



## **Dissociated Parts, Traumatic-Implicit-Memory Child-Ego-State Parts, Conflicted Self-State Parts, Mental Construct Parts, and Pseudo Parts**

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I think it is helpful to recognize dissociated internal parts, traumatic-implicit-memory child-ego-state internal parts, conflicted self-state internal parts, and mental construct internal parts as being four qualitatively different phenomena. It is also important to be aware of several phenomena that are often considered to be internal parts by the internal family systems (IFS) community, but that are *not* actually distinct parts separate from the person's true/core self.

*Immanuel Approach good news (Jesus knows all this stuff):* If you find yourself feeling intimidated, confused, or overwhelmed by the complexity with respect to internal parts, remember the Immanuel Approach good news that Jesus knows everything, and is *not* intimidated, confused, or overwhelmed. With the Immanuel Approach, we help the recipient establish an interactive connection with Jesus and then coach them to engage with Jesus as the therapist. To the extent that they have a good connection with Jesus, He brings all of the needed expertise.

*Good news practical considerations:* If you find yourself feeling intimidated, confused, or overwhelmed by the complexity with respect to internal parts, you can also take a break and look at the "Good news practical considerations" section at the end of this essay.

**I. Traumatic-implicit-memory, child-ego-state internal parts:** With these *non-dissociative* internal parts, the person has traumatic-implicit-memory packages that carry enough child-ego-state that the person feels like they are at least partly blended with their child-self from the time of the original experience when these memories get triggered forward.

A. The internal subjective experience is that the person feels like they are *blended* - they will feel like their adult self is *blended with*, and *co-conscious with*, the child ego-state from the traumatic memory. When they choose to lean more heavily on the child part, and relate from the perspective of the child part, they will look, sound, and feel like a child from the age of the memory. They will use language as if they are a child at the age of the memory, and they will express thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and maturity as if they are a child at the age of the memory. In contrast, when the person chooses to lean more heavily on their adult self, and relate from the perspective of their adult self, they will look, sound, and feel like their adult self in the present. They will use language as if they are their adult self, and they will express thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and maturity as if they are their adult self in the present.

B. The person can *voluntarily* transition back and forth between the child part/child perspective and their adult self/adult perspective, *whenever they choose to*, without difficulty or confusion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>When the person is intensely blended with early, severe trauma (like my first experience of blending with my six-year-old dyslexia trauma and eighteen-month-old separation trauma, as described in "Now that We Have Tools that Work, We can Look at all this Stuff Internal Parts: Case Study & Reflections" case study), it can take a bit of effort to shift from the child perspective to the adult perspective. But this shift is still relatively smooth and

And even when they are relating from the perspective of the child part, they are still fully aware, and can easily acknowledge, that they are actually an adult in the present.

C. In my experience, implicit-memory child-ego-state parts don't use plural pronouns, such as "we" or "us."

D. In my experience, implicit-memory child-ego-state parts don't refer to the adult-self in third person, as if the adult-self were a completely separate person (for example, "*she* had to work on *her* term paper last night).

E. There are no amnesic barriers between the adult-self and implicit-memory child-ego-state parts.

F. Just as with dissociated internal parts, implicit-memory child-ego-state parts can carry issues/concerns that can hinder the process (for example, guardian lies, vows, and bitterness), and that need to be addressed in order to move forward.

G. Use of internal-family-systems principles and techniques are less helpful. Some of the IFS principles and techniques can help the recipient focus and articulate their thoughts and emotions from the perspective of being *inside* of the child memory experience, but the recipient does not experience a group of internal parts interacting with each other. (Again, the subjective experience is of being blended with the child-ego-state package carried in a *single, specific* traumatic memory that is triggered forward, as opposed to experiencing multiple different internal parts relating to each other with family-systems dynamics.)

H. As the toxic content carried in a given childhood traumatic memory is increasingly resolved, the strength of the subjective sense of blending with the child-self from inside the memory will steadily decrease. And when the traumatic memory is fully processed, including the time-line update discussed below, then the subjective sense of blending with the child-self from the time of the trauma will no longer occur at all. Rather (as described below), the person will just have the subjective experience of "I am my adult self, remembering this event from my childhood." And recipients who embrace an Immanuel-Approach lifestyle will become more and more "integrated" and coherent as they resolve more and more of their traumatic childhood memories. That is, they will increasingly live from their *non-blended* adult true-selves at all times, even including times when they are remembering and connected to these *previously-traumatic* childhood memories.

