

A Practical Integration of Internal Family Systems and the Enneagram: Mapping Parts Across the Nine Types

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Why put the Enneagram and IFS side by side?

Most people think of the Enneagram as a typing system and Internal Family Systems (IFS) as a therapeutic model. When you put them side by side, you can begin to see that each Enneagram type actually has its own constellation of IFS defined Parts that shape how that type shows up in the world.

Working with our Enneagram patterns is often a quest to soften the impact of the habitual, to open the limited view screen that our patterns create, as we interact with our world. Using the IFS method, we can work with our Parts to loosen (in IFS speak, unburden) and repurpose these facets of ourselves.

I am going to walk around all nine types and look at how IFS can accelerate Self-awareness and growth. First a bit of context.

How I came to this integration

I've been steeped in the Enneagram for a very long time. Narrative trained during the "golden years" with both Helen Palmer and David Daniels. Around 2010, I learned of a therapeutic model called IFS.

My curiosity led me to discover a particularly useful way to access different areas of development, different challenges, what David Daniels often called our "growing edges".

IFS has a step by step method that I have found to be a really good fit for exploring Enneagram patterns and what underlies them.

Since 2019 I have been actively developing the possibilities of this integration. (see *IFS Integration*, Riemersma, ed. PESI, 2025, chapter 25, Ryan and Sollenberger)

IFS basics: Parts, Protectors, Exiles, Self

IFS is a model created by Dr. Richard Schwartz about 40 years ago. Dick Schwartz is a family systems therapist, who, in his telling, became frustrated by the limits of the help these models brought to his clients and patients. As he says, the patients didn't know they had been cured. He is very much a systems thinker and that's important to this model.

You will find a link to his IFS Institute at the end of this article. Also note that in the past 10 years IFS has become a very hot property. Trainings are filled to capacity, now limited to licensed mental health professionals and by lotteries from long waiting lists. IFS is used in therapy, coaching, negotiation, business and many other settings.

The basic idea underlying IFS is that we are all in some way multiple in that we have different Parts or subpersonalities in ourselves that at different times and in different circumstances are driving our thoughts, our actions, our emotions, and our behaviors. And that's all unconscious. So it lines up with the Enneagram from that perspective.

Parts (and my first image for them)

These sub-personalities are called Parts. When I was first learning this, I would think of those old cartoons where you had a little angel on one shoulder and a little devil on the other and they were arguing with each other. Kind of like that, except without the caricatures.

These Parts have distinct views and ideas and are often stuck in a place in the past without awareness that we have grown, aged and changed.

The three categories

Parts are divided into different categories. The three basic categories are called **Protectors, Exiles and Self**.

Protectors are then divided into two different types, **Managers and Firefighters**. The difference between Managers and Firefighters is that Managers are Parts that act when they think there's a point of reactivity or a trauma that might be triggered, and they act to stop it before it happens. Firefighters come in once it is triggered and, in Dick's words, try to put out the flames. So it's a before and after around the triggering incident.

Behind them or underneath them and being “protected” are **Exiles**. These Exile Parts tend to be very young and often hurt or traumatized. Again, very much in the unconscious until you bring your attention to them.

Theoretically, you can have positive Exiles and positive Managers and Firefighters, but in the therapeutic model, we're usually looking first at the ones that have created discord in the system or are the root of some “stuckness”.

Mapping Parts, polarization, and the pace of this work

In working with clients, I find it helpful to try to create a map of the Parts that we encounter. Very often Parts are interconnected in some way. The method helps us to get into communication with them.

Since many Parts don't know that other Parts exist and they are often stuck at some point in the past, they often don't know that you have grown and changed. So you can have a Part of you that thinks one way and an opposite one right beside and they don't communicate, they may even have different ages and be unaware of each other. Quite often you have polarized Parts with very directly opposite views and experiences.

Once we get connected to them, we can begin do many things. I am going to add a caution here that all of this happens slowly and carefully, no forcing, no pressure, both of which will more than likely create backlash or shutdown.

We can update Parts that we're not five years old anymore or that we're not a teenager anymore. We can understand how they were formed and why they came in to protect those Exiles or hurt Parts that are far in the background. Often, we can do what IFS calls “unburden them,” which is to relieve them of the need to do this protective strategy through understanding and updating.

