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Michelle Glass

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The New Kid on the Block: IFS Informed Financial Therapy™

Richard S. Kahler, MS

Michelle Glass, CIFSP

Internal Family Systems℠ (IFS) therapy is an evidenced-based therapeutic (EBT) tool used to treat various mental health disorders and non-clinical issues. IFS is a promising new approach to building healthy financial behaviors when combined it with financial therapy. During a financial discussion, beliefs, money scripts, and stories around the client's money history are expressed and are then explored using IFS protocols. IFS provides the financial therapist with a tool that has a high probability of being effective at helping clients access their hidden extreme beliefs, emotions, and stories around money and offers the hope of making changes resulting in lasting positive financial behaviors. The initial results of using IFS Informed Financial Therapy℠ with a small pool of clients were promising in helping them address and change problematic financial behaviors. Obtaining IFS certification is possible for most financial therapists. It gives them expertise in an evidence-based model of therapy that can enhance the financial therapy process, which has broad implications.

Keywords: IFS; money scripts; money behaviors; Schwartz; EBT

SECTION I: WHAT IS IFS THERAPY?

Every seemingly illogical financial behavior makes perfect sense when we discover the underlying beliefs held by the Exiles and Protectors that motivate it.

– Richard Kahler, MS, CFP®, CFT-I™, CeFT®, CIFSP

History

Internal Family Systems℠ (IFS) Therapy was developed almost 40 years ago by Richard Schwartz, Ph.D., a family systems therapist. IFS is an evidence-based therapeutic (EBT) treatment (Selva, 2021), as research has shown it to be effective in peer-reviewed scientific publications (Shadick et al., 2013). IFS is used to treat a range of mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression, PTSD, trauma, substance abuse, and eating disorders. As a non-pathologizing approach to psychotherapy, it also effectively addresses non-clinical issues that often lead people to seek therapy. The authors' experiences of personally experiencing IFS Therapy and eventually becoming Certified Internal Family Systems℠ Practitioners lead them to believe it is an effective tool in financial therapy.

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Schwartz practiced Structural Family Therapy (SFT), a Solution-Focused Therapy outcome-oriented treatment modality based on exosystemic principles (Schwartz, 2017-2020). The rationale behind the therapy is that the treatment of an individual, in most cases, is successful only if their family members are also treated. Structural Family Therapy believes that the problem rests not in the individual, but in the family system, and observes and addresses patterns of interaction between family members to find problematic patterns that create difficulties. The goal is to improve the ways family members communicate and interact with each other to create healthy communication, appropriate boundaries, and, eventually, a healthier family structure (Welch, 2021).

Schwartz has described himself as "an obnoxious zealot of SFT who set out to prove SFT was the be-all-and-end-all" (Schwartz, 2017-2020). SFT focuses on the here and now rather than the past. However, as Schwartz worked with his clients, he noticed they often talked about their past and parts of themselves. He became increasingly curious about the power of the past to affect the here and now, specifically related to the power of trauma (Schwartz & Van der Kolk, 2017). He also became intrigued with the possibility that we all had an internal family of parts that could be treated in the same manner that SFT worked with external family members.

He eventually discovered that these parts of people are indeed like little inner personalities. Jung called inner personalities complexes and archetypes, while IFS calls them parts (Schwartz, 2017-2020). In a sense, everyone is a multiple personality. Counter to popular theory, it is the nature of the mind to be multiple. It is not a sign of pathology. It's a naturally occurring phenomenon to talk about ego states as parts (Schwartz & Van der Kolk, 2017). It's common to hear someone say variations of, “A part of me wants or thinks this, and a part of me wants or thinks that." IFS takes parts (i.e., ego) more seriously and respectfully than other forms of therapy (Schwartz, 2017-2020).

Some basic tenets of IFS Therapy include: "All parts are welcome," they are all valuable, all parts have good intentions (i.e., there are no "bad" parts), parts are not their roles or their burdens, and at the core of every person resides the “Self”—a state of being quite different from parts. Since all parts are valuable, each have important roles within one’s system. As Longfellow famously said, “If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man’s life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.” (Longfellow, 1891). Every part has secret histories of how they were forced into the role they took on and are usually unhappy they’ve had to do so (Schwartz, 2017-2020). Even when they take on extreme beliefs—being forced into extreme roles—through life’s challenging events, they attempt to keep the individual safe (Schwartz, 2017-2020). Every presenting symptom, belief, or behavior—including those around money—held by a part has a positive intention. Schwartz notes that while this is a radical idea in psychology, it is empirically validated. Over time, Schwartz established four goals of IFS therapy:

1. Liberating parts from extreme roles so they can choose preferred roles.
2. Restoring trust of parts in the leadership of Self.
3. Reharmonizing the system of parts where productive collaborations can happen.
4. Bringing more Self to the outside world. (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2020)

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Parts

Through the years, Schwartz learned that parts are affected by, but not created by, our experiences. Some are active, while some are dormant, waiting to be activated by life events (Schwartz, 2017-2020). Parts help individuals survive and thrive, but when they are traumatized by an event that overwhelms the emotional system, they are forced out of their natural states into various roles and become stuck in the past at the age that the trauma, attachment wounds, or other challenging life events happened (Schwartz, 2017-2020). IFS finds that these young parts will gladly leave these extreme roles, although they may not admit to that immediately (Schwartz, 2017-2020). While individuals are living in the present, these traumatized parts are most often living in the past. Although the roles they assume are often lifesaving at the time, as one grows up and circumstances change, they are outdated and can ultimately become destructive. Furthermore, parts can't die or be created; they are always there and carry much energy.

