

Conversations Within the Divided Self: a Conceptual Metaphor Analysis of the Internal Family Systems Model

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Abstract

This paper will demonstrate how Schwartz's psychological theory, "The Internal Family Systems Model," is an elaboration of Lakoff's conceptual metaphor, "The Divided Person." I will propose that IFS is intuitive because it is an elaboration of our current metaphorical conception of self--and that where it differs structurally is in replacing the binary, or hierarchical aspects of our current model--resulting in a more compassionate self-conception. This paper contributes to an existing body of research on the conceptual structure of psychological theories, and argues that understanding the differences between them is crucial: each metaphorical elaboration comes with different inferences, leading to real-world consequences in patients' lives.

I. Introduction

Since its development in the late 70s and early 80s, Conceptual Metaphor Theory has increasingly influenced research in multiple fields including linguistics, cognitive science, and psychology, and there is a general sense that we have only scratched the surface of its interdisciplinary value (Bichisecchi & Bolognesi, 2014, p. 4). In the introduction to the fifth edition of the *Journal of Cognitive Semiotics*, researchers Fusaroli and Morgagni explicitly called for "more extensive integration of CMT into a complex framework of social and cognitive dynamics," echoing a current trend in the field (2013, p. 5). This paper aims to address that need by analyzing the metaphorical structure of a groundbreaking psychological theory which has grown in popularity over the last decade: the Internal Family Systems Model.

This paper will propose that the IFS Model is intuitive because it is an elaboration of the metaphorical framework we already use to conceptualize the self, as demonstrated in Lakoff's "The Divided Person Metaphor." But the IFS elaboration fosters a more compassionate self-conception, one that is accepting of even aspects of the self that are often considered negative or undesirable. IFS allows us to become aware of and even dialogue with the parts of

our personality that fractured off and became relegated to the subconscious as a result of trauma--in a sense, reuniting our "divided selves."

II. Literature Review

A. Introduction to Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The basic premise of CMT is that "metaphor," though often thought of as solely a poetic or literary device, is actually the mechanism that underlies all of our thoughts and actions (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 3). Evidence for this deep metaphorical structure can be found in our everyday language. Lakoff particularly has mapped out many of these common metaphors, presenting evidence of their ubiquity through ample relevant linguistic expressions. The most oft-cited, classic example is the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. It is illustrated in expressions such as "your claims are *indefensible*," "I *demolished* his argument," and "I've never *won* an argument with him" (p. 4). In expressions like this one, we understand one, more abstract domain of experience (in this case "argument"), in terms of a more concrete, or embodied one (in this case "war"). The metaphor is realized by the ontological mapping of concepts from the target (or abstract) domain onto the source (or concrete) one. In this case "the arguers" correspond "to warriors", "shots taken" correspond to "provocative or inflammatory comments", and so on. We can see that the metaphor runs deeper than the lexical level, since we "don't only *talk* about arguments in terms of war...we can actually win or lose [them]...[and] we see the person we are arguing with as an opponent" (p. 4). The metaphor can even be embodied, if a person's physical demeanor is affected by their "feeling wounded" as a result of a fight. These patterns illustrate the way we conceive of an argument, pre-linguistically.

The metaphors around argumentation are just one example of how Conceptual Metaphor can provide an inroad to understanding human interaction and relationship dynamics. For this reason, CMT has increasingly been used in psychological research over the last few decades--though integration has been slow. Lakoff explains the reasons for this in a 1997 paper, writing about the "unfortunate" disjointment between psychotherapy and cognitive science. This

rift, he says, exists because researchers in these fields falsely believe that they deal with disparate subject matter: psychotherapists with pathology, and cognitive scientists with the routine workings of the mind.

Crucially, these different perspectives affect how the two fields conceive of the unconscious mind. Psychotherapists have tended to imagine the unconscious mind in Freudian terms--that is, a collection of “hypercharged”, repressed thoughts that can potentially be made conscious through therapy (1997, p. 90). But cognitive science conceives of it more generally as “the mechanism of thought,” which “need not be highly charged at all,” and is not, by nature, repressed. It simply composes the “automatic” and “most commonplace” aspects of our conceptual system. He goes on to suggest however that this is a false paradigm, since certain mechanisms identified in the Freudian unconscious are paralleled in the cognitive unconscious: “*symbolization*” parallels conceptual metaphor, “*displacement*” parallels “conceptual metonymy,” “*condensation*” parallels “conceptual blending,” etc. The main incongruity between these theories then, is that though they each identify similar mental mechanisms, Freud saw them as “irrational modes of primary process thinking” and cognitive scientists assert that they are “an indispensable part of ordinary, rational thought, which is largely unconscious” (p. 90)¹.