Child-ego-state parts only occur with traumatic memories: Internal *child* parts only occur with traumatic memories because part of successful processing for any experience is updating your neurological internal time-line, so that the experience feels subjectively like it is in the past. This update-the-time-line aspect of successful processing produces the subjective sense of, "I am now 65 years old in 2025, and I am *remembering* this experience that happened many years ago." And this subjective experience of *remembering* an event *from the past* is maintained even when

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easy in comparison to switching back and forth between the adult-self and dissociated internal parts. And again, with traumatic-implicit-memory, child-ego-state parts the person can *voluntarily* make the shift *whenever they choose to do so*.

emotions come forward with the memory package.<sup>2</sup> That is, even if I am feeling the emotions from the childhood experience as I recall the memory, my subjective experience is still, “*I am my adult-self remembering,*” as opposed to having the subjective experience of feeling like I am actually inside the child-self from the memory. *In contrast*, part of trauma is that this “update the time-line” aspect of processing is *not* completed, and the traumatic-memory package therefore carries the subjective experience of feeling like you are still small and young – you feel like you are inside your child-self from the memory, including the subjective sense of still being at the age from the time of the memory.<sup>3</sup> (This internal-timeline phenomena results in a handy clinical clue: the subjective sense of being young is a good indicator that childhood trauma content is triggered forward.)

**II. Dissociated internal parts:** Dissociation is a form of disconnection that a person’s mind sometimes uses to protect him from overwhelming pain. The mildest and most common form of dissociation involves disconnection from just the painful emotions, so that the person’s ability to feel the painful emotions will be dramatically reduced even though his ability to recall the rest of the content from the memory will be unaffected. Sometimes dissociation will also include amnesic barriers, so that the person has difficulty with bringing other components of the memory into conscious awareness as well. In the most intense forms of dissociation, the person has no normal conscious memory of any content from the overwhelmingly painful experience. When a person encounters pain that is particularly overwhelming, and especially when this first happens in early childhood, a part of his mind can be split off, disconnected, or *dissociated* from the rest of his normal consciousness; and the overwhelming pain is then carried in this separate compartment, or dissociated part. Carrying the pain in this separate, dissociated part, or dissociated internal part, enables the person to carry the pain without being overwhelmed or incapacitated. That is, the rest of the person’s mind can continue to function fairly normally, since it cannot feel the pain that is disconnected, compartmentalized, and carried by the dissociated part.<sup>4</sup>

A. Dissociated internal parts feel more separate than non-dissociative parts. The person's internal subjective experience is more like switching back and forth between being two different people, as opposed to being *blended*, with shifting back and forth between which side of the blend they are emphasizing. If the person is experiencing co-consciousness and the adult-

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<sup>2</sup>The memory for a traumatic experience can still carry emotions even after the trauma has been resolved. For example, the memory of witnessing a friend dying in an accident might initially be traumatic and carry toxic emotions that are part of the trauma. But even after the trauma is resolved the memory will still carry truth-based, appropriate sadness.

<sup>3</sup>Our Live Ministry Series (LMS) session #5, *Lisa: Childhood Surgery, Panic Attacks, & Abreaction*, provides a dramatic example of this phenomena. For many years Lisa had experienced panic attacks every time she got triggered to a five-year-old surgery memory because she would feel like she was actually back inside of her five-year-old self, going through the horrible experience of feeling like she was suffocating as they were using ether to put her to sleep. And then in the session, as she successfully completed processing for the memory, *including updating her internal time-line*, her panic suddenly disappeared as she realized, “I’m not there any more -- it’s over – I survived! I’m fifty years old in Dr. Lehman’s mentoring group, not five years old in the operating room!”

<sup>4</sup>Note that a person can experience dissociative disconnection, and especially dissociative disconnection from just the painful emotions, without having internal parts as part of the dissociative package. Furthermore, even if a person does have dissociated internal parts, he may not have *severe* dissociative phenomena. For example, a person may have dissociated internal parts but *not* have Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID).

self is forward, the person feels like they *are* their adult-self, and that they are hearing the voice/thoughts of a separate, different person inside, and then reporting this content to the outside world. When the dissociated part is forward, the person feels like they *are* the child part, with the adult-self as a separate, different person inside.

B. The person is *not* able to voluntarily switch back and forth, *whenever they choose to*, without difficulty or confusion.

C. Dissociated internal parts often spontaneously use plural personal pronouns, such as “we” and “us.”

D. *Functional alter* dissociated parts will refer to the recipient’s adult-self in third-person language, as if she is an entirely different person. Dissociated *child* parts, that carry part of the core-self’s autobiographical time-line, will acknowledge “I am \_\_\_\_\_ at seven years old;” but just like functional alters, they will also refer to the person receiving ministry in third person.<sup>5</sup>

E. As mentioned above, amnesic barriers can be present with dissociated internal parts. Amnesic barriers can block the adult self from knowing about the content carried by internal parts, amnesic barriers can block the internal parts from knowing content carried by the adult self, and amnesic barriers can block internal parts from knowing content carried by other parts.

F. Just as with implicit-memory child-ego-state parts, dissociated internal parts can carry issues/concerns that can hinder the process (for example, guardian lies, vows, and bitterness), and that need to be addressed in order to move forward.