But we must do this slowly, carefully and with respect for each Part and its place in the internal system. We must always remember that each and every Part has a very good reason (in their limited view) for doing what they do, even if it seems negative or dangerous to our current reality. Respect is key.

My own type lens

I am a Nine, but I have a very strong line to Six because I was an attorney and my mind was trained in a six style way. To me, that's Six brain. So I was really skeptical at first.

But if you step into it and you begin to separate out the pieces of you that are driving the type structure, it begins to make a lot of sense. What happens on this day, doesn't happen on another day. That's an example of polarized Parts.

“What is that?” Or “I have this idea and I really want to make this change and something is in the way.” That's Parts.

One of the things that I could see when I first encountered this was that it aligned with what I knew about the Enneagram. It took me a long time, almost 10 years, to figure out what exactly that alignment was and how it could be workable. It isn't simple.

Self-energy (the 8 C's) and the Enneagram's essence qualities

There's another piece which is really important. In IFS theory, we all have underneath and as a base what Dick has called "Self" with a capital S. There are eight C qualities using words that begin with C, that define Self and Self-energy.

The alignment here is that the qualities of Self-energy are very similar to the higher or essence qualities mapped in the Enneagram. The words are different but the ideas are similar. These are the innate good qualities that are actually in everyone. It's just that they get, as I said, covered up and obscured and blocked by Protectors and Exiles and actually by the limitations of Enneagram defined type structure.

Self has **calm, curiosity, compassion, confidence, creativity, connectedness, clarity, and courage** (the 8 C's).

The theory is that the more that you, in IFS language, unburden the Protectors and the Exiles and thereby make space for the qualities of Self to come through.

The corollary to the Enneagram is that the more you relax the limitations of your Enneagram type structure, the more space you make for the essence qualities or the higher qualities to come through. They're always there, but they're obscured. And I love that similarity.

What's most striking is that you can use IFS and the Enneagram together to unburden the patterns, your Enneagram pattern to create space for your essence to rise and come forth. I really like that image. It shows how the anxiety level can go down and you can flourish more.

It's a complicated model the same way as the Enneagram is a complicated model. So I am just laying out the surface structure. Dick Schwartz is very clear, Self can't be damaged, is completely non-judgmental, and is in everyone somewhere underneath.

But you don't want to ever try to get rid of a Protector or get rid of an Exile. You just want to unburden it so that it can be what it was meant to be.

The corollary to the Enneagram is we're never trying to get rid of our type. Our types, as you know, have embedded in them many positive qualities. And I know that many people look at this and say, "Well, okay, so I'm this type. And if I just get rid of that." That's not how it works.

You're trying to relax the structure so that the positives have space to come through. And the metaphor of internal space, I think, is really powerful.

Walking around the types by Center

Heart Center (Types 2–3–4)

We know from the Enneagram that in an individual who identifies as a “Heart Type” we have to have Parts that are concerned with image, that are sensitive to their impact on other people in different ways, and that probably have more familiarity with their emotions than people in the other two centers, as a general rule.

So we can begin from that place looking for Parts and if you're using the IFS methodology, you're helping your client look for Parts.

Type Three

So to take that to Type Three, the image focus in Type Three is going to have Parts that are focused on accomplishments and tasks. And from there, I'll back into my favorite, which is the focus of attention, which of course we know in Type Three is tasks and goals.

So if I'm working with a Three client and I'm trying to use IFS, I might start with the Parts in that individual client that are focused on task and goal and try to flesh out what that individual's Parts think and do around that issue.

So I might ask a client who identifies with the Three patterns, the role of tasks and goals has been in their life. And then I might ask if they could find some of that in a Part. We look first, in IFS method, for a physical sensation or a particular thought that holds that view.

As the facilitator or clinician, I will focus on the things that I know have to be there to hold your Type structure. And the first one, obviously, is focus of attention. So tasks and goals and accomplishments. And then from there into what recognition of accomplishments or lack of recognition of accomplishments means. That would be the basic way that I would use IFS as the methodology to explore the type.

"Am I making sense" is a phrase that my Parts use to check where I am and it kind of comes up a lot. Using the method, I understand that now.