In his 1997 paper, Lakoff does not speak to whether “repression” is considered a valid phenomenon from a cognitive perspective or not, but he does mention that “if Freud was right [and it does exist,]...then the use of the conscious metaphor system in dreams is a perfect way for the unconscious mind to hide thoughts from the conscious mind while nonetheless thinking them” (p.106). By examining a few case studies, Lakoff demonstrates how dreams show evidence of the same general system of metaphorical thought that he and Kovecses have shown to govern our everyday (waking) lives (p. 91)--and moreover, how CMT can explain why

¹ Interestingly, the particular psychological theory I examine below IFS actually provides a framework that neutralizes this disparity, using metaphor to conceive of the repressed parts of a person's psyche. It is perhaps because of the metaphorical structure of this framework that the theory is non-pathologizing.

reliable tropes can be found in dreams, and why standard or “normal” interpretations of them can exist (p. 105). This is because the imagery used in dreams is constrained by the general metaphors at what is called the “superordinate level” (ie LOVE IS A JOURNEY), but then realized in images from the “subordinate level” (ie images of “a car, roads, bridges, bad weather, and so forth”) (p. 106). Considered in tandem with unique knowledge about each individual dreamer, Lakoff contends that an explicit knowledge of the metaphorical system (that we as English speakers already use) can be a useful clinical tool. Lakoff concludes by expanding the scope of this assertion beyond dream analysis to all of psychotherapy, since “people can believe their metaphors and live according to them” (p. 119).

Modern linguists and psychoanalysts like Bolognesi and Bicisecchi (2014) and Terry Eynon (2002) build upon this work, using Conceptual Metaphor as just one tool in an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing patients’ dreams. Like Lakoff, they recognize the subconscious, experiential bases of conceptual metaphors that show up in dreams and elsewhere--while also validating their deep roots in “personal, interpersonal, and cultural dynamics” (p. 5). For this reason, these researchers and others are part of the gradually building movement to integrate CMT more extensively “into a complex framework of social and cognitive dynamics” (Fusaroli and Morgagni (2013), as cited in Bolognesi and Bicisecchi, 2014, p. 5).² For example, Marco Casonato (2003) analyzes his clients’ metaphors against a control group, observing parallels like “BULIMIA IS A GAME” and “FASTING IS LOVE” to “EATING IS A GAME” and “EATING IS LOVE” (as cited in Bolognesi and Bicisecchi, 2014, p. 6).

Perhaps because Conceptual Metaphor Theory “provides a natural mechanism for relating concrete images to abstract meanings” (Lakoff, 1997, p. 104), it has “long been of interest to many schools of psychotherapy...with numerous potential benefits asserted” (F.

² However, like psychotherapy more generally, the specialized field of psychoanalysis has been slow to integrate with cognitive linguistics; this is largely because the modern “knowledge base” of psychoanalysis exists in the somewhat fractured and “idiosyncratic terminologies of rival psychoanalytic schools” (Borbely, 2008, p. 412, as cited in Bolognesi and Bicisecchi, 2014, p. 5).

Matheson et al, 2018). In the realm of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) specifically, there has been a growing interest in using it in therapy, considering both “the need for attention to client metaphors” and “the therapist’s use of metaphor” (p. 2). Though it is the first of its kind in the literature, F. Matheson et al.’s 2018 study demonstrates that training experienced therapists in the use and identification of metaphor may effectively help clients feel understood, strengthening their connection to the clinician. The therapists who participated in the training maintained that their clients seemed to “feel heard” when clinicians picked up on their metaphors (p. 10), and researchers concluded, quoting Elliot et al. 1992, that an intentional use of metaphors may ultimately “be effective in helping to change clients’ distorted views” (p. 1).

Conceptual Metaphor Theory has even been useful in designing studies for schizophrenia research. In B. Elvevåg et al. (2011), researchers used Conceptual Metaphors from Kovecses (2011) to study “what aspect of semantics accounts for the unusual speech and comprehension deficits in schizophrenia” (p. 206). In both examination of their free speech and in a priming experiment, it was found that schizophrenic patients were more likely to interpret metaphors literally than the control group. Researchers were able to use these findings to support the theory that schizophrenic delusions may essentially be literal interpretations of Conceptual Metaphors and their elaborations. In other words, “figurative thinking in the ‘pre-delusional period’ may pave the foundation for later delusions” (p. 206). To use an example these researchers cited from Rhodes and Jakes (2004): “at some stage, thoughts such as ‘I am *like* someone possessed by a devil’ become ‘I *am* possessed by a devil” (p. 206).

B. Introduction to “The Divided Person Metaphor”

The Conceptual Metaphor most relevant to our discussion of inner plurality is The Divided Person Metaphor. It was developed as a model for conceptualizing the self around the time that “non-cognitively oriented theories of semantics” were being disproved (Lakoff, 1996, p. 92). Lakoff explains how this evolution was catalyzed by a few key linguistic phenomena. In the era of generative semantics, for example, it was a widely-held contention that first-person

pronouns like “*I*, *me*, and *myself*” will always refer to the same person, the speaker of the sentence (p. 92). The flaw in this logic was famously elucidated by a few examples, one of which being the counterfactuals exhibited in 1.1 and 1.2 below:

1.1 If I were you, I’d hate me.

1.2 If I were you, I’d hate myself. (p. 91)

Since these sentences mean different things, it became clear that a deeper explanation was necessary. Lakoff ultimately concluded that to understand such cases where reflexive pronouns fail to indicate identity of reference, “we must be able to conceptualize a person as having two parts: the *Subject* and the *Self*” (p. 93). The Subject is essentially “the locus of subjective experience, [including] consciousness, perception, judgement, will, and capacity to feel” (p. 93). The Self, by contrast, is “the part of us that acts in the world” like our bodies, emotions, and cultural beliefs (p. 93). Together these claims are known as *The Divided Person Metaphor*. It is a “superordinate” metaphor, meaning it “forms the basis for a whole system of other metaphors” (p. 99). One of these, *The Projected-Subject Metaphor*, helps us interpret 1.1 and 1.2 as the *Subject-of-I* being projected onto the *Subject-of-You* in a hypothetical situation.³

Looking at various linguistic expressions, Lakoff and Becker (1991) point to some of the more nuanced layers of the “The Divided Person Metaphor,” demonstrating the related system of sub-metaphors we use to conceptualize the self in English. Consider 1.3 - 1.7 below.