Schwartz identifies two types of roles that parts may assume—Exiles and Protectors. Exiles are often young parts of an individual that hold the burdensome and painful feelings, beliefs, and memories of the past, such as worthlessness, grief, and shame. Typically wounded by traumatic events and attachment injuries, they become isolated by Protectors from the rest of the system as a means of protecting the individual from feeling these difficult emotions, hence the moniker Exile. Exiles want to be seen and heard, often becoming increasingly extreme and desperate to be cared for and to tell their stories. The suppressing Protectors, who are also young, worry that the Exiles' distress will overwhelm the system (Schwartz, 2017-2020).

Schwartz came to understand that there are two categories of Protectors: Managers and Firefighters. Managers run our daily lives, are *proactive*, and work to contain the Exiles by controlling events and relationships. Wanting the individual to look good, they keep the Exiles locked away, so their strong emotions remain encapsulated. Their job is to orchestrate life to keep the Exiles safe from whatever might activate painful emotions, beliefs, and memories. Common Managers are those that control, evaluate, caretake, organize, keep time, and criticize. Oftentimes, these strategies are regarded as valuable by society.

Managers are never 100% successful, and inevitably an Exile gets activated. This can become overwhelming for the Manager to contain. The system is naturally set up for this with the *reactive* Protectors, called Firefighters. They step in to protect at any cost after an Exile has been activated (Schwartz, 2017-2020). They have the same goals as Managers—to keep Exiles locked away—but possess more extreme strategies. Firefighters will use anything that can effectively put out the fire (i.e., pain) and medicate or numb the difficult emotions coming from an Exile. Common Firefighter tools identified by IFS are alcohol, drugs, porn, shopping, gambling, food, isolation, dissociation, and even suicide. While many Firefighting tools are seen by society as destructive, not all are. They can include anything that might reduce the pain of the Exile, such as working, reading, exercising, cleaning, and a host of other potentially helpful activities that can be used as distractions. While it may be hard to understand at first, even Firefighters that want to use suicide have positive

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intentions—the system is in such terrible pain that they think the person will be better off not being alive (Schwartz, 2017-2020).

While some parts of a system might want to cajole or manipulate other parts, the Self would never do so because the Self is naturally respectful of and connected with parts. Other traditional therapies differ in their approach in this regard. Those forms of engaging with parts won't work if the Protector is worried that the Exile they guard could overwhelm the system or be devastated. It's imperative to engage Protectors in learning about the Exile, appreciate the good intentions of their protection, and get their permission to have them stand aside (Schwartz, 2017-2020). Both Protectors and Exiles can ultimately be unburdened from the beliefs where they find themselves stuck.

Self

Schwartz emphasizes that these parts are distinct from the undamaged, essential Self that is an individual's core. The Self is not a part. Schwartz describes the Self as the leader of one's internal system, possessing qualities such as calm, curiosity, compassion, and wisdom, unlike parts. Self is in everyone and cannot be damaged (Schwartz, 2017-2020). This is, in itself, another radical concept in psychology. Often parts blend with the Self and mistakenly believe they are the Self. In IFS, the process of differentiation is called unblending. "When differentiated, the Self is competent, secure, self-assured, relaxed, and able to listen and respond to feedback." (IFS Institute, 2021). Consider how different it is to view the world from the eyes of the mature Self versus a three-year-old part (Schwartz, 2017-2020). Establishing a relationship between the Self and parts enables healing to become possible. When the parts unblend and open space for the Self, it knows how to heal. There are qualities that are most important for healing; Schwartz came to call them the 8 Cs: Curiosity (which is often the first one to show up), Calm, Confidence, Compassion, Creativity, Courage, Clarity, and Connectedness. Additionally, for the IFS therapist or practitioner, he noted essential qualities he called the 5 Ps: Patience, Presence, Perspective, Persistence, and Playfulness (Schwartz, 2017-2020). This Self-led energy comes to the fore in therapy when parts step back and unblend.

Burdens

Challenging life events, such as trauma and attachment injuries, result in all these roles being taken to extremes. Individuals who suffer trauma absorb beliefs or energies from those events (Schwartz, 2017-2020). In IFS, burdens are extreme emotions, beliefs, sensations, behaviors, or roles acquired or formed by traumatic experiences. They attach to a part and drive the way it operates, much like a virus, taking it from its natural state to an extreme state. Both Exiles and Protectors take on burdens.