Another way that I can look at Type Three, if I'm working from an IFS lens, is I know that the identification, the way you see yourself if you're a Type Three, is going to be some version of "I am a successful person." And everybody's going to be a little different how they do that, which is why the Enneagram is so interesting. But there's got to be some energy around that.

I can begin with a client to look for the Parts that believe that and then begin to investigate why they do. So for example, in the Three, I might use an Enneagram question and say, "What does success mean to you?"

And then I would go into, "Where did that come from? Do you have memories or do you have associations in your past to that particular view of yourself being successful?"

And then we would go from there to try to find a Protector who is acting to make sure, in its view, and it's usually from a young age, that you are seen as successful. And that's how it just lays out beautifully if you do it together.

The other way that we can go is we can look for a Protector who believes this and we can interview them to find out how they actually craft a positive image. There's the image word again. To show other people that they're a success.

I caution that every individual of a type is going to have a slightly different take on this. And their Parts are going to be slightly different, but there's going to be a lot of commonality. There's going to be a lot of difference between what success might mean, but there's going to be a lot of similarity in how we project it, if that makes sense. So that's how I would begin to work with the Three.

In one interview the client said "when I was a little kid, my definition of success would be, did I make it into the town newspaper? Talking about one of my accomplishments."

So if we dug into that little kid, we would probably eventually find an Exile Part underneath who at one time or another was hurt by not being recognized or not being seen or had been ignored or something like that.

And a Protector came in and said, "I'm going to make sure that he's noticed and here's a great way to do it. Let's go find a way to get in the paper." And you can track it.

And that's what I meant when I said earlier that we map this out. What my students find and what I find for mySelf is when we begin to map that out, it begins to come into sharper focus.

"Oh, I see, that's why that's so important to me. That's why I've spent so much time doing that even though I keep trying to do it differently."

Type Two

So then we can move to Twos. I have a particular piece with all three image types, but I usually bring it up around Two.

I said in the introduction that the theory in IFS is that Self-energy is in all of us. And it can't be damaged and it can't be changed and it is non-judgmental, always in the present.

For many types, this is a very comforting idea if they come to understand it or adopt it. Of course, there's no pressure. You don't have to agree with me. (that's a Part of me by the way)

But if you do, and if you do agree that IFS makes sense and that Self does exist, it creates a solution for something that's always been an issue that I've seen particularly with Two, but also can come up with Three and Four.

And that is that if you work to soften the identification, which in the Two's case is "I am a helpful person, I am a giving person," you often hit a panic place in the Two or they find it in themselves because there's an underlying belief, which is an Exile Part, that without being helpful, they have no reason for being. It's a black hole. Some clients describe it as an abyss.

You find a similar story from some Threes. "If I am not a successful person, if I am not a doer, I have no reason for being."

If Self exists, that can't be true. And that's a way to create a platform to stand on that removes the possibility of that black hole.

In my experience, if we can get a Two to understand that and accept it, or a Three—Four is a little different—then we have a place to work that we never had before because they've got a base underneath. And that's been one of the biggest things with my clients and some of my friends for them to get.

So yes, we have Parts that say, "I am helpful, I am generous, I am giving." That's the identification and it's holding it together and we can go find those Parts, but we also can create an awareness that we're more than that. And I think that's really powerful.

Here is a little bit more on Twos. You're going to find Protectors where the attentional focus is so much on the other to the expense of the individual Two. So much focus goes out that there's not any left and that's where we find the Twos neglecting or resisting their own needs, those kinds of things. So again, it elucidates what we know about the type.

You're also going to find Parts that are going to create the limited view screen of the type pattern. Helen Palmer used to say that a type is like a horse with blinders on. It doesn't know there are blinders. It doesn't know that their vision is limited. This is true, of course, of all types.

But with respect to the Two, what it means is they only see needs in others unless they're really careful or unless they've done their development work. And they get locked on it and it's the Protector Parts that are maintaining that lock. So it's a good example again of how Protectors work.

Type Four

Fours, of course, have to be a little different because they wouldn't be happy otherwise. And I say that with lots of love for my Four friends.

But the identification for Four is that they are somewhat “unique” is the word we hear often, or in some way “special”, which is another word we hear often.

I suggest that while that is, in many cases objectively true, it gets magnified by the Parts and particularly the Protectors that are holding up the type structure of the Four.