G. Dissociated internal parts seem to appreciate it when I recognize the reality of their existence by using the same language they use, and sometimes seem offended and invalidated if I insist on using language that tries to downplay their autonomy (semi-autonomy) and importance.

H. Use of internal family systems principles and techniques is easy and often important (it usually seems easy and helpful to work with dissociated internal parts as if they really are a family system).

I. Functional alters: Some dissociated internal parts are what many call “functional alters.” These parts can sometimes also carry autobiographical memories,<sup>6</sup> but this kind of dissociated internal part is especially focused on a specific function. For example, many recipients have a protector/guardian dissociated internal part whose primary function is to keep the person safe. This becomes very relevant to emotional healing work because “keeping the person safe” usually includes preventing her from remembering or connecting with traumatic memories that

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<sup>5</sup>Note that in Sybil, parts of the core self from different ages had different names, and did *not* readily acknowledge that they were Sybil at different ages, but some of these parts *did* carry portions of her core-self time-line. So the internal parts structure can sometimes be more messy and complicated. From Flora Rheta Schreiber, *Sybil* (New York, NY: Warner Books, 1973).

<sup>6</sup>For example, you can have a function alter that initially presents as a protector/guardian part, but later turns out to be an eight-year-old child part that took on the role of protector/guardian.

are deemed to be too painful. Protector/guardian parts will block/sabotage emotional healing work until they become convinced that it is a good idea to allow the process to move forward.

J. One of the many wonderful things about the Immanuel Approach is that Jesus takes the lead with respect to integrating internal parts. In my experience as a facilitator, Jesus has provided this leadership so fully that I never worry about this question and never need to initiate anything with respect to this question. For example, at some point in the course of an Immanuel Approach session, an internal part will spontaneously say something along the lines of, “Jesus says that my job is finished, and that I don’t need to be separate any more,” and then the recipient will report, “The part just waved goodbye and disappeared into the light around Jesus.” And the recipient will report that any memory content the part carried is still present, but that there is just no longer any sense of an internal part that is separate from their core self. Or the recipient might report, “Jesus is telling this part that she doesn’t need to help protect me any more – He’s explaining that she doesn’t need to keep the memories separate any more because now they don’t have any poison in them, and now she can just go and do something fun with Him.” Then after a pause, “Now I see her running off somewhere with Jesus. She’s laughing and holding His hand.” And the recipient will report that any memory content the part carried is still present, but that there is just no longer any sense of an internal part that is separate from their core self. Or the parts just work more and more smoothly with Jesus as the person continues with Immanuel Approach work, there is more and more internal agreement regarding every aspect of ongoing Immanuel Approach work, and the whole issue/question of internal parts just comes up less and less.

To make this very explicit: My understanding regarding dissociated internal parts that do integrate is not that they are destroyed, but rather that they are integrated into the rest of the person's self. The person can still remember and feel everything the part carried – it is all still present in some way – but the person no longer perceives a separate internal part distinct from her core self. I think computer hard drives provide a good analogy. If you have a hard drive that is partitioned, you have to follow special procedures to communicate across the drive partition. The partition barrier is so real that the parts of the drive on different sides of the partition are usually referred to as different drives. My perception is that integration after healing is like removing the drive partitions. All the hard-drive space is still there, all the files from the different drives are still there, but there are just not partitions any more. You can work smoothly anywhere within the entire hard drive without any special procedure for communicating across drive partitions.

Recipients who embrace a lifestyle of regular Immanuel-Approach healing work become increasingly integrated and coherent as they continue to work with Jesus. That is, they increasingly live from their adult true-selves at all times, they increasingly feel like the same integrated, coherent person across all different situations, and they have fewer and fewer subjective experiences of perceiving internal parts that are separate from their core selves.

**III. Conflicted self-states for different tasks/roles:** Sometimes we develop specialized self-states (or specialized selves) to deal with certain specific situations because we feel unable to deal with these situations from within our usual core selves. The key here is that these situations need to be dealt with, but we believe that in order to succeed/survive, we need to be and act in ways that are not entirely compatible with who we want our core selves to be. So we somehow

create specialized self-states to be and act in ways that we don't want to own or live in as our baseline. These specialized self-states will, of course, *not* be fully consistent, coherent, and integrated with our true selves/core selves. And since the whole point is to avoid owning the thoughts, behaviors, etc required to "get the job done," we will try to keep the whole process out of conscious awareness as much as possible. We call the specialized self-states forward when they are needed, we send them back as soon as possible, and we try not to think about the whole uncomfortable arrangement in between.