Protectors worry that something terrible will happen to the individual if they don't do their jobs. The burden is not a part's core belief (i.e., value) but an acquired, often distorted, belief that the part carries. Parts are often mistaken for their burdens (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2020). It can be hard for one's parts to have compassion for the burden, but when one gets to know these parts and their positive intentions, it is natural for the Self to have

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compassion for them. While most burdens are acquired through direct personal experience, some are passed on to individuals through the family or culture. These are called Legacy Burdens and Cultural Burdens, respectively. With the IFS process, parts can release these burdens and return them to their natural state.

Parts can carry burdens specifically about money. These are extreme beliefs acquired from direct personal experience, family history, or cultural attitudes and beliefs about money. The term used for a money burden is the same as what financial therapists call Money Scripts (Kahler & Fox, 2007). Money burdens are beliefs about money, adopted or created by both Exiles and Protectors, that worked well in childhood to keep one safe but usually don't serve an individual well as an adult. Facilitating Financial Health (FFH) describes Money Scripts as "typically unconscious beliefs each of us have developed concerning money and life that help us make sense of the world. These beliefs, developed for survival and protection in an unpredictable world, are often incredibly resistant to change, especially when strong emotions are [Exiles] attached to them" (Klontz B., et al., 2016). The IFS unburdening process can be effective with Money Scripts by listening to the part's story around how the Money Script came to be, validating the intense emotions held by the part as a result of the wounding, and assisting the part in unburdening the Money Script. Concrete examples of parts with money burdens and how to work with them will be discussed in later sections.

Working with the System

While many scientists focus on how to interact with external systems in ecologically sensitive ways, Schwartz became a student of what he termed "inner physics." Inner physics describes the laws of functioning within a person's inner universe, which are similar to the natural laws that govern the external universe. Many of these differences are iterated in this paper.

An IFS therapist or practitioner facilitates the client in forming a Self-to-part relationship with their parts. This is achieved as parts unblend from the Self. Eventually, with the Self witnessing the part, it can relax, and the burden can be jettisoned from the system. The process of releasing a part's burdens is called unburdening. One goal of IFS therapy is for the parts to feel safe enough to unburden so they can revert to their natural roles. When parts are burdened, they often overwhelm the system and blend with the Self. As protective parts begin to trust the Self, they can step aside (i.e., unblend) to allow traumatized parts access to the Self and begin the healing process of unburdening. The unburdening allows more freedom in the system for the Self to lead and make healthier decisions. As more parts release their burdens, individuals will feel lighter, clearer, and more confident. When parts are unburdened, that energy can be channeled elsewhere (Schwartz, 2017-2020).

In the early days of developing IFS, Schwartz attempted to get clients to stand up to their critical Manager parts, tried to eliminate Firefighter parts that encouraged harmful behaviors or had extreme beliefs, or would try to get past the resistance of the Protectors and heal the traumatized Exiles. He experienced that this approach resulted in significant pushback from the Protectors, who were not about to be manipulated or discarded. He later learned that he was violating the "rules;" Protectors had spent their lives protecting and

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isolating what he was bringing out (Schwartz, 2017-2020), and it was a fundamental misstep to try to reach an Exiled part without the permission of the Protector. Through trial and error, he learned these parts are stuck in their roles (Schwartz, 2017-2020) and, at their core, have positive intentions for the individual.

The most significant distinction he found was that vulnerable Exiled parts carry the shame, loneliness, pain, and terror, and Protectors keep you from the Exiles by locking them up. The Protectors' job is to keep those emotions from being felt by locking them up, from ever feeling that pain again. Exiles are abandoned by the Protectors who have cut them off from the Self. As a result of exiling these vulnerable parts, individuals also don't have access to natural qualities of love, playfulness, innocence, and other lighter emotions. The resulting behavior often includes people-pleasing and constant scanning for danger, which are attempts to prevent the Exile from feeling rejected and even from thinking it will die (Schwartz, 2017-2020).

Learning the dynamics that force the part into the role (usually as a young child) and helping parts unblend from the Self increases the client's access to the Self. With more and more access to Self, they can be more Self-led. Central to IFS therapy is improving relationships between the Self and the parts by establishing a dialogue between the Self and the Protectors. This is especially true for those parts that are perhaps involved in making problematic financial decisions.

It is normal when beginning IFS Therapy to find that a person is completely identified with a part or several parts. Most people live in a state where the Self is pushed out of the body—in a sense, exiled (Schwartz, 2017-2020). The Self can be held hostage by parts that don't trust its leadership. These parts don't trust that it is safe to let the Self out or give access to it. Therefore, at the beginning of IFS therapy, the therapist usually only has these Protectors to work with (Schwartz, 2017-2020).

It is almost always the case that when initiating a dialogue with one part that a different part dislikes the initial part. This second part is often blended with the Self and initiates the conversation. Therapist will ask that biased part if it is willing to relax back. If it is willing, this action releases the Self (unless yet another part is in action). Once able to get into the place of Self energy, the therapist can guide the Self in building a relationship with the Protector and allow it to feel safe enough to tell the story of how it acquired the role. Eventually, it is possible to get permission from the Protectors to go into the Exile and then go through the same process with the Exile, witnessing its story, beliefs, and emotions.

