensation, or emotion. Indeed, it will let you know that it has a whole range of feelings and thoughts, and it can tell you about the role it is in and why it does what it does. Then it will feel seen by you and you can honor it.

That's what I started to do with my clients in the early 80s and an entirely new world opened up in the process of doing that. It reminded me of high school biology class when we looked in the microscope at a drop of pond water and were shocked to see all kinds of little paramecia, protozoa, and amoebas scurrying around in it. When we simply turn our attention inside, we find that what we thought were random thoughts and emotions comprise a buzzing inner community that has been interacting behind the scenes throughout our lives.

In this exercise you may have noticed that by simply focusing on one of your parts, you were separating (*unblending*) from it. In other words, suddenly there was a *you* who was observing and an *it* that was being observed. Like I said in the Introduction, you'll find this type of separation in mindfulness practices, and it's a great first step. Then you took the next step when you explored how you feel about it and noticed what other parts feel about it. When you feel angry or afraid of it, that wouldn't be the Self, but other parts that are still blended with the Self.

If you were able to get those parts to step back and open space, it's likely you felt a shift into more mindfulness. From my point of view, your Self was being accessed through that unblending. The simple act of getting other parts to open space brings the Self forward, and a lot of meditation works by simply getting you to that more spacious, emptier mind and enabling you to feel the sense of calm well-being that fills that space.

In this process you turn toward what you're observing and begin a new relationship with it.

But instead of simply observing what most traditions think of as the ego or as mere ephemeral thoughts and emotions, in this process you turn toward what you're observing and begin a new relationship with it, one that involves a lot of curiosity about it. Ideally, you can continue to deepen the relationship, and parts really appreciate it when you do that. Usually, they've

been operating by themselves in there without any adult supervision, and most of them are pretty young. When you finally turn around and give them some attention, it's like you're a parent who's been somewhat neglectful, but who's finally becoming more nurturing and interested in your children.

Exercise: Mapping Your Parts

Now I'm going to invite you to get to know a cluster of parts that have relationships with each other. To do that you'll need a page of paper and a pencil or pen. Again, focus inside and think of another part—not the one you just worked with, but a different one that you'd like to start with this time. The trailhead could be any emotion, thought, belief, impulse, or sensation.

As you focus on this new part, find it in your body or on your body. And now, just stay focused on it until you get enough of a sense of it that you could represent it on the page in front of you. It doesn't have to be high art—any kind of image is good. It could even be a scribble. Just find a way to represent that part of you on a blank page. Stay focused on the part until you know how to represent it and then draw it.

After you've put that first part on the page, focus again on that same one in the same place in your body and just stay focused on it again until you notice some kind of a shift and another trailhead—another part—emerges. And when that happens, focus on that second one, find it in your body, and stay with it until you can represent it on the page also.

After you've drawn that second one, go back to it again and stay with it until you notice yet another shift and another trailhead emerges. And then shift your focus to this new one, find it in your body, and stay with it until you can represent it on the page. Then, once again we'll go back to that third one, focus on it in that place in your body, and just stay present to that until still another one comes forward. And then shift to that one, find that one in your body, stay with it until you can represent it.

You can repeat this process until you have a sense that you have mapped out one complete system inside you. When you feel you've done that, shift your focus back outside to your surroundings.

It's likely that what you found is one *clove of the garlic*, as we call it in IFS. You might be familiar with the onion analogy used in psychotherapy—you peel your layers off and you get to this core and then you heal that and you're done. Well, in IFS it's more like a garlic bulb. You have all these different cloves, each of which has a handful of different parts inside that are related to each other, and maybe are all stuck in one place in the past. As you work with one clove, you'll feel relief from the burdens it contained, but you may not have touched other cloves that revolved around other traumas. So this mapping exercise is designed to bring forth one of your cloves—one subsystem within you. Feel free to continue and map out other cloves.