1.3 I lost myself in writing.

1.4 I found myself in writing.

1.5 You need to step outside yourself.

1.6 I’m beside myself.

1.7 I’m not myself today. (Lakoff, 1996, p. 99)

³ While the explanation of this interpretation will not be belabored here, it should be noted that it is made possible largely by Fauconnier’s theory of mental spaces (1985), which replaced Kripke’s “possible worlds” and surpassed the limitations of logical forms (Lakoff, 1996, p. 93).

The examples 1.3 and 1.4 are telling because *lost* and *found* are opposites, yet these expressions do not have opposite meanings. Similarly, the prepositional phrases in 1.5 - 1.6 indicate that some properties of the “physical senses of those words” are being mapped onto a more abstract domain. All of these examples allude to the presence of a rich system of metaphors at work in our conceptualization of a person’s “inner structure” (p. 100). Crucially, 1.7’s phrase “I’m not myself today” does not mean “X is not X.” Rather, it implies that there are two different aspects of the same entity that are distinct--two contrasting incarnations of Self. In fact, Lakoff has demonstrated evidence of “various kinds of Subject/ Self divisions,” and of our tendency to conceptualize them as “external individuals.” Problematically though, these divisions are often inconsistent with one other, and don’t seem to “fit together into a simple general scheme” (p. 100). It is the primary goal of the present paper, to demonstrate how The Internal Family Systems Model can in a sense, resolve this issue: offering a framework that accounts for our internal inconsistencies, and even suggests some methods to unify or otherwise harmonize them.

C. The Data: Internal Family Systems Model (IFS)

1. Intro to IFS

The “Internal Family Systems Model” (IFS) is a metaphorical conception of the self that drew inspiration from literal (external) “family systems therapy.” For the purpose of this paper, we can think of this psychological theory itself as the data that we are using conceptual metaphor to analyze. IFS Founder, Dr. Richard Schwartz, was a practicing family therapist who followed Minuchin and other externally-based psychologists of his time in the early 1970’s. They were some of the first to introduce “systems thinking”--a concept that originated in organismic biology around the same time--to therapy. He mainly worked with troubled adolescents, treating them by reframing their psychological issues and behavior symptoms as reactions to issues in the larger family dynamic, often trying to “protect” the parents from dealing with their failed marriages (Schwartz 2020, p. 6).

Inspired by Bowen and Satir, Schwartz wrote his dissertation on improving communication between couples in order to improve individual self-esteem (p. 8-9). Though the strategy initially seemed effective, the follow-up to the study showed that the couples had not retained a higher sense of self-esteem (p. 8). When Schwartz got hired at the Institute for Juvenile Research (IJR) in Chicago, he learned about a newly diagnosed disorder called “bulimia,” and felt inspired to use this population to test (and he predicted) to prove the efficacy of family systems therapy. But when some clients’ bulimic symptoms persisted even after the family had been “reorganized,” Schwartz began to doubt the effectiveness of the externally-focused family systems approach as a sole provider of healing (p. 9).

2. Inner Parts

Driven by his frustration in working with a treatment-resistant patient named Quinn, Schwartz stepped outside the theoretical model of family systems therapy and asked her about her inner experience, and what was occurring there that kept driving her to binge and purge (p. 10). Quinn responded by describing “warring parts” in her mind: seemingly autonomous voices that “talked back, said funny things, and were willing to cite their motives” (p. 10). This discovery held major implications for the field of psychology which, in the 20th century, viewed the phenomenon of “psychic multiplicity” as pathological--and in which professionals often used singular adjectives (“needy, hostile, nurturing” etc), to describe patients. Working with Quinn and other young women with eating disorders, Schwartz slowly assimilated the idea that “although our limited vocabulary for distinguishing among inner entities (at least in English) blocks us from being aware of the activity of this inner community” it is still very much a constant, active presence (p. 11). As he continued working with his patients’ inner parts, he found that these inner families displayed some of the same issues external ones, particularly in terms of “leadership problems” (p. 15).

3. Parts as “Inner People”

Schwartz contends that though parts can be identified by certain labels as to how they present in a given instance, (ie “the *sad part*, the *angry part*, the *caretaker*” etc), one label, one emotion, or even one “habitual thought pattern” does not capture their true essence (p. 30). Parts should be understood as “discrete, autonomous mental systems,” that have individual goals, challenges, strengths, and beliefs about the world. Like a “caretaking child” or “an angry rebel” in an external, alcoholic family, different inner parts can be “forced into extreme [maladaptive] roles that they don’t want” for the survival of the system (p. 31).