An IFS Practitioner/Therapist becomes what Schwartz calls a "hope merchant" (Schwartz, 2017-2020), someone who sells hope to hopeless parts and ushers the whole system into harmony. The IFS process naturally allows clients to reach other goals they may have, such as decreasing anxiety, improving their relationships, or recovering from trauma. The natural side effect of this healing is a reduction in problematic or symptomatic behaviors, including those around money.

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On Trauma

The word "trauma" often suggests an extreme occurrence like the death of a loved one, severe injury or illness, a natural disaster, physical or sexual abuse, or military combat. Events like these are descriptions of extreme trauma. The word trauma is simply the Greek term for wound. In this paper, it is used to describe physical, emotional, and financial injuries. Today, trauma is considered any overwhelming experience where the person lacks a supportive response. Any trauma, from mild distress to extreme debilitation, can be emotionally debilitating.

A traumatic event can impact a person's physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and financial well-being. A physical injury can result in lingering psychological symptoms even after someone recovers bodily. Most people have become familiar with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Its symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, flashbacks, and recurring nightmares, can stem from an original physical, emotional, or financial trauma.

A chronic series of equally extreme traumas (such as relational or attachment-based wounds) can lead to experiencing the same symptoms as acute one-time traumatic events. The impact of being exposed to multiple or prolonged stresses is called complex trauma. Complex trauma can result from periods of neglect and isolation. However, it can also come from repeated abuses like childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence, repeated incidences of stress, emotional abuse or neglect, chronic criticism, chaotic family dynamics, or relatively minor but chronic illnesses such as asthma or significant allergies, etc. It is more extensive than developmental trauma and usually accompanied by dissociation (Leiderman, 2020). Many forms of therapy are used for the treatment of trauma. An increasing number of modalities are now incorporating IFS to enhance outcomes (O'Shea Brown, 2020).

Shame is one of the most powerful burdens in the system and is commonly associated with trauma. Most trauma is received at the hands of loved ones. Trauma is as much about what didn't happen to an individual as what did happen. At the core of trauma is what Bessel Van der Kolk, MD, has described as "God-forsaken loneliness" (Schwartz & Van der Kolk, 2017). This primal shame, often carried by Exiles, differs from ordinary shame. Primal shame is when a part is convinced there is nothing of value, and the individual should not even exist. This type of shame is terrifying to carry, and Protectors work very hard to keep it contained (Schwartz, 2017-2020). Trauma is often the genesis of many money scripts.

SECTION II: WHAT IS IFS INFORMED FINANCIAL THERAPY™

Development

The primary author, a Certified Internal Family Systems℠ Practitioner, and CFT-I™, has pioneered combining IFS Therapy™ with Financial Therapy to create IFS Informed Financial Therapy™. IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ combines addressing the specifics of a client's finances with the traditional IFS process. Burdens (e.g., beliefs, money scripts) that surface during the financial discussion are then explored using IFS protocols. IFS gives the

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financial therapist an Evidence Based Treatment methodology that is effective in helping clients access their hidden beliefs, burdens, emotions, and stories around money and offers the hope of permanently changing problematic financial behaviors. Whether protective strategies come from Managers or Firefighters, IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ focuses on money behaviors as many of those tools impact finances.

For the past year, as part of the work toward becoming a Certified Internal Family Systems℠ Practitioner, the primary author has been working with a pilot group of clients, using IFS in conjunction with financial therapy. All of the clients had completed an IFS Level 1 training. Working with clients with a functional knowledge of IFS helped move the testing of the IFS protocol as applied to financial therapy. It was surmised by the author that introducing IFS to a client requires a period of time before establishing a rhythm of working with the IFS model. The author's intention was to shorten the time it may take to introduce clients to the model and get to the application of the model to financial therapy as quickly as possible. It is unnecessary for a client to have been trained in, or even know, IFS to benefit from the application of IFS Informed Financial Therapy™.

The role of any IFS Therapist/Practitioner is to be unblended, bringing Self energy to the session. Inherent in Self energy is a lack of attachment to the agenda of healing. IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ is different, as there is an overarching agenda of focusing on financial issues and money burdens. This was a major objective in testing whether IFS Therapy could be effectively combined with Financial Therapy. Could the integrity of an agenda-free IFS process be preserved when focused on a theme of financial issues and burdens? After an initial year of testing, the conclusion was that it could. An IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ session can have a portion of the session where a financial part of the therapist/practitioner has an agenda of resolving financial or money burdens. Still, their Self is unattached to the outcome during the session. This often results in achieving the goal.

The Process

Like other methodologies, the process begins with helping the client become aware of the money scripts, beliefs, and stories held by their emotional system. Rarely is awareness enough to create behavioral change. IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ understands that the key to understanding and changing a client's problematic financial behaviors is having a Self-led approach rather than a strong-arm approach (i.e., manipulating, shaming, or exiling the "bad" or "illogical" behaviors of their parts). This requires meeting clients from the seat of Self. Many financial and mental health professionals employ the latter techniques, usually with limited success that lasts for a few days or weeks but that doesn't result in lasting financial behavioral change.