Magnification is a word that I often add when I'm teaching. Four is the clearest example of magnification. They're not the only type where a certain sector of reality or perception is magnified, but it's the easiest one to see both from the outside and the inside.

So we've got Protectors that are, for whatever reasons in the structure of that individual, going to want to make that person stand out in the crowd, positively or negatively. We know this from the narratives, that Fours will sometimes seek negative attention and believe it to be better than no attention at all, some Fours. So I'd help the client to look for Protectors in that realm.

I'd also look for Protectors that are going to take the situation in front of them and magnify it to make it bigger, to make a bigger impact or to amp up the emotional tone. That's how the image piece works in the Four structure.

And there's nothing right or wrong about it. There's no judgment in this. It's just what happens. An emotion is an emotion, but if you're caught in it and you're a Four, it's going to get really, really big until we can catch it, if we're that individual and bring it back down into, as I said before, present moment and what's real.

It could still be really big, but we don't want that magnification because that's usually counterproductive to the individual. It takes them out of present moment and blurs their view of what is actually going on.

So the focus of attention for the Four, to keep going with the different factors that I look at, tends to be a very finely tuned sense of what's missing. And you hear this over and over again.

"I notice what isn't there before I notice what's present. And sometimes that really gets in my way."

So if a client says that to me, which very often they have, then I want to go help them find out why missing is more interesting to those Protector Parts and what are they protecting.

One possible explanation is that the Parts are often going to keep the attention on an idealization and not on what's there in the moment. So again, I've got an example of how I can dig into the push-pull behavior that we know Fours report all the time.

I can help them to look at, "This is why that Protector does that. This is what it thinks it's protecting me from." And maybe we can get it to relax a little bit, and then we get a little bit more of the authentic connection that we actually want.

Because again, I know from my Enneagram work that push-pull behavior is connected to idealizations and it interferes with the connection that is so badly wanted.

Head Center (Types 5–6–7)

Let's move on to the Head Center.

Type Six

I will start with the Sixes. In my experience, both with students, clients and my own Six side, Six can be the most difficult and most complicated type to work with, whether you're inside it or you're communicating with it.

That's because of the structure of the thinking and the doubt, which is the center of everything. It's the bane of existence for the Six, but also sometimes for those of us in relationship with it. And again, no judgment, just how it is.

I was teaching recently and what came out of me spontaneously was a piece of my own experience. I'm pretty good at seeing type and I have done a lot of typing interviews. I can read energy, I can feel it, I've been doing it forever.

But if I'm really, really stumped in a typing interview, I know that I better go look at Six because it's so complicated. And often when I do that it turns out to be correct. It's not confusion, it's the contradictions and opposites.

So we know from the Enneagram that the focus of attention for Six is anticipating or blunting danger, looking for possible harm. As with all types, this is going to be different for each individual Six. Something that one Six believes is potentially harmful is not going to ring true for another Six.

And again, this is a way to find the Parts that are driving this and the reason that it's different from one Six to the next.

I'm, as I said, narrative trained, so I teach with a panel. On a panel you see the similarities across type, but you also see the differences. I think that IFS explains a lot of those differences. It's the same idea, but it gets formed and shown differently.

So I'm going to look for, if I'm working with a Six at the beginning, something larger than just looking for harm or danger. My personal favorite is to look for the Part (that has to be there), that has the capacity to go to worst-case scenarios. It's just a good one to dig into. It was before IFS. It is now. All sixes can relate to it, even at the beginning.

Before IFS, we would work with the worst-case scenario facet of the Six and get them to try to go all the way down the rabbit hole til it gets so comical you have to laugh at it.

Now it's more about, "What created this? What created this propensity to do this in the thought process, which goes so quickly and so deeply and has so much impact on the whole system?"

And if we can find out what happened and where and why, and it's usually an early experience, or it's a series of experiences going back in age, usually you hit teenage and then around 10, you get back to the early—maybe we're going to figure out why this happened and then got stuck.

Maybe we can soften the impact of this thinking because again, what we know as Enneagram practitioners is that worst-case scenario thinking creates an enormous amount of anxiety and pain in our Six friends.

So I'm going to want to—Nine that I am, I'm going to want to find something that is going to help relieve that anxiety. That would be a way that I might do it.

The identification for the Six is another route. The identification is usually something around "I am logical" or "I am loyal." They can hold on to that logic or that loyalty with a death grip, as my dad would say.