For example, a Christian woman with deep rejection/loneliness wounds might feel like she needs to be in a relationship in order to prevent unbearable emotional pain. And if she believes that the only way to get a man to stay with her is to offer sex very early in the relationship, she might try to solve the problem by creating a specialized self-state whose task/role is to engage in the necessary sexual behavior. This will make it easier to avoid looking miserable during sexual intimacy, and also make it easier to distance herself from the confusion, guilt, and shame that results from the collision of her Christian values with her non-Christian sexual behavior.

My perception is that these conflicted specialized self-states develop slowly over time – they become increasingly strong psychological habits and increasingly reinforced neurological pathways as they are called forward over and over again. In contrast, it seems that dissociated internal parts can be created very quickly during extreme trauma.

My observation is that trauma-splinters getting triggered, along with sliding into non-relational mode, are usually (always?) tangled in with the formation of these conflicted self-state internal parts. But in contrast to the traumatic-implicit-memory child-ego-state parts discussed above, with these conflicted self-state parts the *core phenomena* at the center of the subjective perception of an internal part is the learned self-state package. (My perception is that many of the parts that the internal family systems (IFS) community works with are the subjective experience of being in a mildly-conflicted self-state while also subtly blended with traumatic implicit memory content that includes a child-ego-state package.)

Recipients with conflicted self-state internal parts will become more and more fully integrated and coherent across these different self-states as they increase their capacity, learn better relational maturity skills, and work with Jesus to resolve any trauma splinters and dysfunctional components included in these self-states. For recipients who persist with an Immanuel Approach lifestyle, these conflicted self-states will eventually be fully integrated into their core selves, and they will no longer have the subjective experience of separate, distinct internal parts – they will increasingly feel like the same person, living from their true heart, at all times and through all situations.

**IV. Mental construct internal parts:** Sometimes our minds will generate a mental-construct internal part for a very specific purpose. For example, toward the front end of Charlotte's personal healing journey we realized that she often had difficulty figuring out what she really thought, felt, or wanted. And if she did figure out what she thought, felt, and wanted, she had great difficulty with speaking up for herself. Furthermore, if she did figure out what she thought, felt, and wanted, and spoke up for herself, I often had a hard time hearing her. In this context, as I was facilitating a session for her she reported, "I'm getting a mental image of a young woman wearing a pants suit. She has brown hair with auburn highlights, and she's wearing it in a pixie

cut. She refers to herself as ‘Suyak’ – a term-of-endearment nickname one of my grade-school friends used to call me – but she doesn’t really look like me.”

The most important point quickly became clear: Suyak was strong, confident, and opinionated – she knew what she thought, she knew what she felt, she knew what she wanted, and she could speak up for herself. Charlotte was very clear that she was not consciously, intentionally imagining Suyak. Rather, Charlotte’s perception was that Suyak was a spontaneous mental construct, produced by her unconscious mind with the very specific purpose of compensating for Charlotte’s lack of confidence, difficulty identifying what was in her own heart, and lack of voice. Charlotte never knew what Suyak was going to think or say or do. But *after* Suyak spoke up about something, Charlotte would recognize, “Why yes, that *is* what I think and feel and want!”

For example, on one occasion when Charlotte and I were arguing about something, Charlotte was having difficulty with focusing and speaking her thoughts, feelings, and preferences. But when I asked, “So what does Suyak think?” Charlotte promptly responded with, “She thinks you’re being selfish,” and then paused and continued with, “Hmm...Yes...I do think you’re being selfish.”<sup>7</sup> Trying to decide what to do for our date nights provides another example. I would usually start with sharing my thoughts, feelings, and preferences with respect to possible activities for the evening, and then would ask Charlotte, “So what would *you* like to do?” She would usually respond with, “I don’t know.” But when I would then ask, “What would Suyak like to do?” Charlotte would quickly identify thoughts, feelings, and preferences coming forward. And with a brief pause for a bit of introspection, would recognize that they were accurate.

When healing and growth resolve the issues that cause the need for a particular mental-construct internal part, the part will just quietly disappear. For example, a couple of years after the experiences described above, when I asked Charlotte about Suyak she replied with something along the lines of, “She’s not there any more. I think she was just a mental construct to help me recognize and say what I was really thinking, feeling, and wanting, and I don’t need her anymore.” Once again, recipients who embrace a lifestyle of regular Immanuel-Approach healing work become increasingly integrated and coherent as they continue to work with Jesus – they increasingly live from their adult true-selves at all times, they increasingly feel like the same integrated, coherent person across all different situations, and they have fewer and fewer subjective experiences of perceiving internal parts that are separate from their core selves.

**V. Combination packages:** The different internal parts phenomena described above can also mix together to produce a variety of combination packages. For example:

When a person experiences early severe trauma and learns to produce dissociated internal parts as a core part of their psychological survival, they will often end up weaving dissociative-parts phenomena into many aspects of their psychological defenses, even in fairly minor situations.