The IFS Informed Financial Therapist™ supports the client in befriending and building a relationship with their system of parts that drive the problematic financial behavior. This Self-to-part relationship becomes the basis for resolving their issues around money. *Every seemingly illogical financial behavior makes perfect sense when we discover the underlying beliefs held by the Exiles and Protectors that motivate it.* IFS maintains that every part of a client's emotional system has their best interests at heart, even those that appear to

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be "the problem." This includes parts that appear to be the cause of financial disorders or problematic behaviors (Klontz, et al., 2016). Additionally, the IFS Informed Financial Therapist™ becomes a hope merchant, selling hope to their clients and assisting them in creating healthy financial behaviors and increased financial well-being.

An IFS Informed Financial Therapist™ will encounter parts polarized around money decisions. Conflicting money scripts, a common occurrence, are an example of two or more parts that are polarized. An example of polarization would be hearing someone say, "A part of me believes I need to save or else I will end up a bag lady, and another part of me believes I deserve to spend." It is also normal that parts adopt money scripts handed down by caregivers and ancestors. IFS calls these generational money scripts Legacy Burdens.

The IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ Protocol

Because financial therapists have an agenda focused on financial issues and money burdens, an IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ session differs from the usual IFS therapy process. Thus, a typical session includes two components: (a) Financial Issues and (b) using IFS to explore areas where the client cannot modify or change problematic financial behavior. Often, the first part of the session focuses on financial issues. These can be specific issues that brought the client to financial therapy, or issues and emotions that have surfaced by completing various financial exercises or evaluations. These are referred to as "trailheads" for further exploration in the session. The second part of the session can use the IFS process to address the trailheads that arose around the financial discussion.

Depending on the needs and interests of the client, an engagement often starts by giving exercises like the Klontz Money Script Inventory-Revised (KMSI-R), the Klontz Money Behavior Inventory-Revised (KMBI-R), the Money Egg, the Money Atom, the Life Aspiration Exercise, etc. (Klontz, et al., 2016). These all can be given to the client to complete ahead of the first session. Depending on the client's scope of the engagement, the exercises will most likely be pertinent to the discussion and provide some trailheads from which to hold a natural conversation. It is also common for the financial therapist and client to agree to some financial action steps for the next meeting.

Most IFS therapy sessions begin with the client giving a narrative about what has happened since the last session, an update on any agreed-upon action steps, or reviewing any exercises they may have completed. From there, they can determine the financial issues and possibly the parts they most want to focus on in the session.

The IFS Informed Financial Therapist™ wants to understand the scope of the problem and may spend a significant amount of time asking financial questions and gathering data, not unlike any financial data gathering or coaching session. It is not unusual for clients to ask for financial advice during this exchange, and it is often quite appropriate for the financial therapist to offer additional knowledge. Knowing when to offer additional knowledge and when to abstain is a critical reason why the IFS Informed Financial Therapist™ needs to be unblended from their financial and analytical parts (typically Managers) and interface fully in Self energy when facilitating a session.

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If the financial therapist notes any resistance, dissonance, money scripts, etc., that arise during the financial portion of the session, the therapist may also check in with the client about what they are noticing internally. What conflicts or polarizations may be arising? What difficult feelings may have arisen from the financial discussion? What thoughts are presenting internally that may impede progress on the financial action steps? The financial therapist can invite the client to ask themselves: "Am I feeling calm, curious, confident, clear, etc., regarding this money issue?" This can help illuminate parts and help them notice when they are not feeling some of the 8 Cs—which could mean they have blended parts. The client is invited to check in with all the various messages, thoughts, or emotions that are presenting themselves and select a trailhead to explore for the rest of the session.

The primary author's initial sessions were typically 90 to 120 minutes—this included 30-60 minutes spent addressing the financial issues and 60-90 minutes using the IFS process to follow the trailheads that surfaced from the financial portion. Working with clients in this way is not a quick fix. The IFS process takes time, although it is usually a process of slowing down to ultimately go faster. It does, however, apparently lead to deep healing and change. It also leaves clients with understanding and tools to help them continue to resolve financial issues and address new ones as they arise in the future. The process enables them to be aware of their responses around money, to look inside and notice parts, and to unblend to become more Self-led.

Financial Addictions

Any type of self-destructive financial behavior, including financial addictions (e.g., gambling, overspending, compulsive shopping, hoarding, etc.), usually involves three parts. The Exile often has had overwhelming experiences and holds strong emotions and beliefs from those experiences (e.g., shame, not good enough, emotional and/or physical pain, humiliation, etc.) that necessitate actions of Protectors (i.e., Managers and Firefighters) as a reaction to the feelings felt by the Exile. One of the two Protectors, the Critic—what Schwartz calls a Manager—tries to manage the Exile's strong emotions/beliefs, often by nagging with familiar shame-inducing statements to keep them quiet; however, this only fuels the fire. The other Protector, the Firefighter, gets the system away from shame at any cost, which is usually experienced as behavior or addiction. This usually brings more shame (or often added intense feeling/belief) to the Exile, which starts the cycle all over again.