According to Schwartz, these parts take on roles that can be categorized into three general archetypes: managers, exiles, and firefighters. Managers are “highly protective, strategic, and interested in controlling the environment to keep things safe” (p. 31). Managers suppress or hide the parts that feel “injured” or “outraged” for the good of the system, and these are called “exiles.” Exiles are often young; an inner personality with the innocence and temperament of a child, lacking the capacity to process the trauma they are experiencing. To protect, “stifle, anesthetize, or distract from the feelings of exiles” are the firefighters (p. 31). Though they have the same ultimate goal as managers, “to keep exiles out of mind,” firefighters use very different tactics, often including “numbing activities like self-mutilation, binge eating, drug or alcohol abuse, dissociation, and sexual risk taking” (p. 35). They often overtake a person thoroughly, without concern for distress they may cause to other parts of the system. Because of this, the protective parts (managers and firefighters) are often at odds--and “the more an exile is suppressed, the more it tries to break out,” perpetuating an unhealthy cycle (p. 31).

Schwartz observed that these dysfunctional relationship dynamics mirrored those found in (external) Family Systems Therapy (“triangulation,” “scapegoating,” etc), and began trying to help them improve their communication (p. 15). This proved to be a difficult feat. Even engaging in noncoercive dialogue with one part at a time was a challenge, since other parts often

interrupted, escalating the conflict (p. 16). Familiar with this dynamic from working with (external) families, Schwartz developed a method of asking the interfering parts to “step back” so that the desired part or parts had a chance to speak. It was engaging in this process with a patient named Cora that he first discovered the open, compassionate, “true self” lying in wait behind all the others. This part, which he began to call the “Self” with a capital “S,”⁴ was the essence of each patient’s inner leader. To Schwartz’s surprise, all of his patients demonstrated the presence of a “Self” part, and in each case that part seemed naturally equipped with an innate sense of calmness, confidence, creativity, and healing (p. 17-18).

III. Analysis of Conceptual Shifts IFS Inspires to the Metaphorical Understanding of the Self in English

A. Normalizing Inner Plurality

Schwartz discovered that despite psychotherapy’s history of considering “inner parts” to be pathological, they are actually ubiquitous, and subsequently, working with them is very intuitive. This makes sense from a cognitive linguistic perspective, in which the Internal Family Systems Model may be seen as an elaboration of the metaphorical system we already have. The focus of this paper will now turn to demonstrating how the IFS Model is conceptually structured through The Divided Person Metaphor, and how this particular elaboration allows us to reason about the self in a way different from standard, everyday understandings--resulting in a more compassionate self-conception.

For example, Lakoff contends that based on the Divided Person Metaphor, “Normal functioning is non self-conscious and controlled with no internal incompatibilities” (1996: 101). IFS holds that there is always a system of inner entities, and incompatibilities are normal--a more unified feeling of consciousness occurs when the parts are working cohesively.

⁴ A note on convention: the term “*Self*” with a capital “S” has a different significance in Lakoff’s vs. Schwartz’s theories. As mentioned above, for Lakoff it implies “the part of us that acts in the world,” while for Schwartz it is the “true self.” For the purposes of our analysis here, we will use Lakoff’s definition, and the term “the true self” will refer to “the open and curious part”.

Essentially, IFS teaches us that optimal functioning is a result of our inner parts in a state of harmony and appropriate hierarchies. Beyond normalizing inner plurality, IFS teaches us to understand how our “incompatibilities” are actually evidence of our psyche trying to protect itself. Schwartz would say that this concept can be difficult to grasp, precisely because our different parts will disagree on the best method of self-protection--and because different parts manifest at different levels of consciousness in each moment. The personification of inner parts is a crucial aspect of IFS’s elaboration of The Divided Person: because our inner parts are perceived as somewhat autonomous “people,” we are able to conceive of a rich variety of interactions among them. Within this richness we find space to reimagine our everyday conceptions of ourselves, and find healing.

B. Reimagining the “Rationality vs. Emotions” Binary

1. The Divided Person and the Objective Subject

Consider example 1.8 below.

1.8 “He took a long, hard look at himself”

This expression represents our attempt to see ourselves as others see us, conceptually splitting ourselves in two (Lakoff, 1996, p. 102). To review, Lakoff explains this divide as:

- a. The Subject: Locus of consciousness/ rationality/ subjective experience
- b. The Self: Our bodies / emotions / the part of us that acts in the world

It is telling that “rationality” is considered coupled with conscious awareness, while “emotions” are considered separate. Lakoff writes that this conception is shaped by a strong cultural belief that “the Subject, our locus of consciousness and reason, *should* be in control of our Self, so that our desires and passions do not get out of hand and lead us to harm others” (p. 102). This binary view that emotions and rationality cannot exist together, is indicative of a certain disconnected nature of the self in western culture. IFS reframes this idea in the sense that the “open and curious” part is considered the true and most central self, but its job is not to control the other inner parts as much as it is to listen to, lead, and work with them. Though they

may perform maladaptive coping mechanisms before therapy is introduced, the parts are not inherently good or bad--they are simply balanced or unbalanced, and can function within a gradient of helpful to hurtful (Schwartz, 2020).

Lakoff notes that our culture also tells us that “there is a singular way we ‘really are,’ and an objective viewpoint from which we could see it, if only we could ‘get there’” (p. 102).