When a person who learns to produce dissociated parts as a routine coping strategy also learns to generate mental constructs, a wide variety of mental construct imagery will be woven into

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<sup>7</sup>I was grateful that Charlotte’s Suyak mental construct was helping her to identify and communicate what was really in her heart, but I was also often a bit mortified by the bluntness and accuracy of Suyak’s observations.

their experience of dissociated internal parts.

The combination of the child-ego-state package from a triggered traumatic memory, non-relational mode (see below), and a conflicted self-state can produce the subjective experience of an internal part that is *very* different from the person's usual adult true self (even without dissociation being involved).

As mentioned above, I think many of the parts that the IFS community works with are the subjective experience of being in a mildly-conflicted self-state while also subtly blended with traumatic implicit memory content that includes a child-ego-state package.

**VI. Pseudo parts (phenomena that are *not* internal parts):** There are a number of common phenomena that are sometimes mistaken for internal parts: Shifting back and forth between relational mode and non-relational mode, feeling ambivalence regarding a decision, shifting into different *non-conflicted* self-states for different tasks/roles, and an internalized others.

**A. Shifting back and forth between relational mode and non-relational mode:** As discussed at great length in *Outsmarting Yourself*, having one's relational circuits online and being in relational mode feels profoundly different from having one's relational circuits offline and being in non-relational mode. This difference can be so profound that going back and forth between relational mode and non-relational mode feels almost like being two different people. In fact, Charlotte and I have joked that there are two versions of each of us – relational-mode Karl is a different person from non-relational-mode Karl, and relational-mode Charlotte is a different person from non-relational-mode Charlotte.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, almost all of the situations in which people fall into non-relational mode are caused by being triggered into traumatic memories.<sup>9</sup> Which means that almost all experiences of falling into non-relational mode also include traumatic implicit memory content being triggered forward and feeling true in the present. Which, in turn, causes the subjective experience of being in (triggered) non-relational mode to feel even more dramatically different from the subjective experience of being in (non-triggered) relational mode.

In light of the profound differences that are inherently present between the subjective experiences of being in relational mode and being in non-relational mode, and in light of the fact that being in non-relational mode usually also includes being blended with traumatic implicit memory content that feels true in the present, it is not surprising that some people perceive their non-relational-mode self to be a separate internal part that is distinct from their core-self. For example, Richard Schwartz starts the first chapter of his book on internal family

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<sup>8</sup>For a thorough discussion of relational circuits, relational mode, and non-relational mode, see chapters twelve through sixteen in Karl Lehman, *Outsmarting Yourself: Catching Your Past Invading the Present and What to Do About It* (Libertyville, IL: This Joy! Books, 2014).

<sup>9</sup>Almost all traumatic experiences include our relational circuits going offline, and this is part of the toxic content carried in the memories for these experiences. So when one of these memories gets triggered forward, being in non-relational mode is part of the ego-state package that comes forward with the memory. See chapter fifteen in *Outsmarting Yourself* for additional explanation regarding why most trauma includes losing access to our relational circuits, and regarding why most incidents of falling into non-relational mode are caused by getting triggered.

systems therapy with the following story:

“I looked at my father with warm gratitude. His feedback and encouragement over the past year had enriched my book, which now was almost done. I told him excitedly, ‘I finally figured out how to begin the book. I’ll start with a personal anecdote.’ My father looked at me from behind his newspaper and said, ‘That sounds good,’ in a flat, distracted tone. I felt a surge of resentment slide up from my gut, making my face flush and my head throb. Suddenly the affection and excitement I had been enjoying disappeared. ‘He just doesn’t care about my work,’ I thought. ‘He never cared about my ideas or about me.’ I looked again at my father’s face, and it seemed harder, more angular. Somewhere inside I had a vague sense that I was overreacting, but this didn’t stop me from storming out of the room, vowing to myself never again to talk to my father about the book.

What happened here? Did I simply lose my temper (what does ‘losing one’s temper’ mean, exactly)? In a sense, I changed temporarily into a very different person, complete with different feelings and thoughts, but also different ways of sensing and seeing the world and of moving and talking. Indeed, my father literally looked different to me after the shift—more menacing and less sympathetic. What became of the person I was before the shift? Did the tidal wave of resentment wash that person away or simply cover him over? Who then am I? Am I the resentful person or the affectionate one, or both? Or am I the one who knew I was overreacting, or someone entirely different?

What are we to make of what seem to be different personalities within people? Are they merely sets of cognitions and emotions, or are they something more? How did they develop? How do they related to one another and to other people? How are they affected by the person’s past, family, or culture? How can they change?”<sup>10</sup>

If the founder of internal family systems perceived the experience of falling into non-relational mode, along with traumatic implicit-memory content being triggered forward and feeling true in the present, to be a separate, distinct internal part, then I’m sure many others have made this same mistake. It is very helpful for both facilitators and recipients to be able to recognize non-relational mode, and to understand that *just* being triggered into non-relational mode is **not** an internal part. (Note: both dissociated internal parts and traumatic-implicit-memory child-ego-state internal parts will often be in non-relational mode, but *just* being triggered and in non-relational mode is **not** a separate internal part that is distinct from the person’s core self.)