This cycle does not necessarily have to be around outwardly obvious self-destructive behaviors. A Firefighter can use an almost unlimited number of behaviors that are not outwardly seen as self-destructive (e.g., reading books, watching TV, etc.) to soothe and medicate an Exile that has burst out. However, the ultimate impact on the internal system is the same.

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Here is but one of the unlimited possible examples of how this might play out financially in someone's behavior:

A client might have an ***Exile*** that carries wounding or trauma around not feeling accepted, loved, or seen.

They may also have a Spending Part (often a ***Firefighter***), who assumes the role of trying to provide acceptance, love, and being seen for the Exile. It may have a money script that, "Status will make me feel accepted, loveable, and seen." The Firefighter decides the way to get status—hence acceptance, love, and belonging—is to buy things that will impress others.

They may also have a Critic (a ***Manager***) who doesn't go along with this plan that may fear there may not be enough money saved and invested for retirement. It uses criticism to keep the Spending part in check. It may say things like, "You don't need that. You do such a terrible job saving money. Other people don't have a problem saving. You need to have self-control!" Or it might simply say, "You can't afford that."

While the Critic's intentions are good, it does its best to keep the Exile's longing for acceptance, love, and belonging under control by nagging, manipulating, guilt-tripping, and shaming it for having these feelings and needs. This can work for a while. Eventually, though, the needs of the Exile to find acceptance, love, and belonging remain unsatisfied and intensify, finally becoming too much for the Manager to contain, and these unmet needs begin to be felt strongly and overwhelm the system.

At that point, the Firefighter, feeling overwhelming pain from the Exile, steps in to put out these difficult emotions by again taking over the system and orchestrating a spending binge to soothe the unmet needs of the Exile. The binge works temporarily, and the Exile immediately feels an injection of belonging and acceptance from all the new purchases and the reactions of friends and family. However, the Critic becomes completely alarmed and begins to berate the Firefighter for being the cause of "blowing the budget," scolding, "We are going to end up in the poorhouse because of your irresponsible and illogical actions!" While directed at the Firefighter, it is the Exile who receives the criticism.

Unfortunately, the Exile internalizes this added layer of shame. The Exile also feels a growing lack of connection and acceptance from others as the newness wears off from the purchases. The shame, loneliness, and rejection begin to grow again until the criticism from the Critic isn't enough to keep the Exile in check. At this point, the shame and rejection reach a boiling point and begin to spill over, requiring the Firefighter to step in, and the pattern repeats itself.

Breaking this pattern eventually involves establishing the Self-to-part connection with the Protectors and getting permission from them to step back to

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allow the Self to go to the Exile to fully witness and help it release and heal its burdens around not feeling accepted, loved, or seen, ultimately bringing more equilibrium to the emotional system. With the Exile unburdened, the Protectors have nothing to protect, and even they can unburden and take on new roles.

Shame around financial burdens often stems from some type of trauma, which can but does not have to be financial in nature. Because money is so integral to all aspects of our lives, distressing or disturbing financial experiences can overwhelm our parts and become traumatic. A wide variety of financial events and circumstances might qualify as either one-time or complex trauma. This includes events and circumstances that could appear insignificant to others but still be traumatic for the person involved.

Financial Trauma

Much financial trauma and the problematic financial behaviors and disorders resulting from the trauma are experienced as children, not adults. Many sources of trauma—such as addiction, mental illness, chronic physical illness, or the death of a parent—include financial components or may have long-term effects on someone's financial behavior. Some trauma results in parts taking on burdens around money that significantly affect someone's money decisions, usually in a manner that may not be in their financial best interests.

Examples of situations that could be financially traumatic include:

- Growing up in chronic poverty or financial uncertainty
- Chronic worry or fear around money, regardless of one's income level
- A sudden change in financial circumstances, either a setback such as a job loss or a windfall like an inheritance
- Having a parent or partner use money to control and manipulate an individual
- Regret or shame over a past financial decision or circumstance
- Any perceived financial wounding, especially in childhood
- A family legacy of poverty, even if it skips generations

Behavioral signs of financial trauma include gambling, hoarding, compulsive buying, overspending, underspending, financial denial, financial enabling, financial enmeshment, squandering sudden windfalls, and repeated poor financial decisions. Emotional signs of financial trauma may show up in our parts as depression, ambivalence, regularly reliving the original event, mood swings, overeating, trouble concentrating, chronic fear, shame, and anger.

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Following the Client: A Case Example

As previously noted, many therapists and modalities encourage their clients to stand up to and manage, subdue, or silence these problematic parts (Schwartz, 2017-2020). IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ recognizes that this approach is unlikely to ultimately succeed in permanent behavioral change. As an example, the primary author had a client who could not save money. She was not an over spender; she just couldn't save. Her Critic part tried to use logic, guilt, and manipulation to control spending and establish a habit of saving.

Rather than trying to help her control the part that she didn't want to save, the primary author worked with her to become curious about why the part did what it did. Through this, she discovered the positive role the part played. In this case, her parents had stolen her savings multiple times when she was growing up. *Saving, then, meant her money would disappear; spending was a way she could derive some benefits from it.* Once this part told its story and released its burdens, she was able to begin saving within a few weeks. A year later, she reports not only having continued to save money consistently and well, but her annual income has more than doubled.