But can we find out what is driving that need to do that? It's not just that "they're a Six and if you want to make me mad", watch me when somebody says, "I do that because I'm a type whatever." I get hysterical. You don't want to see that. It's not pretty.

Can we figure out what caused it, why that loyalty is stuck and so powerful. That's clearly a Protector. It sometimes is even a Firefighter that'll come in afterwards as a reason.

And we can communicate with it and we find out how it formed, then maybe we get it to relax. I think that's what I would do most with a Six.

You can work with the Parts that analyze everything, but they tend to be much broader and we're not going to get that relaxation of the tightly held pattern as easily with that. Also, a good Six can always out logic me or any other not Six type.

Again, experience lets me choose which facets of the Enneagram type I'm going to look for depending on the story of the individual client or student.

Type Five

So let's go to Five.

The identification for type Five—and these are all generalizations, and each individual is going to be a little different—is something around "I am a studious person" or "I'm a researcher-focused person" or something like that.

And using the IFS method, I want to see if we can find the Parts that feel that this is the most important facet of that individual's personality?

Identification is usually what the individual has landed on as a positive piece of themselves that they want to show to the world. So for the Five, who doesn't want to show much anyway, or feels that it's unsafe to show much anyway, we want to come to something that is relatively safe and not charged.

Studiousness or researcher-ness is a good way in.

We can look at "where and why did the Protectors form that are driving this quest for more and more and more knowledge on a particular subject". Or why does that Protector think that there's never an end to how much you can study something, which is often reported by Fives as problematic for them. So I want to work with something where it might make a difference.

The other way we can go with a Five is from the almost delight that you see in Fives on gathering knowledge. Like they just get really into it and you see the joy in it, but they get stuck.

I want them to have the joy in the gathering of knowledge, but I want them to have the capacity to step out of it, which many don't have, especially under times of stress.

If we can figure out what is driving all of that, what is making that a safe space, which is a good thing, we give them more choice in how they're navigating through the world. And more choice in behavior, thought, and feeling is always going to be the goal to me.

There's likely also in Fives, Parts that are very good at blocking out interference. We know this especially in Self-pres Fives with the castle behavior. And so the Parts have figured out how to create those blocks.

And again, "Can we get them to relax? How do we get them to relax?" In this method, that's by understanding what the Parts think they're doing and why they think it's necessary.

I think I said this before, but I'll repeat it here. A lot of the time strong Protector Parts are caught in something that happened very early in development and it has magnified the importance of this situation. There's an over-fixation on the importance of creating a protective barrier like the castle in the Self-pres or something like that.

That said, I very much follow Dan Siegel and I do not believe that type is— I never believed that type is formed by experience or nurture. I believe it falls on prepared

ground. So we're looking for "What are those experiences that set that pattern that is the type so deeply in the individual?"

Type Seven

Type Seven is interesting. In my materials, I normally said that the identification is "I am a visionary" and/or "I am a very positive person." I'm beginning to think with some current experience that it's broader than that. But for purposes of what we're doing here as an example, let's use that.

The way this usually shows up is that the individual who identifies as Seven is really good at overview, particularly 30,000-foot overview to use a common metaphor.

Often, however, they're not so good at detail and the nitty-gritty of getting that vision activated. That's not always true, but generally it is the opposite of type One. One focuses on detail, Seven focuses from up there.

What we want to do with both of them is we want to give them the facility to do both. And that move towards balance requires self awareness to catch the pattern when it activates.

If I'm working with a Seven and they identify themselves with positivity, that, from a therapeutic standpoint, is a big opening to try to find out "Why is there such a strong hold on being positive? Why is this so necessary and what has created that lock on positivity?"

They just won't go anywhere that isn't positive. It's interesting, but it's very, very limiting. And that's fascinating because the thing they often hate the most is limitation.

I want to know, "What do those Protectors think that allows them to take this limiting position of 'We have to be positive all the time' when we know that there are other Parts that absolutely go bananas with any kind of limitation or restriction?"

That can be very fertile ground.

We also know that it's really hard for Sevens to actually go into situations that they remember as or they experience as painful. We have to do this really carefully and very slowly.