Now I'd like you to hold your page a little bit away from you, so extend your arms with your pad of paper all the way out and look at these four or five parts you've represented with a little perspective. How do the parts relate to each other? Do some protect others? Do some fight with each other? Is there some kind of alliance in there? As you start to form some answers, make a note to represent them on your drawing.

Now I want you to look at the parts again and explore how you feel toward each of them. When you're done with that, think about what this system needs from you. Finally, take a second to focus inside again and just thank these parts for revealing themselves to you and let them know again that this isn't the last time you'll be talking to them. Then shift your focus back outside again.

I recommend this exercise for many contexts. For example, if you have a pressing issue in your life, go inside and map it out and some of the answers will come to you—either about what decision to make or about what parts are making it so difficult. Mapping your parts is another way to separate from them, as well, because often we're quite blended with more than one.

NOTES

Chapter One: We're all Multiple

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4. For a thorough review of this and related studies, see Rutger Bregman, *Utopia for Realists* (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 2017).
5. Van Ness, *Over the Top*, 173.
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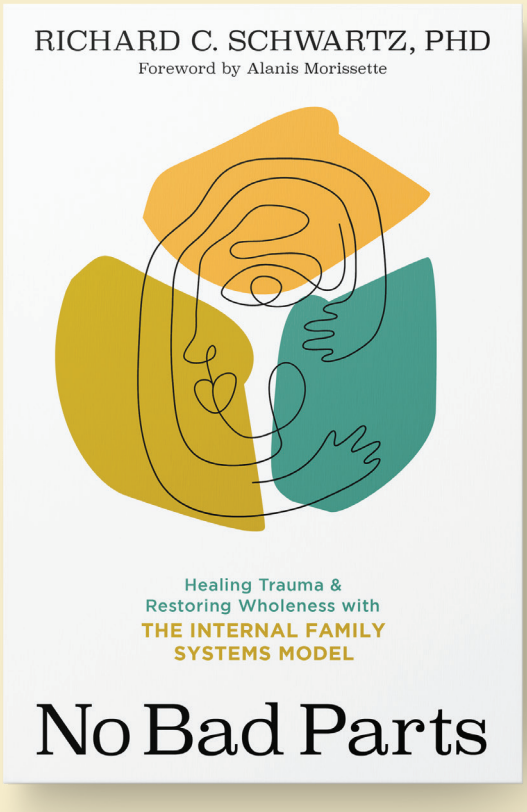
8. Matt Licata, *The Path Is Everywhere* 2017. (Boulder, CO: Wandering Yogi Press, 2017), 72.
9. Jeff Brown, *Karmageddon*, directed by Jeff Brown and Paul Hemrend (Ontario, Canada: Open Heart Gang Productions, 2011), documentary, 2 hours.
10. Saul McLeod, "Bowlby's Attachment Theory," SimplyPsychology.com, updated 2017, simplypsychology.org/bowlby.html.

RICHARD C. SCHWARTZ, PHD, earned his PhD in Marriage and Family Therapy from Purdue University, and coauthored with Michael Nichols Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods, the most widely used family therapy text in the United States. Dr. Schwartz developed Internal Family Systems in response to clients' descriptions of experiencing various parts—many extreme—within themselves. He noticed that when these parts felt safe and had their concerns addressed, they were less disruptive and would accede to the wise leadership of what Dr. Schwartz came to call the "Self."



Because IFS locates the source of healing within the client, the therapist is freed to focus on guiding the client's access to their true Self. This approach makes IFS a non-pathologizing, hopeful framework within which to practice psychotherapy. It provides an alternative understanding of psychic functioning and healing that allows for innovative techniques in relieving clients' symptoms and suffering.

In 2000, Dr. Schwartz founded The Center for Self Leadership (now the IFS Institute) in Oak Park, Illinois, offering IFS training for professionals and the general public. He is a featured speaker for many national psychotherapy organizations and a fellow of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and he serves on the editorial boards of four professional journals. He has published four books and over fifty articles about IFS, including Internal Family Systems Therapy, The Mosaic Mind (with Regina Goulding), and You Are The One You've Been Waiting For. For more, visit ifs-institute.com.

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