It is helpful to view burdened parts as children in a family that get stuck doing things they don't want to do to keep the family safe (Schwartz, 2017-2020). This helps an individual frame the relationship of the adult Self to child-like parts—unblend from the part and be in Self. The client above, who was a business owner, once exclaimed during an IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ session, "OMG! Is no one in here concerned? We have a 12-year-old running the business!" As a result of this work, her 12-year-old part no longer runs the business because she has more Self leadership guiding decisions.

Feedback

The primary author's clients made significant progress on their financial issues. This progress was much more than he has seen by employing some traditional modalities. The following is some of the feedback received:

- "Doing IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ was life changing. It blends deep inner work with wise and tangible financial next steps that can allow you to see results both internally and externally. As a therapist myself, I have parts that don't love looking at money, and that just want to be of service to my clients. IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ helped me shift and be with all these parts, allowing me to be more financially abundant, which in turn allows me to show up more fully for my clients. I would recommend ANY well-being professional do this work."
- "IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ brings a unique blend of financial expertise combined with therapeutic support and attunement. I highly recommend it!"
- "IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ is a powerful mechanism for change. I have been amazed by the progress I've made in managing my finances since doing IFS Informed Financial Therapy™. I was quite avoidant, overspending in some ways, never looking realistically at my finances, nor planning clearly for the future. I'm

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> now handling my money much better. I have a vision for the future and a plan to get there. I've cast off some of the money habits and unhelpful mindsets I have had since childhood. This was a huge step forward for me in freeing myself to build wealth and well-being for the future."

Behavioral Changes

As the primary author worked with these clients, he saw them make specific, measurable changes in their financial behavior. Some of those changes included:

- Saving most of an unexpected six-figure gift that would previously have been spent
- Completing a financial plan for the first time
- Increasing awareness of their finances
- Paying off some of their house mortgage early
- Researching pension options for the first time ever and adding a significant sum to the account
- Filing for a significant tax refund that previously would have been left uncollected
- Opening an IRA for the first time
- Negotiating and establishing a giving fund strategy with parts that were polarized around giving and saving
- Obtaining disability insurance
- Purchasing a newer car "just for myself" because everything else was in place financially
- Deciding with new enthusiasm to continue in current employment

DISCUSSION

Admittedly, the sample population that the primary author worked with was small and not scientifically significant. While the self-reports and practitioner reports of the subjective changes in clients' level of functioning as it relates to their finances do not convey uniformity of efficacy across participants, they are important clinical observations that point toward efficacy.

The primary author's next step is to combine the IFS process with the financial planning process to test its effectiveness. He currently has three clients, also all trained in or very familiar with IFS, who will undergo the typical financial planning process with one of his associates as the lead planner. The client will then do separate monthly or bi-weekly IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ with him as a part of the engagement. Beyond this, it's clear that further next steps involve formulating studies with control groups with clients who are unfamiliar with IFS to evaluate and measure any statistically significant changes in client functioning through objective measures to provide empirical research utilizing IFS Informed Financial Therapy™. These further studies will certainly evoke more interest in the field of financial therapy.

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SECTION III: CERTIFICATION

It is the opinion of the authors that the practice of IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ will require that the practitioner is well-educated and experienced in both the practice of financial planning and mental health. And, since financial planning, financial therapy, and therapy are not regulated titles, it is necessary for a credible practitioner of any to be certified in them. Certification brings with it both credibility and a wealth of experience. Therefore, the authors highly endorse becoming certified in both IFS and financial therapy.

Financial Therapy Certification

Anyone can call themselves a financial therapist. The term is unregulated, much in the same way "financial planner" is unregulated. The Financial Therapy Association (FTA) rolled out its Certified Financial Therapist – Level 1™ certification in 2019. The intention of the FTA was to eventually roll out a Level 2 and a Level 3 certification. Level 1 is a non-practicing (more of an educational exposure to financial therapy) certification, while Levels 2 and 3 were to be practicing certifications for a financial therapist.

Today, the FTA is currently redesigning the three levels and nomenclature to make it simpler for the public to understand. The current intention is to rename Level 1 the Affiliate of Financial Therapy – Education, which is a non-practicing certificate of education that focuses on exploring the student's personal relationship with money. Level 2 will become a Certified Financial Therapist – Practitioner, and Level 3 will be renamed Certified Financial Therapist – Supervisor, a train-the-trainer program.

A financial therapist is someone who has formal training and experience in both financial planning and mental health counseling. For example, someone holding the Certified Financial Planner™ (CFP©) certification and a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) has specific education in both financial planning and mental health counseling and generally has two years or more of experience. It is the primary author's intention that any professional engaged in IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ will need to be a Certified Financial Therapist – Practicing. Currently, the best place to find a certified financial therapist is through the Financial Therapy Association website.