I'm a big proponent, especially the last few years, of any change like this, any work like this, being done incrementally. I no longer believe that if you can see it, you can make this huge change. Because my experience is that's not sustainable for anybody, ever. Unfortunately, I would like it to be, but sorry, it isn't.

With a Seven, we have to go particularly slowly if we're going towards something that they perceive as pain. Now there's another piece here that's important, like with the other types, their perception of what's painful is going to be different for every Seven.

We can't, as the facilitator or the therapist or the coach, we can't assume that we know what's painful for them. I might begin with something like this: "Well, what's a painful situation that you feel you can handle or that you've learned to handle?"

And then maybe we find the Parts that have acclimated to that and have made peace with it so that they're okay.

The other big piece for Seven is the eternal quest for additional positive options or David Daniels would have said, "planning for pleasurable possibilities."

We know that because of that focus of attention, there have to be Parts that are scanning and are never satisfied and always looking forward.

Or the classic Seven planning example of "I planned this trip and it was so much fun and I had a great time planning it and then I got there and I was disappointed because it didn't meet the—"

What I want to know if I'm working with that person is "What's driving that? How did that get stuck in there?"

Because I want them to enjoy the planning and the trip. Can we figure out a way to talk to their Parts and get them to soften and get them to relax enough so that we can get there.

Body/Gut Center (Types 8–9–1)

Now we can move to, as Helen would say, the correct view of the world, which is the body or gut center, because that's mine.

Type Nine

I can start with Nine. So our audience here is primarily Enneagram-informed people. I am a Nine. I think if you wanted to nail me, I'm primarily a one-to-one subtype Nine. I don't like to be limited by that, but it's true.

One of the facets of my Nine structure is that I absolutely detest stereotyping. And I particularly detest stereotyping of Nines as inactive, we could say, if we were being gentle, or the "lazy" word comes up.

There have been incidents of me being on a Nine panel and somebody saying something about that inactivity. My favorite one was where I was sitting there. I was still a lawyer at the time. And I said, "Yeah, we're really, really lazy. There's a lawyer here."

My friend next to me is a doctor who runs treatment centers. And my friend over here is a government official who does blah, blah, blah."

So I say all of that as encouragement to our Nine listeners because what I've found by using IFS with myself is that perception of laziness is completely internal and is generally 100% unfounded.

The way I finally, finally learned it was quite recently, which is embarrassing, but okay. My brother, who's a Three, was here with me and I said something about how lazy I was and he stopped and he looked at me and he said, "Excuse me, who are you talking about?" And everything stopped.

So I throw that out to my Nine friends because you might have the same Parts I have that think that we have to stay under the radar. We have to see ourselves that way. And it is not true.

And there are episodes sometimes in a Nine's life where it looks like it's true. But if you see that, there's intense distress going on internally that they don't want you to know about.

So that's my Nine soapbox.

The identification of a Nine is usually some form of a peacemaker. Okay, so I was a courtroom lawyer. That's not exactly mediating, but I could do it. And being the calm presence in the room, which is very valued by every Nine I've ever met.

But that's very limiting because it means that you work very hard to stay under the radar. And it means that a lot of the talent and the positive and the impact that can be in that individual gets muted and pushed under.

So if I'm working with a Nine in the appropriate situation, I'm going to want to bring that out. I'm going to want to find out "What created that? Why is it so necessary to stay hidden for lack of a better descriptor? And why do your Protectors believe, as mine do, that the ultimate reason for being is to mediate disputes between other people and avoid conflict? What's that about? Where did that come from and why?"

What I can tell you is when you begin to work with that, both for myself and all of a sudden recently I have a lot of Nine clients, the system does begin to relax.

When the system relaxes, you can do what I'm doing with you today, which even 10 years ago I couldn't have done. I've worked on my Nine structure for years, but I couldn't sit here and do this cleanly and clearly like this because those Parts would get in the way. Does that make sense? I think it does.

In another way of looking at the Enneagram, I have a fairly substantial Eight wing. I always have. My dad was an Eight. I absorbed it and it's natural to me.

But it was always very sporadic and unpredictable, I had no control of it. The clarity of the Eight was very hard for me to stand in because I saw it negatively too from role modeling.

But when I began to help these Protectors to relax and unburden some of this with the IFS work, I began to step into the positive side of that Eight wing and the positive side of the Nine in me, which is the intuitive.