While the IFS Model does acknowledge the “open and curious” inner part as the “true Self,” it emphasizes that each of the inner archetypes are necessary components of the self-system. Each part is seen as having its own, completely valid, subjective experience, and these parts can interact with one another and/or the outside world.

2. The Objective-Subject Metaphor

The mapping of this metaphor contends that:

- i. The Self is a container for the Subject
- ii. Being subjective is staying inside the Self
- iii. Being objective is going outside the Self

This mapping combines with the metaphor “Knowing is Seeing,” to create the source domain knowledge that “when one is inside a container one cannot see the outside of the container, the part that outsiders see. One is normally inside, and going outside takes more effort and more control than staying inside” (p. 103). The IFS Model proposes a different spatial conception: the various parts are asked to “step aside”--almost like removing layers--and at some point uncover the “true Self” (“open and curious” part). This process is an elaboration of the concept of “removing the ‘Subject’ from the container”. Parts can also “step forward” when it is their moment to communicate their needs or serve their purpose. The two conceptual models share elements of effort, control, and “removing” the most central/true part or Self, from a state of being encased. In the IFS model though, each “removed” element is seen as an important aspect of the self as a whole, removing the hierarchical conception of “objectivity” and

“subjectivity.” Each “subjective” element of the self is seen as serving a purpose, and can only be thanked for its service, and asked to step aside for the purposes of examining certain issues.

3. The Loss of Self

To “lose yourself” in an activity means to continue doing the activity while relinquishing conscious control of it, or ceasing “to be aware of each thing one is doing” (Lakoff, 1996, p. 104). The default state of “conscious control” is thought of as the Subject “possessing” the Self; not being in conscious control is conceptualized as “loss,” as in “I lost control.” The “loss” can have either a “positive” / “exhilarating” connotation, or a “scary” / “negative” connotation. In IFS, this concept leads into the character traits of the personified components--namely a protector taking over, particularly in negative cases in which one is “seized by anxiety” or “in the grip of fear”. These phrases represent instances of a “firefighter” coming to the forefront of consciousness. Another of Lakoff’s examples in this category is “to get carried away,” defined as “when one feels that one’s actions are being controlled by someone else, a hostile being, as when one feels possessed” (p. 104). In IFS this phrase would represent at least three roles interacting, perhaps two different protectors, a “hostile” one, the one who is (later or simultaneously) “afraid” of the hostile one, and the threatened exile that the firefighter rushed in to protect.

This is another example in which IFS elaborates our current metaphorical model to be more empowering. Rather than seeing a “loss of conscious control” as a “possession” by an external being, and all of the negative cultural references that come along with it (ie demonic possession as feared in various religious sects), we can think of our own “surprising” or “out-of-control-feeling” actions as being performed by inner parts that are usually more subconscious--parts whose motives and needs can be understood and modified by conscious attention and examination with the most neutral focused awareness (the “true self” in IFS or “The Subject” in CMT). In this way IFS can help us move away from the current binary conception of Subject vs. Self, toward a more unified image in which each emotional response

(or Self), is considered a necessary part of the system. It empowers us to enact change to our subconscious patterns or responses, through compassionate awareness and a systems understanding.

The positive loss of self is currently conceptualized as “freedom from normal concerns.” This concept is mirrored in psychological theory (and also various religious practices) in the idea of a “flow state,” named by positive psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi in 1975 (Harmat, Andersen, Ullén, Wright, & Sadlo, 2018). Csíkszentmihályi describes it as “a state of complete immersion in an activity” in which “the ego falls away” and “time flies.” He compares the experience to playing jazz, in which “every...thought follows from the next one.” Crucially, he says, “you are using your skills to the utmost” and “*your whole being is involved*” (Cherry, 2020). Within this very statement is an implied unity of internal parts, and a conceptualization of this unity as the most optimal state of being.

Modern flow researchers have expanded on this idea, conducting studies that demonstrate the benefits of flow state across various domains including “creativity and productivity,” sports, education, social interactions, and even physiological well-being (Harmat, Andersen, Ullén, Wright, & Sadlo, 2018). This research indicates an inclination to promote inner unity as the optimal mental state in at least one other sub-section of clinical psychology--conceptually supporting the IFS focus on full-system validation and health, rather than the current western conception of promoting only the “rational” part to control the others.

C. Spatial Conception: Parallels & Differences

1. The Split Self Metaphor

This sub-metaphor shows many parallels with the IFS elaboration, acting as further evidence of its intuitiveness. Lakoff contends that “incompatible aspects of a person are [conceptualized as] different people” (p. 105). He maintains that these inconsistencies are conceptualized through two common metaphors: “Being at war with oneself,” as in, “*He’s at war with himself. He’s struggling with himself over whether to go into the church,*” and “*Going back*

and forth,” as in, *“I keep going back and forth between the scientist and the priest in me.”* The mappings of these metaphors are as follows: “having the same values is being in the same place,” and “indecision is going back and forth.” What we ultimately infer from this understanding is that since “you can’t be in two places at the same time... “you can’t have incompatible values” and “adopting new values necessarily entails giving up old [ones]” (p. 105).

