

THE QUEST

By Lia DeLand

This is the saga of a quest for a personality scale based on the IFS model. It began in the last Age (graduate school), as I sought a worthy project for a Masters thesis. I had a vision of a personality profile that would give an indication of the types of Parts that were dominating an individual's internal system, how protected that system was, and how much access to Self-leadership there was. My thesis committee outlined the many trials that I would have to face on the journey. Dick Schwartz, the great Wizard, affirmed that this was a noble quest, because such a scale would be useful clinically for pre- and post-testing purposes, as well as to support the increasing number of research projects that are based on the IFS model. He gave me charms and potions along with a magical map.

The First Trial: Nomothetic vs. Idiographic

As I set off on my quest for this profile, I came to a fork in the road. My first trial involved deciding which path to choose: the nomothetic path, which leads to the land of General Patterns, or the idiographic path, which leads to the mountains of Individual Uniqueness. A sphinx materialized out of thin air, blocking the road, and asked, "What is the best way to represent an individual's internal system?"

My knees shook. "This is a very difficult question," I stammered, "because one of the great advantages of IFS therapy is its open-ended framework. There is no archetypical Controller, Pleaser, or Critic; every Part is unique. An individual may have many different controlling Parts, pleasing Parts, or critical Parts, each one with its own personality. If I choose the road to the land of General Patterns, I risk losing the wonderful richness of all those different Parts."

The sphinx waited.

I continued. "But the potential number of Parts is...unlimited. If I take the road to the mountains of Individual Uniqueness, I risk getting lost in a jungle of Parts."

The sphinx was silent. My head felt all foggy, and I didn't know what to do. Then I remembered the charms that Dick the Wizard gave me, and I grabbed one out of my pocket. The fog cleared, and I found myself saying, "Even though there is a wide range of unique Parts, there are commonalities within that range. For example, controlling types of Parts, even though they have various ages and personalities, usually have a hard time trusting people; numbing Parts often make people feel disconnected from their bodies; and pleasing Parts usually fear that if they stop doing so much, then people won't like them. So I'm going to choose the road to the land of General Patterns, and find the sorts of thoughts and feelings that are expressed by the most commonly found types of Parts. Even though this won't reveal the full complexity of the internal system, it will give us an overview, telling us which types of Parts are stronger than average, and how much access to Self there is."

With that, the sphinx disappeared.

The Second Trial: Questionnaire Items

I had not journeyed very far along the path to the land of General Patterns before I was challenged by the second trial. A funny little man jumped out of the woods and threatened me with dire consequences if I could not find the appropriate questionnaire items for each sort of Part. Gamely, I set to my task. Some of the Parts were relatively simple. For example, "I feel disconnected from my body" fit unambiguously into the Numbing/Dissociating category, and "I feel irritable or angry" fit easily into the Raging category. Many other statements, however, didn't seem to fit cleanly into just one category. For example, did "I have a hard time trusting people" belong with Anxious Parts or with Controlling Parts? Did "I do things I don't really want to do, but I can't stop myself" belong with Addictive Parts or Impulsive Parts?

My head began to spin. I reached for another one of the Great Wizard's charms, which transformed into a giant sifter. There was elvish writing on it, saying, "Factor Analysis."

"Ah ha!" I said to the funny little man. I will do the very best I can to find the appropriate statements for each sort of Part, and then, when I am finished, I will use this magic sifter, which will sort it all out properly into the correct categories." And the funny little man vanished.

The Third Trial: Parts vs. Self

After finding my way out of the woods, I came to a great river. Guarding the ford was a chimera, who said, “You must perform one more task with those questionnaire items before you can cross this river. Some of them need to be transformed for the magic to work.”

This was an easy task (or so I thought). I knew I needed to reverse some of the statements, so that they would say the same things but in opposite ways, in order to make the scale valid and reliable. As I set about my task, however, I realized that something disturbing was happening. When Parts items were reversed, they sounded like Self items. For example, the Pessimistic category included the statement, “I feel hopeless and discouraged.” When that was reversed it became, “I feel hopeful and optimistic.” And one of the Exile statements was, “I feel worthless.” When that was reversed it became, “I feel worthy.” If these reversed items sounded so much like Self statements, then was Self truly a separate dimension of personality, or was it just the reverse of, or absence of, Parts? My head ached as I wrestled with this riddle. Our experience of our clients’ (as well as our own) inner systems tells us that there is a qualitative difference between Parts and Self, and that Self doesn’t change the way that Parts do. But can that difference be quantified? Can that difference be represented in a questionnaire via language, mathematics, and statistics? If we reverse a Parts statement and it is indistinguishable from a Self statement, then is there a difference between Parts and Self on a **statistical** level? I wondered if there was a limitation of language that would affect how well the two could be distinguished in a context such as a self-report scale.

The chimera waited, lashing his snaky tail.

Taking a large swig of the Wizard’s potion, I decided that this was a mystery that would only be revealed by the final statistical alchemy. All I could do was to write items representing characteristic feelings of each of the Parts and Self as clearly as possible, and then to reverse those statements as clearly as possible.

The chimera stepped back and let me cross the river.