But I can't do it if the Parts are in there telling me that I can't be seen and I have to hide and I have to be worried about what everybody else thinks.

So I hope that's a good example. It is interesting that I have all these Nine clients because they're incredible people. And you would never call any of these people lazy, but they don't know that.

Type Eight

Let's go to Eight. So the focus of attention for Eight is power and control. And we know again, from the Enneagram study, that the need for power and control is primarily sitting, at least in my experience, in a need to not be controlled.

Most Eights that I've met, especially if they've done some of their work, really can clearly tell you that they don't actually care about controlling you. It looks like they do, but that's not what's going on. It's a protective stance.

And this is really a place where IFS is helpful because you can find the Parts that believe that and you can find the Parts that say, "Don't control me. Controlling me is unsafe."

And you can find in almost all of them the Exile that says, "If I'm being controlled, I'm going to get hurt."

There's an interesting thing here that Part of the IFS methodology is to send a question inside for lack of a better way to say that and then wait for the answer, not try to conjure it, not try to logic it, but just settle into yourself and wait.

Oftentimes what happens when you do that is the Parts inside will show you a memory or show you a situation. You can't force it, but very often it will happen. And in the Eights, we usually find something very, very young that caused this.

What you also find is Protector Parts who are really good at sussing out "Are there rivals for control here? Is there somebody here who's going to fight me to be in charge in a way that is going to restrict me or control me?"

I said before that I have a rather large Eight wing. I do. And one of the things I hear mySelf say very often is this is the Nine side of it, not the Eight side.

"You can ask me to do just about anything. If I have the ability to do it, I'm probably going to do it for you. Even if I don't want to. Tell me I have to do it. You can just forget it."

That's Nine, but that's also the influence of Eight because the Eight says "You're not telling me what to do no matter what." And there's the similarity.

The identification for the Eight, from a therapist viewpoint, is "I am strong and I am protective," which of course creates the avoidance of vulnerability, which is a huge issue for Eights to work with. Once they begin to work with it, we know it creates enormous flexibility for them in their daily life and in their interactions.

But that strong protective stance is really strong Protectors.

This is a point where I can give you another little IFS piece, which is you can never force a Part to make itself visible. You can never force a Part to want to talk to you. You can never force a Part to want to relax or back up so you can talk to another Part. None of this can be done by force. It just doesn't work.

In testing and creating the model, Dick is very clear about that. What you have to do is you have to show them that you understand that their intention is good. Their intention is always, no matter how extreme the behavior, to protect you.

That's a little bit hard to understand when you first come into this. How could it be like in a Firefighter situation, which could be an addictive behavior. How could that be well-intentioned?

Well, it's protecting usually against extreme pain or extreme trauma or something like that. The intention, though, still is good.

This is something different that I had never learned from other work, that we have to respect how all of this formed and we have to interact with it from a place of respect and listening and trying to understand.

It can be really frustrating. You can find a Part and you can be really clear. "This is the Part that, for example, is insisting that I can't be vulnerable." Until that Part agrees that it's going to work with you, you basically have to go elsewhere in the system. It's kind of an interesting learning of respect. If you look at it in overview.

Type One

On to Type One.

I remember doing panels in training and the Ones always got really mad at us that they were last. "Why are we last? That isn't correct." Well, they could be first if you go one through nine, which back then we never did.

The identification for a One is "I am a good and ethical person" or something like that. Again, I repeat myself because it's really important to validate the individual experience and the individual expression of type in each person.

What that does is create both a drive to get everything perfect, which we know we usually call it perfectionist or moralist or ethical person or whatever.

But it also creates on the other side, an extreme reactivity to people who are not good and ethical in the opinion of that particular One. That can be really difficult because it creates discord which most Ones will translate as a bad thing.

So we've got a polarization there between two different views of how to protect this individual.

"I'm going to protect them by being good and I'm going to protect them by monitoring everybody else and fixing them." That can be a very difficult place to be.

So in that situation, you're going to probably start with the good and begin to find those Parts and work with them because you've almost certainly got Protectors who keeps the focus on right and wrong.

I'm sure you know that the definition of right and wrong from one Enneagram One to the next is going to be different. That took me a year to understand. "How can it be?" Well, it is. What this One thinks is the right way is different than the One over here, and they're going to argue about it.