**B. Ambivalence about a decision:** Feeling ambivalent is a very common phenomena that does not cause the average person to think about distinct internal parts that are separate from the core self. However, some in the internal family systems (IFS) community believe that ambivalence is actually a subtle manifestation of internal parts. For example, Regina Goulding, co-author of *The Mosaic Mind*, states:

“We have all experienced simultaneous, contradictory feelings. For example, when one part feels scared about getting married, another part is excited; one part feels relieved about quitting a job, while another part is sad. The IFS model rests upon the assumption...that these

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<sup>10</sup>Richard C. Schwartz, *Internal Family Systems Therapy* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1995) page 8.

internal fluctuations and contradictions result from individual subpersonalities or parts comprising the psyche of all healthy persons.”<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to this IFS formulation, my perspective is that this kind of common, everyday ambivalence is simply caused by going back and forth between focusing ones attention on the “pro” side and the “con” side of a given question or issue. For example, consider the internal experience I go through when it’s time for my regular exercise walk and the weather outside is cold and rainy. I’m sitting in my big comfy chair with a blanket in my lap and a cup of hot chocolate on the end table beside me. I see and hear the rain falling against our livingroom windows, and I remember the weather report mentioning that the high today was going to be forty-three degrees. As I focus my attention on how wonderfully cozy I am, on how nasty the weather is outside, and on how nice it would be to just skip my walk and stay home with my hot chocolate, I feel a spontaneous wave of reluctance to get up and put on my rain gear.

But then I remind myself that I have really good rain gear, that I will not get cold if I wear my light-weight down layer underneath my raincoat, that I sometimes see interesting wildlife when I’m the only one on the walking path in especially nasty weather, and that I always feel really good when I get back from one of these challenging walks. By the time I have focused on these true, positive considerations for a few minutes my reluctance is gone and I get out of my chair. I head out the door with a mild sense of excitement about battling the elements, and (as always) I feel really good when I get back.

My ambivalence is not being caused by two internal parts holding opposite opinions regarding whether I should stay curled in my comfy chair or start putting on my rain gear. This is just me – just my true/core self – with different internal subjective experiences as I switch between focusing my attention on the “con” side of going out for my exercise walk and focusing my attention on the “pro” side of going out for my exercise walk.

Note: Ambivalence *can* involve internal parts. That is, two (or more) internal parts having differing opinions about some particular situation *can sometimes* be the source of ambivalence. And ambivalence *can sometimes* be caused by an implicit-memory child-ego-state part that has been triggered forward. (For example, I might have an internal-part component of my ambivalence regarding my exercise walk if a traumatic childhood memory of going out in cold, rainy weather has been triggered forward.) But normal, average, everyday ambivalence, as I described above regarding my usual experience with taking a walk in foul weather, is *not* a manifestation of internal parts.

***C. Shifting into different (non-conflicted) self-states for different roles:*** Shifting into different self-states (ego-states) for different roles is a very common phenomena that does not cause the average person to think about distinct internal parts that are separate from their core self. However, some in the internal family systems (IFS) community believe that this phenomena is actually a subtle manifestation of internal parts. For example, John Rowan, one of the editors and also a co-author for *The Plural Self*, states: “Different roles bring out different subpersonalities....Certain roles are notorious for the creation of subpersonalities: mother,

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<sup>11</sup>Regina A. Goulding and Richard C. Schwartz, *The Mosaic Mind: Empowering the Tormented Selves of Child Abuse Survivors* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & company, Inc, 1995), page 16.

teacher and social worker are examples.”<sup>12</sup> In giving examples of subpersonalities (internal parts), this same author comments: “It is well known that people become much more aggressive when they are behind the wheel of a car. The role, very masculine as it normally is, brings out the inner aggression....So in everyday life we have many examples of another personality taking over at times....”<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to this IFS formulation, my perspective is that this kind of common, everyday shifting between different self-states is simply the normal internal experience produced by focusing on different role-specific content and being immersed in different role-specific memory networks. For example:

Karl the bird-watcher: As I spend time listening and watching for birds while hiking through a variety of beautiful habitats, memories from many past bird-watching adventures will be increasingly activated, bringing forward many positive emotional associations of what it feels like to be enjoying nature in this way. As I spend time hiking, watching, and listening, I will also be increasingly activating memories for relevant skills and knowledge (for example, how to best scan particular habitats for particular birds, how to frame a bird in my binocular’s field-of-view and then quickly adjust the focus, and how to identify each bird by certain unique aspects of it’s behavior, appearance, and call. After a couple of hours of bird watching I will be totally immersed in my Karl-the-bird-watcher self-state.

