



## **Internal Family Systems (Family Systems with Internal Parts)**

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I have recently discovered an excellent book, *Internal Family Systems Therapy* by Richard Schwartz.<sup>1</sup> Schwartz is a family therapist who was observant enough to discover internal parts in many of his clients. His special genius was to realize that the system patterns and principles we have discovered for groups of people (families, churches, businesses, etc.) apply to how internal parts interact and relate to each other. He shares valuable insights about how internal parts can be polarized and stuck in their interactions with each other, and how they can thereby interfere with the healing work. He also shares valuable insights about how to apply family systems theory to help internal parts get unstuck so they can cooperate with healing instead of getting in the way. The insights in this book have been a blessing for our Theophostic and EMDR work. They have already been helpful in my own healing work and have been especially helpful with some of our dissociative clients who have been stuck.

Most of what Schwartz says is consistent with our clinical experience and with what has been written about dissociative parts in the context of trauma. However, Schwartz believes that everybody is born with internal parts, that this is a normal and healthy part of the way our minds work, and that they normally function so smoothly that most of us don't even realize they are there. Schwartz believes that these internal parts remain even after complete healing, but that they then cooperate and work together smoothly so that the person does not feel fragmented any more. He believes that we should help internal parts work together more smoothly and release trauma burdens, but that we should not try to “integrate” them. We do not agree with Schwartz on these points. However, his insights about how to get internal parts unstuck are very helpful regardless of whether or not the rest of his theory is correct.

Most people working with “dissociative” parts in the context of trauma feel that these parts are created in response to trauma and that when the trauma burden is removed, parts integrate and are no longer present as “parts.” I currently perceive this to be the correct understanding.

NOTE: This understanding is not that they are destroyed, but rather that they are integrated into the rest of the person's self. You don't “see”/feel them as separate parts any more. You can still feel them present in some way, but as an integrated part of your mind and self as opposed to being separate. 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.

Theophostic appears to be fantastic for unburdening trauma from the parts, for releasing polari-

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<sup>1</sup>Schwartz, Richard C. *Internal Family Systems Therapy*. (New York, NY: The Guilford Press), 1995.

zation (usually based on guardian lies), and for resolving extreme behavior (usually caused by parts that are highly polarized). One of our clients had a very neat experience with Jesus speaking to internal parts and addressing the guardian lies that were maintaining a very polarized and destructive dynamic. The techniques and tools Dr. Smith teaches as a part of Theophostic also systematically disinfect internal parts from any demonic infestation. This is especially important because secular authors (such as Schwartz) don't address demonic infection. Our perception at present is that this component of Theophostic work enables more complete healing and integration.

Charlotte and I are very much trying to figure out how IFS theory and trauma dissociative parts theory fit together. Schwartz has some thoughts about this, but we do not currently agree with him. One concern is that utilizing this IFS framework could enable and rigidify a fragmented internal system, and that this could hinder a deeper level of healing. It is possible that the trauma people who talk about "integration" are seeing dramatic changes with depolarization, unburdening, etc., but when the parts are working together smoothly nobody sees them. However, our belief at this time is that parts can be fully integrated into the adult self once they have been truly healed and disinfected (from the demonic). Dr. Smith has observed Jesus facilitating this kind of integration on many occasions. I have also seen this. In one situation an internal part was relieved of a tremendous trauma burden and the Lord had just exposed and resolved the associated lie. This internal part then spontaneously asked, "Now what do I do?" I replied "Let's ask Jesus. Jesus, what do you want this part to do now?" Moments later this part commented "Jesus says that it's time for me to go back inside \_\_\_\_\_. Good bye." My perception and the perception of the person receiving healing was that this "part" was then "integrated" into her adult self in some way and was no longer present as a separate "part." NOTE: Sometimes Jesus does NOT ask them to integrate, but rather asks them to take on some other role for the time being. It is important to follow the Lord's guidance regarding the when and how of integration.

This book is not easy to read like a novel, but Schwartz is very articulate and the book is well written. Overall I think it is accessible to the general public. A number of our clients are reading this book and finding it very helpful. Clients reading this book seems to increase the efficiency in our sessions, since Schwartz is very articulate and provides a very usable shared frame of reference from which we and our clients can talk about work with the internal parts.

This book is a fairly recent publication (1995), so it will probably be reasonably easy to find. We found a copy at the local Barnes and Noble, no special order required.