The Fourth Trial: Managers vs. Firefighters

I journeyed on, carrying my bulging pack filled with the elements of the scale. I came to a mountain, and knew that my goal was to reach the peak. But as I climbed, my bundle grew heavier and heavier. Finally, I put it down, and opened it up to see what the problem was. The

Self category looked all right, as did the Exile category. It was the Managers and the Firefighters that were feeling so heavy; they were all tangled up. The harder I tried to untangle them, the worse it got. I tried putting Anxious Parts and Numbing Parts into the Manager category and Addictive Parts and Raging Parts into the Firefighter category, but they kept jumping back and forth, and didn't want to stay put.

"But I'm not an Anxious Manager!" said one of them. "I'm an Anxious Firefighter! I trigger panic attacks when things get too threatening. There's the Anxious Manager," it said, pointing to another Part.

"That's me!" it said, "I keep watch and try to anticipate problems."

Another one bit my finger and said, "I'm not a Raging Firefighter, I'm a Raging Manager. I maintain control over everyone by threatening to lose my temper."

When I tried to separate two others, one of them said, "I'm an Addictive Manager. I maintain a level of numbness so that we don't get anywhere close to those monsters." The other one said, "I'm an Addictive Firefighter. I jump into action when one of those monsters get loose, and I just knock us out!"

I looked at that tangled mess and realized that separating them all out wouldn't work; they looked like all one category to me: Protectors. Some of them protected proactively, and some of them protected reactively. There was a continuum of each category of Parts. At one end of the continuum they were Managers, and at the other end they were Firefighters, but they were all Protectors.

I search my pockets and found the last charm. It looked like a little bird. "Fly back to the Wizard," I told it. "Ask him if it's all right to leave these Parts in a Protector category rather than trying to separate them into Managers and Firefighters." It zoomed off.

Finally the little bird returned. "The Wizard said it makes sense to him."

The Prize

Voila. At the top of the mountain I performed the secret rites of statistical alchemy. What emerged was a profile with nine subscales (Self; Exiles; Self-critical; Raging; Dissociating; Self-harming; Anxious/Pessimistic/Controlling; Addictive/Impulsive; Pleasing/Fearing Abandonment). The magic sifter of Factor Analysis was most helpful, revealing that Anxious, Pessimistic, and Controlling Parts were really one category, not three; that Addictive Parts and

Impulsive Parts were one category; and that Pleasing Parts and Fearing Abandonment were also one category. It also revealed that Self was not just a reversal of Parts; it was a separate factor, although they were all very closely related to each other. Self was particularly closely (although negatively) related to Exiles. The higher someone's score was on the Exiles subscale, the lower it was on the Self subscale. These two subscales were so closely related that they interfered with each other in the statistics, so it was decided to separate the Self scale from the Parts scale for the sake of statistical clarity.

There were some surprises. Many of the Self statements that seemed the most obvious because they related to the "eight C's" (e.g., "I feel a deep compassion for others," "I feel a sense of connection to the universe") turned out to be too weak statistically to be retained. Perhaps social desirability is an issue here. It is possible that we all like to think of ourselves as compassionate, curious, and creative.

The remaining Self items clumped into two factors: Self-Qualities and Self-Leadership. This was a delightful reflection of the Wizard's conceptualization of Self as having a dual nature, like light. Depending on the context, light manifests sometimes as waves and sometimes as particles. The Self, likewise, manifests sometimes as an active, compassionate inner leader (its "particle" state) and sometimes as an expansive, boundaryless state of mind (its "wavelike" state). Consistent with that conceptualization, Self-Qualities corresponds to the expansive, boundaryless (wavelike) state, while Self-Leadership corresponds to the active inner leader (the particle state).

The items in the Self-Qualities factor related to how we feel when we're "in Self" (e.g., "I feel worthy and valuable," and "I feel balanced and calm"). The items in the Self-Leadership factor related to our ability to bring ourselves back to Self when we've been knocked off-balance (e.g., "I'm able to resolve inner conflicts fairly quickly," and "I can manage ok in the midst of chaos"). When the Self scale was reduced to the most powerful items, most of those turned out to be from the Self-Qualities factor.

Thus, the result of my quest was two Scales: an 18-item Self scale, and a 53-item Parts scale that has eight subscales of the most commonly found types of Parts. The Parts scale takes 10 minutes to administer and gives a profile of the individual's internal system in IFS terms by indicating which Parts are dominating the system and how extreme they are. It is also possible to tell how much access to Self-leadership there is in the system by noting how extreme the Exiles

are. Both scales are suitable for clinical as well as research purposes (they would be especially helpful in a pre-test/post-test context). The norms are based on 1175 people from all over the US and Canada. This was not a random sample, but every effort was made to obtain as wide a sample as possible, via social/professional networks, and internet support groups.

For those who can read runes, the internal reliability and the preliminary validity of these scales are good. Each of these scales and subscales distinguishes between groups (high versus low trauma) $p < .0005$. Cronbach's alpha for the 18-item Self scale is .97 (item-to-total correlations: .72 to .87). The alpha for the 53-item Parts scale is .98 (item-to-total correlations: .45 to .84).