Uncle Karl: As I spend time playing with my nephews and nieces, memories from many past adventures will be increasingly activated, bringing forward many positive emotional associations of what it feels like to be in uncle-Karl mode. As I spend time enjoying these wonderful small people, I will also be increasingly activating memories for relevant skills and knowledge (for example, how to play various childhood games; how to discern the thoughts, emotions, wants and needs of small children; how to comfort and attune to children in distress; and how to moderate disputes between children). By the end of a couple of hours of having fun with my nephews and nieces I will be totally immersed in my Uncle-Karl self-state.

And quick summaries of a few more examples:

Karl listening in prayer or listening to music: When I engaged in listening prayer or listening to music, I enter a quiet, listening, receptive self-state.

Karl confronting injustice/hurtful behavior: When I am confronting injustice and/or hurtful behavior, I enter a self-state that is assertive, tenacious, strong, and sometimes even angry (but still in relational mode and still consistent with my true/core self).<sup>14</sup>

Karl engaging in intense, challenging cognitive activities: When I am taking a test or

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<sup>12</sup>John Rowan, “The Normal Development of Subpersonalities,” in *The Plural Self: Multiplicity in Everyday Life* editors John Rowan and Mick Cooper (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE publications, 1999), page 12.

<sup>13</sup>John Rowan, *Discover Your Subpersonalities* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), pages 3 & 4.

<sup>14</sup>This is hard to do, but it is possible if one is not triggered, and if one has developed high capacity and strong relational maturity skills for staying relational while angry.

providing a psychiatric consultation, I enter an energized, focused, effortful, logical, analytical self-state.

When I immerse myself in all of the components of a bird-watching adventure I end up in my bird-watching self-state, and the experience of being in this self-state is *very* different from being in my uncle Karl, listening prayer, test-taking, or confronting-injustice self-states. Again, some in the internal family systems community believe that these self-states should be considered as separate, different internal parts distinct from the core self. But as described above, these different self-states are just me – my same core self – but with my attention focused on different role-specific content and with different role-specific memory networks being activated. These different self-states are just different Karl-modes that are completely compatible, coherent, and integrated with my true/core self.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, if there are any dysfunctional components included in any of these self-states, or any triggers consistently associated with any of these self-states, then the self-states will actually be *slightly*-conflicted, in proportion to the amount and intensity of the dysfunction and triggers. In these situations recipients will experience subtle internal parts phenomena. And just as described above for conflicted self-states, recipients will become more and more fully integrated and coherent across their different self-states as they increase their capacity, grow their relational maturity skills, and work with Jesus to resolve the triggers and dysfunctional components.

**D. Internalized others:** Encountering a particular situation, and then getting a spontaneous mental image of one of your parent's faces, and getting a spontaneous memory of hearing them delivering the advice or correction or commentary that they delivered in similar situations during your childhood, is a common phenomena that does not cause the average person to think about distinct internal parts that are separate from the core self.<sup>16</sup> However, some in the internal family systems (IFS) community believe that this phenomena *is* a kind of internal part. For example, in presenting support for his belief that all people have internal parts, as a universal aspect of normal psychology, Richard Schwartz references object relations theory, "Which, since Melanie Kline in the 1940s, has asserted that our internal experience is shaped by introjected 'objects,' holographic-like representations of significant people in our lives (Kline, 1948; Gunthrip, 1971.)"<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to this IFS formulation, my perspective is that this kind of experience is simply spontaneous recall of interactions from your past that were with especially significant people, and that were particularly important and/or particularly common. For example: When I was a kid I had many experiences of being with my father as we observed some kind of situation in which a person did something wrong and then immediately experienced consequences. Such as seeing a person fly by us on the highway, driving at an unsafe speed, and then seeing them get pulled over by a state trooper thirty seconds later. As we passed the scene of the irresponsible

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<sup>15</sup>Completely compatible, coherent, and integrated with respect to values, behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, and shared memory content.

<sup>16</sup>Parents are the most common, but the face and voice can be from any significant person in your life.

<sup>17</sup>Richard C. Schwartz, *Internal Family Systems Therapy* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1995), page 12.

driver getting his ticket, Dad would comment, “That’ll teach them a lesson!” with a mixture of satisfaction and judgment on his face and in his voice. This was a common experience, it was with a particularly significant person, and the content was important. (I never wanted my father to apply that face, voice-tone, and comment to me!).

For my entire adult life, whenever I have observed a situation in which a person does something wrong and then immediately experiences consequences, I have gotten a mental image of my dad’s satisfied/judgmental face and remember hearing his satisfied/judgmental voice saying, “That’ll teach them a lesson!” But this is not some kind of separate internal part, distinct from my true/core self. Rather, this is just normal spontaneous memory recall of an event that involved an especially significant person, that carried important emotional content, and that was common.