You're going to look for Protectors, the right and wrong Protectors. You're also going to undoubtedly find a Protector who believes that it's their job to correct errors in other people. That one creates a lot of difficulties. So that would be a place to start.

Working this way with the One can be really difficult because they're very focused on the details of whatever it is they're looking at and they get locked in one way to do it. Trying to create some relaxation is going against—it's counterintuitive to them. That can be difficult.

So a lot of it has to begin gently, I think, with Ones to look at the places where they are a little bit more relaxed and they are a little bit less rigid. Where are those situations?

Very often it comes from the line to Four. We can look for creativity, the artistic pursuit. There's more relaxation.

So I might go to look at the Parts or look for the Parts that are carrying the artistic impulses and the creativity, which is a positive, which can be in Parts or something like that. But again, each individual is going to be different.

The other place that you can work with the Parts in a One is similar to Seven, to see if the Parts are willing to understand that what they are doing is limiting the view screen on reality of their person.

Once they get that and they're limiting their view to small details in this case, if you can begin to get the Parts to understand that balance between detail and overview is a good thing potentially, then it can begin to open up.

There's a funny thing in Ones, it's the similarity to Five. It always has to be logical. But with the Fives, logical is kind of a known thing. And with the Ones, it depends on what they think is logical inside. So you kind of have to navigate that.

My best friend of many, many years is a One. She's taught me a lot of this. And so there we have it.

Where this has led: The Inner Shift Experience

Where all this has led is to my latest collaboration, with the wonderful Leslie Hershberger. We call it the Inner Shift Experience and had our first (sold out) retreat in February 2026. <https://innershiftexperience.com/info>

What we're creating is a setting and hopefully a community for people who want to step more deeply into their own work. Our view is that deepening one's own work is the key to deepening your work with others,

This is about "Do you want to go deeper into yourself? And can we use all the techniques that I've learned, that she's learned, which come from different lineages, to help you go there?" So it's more of a facilitated experience.

Summary

I am pairing the Enneagram and IFS because they illuminate each other: type patterns often reflect a constellation of Parts, and IFS gives a respectful, step-by-step method to map those Parts, understand their protective intent, and (slowly, carefully) help them relax and unburden. As Protectors and Exiles unburden, Self-energy—the 8 C's—has more space to come through. In Enneagram language, relaxing the type structure creates more space for essence qualities to arise. All on the receptive, as Helen Palmer taught us.

I then walk through the centers and show how I would begin finding Parts that help hold each type's "view screen" in place—from Three's task-and-success focus, to Two's panic at losing the helpful identity, to Four's magnification, Six's worst-case scenario engine, Five's knowledge-as-safety, Seven's positivity lock and scanning for options,

Nine's under-the-radar strategies, Eight's not-being-controlled protectors, and One's right/wrong and correction dynamics.

And this is exactly where my collaboration with Leslie Hershberger is headed: creating an in-person container where people can do this work as a facilitated experience—not just to collect more information.

Call to action: Apply for a future Inner Shift Experience retreat

If you feel the pull to do more than “learn about” Parts and Patterns—if you want to **work with them in real time**, in a carefully held, relational container—this is what we're building in the Inner Shift Experience.

Inner Shift integrates:

- **Parts (IFS):** meeting Protectors and Exiles with respect, and making space for Self-energy
- **Patterns (Enneagram):** recognizing the limited view screen of type and gently relaxing the structure
- **3-Centered Presence:** bringing awareness into body, heart, and head so the work becomes lived, not just understood

If you're ready to take the next step—not more content, but more depth—watch for the next application window for future retreats and apply.

This is for people who want to go deeper into themselves, with skilled facilitation, steady pacing, and real practice.

Resources for further study

- “IFS Integrations”, Jenna Riermersma, ed, PESI 2025. Chapter 25 “IFS and the Enneagram” by Joan Ryan and Tammy Sollenberger.
- Podcasts: *The One Inside* (with Tammy Sollenberger) – six short podcast interviews in 2021 that really lay out the basis of what I am talking about.
- www.creativecollaborations.net
- <https://innershiftexperience.com/info>

@2026 Joan R. Ryan

This article is adapted from a presentation/interview with Tyler Zach aired in EnneaSummit (Mental Health 2026).

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