This model provides evidence of the limited binary thinking of our current conceptual model. But the IFS elaboration normalizes internal incompatibilities or inconsistent values. In IFS the “true Self” / “open and curious part” listens to the arguments of different protectors, and sympathizes or “is in the same place” as each of them, in different moments. Again here, the emphasis shifts to acceptance of and working within the whole. IFS acknowledges that there will always be different “Self” aspects, or internal roles, with their individual perspectives and goals. The objective of therapy and self-inquiry in general is about finding a way for the system to be in harmony.

2. The Scattered Self Metaphor

This metaphor may be seen in expressions such as “I’m all over the place,” and other phrases that indicate a difficulty in functioning “when there are a lot of divergent demands on your attention” (Lakoff, 1996, p. 111). This mental state can arise as a result of attending to “divergent needs, responsibilities, [or] interests...[or] when you are emotionally upset” (p. 111-112). According to Lakoff, “the Self’s attending to one concern is conceptualized as the Self being in one place,” so, “when different aspects of the Self are attending to different concerns, the Self is split into different places” (p. 112). In IFS terms, this state is a symptom of disharmony within the inner system--so many internal incompatibilities are present that it affects one’s ability to focus their conscious attention. This state could be brought about by overactive firefighters, and/or the presence of a protector who shields exiles from pain using the techniques of dissociation or confusion.

In our current conceptual model, the antidote to the Scattered Self is “focusing attention on one concern [to bring] parts of the Self together” (p. 112). This idea is consistent with the IFS elaboration, which uses conscious attention to investigate and heal inner parts’ issues. But IFS takes the concept deeper: the uncovering process reaches for exiles that are hidden / frozen / “stuck,” and attends to their needs as defined by past traumas, thereby rewiring the processes that have been inhibiting conscious functioning.

3. The Self-Control-is-Up Metaphor

A crucial component of the IFS elaboration of The Divided Person Metaphor is the shift from a hierarchy to a systems approach. Because “control is up, [and] lack of control is down” in our current metaphorical model, we conceive of the Subject as being above the Self, and exerting control “over it,” as in, “he’s got control over himself” (Lakoff, 1996, p. 115-116). “Losing control,” then, is seen as “the Subject falling or being overcome.” This metaphor is realized in two special cases, the first of which is “conscious is up, unconscious is down,” which we observe in expressions like, “he fell asleep,” “she slipped into a coma,” and “he fell into a drunken stupor” (p. 116).

Because IFS focuses on making subconscious processes conscious, the second case is more relevant to our purposes here. Since “reason” is seen as localized to the Subject and “passion” is seen as localized to the Self, we understand that “reason is up, [and] passion is down” (p. 116). This metaphor may be observed in expressions like, “the argument fell to an emotional level,” “a sudden impulse came over me,” and “we had a high-level, rational discussion” (p. 116). Each of these expressions exemplify the perceived binary split and hierarchy of rationality and emotions in western culture.

The negative connotations of “falling into” or “being overcome” by emotions are further strengthened by their association with another conceptual metaphor, “health is up, sickness is down” (Kovecses 2010). The emotional mind is perceived as something we must be wary of succumbing to, almost like an illness. This is a key variable that can be reframed by IFS, in

which no such hierarchy exists. The spatial conception does not deal in components of “above” and “below,” more vulnerable parts of the system are simply seen as “behind” the others. The concept of “being overcome” by an emotion or impulse is recognized in IFS as a protector “coming forward” or “coming out” (often a firefighter if the change is sudden and dramatic). But even in these cases, through IFS we understand that protectors have a valid reason for coming forward--they are doing so for the protection of the exiles, and the survival of the system. When we seek to understand the impetus for these responses with openness and curiosity, we can actually view them as helpful clues to system understanding and repair. The goal is to view our actions through a more compassionate lens, and work to rewire the system from a place of non-judgment.

D. The Real & Unreal Inner Selves

1. The True Self

This metaphor presents another difference in terminology between Schwartz and Lakoff. In this paper thus far I have used the term “true Self” to reference Schwartz’s definition: the open, curious inner part of one’s psyche that is the natural leader of the others. According to Lakoff, our current cultural conception of the “true Self” is somewhat similar, but it differs in an important way--we think of the “true Self” as a more desirable or optimal version of ourselves, that we would like to *replace* a perceived current self.

When we feel unsatisfied with our lives--in terms of career trajectory for example--it is metaphorically understood that this is because our “true Self” has not been realized (p. 106). The “true Self” is defined as “the Self which is compatible with your judgment as to what is [truly] important,” and if you are unhappy with your place in life, your “true Self” is incompatible with the Selves that *have* been realized (Lakoff, 1996, p. 106). Those aspects of a person that are “realized” are metaphorically considered to be “in the same place as the Subject,” (i.e. *in touch with oneself*) while Selves that are “unrealized” are “not in the same place as the Subject” (i.e.

out of touch) (p. 106). In order to reach our most optimal level of being, we must “find” our “true Self”--or that is the cultural story we tell ourselves through the English language.

In the IFS Model, the optimal level of being is not achieved by finding the one “true Self,” but rather by discovering and conversing with a variety of inner parts, in order to bring harmony to the system as a whole. Like in our current conceptual model, the ease of this ideal state can be conceived of as the absence of internal incompatibility--but unlike the current model, it is not because one “true Self” has been “found” and can replace the others. It is because the needs of all the parts have been validated and addressed. In IFS, the “true Self” does not equate to the concept of “optimal level of being,” but a leader who can help the system reach its optimal level by facilitating healing between different managers, firefighters, and exiles. Schwartz contends that getting in touch with the “true Self” is crucial, but it is only the first step in working toward a harmonious state of being.