Note: An internal dissociated part *can present as* an internalized parent (or internalized other): People who have dissociated internal parts as a major part of their psychological defenses often have parts who have taken on the role of representing their parents and/or other important people from their childhoods. These parts produce an internal experience that fits Melanie Kline’s description of holographic-like representations – they look exactly like the person from the recipient’s childhood, they have the person’s exact same voice and mannerisms, and they deliver the exact same criticisms, corrections, and warnings. And when I work with these internal dissociated parts, the whole picture makes sense – they always explain some version of, “It’s my job to make sure \_\_\_\_\_ (name of recipient) does what she needs to do, so that (important person) doesn’t beat the crap out of her!”

**VI. Good-news practical considerations:** When we struggle with feeling intimidated, confused, or overwhelmed by the complexity of internal-parts phenomena, and by the humbling reality that there are many aspects of this phenomena that we do not yet fully understand, it is important to remember again that Jesus has complete and total understanding of all internal-parts phenomena. Jesus is not the least bit intimidated, confused, or overwhelmed by the complexity. And in proportion to the strength of the recipient’s connection with Jesus, He can bring the needed expertise.

Furthermore, there are some principles, tools, and interventions that are helpful in many different situations, just like good hydration will help a patient recover from many different specific medical problems. These principles, tools, and interventions are especially valuable and encouraging to remember. For example:

**A. Help every internal part to engage directly with Jesus:** With any internal part you encounter, of whatever kind and in whatever situation, it will *always* be valuable to help the part to establish an interactive connection with Jesus, and then help the part to engage directly with Jesus regarding whatever issue, question, problem, guardian-lie fear, blocking thought, resistance, or trauma they are dealing with.

**B. Basic, universal principles, tools, and interventions:** No matter what kind of internal part you are working with, it will always be helpful for the facilitator to keep their relational circuits on. It will always be helpful for the facilitator to maintain an interactive connection with Jesus. It will always be helpful for the facilitator to offer attunement – offering attunement will

always help the recipient to feel cared for and to get their relational circuits back on, even if they are currently operating from inside the perspective of an internal part.

**C. *Direct-eye-contact technique:*** The direct-eye-contact technique will be helpful in working with any of the internal parts described above.<sup>18</sup>

**D. *Internal Family Systems (IFS) principles and tools:*** IFS principles and tools will be helpful in any situation in which multiple internal parts are interacting with each other.

**E. *Get Jesus in the middle of any work with internal family systems:*** With any internal family systems work, one of the simplest, most strategic things you can do is to keep Jesus in the center of it. Help all parts learn to trust Jesus, and then turn to Jesus for guidance and leadership. One of the most common, most difficult problems with internal family systems is that parts get stuck in polarized impasses, and they don't trust each other enough to cooperate to resolve their impasses. However, they can all learn to trust Jesus, and to let Him lead. Even though they don't trust each other, and are unable to cooperate with each other, they will trust Jesus and cooperate with whatever plan He proposes. This opens up totally new possibilities – parts that have been totally deadlocked with each other for many years will let Jesus lead a new way forward.

**F. *Progressively increasing coherence and integration is the ideal:*** My perception is that God's best plan is for us to experience steady, progressive integration as we resolve trauma, resolve internal conflicts, and build relational maturity skills – my perception is that the ideal is to increasingly experience ourselves as the same integrated, coherent person across time and different experiences.<sup>19</sup> And the really good news is that we can leave all of the most difficult judgment calls regarding integration to Jesus. For example, there is deep disagreement between the IFS community and other therapists regarding whether internal parts need to be truly, permanently eliminated as the person becomes more and more integrated, or whether parts sometimes remain in some subtle way that the recipient is not even consciously aware of. Furthermore, if integrating parts into the true/core self *is* ideal in some situations, when and how should this be facilitated? With the Immanuel Approach, we just leave all of this up to Jesus. We just coach recipients and all of their parts to keep engaging directly with Jesus, and He will sort out these really complicated, really difficult questions.

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<sup>18</sup>For discussion of the direct-eye-contact technique, see “The Direct-Eye-Contact Technique for Connecting with Internal Parts,” available as a free download from the Special Subjects/Advanced Topics section of the Resources page of [www.immanuelapproach.com](http://www.immanuelapproach.com).

<sup>19</sup>For example, instead of feeling like I am a different person/part/subpersonality when I am worrying about a new venture turning out badly, my experience would be: “This is still just me. Right now I'm more connected to the concerns about how this plan might turn out badly, I'm a little triggered to painful childhood memories of how plans can look wonderful but then turn out badly, and my triggered anxiety is pushing my relational circuits offline, but this is still just me. This is not some separate “anxious part” with an identity organized around worrying about how any new possible adventure might turn out badly.” Furthermore, “And I know what the plan is – get a good connection with Jesus, and ask Him for guidance and help regarding all of this.”