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Parts Of A Whole- Part 1

A few weeks ago, I watched the animated movie **“Inside Out 2”**, the highly anticipated sequel to the film with the same name. The first movie follows a 12 year old girl named Riley who moves from Minnesota to California with her parents and realizes that all the many changes she faces as a result of this are not as easily weathered as she had anticipated.

What is even more compelling to me in the first movie, and also carried through to the second, is the depiction of the complex world full of the different emotional “parts” that exist inside Riley’s consciousness. In her mind we meet anthropomorphized versions of “Joy”, “Sadness”, “Anger”, “Worry”, and “Disgust”. We watch the push and pull amongst each of these different “parts” as she goes through her life. In the sequel, Riley is entering puberty, a tumultuous time for virtually everyone, **and new highly intense “parts” are thus introduced, including “Anxiety”, “Envy”, and “Embarrassment”.**

As Riley rides through the twists and turns of her adolescent life, we watch her various “parts” vying for control as she interacts with her world. We also witness that when one “part” monopolizes, Riley’s emotional balance is thrown off and she stumbles and falls. What we eventually learn (after a wild ride with “Anxiety” in charge of Riley), is that together these different “parts” ultimately make up what we consider the “Core SELF”, a guiding light that when called upon, helps us find more ease, calm, and acceptance in our lives.

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Pulling back the curtain a bit on the psychological influences behind “Inside Out” and its sequel, we see an evidence-based psychotherapy model called Internal Family Systems (or IFS). IFS is based on the premise in the “multiplicity of self”, in that we are all made up of various “parts” that came into being at various times in our life (frequently during childhood and adolescence) to protect us and keep us safe. Sometimes these parts are in sync, and sometimes they are in conflict with one another.

What are these parts and what are their roles?

1. **Managers** - these parts tend to be highly critical and try to control the outside world to keep you safe and are vigilant about keeping you from feeling triggered and flooded with emotion. They are strategic and usually cognizant of cause and effect.
2. **Firefighters** - these parts step in when the managers can't keep control any longer. They discharge automatically without concern for consequences, trying to block emotional distress/block all feelings no matter what the cost.
3. **Exiles** - these are the injured and most vulnerable parts of us that are frozen in time (think wounded “inner child”). They usually show up as negative feelings of guilt, shame, pain, and fear. They are buried deep within us and trying to break free. The Managers and Firefighters are working to suppress these parts which can be a full-time job.

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So how do we break this cycle?

The answer lies in connecting with our **“Core SELF”** and letting this take the lead. Sometimes called the “wise self” or the “adult self”, it exists in all of us - sometimes it’s just a matter of finding it and letting it be the guide to our protective “parts”. One way to awaken your Core SELF is through gratitude of all our parts. I have started this dialogue recently when I notice my own Managers and Firefighters showing up... I will say, “Thank you for being here. I know that you are here to protect me, but you are not serving me in a good way right now. Please step aside so that my wise self can lead me through this situation.”

In the end of Inside Out 2, **Riley also connects with her Core SELF again.** “Anxiety” gets a special “timeout chair” so that she can watch what is going on and give input here and there, but she does NOT get to be in charge. With the right leadership, all of our parts can work in sync with one another, and the heaviness of our suffering can finally be made lighter.

Stay tuned for next month’s article where we explore the **8 C’s** (or qualities) that make up our Core SELVES that help us turn our “parts” into inner advisors instead of the ones in **Complete control. Compassion, Curiosity, Clarity, Creativity, Calm, Confidence, Courage, Connectedness.**