In order to reach the “true Self” and the hidden, more vulnerable inner parts (exiles), there is a necessary process of “uncovering” that takes place. The therapist and the patient ask protectors to step aside, but the goal is not to banish or replace those inner parts. In fact, Schwartz emphasizes that protectors will only feel comfortable stepping aside if they are approached with gentleness, empathy, and gratitude--and patients and therapists should be aware that asking one protector to step aside will often reveal another one.

This “uncovering” process is an elaboration of our conception of “realized” and “unrealized” Selves (as defined by Lakoff). As a person slowly unearths various inner parts, they are “brought” to consciousness--or metaphorically understood as “being in the same place” as conscious awareness (the closest IFS correlate to what Lakoff defines as “The Subject”). Importantly though, “The Subject” is defined as “neutral” in the sense that it is rationality void of emotion, while its correlate, the conscious awareness implicated by IFS, is multi-layered. When we become conscious of a new part, we often work our way through various perceptive lenses (judging, impatient, etc) before arriving at the “open and curious” perspective--and even this

lens is not void of emotion, but rather actively curious and open-minded. This is one of the most important shifts the IFS Model offers to our current metaphorical conception of “Self”: “finding your true Self” is not a wholly rational process, divorced from emotion; in fact, it necessitates active engagement in emotional inquiry.

2. The Real Me

Lakoff defines this metaphor through the example of being “depressed” or “grumpy” and “saying something unkind to a friend,” and then the next day apologizing by insisting that you “weren’t yourself” yesterday (1996: 107). In this model, “the ‘Self’ that people normally see is compatible with the Subject’s values.” Lakoff raises the point that this metaphor may, on the surface, seem inconsistent with the “true Self metaphor,” but that the dissonance can be explained by considering the “true Self metaphor” to be correlated to the “cosmic values that determine the course of one’s life” (spiritual, vocational, etc), and the “Real-Me” is more about “everyday values involved in social interaction” (p. 107).

IFS naturally resolves any perceived discrepancy here, coming from the standpoint of all inner parts being valid. Subsequently, the “Real-Me” that we talk about could be the “true Self” as Schwartz defines it, but it could also reference a manager part who normally deals with stressful social interactions. The offending part that acted “depressed,” “grumpy,” or otherwise flouted social norms--the “un-Real me” as Lakoff calls it--could be conceptualized in IFS as a different protector coming forward, likely a firefighter who came to the forefront to shield an exile. The part that steps in to do damage control is probably a manager, carrying out an apology the following day, or otherwise taking steps to mitigate the threat of social damage (loss of face, etc).

3. The Two Inner Selves

This metaphor concerns the difference between how people act in “private” situations vs. “public” ones, especially regarding a desire to repress “true feelings” and present a certain, more socially palatable self for external viewing. The two inner selves are evident in expressions

like “the truth came out” and “keep your feelings in.” These expressions also illustrate the influence of other conceptual metaphors: “knowing is seeing” and “essential is central” (p. 108). Because “knowing is seeing,” the outside self is visible, while the inside self is hidden and unknown. Because “essential is central,” the inner self is considered more “real.”

But this is another example in which the IFS elaborates the metaphor in a way that removes the hierarchy of selves--all selves are seen as valid and essential. With our current metaphorical model, we believe that “revelations about someone’s private life are seen as insights into [their] ‘true character,’” but IFS would counter that such insights are simply evidence of different, if perhaps more vulnerable aspects of a person--exiles and the protectors that shield them. IFS can help people reconcile the experience of the divergent inner parts by fostering an understanding of their different goals, and their triggers for coming out. Through this framework it becomes possible to analyze and understand the sometimes extreme or seemingly irrational actions these parts take.

4. The General Inner Self Metaphor

This metaphor is used to extrapolate two special cases: “The Unacceptable Inner Self Metaphor” and “The Fragile Inner Self Metaphor.” These sub-metaphors are evident in expressions such as “you’ve never seen what he’s really like” and “he retreats into himself,” respectively (Lakoff, 1996, p. 108-109). Both of these metaphors correlate to the concept of “exiles” in IFS. In the first special case, the inner self has “negative, socially unacceptable aspects” and is hidden by the “Subject” due to shame. In the second, the inner self is “fragile” and “needs to be protected from the world by a false, outer self” (p. 108-109).

The IFS elaboration perceives both of these cases as protectors shielding exiles from pain. It is interesting that the “unacceptable” inner self is conceived of as being hidden consciously, by the Subject, while the “fragile” inner self is conceived of as hidden by another Self, implying a lack of conscious awareness in the process. It entails that we are aware of suppressing some shameful aspects of ourselves for social purposes--while protecting our

vulnerability, (often our young exiles), and subsequently disconnecting from them, happens more automatically. IFS is a tool to bring compassion to both of these processes, and foster reconnection.

