

## **Parts, Roles, and the Spark of Creation: The Union of Internal Family Systems Therapy and Psychodrama**

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Psychodrama and Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS) are complementary approaches with shared experiential practices. While some have presented workshops focused on using psychodrama and IFS therapy in conjunction, very little has been written about integrating these two approaches. This short article hopes to create a written dialogue on the intersections between these action-based approaches.

Psychodrama practitioners and IFS therapists alike can benefit from the adoption of aspects of IFS therapy and facets of psychodrama into their respective practices. The encounter between IFS and psychodrama could be characterized by positive tele and cocreation. Considering IFS's status as an evidence-based practice, the field of psychodrama may systematically benefit from the connection with IFS. Psychodramatists can also benefit from IFS's use of theory to guide practice with structured enactments and role categories. IFS practitioners would benefit from the integration of psychodrama theory, psychodramatic interventions, and sociometric warm-ups.

IFS practice relies on the assertion of multiplicity within the psyche. The theory conceptualizes the psyche as the sum of many inner parts. Each part carries with it its own specific beliefs, personalities, and behaviors. IFS categorizes these inner parts into two domains: protectors and exiles. When a traumatic experience has transpired, a part may become injured or overwhelmed and often develops extreme beliefs. These hurt, traumatized parts are *exiled* away by protector parts in order to shelter the internal system from overwhelm. Exiles hold fear, pain, shame, memories of traumas, and are highly sensitive. The IFS model offers *permanent* healing of exile parts through the "unburdening process".

Protective parts are further categorized as either proactive protectors (managers) or reactive protectors (firefighters). Manager parts are generally controlling, motivated, and oriented toward success. Firefighters, desperate to avoid the experience of pain, employ dangerous behaviors to distract the inner system from experiencing painful overwhelm. Where manager parts are often perceived as adaptive, firefighters may be viewed as chaotic and dangerous. A critical aspect of IFS therapy is its honoring of the heroic nature in both proactive and reactive protectors, acknowledging their desire to protect exiled parts. Another important contribution from IFS to psychodrama is the practice of habitually asking permission from parts before engaging with them. This simple, yet profound practice, would increase the level of emotional safety in classical psychodrama.

While the term "parts" is used in IFS to describe aspects of personality, psychodrama uses the term "role" to describe the same concept. In both modalities, the facilitator offers a non-pathologizing approach which supports the client's autonomy in their healing process. Similarly, both modalities offer the potential for a corrective experience through surplus reality. In IFS

therapy this is achieved through visualization techniques, while in psychodrama, the presence of the group makes it possible to physically act out the corrective experience.

While classical psychodrama often has an *interpersonal* focus, the Therapeutic Spiral Model (TSM), is a clinically-modified *intrapsychic* psychodrama model. It appears that TSM and IFS have even more in common than IFS and classical psychodrama. While IFS offers classical psychodrama a novel view of defenses, TSM provides IFS and psychodrama, alike, with a strengths-based and trauma-informed approach. The practice of IFS parallels TSM's Trauma Survivor's Inner Role Atom (TSIRA), which explores and externalizes a protagonist's inner roles with the goal of cultivating connection between the inner roles (parts) and the protagonist (self).

IFS theory emphasizes the concept of the *Self* - or the core essence of an individual. IFS theorizes the Self as calm, curious, compassionate, and innate within all individuals. While classical Morenean philosophy does have a similar concept - the autonomous healing center within, it is rarely employed explicitly in the clinical practice of psychodrama. While Psychodrama and TSM assert that the self is the sum of the roles that we play, IFS offers a slightly different belief that the Self is the leader and core essence of a person who orchestrates the movement of the inner parts.

While psychodrama is usually offered within a group psychotherapy setting, IFS therapy is most often utilized in an individual psychotherapy setting, in which parts of the self are explored through mindfulness, guided imagery, and interoception. IFS therapy most often encourages an internal dialogue with parts in which the Self verbally conveys to the therapist what an inner part is saying and feeling. In psychodrama, this would be externalized, concretized, put into action, and displayed through role reversal.

These unique models of therapy offer a creative possibility. If utilized in a clinical setting simultaneously, clients will gain an evidenced-based action method model which is trauma-informed in nature. It is apparent that these modalities are highly complementary due to their many similarities and mutually enhanced by their differences. As there is very little literature observing the blending of Psychodrama and IFS therapy in clinical practice, this article hopes to introduce a new integrative movement in the fields of both Psychodrama and IFS.