5. Being True to Yourself

This metaphor refers to the Self in terms of personal, familial, cultural and other contextual values. The Self is conceived of as a person “who sets standards for the subject,” and the Subject “can fail to live up to the Self’s standards either by choice or not” (p. 109). Failure by choice is thought of as “betraying the Self,” and failure not by choice is thought of as “letting the Self down.” This is an interesting metaphor because it is the Self, rather than the Subject (conscious awareness) that is setting standards to be followed, as seen in “I disappointed myself.” So why is the Self the one declaring standards of behavior? Lakoff contends that it is because the “Self” is the aspect that interacts with the outside world, ergo the one with “a past”--while the “experiencing consciousness,” the Subject, can only exist in the present (p. 109). In this sense the IFS model aligns with our current conceptual understanding. If we assume the “Self” is composed of various IFS archetypes--exiles and protectors--we know that they were all formed in the past: exiles a fragment of mind frozen in a moment of trauma, and protectors appearing in those moments to shield them.

However, the Self can also disappoint the Subject, in such expressions as “I’m disappointed in myself” (p. 109). (This exemplifies a metaphor that will be touched on later in this paper, in which the Self is conceived of as a servant for the Subject). This expression is interesting, seeming to indicate a disharmony within the system, or a protector coming forward that the person was not consciously aware of.

E. Internal Forces

1. The Internal-Causation Metaphor

In our current conceptual model, “causes are understood metaphorically as forces,” and “internal causation” is understood in terms of “external causation” (p. 112). In phrases like “I

lifted my arm,” the Subject acts as the cause, “exerting force on the Self” to make the arm move (p. 112). The concept also applies to phrases that express will in a slightly more abstracted way, like “I made myself get up early” or “I restrained myself from hitting him” (p. 112). In IFS this relationship between Subject and Self might be understood as the influence of a protector acting on another protector, such as a “coach” archetype that “makes” you get up early to avoid the consequences of being late for work. This is an area which may be best explored by Fauconnier’s “blended spaces” theory. Though this paper is too brief to dive into such an analysis, it would certainly be a rich topic to explore given the range of internal “roles” or “archetypes” that show up in dialogue with patients (Earley, 2009).

2. The Self as Companion: Friend and Servant

From the mappings of the Internal-Causation Metaphor we understand that the Subject and the Self are conceived of as “two people inhabiting the same body” (Lakoff, 1996, p. 113). From this we see that there are two special cases that are elaborated from the mappings of the Internal Causation Metaphor: one in which the Self is seen as the Subject’s “Friend,” and one in which it is a “Servant.” Work within the IFS model would strive to make each and every aspect of Self the Subject’s friend, treated as “an equal with whom you share and discuss thoughts” (p. 113). If the Self is conceived of as a servant who “carries out the Subject’s needs and desires,” the Subject is the “master,” responsible for caring for the Self (p. 113).

This model could perpetuate a potentially unbalanced relationship however, on the grounds that there is an inherent hierarchy in the “master” and “servant” relationship. Lakoff writes that “when the Self makes a mistake, the Subject may reprimand him,” and “when the Self cannot perform up to the standards of the Subject, the Subject may be disappointed in the Self” (p. 115). This dynamic inherently lacks compassion--the primary difference between our current conception and the IFS elaboration of it.

The Divided Person Metaphor demonstrates how it is so culturally and linguistically engrained for us to judge and reprimand ourselves. The IFS Model would hold that these

reactions demonstrate the presence of protectors, whose strategies--though they may have been helpful for survival at a certain time in life--will ultimately become counterproductive and harmful. The "Subject Master" and "Self Servant" dichotomy can be seen as the basis of a host of maladapted coping techniques.

IV. Conclusion and Overview: How IFS Restructures the System

In comparing our current metaphorical conception of the self with IFS, we have seen how different metaphorical elaborations come with different inferences. "The Divided Person Metaphor" demonstrates that though we are conscious of the plural psyche in our current conceptual model, the various "Selves" are conceived of in a hierarchical manner, one that overemphasizes a "rational" perspective and devalues emotion. Internal Family Systems frames the self with the same set of metaphors we already use, but it elaborates the model more fully, personifying the inner parts and providing us with language for the various roles they can take, and the rich variety of interactions that occur between them. This elaborated model allows us to consider the needs of each of our inner parts as valid and crucial to our mental well-being.

This analysis contributes to the small but growing body of literature that utilizes CMT in an interdisciplinary context. Researchers have noted its effectiveness as a tool in clinical psychology, and here specifically it has been shown to be a beneficial tool in unpacking the inferential structure of psychological theories. Patients are making cognitive and lifestyle changes based on the validity of these models, so it is important to understand the inferences upon which they are predicated.

More broadly speaking, this analysis points to the importance of analyzing the metaphorical structure of theoretical frameworks in general. Applying CMT as an analytical lens reveals the ideas *implicit within* these frameworks--assumptions that ultimately inform decisions made by researchers, the media, and even policy-makers. In this way, understanding the conceptual models by which we live, can create real change in people's lives--and elucidating the different elaborations of conceptual metaphors, will only provide more insight into the

workings of the mind, inspiring further research in the field of metaphor itself. For these reasons, it is crucial that the knowledge of conceptual metaphor is integrated with that of other fields. As Lakoff writes in his 1997 paper, “people can believe their metaphors and live according to them.” The onus is on us now, as cognitive linguists, to investigate the frameworks of other disciplines, and uncover the beliefs upon which they are operating.

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