The cost of obtaining certification as a financial therapist can fall in a broad range. It requires at least the equivalency of a master's degree in one discipline, another master's degree in the other discipline or extensive training, and several years of experience. A strength of the CFT certification is that practitioners are required to obtain the Affiliate of Financial Therapy – Education, which helps the CFT address their countertransference issues with money.

A weakness of the CFT certification process, like with many other certifications, is that applicants are not required to undergo their own personal financial therapy as a client. It is the view of the primary author that having personal experience as a client of a financial therapist or financial coach is important to fully embodying the experience of financial

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therapy. He strongly recommends finding a financial therapist who is certified and listed in the FTA's directory, which ensures they have at least been officially trained.

IFS Certification

The IFS process and training is a very specific modality. While becoming certified requires a lot of skill in applying the IFS model, and the total cost can be similar to obtaining a post-graduate degree, it does not require a postgraduate degree in mental health counseling. By obtaining IFS certification as a Practitioner, a CFT-I™ who does not have an advanced mental health degree can gain expertise in this evidence-based model of therapy that can greatly enhance the financial therapy process.

Certification in IFS Therapy is available to any CFT-I™, not just those holding a master's degree in a mental health field. May 1, 2023 brought new requirements for becoming a Certified IFS Therapist or Practitioner. The IFS Institute offers two categories of certification, both of which require the same level of training. To become a Certified Internal Family Systems℠ Therapist, one must have a master's degree in a human services field and be licensed in clinical practice. As of May 2023, if a CFT-I™ does not have a master's level degree in mental health and isn't licensed, then the IFS Institute will accredit them as a Certified Internal Family Systems℠ Practitioner provided they are registered or certified in their field of practice, which must include its own professional scope of practice including an ethical code and formal complaint process. Those holding the Financial Therapy Association's CFT-I™ certification appear to meet these qualifications.

Learning and applying the IFS protocol is accessible to any CFT-I™ practitioner willing to meet the necessary education, supervision, and experience requirements. Those requirements are rigorous. IFS training is much more than a short-term workshop that gives participants some new strategies and tools. It is an intense, in-depth program that includes not just educational presentations, but also personal experiential IFS sessions and many hours of supervised practice.

To become certified requires the following five components:

1. Successful completion of either one Level 1 and one Level 2 IFS training programs OR one Level 1 training program and completing one Level 1 training program as a Program Assistant
2. Documentation showing a minimum of 2 years and 200 hours of direct IFS application in your relevant field of practice
3. Documentation of 30 hours of IFS continuing education and IFS clinical consultation
4. An approved clinical consultant recommendation
5. A recorded session review or live session review

The total process can take a minimum time investment of 350 to 375 hours. Certified IFS Practitioners or Therapists must complete continuing education requirements and renew their certification every two years.

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In 2021, the primary author became a Certified Internal Family Systems℠ Practitioner. Gaining the certification took him 18 months and cost around $10,000, plus travel and lodging expenses. If the professional is self-employed on an hourly basis, there is the additional "soft cost" of the loss of income for the 150 hours a professional is away from their practice.

Since there is a significant investment of time and money in becoming certified, it is not surprising that only about 20-25% of the therapists or practitioners who complete the Level 1 training will choose to go on to become fully certified. That's understandable, given the significant money and time difference between completing Level 1 training and the more intense process of becoming fully certified. Obviously, the skill level of someone who is certified is substantially more than someone who has only completed Level 1 training. While becoming a fully certified IFS therapist or practitioner is obviously a best practice, certification is not required to use the IFS process with clients. Anyone who completes the Level 1 training can offer IFS Therapy to their clients.

A major weakness of the IFS Certification process is that applicants are not required to undergo their own personal IFS therapy as a client. It is the view of both authors that having this personal experience is essential to becoming proficient in the IFS process. The authors cannot emphasize this importance enough. For decades, the primary author has quoted Gayle Colman, CFP, as saying, "We can only take our clients as far as we have taken ourselves." While this is true for financial planners, it is crucial for anyone wanting to become effective with the IFS process. *When an IFS Informed Financial Therapist™ has strong Self-to-part relationships with their own parts and is unrestricted by their own burdens, they are much more effective with helping clients.* The primary author could list numerous occasions when working with a client that he has run into something that was not covered in any training but that has come up in his own IFS therapy.

He strongly recommends beginning IFS as a client before taking Level 1 training (as one awaits the lottery system for Level 1), as it will enhance and deepen the training experience. When looking for personal IFS Therapy, he strongly recommends finding a certified therapist or practitioner who is listed in IFS Institute's directory. This ensures they have at least been officially trained. If a fully certified practitioner is not available, a second choice would be to use a therapist/practitioner who has completed Level 3 training. The next choice would be a therapist/practitioner with Level 2 training, and lastly, one who has only trained in Level 1 training. Because Level 1 training is currently very difficult to get into, more and more people are opting for other unofficial IFS courses and erroneously purporting themselves as IFS Therapists or Practitioners. This is false advertising; without having completed official IFS Institute Level 1 training, the only correct designation is to state that one is IFS-informed. The IFS Institute is diligently working towards more accessible trainings.

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IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ Certification

A future possibility of IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ is to certify those holding a CFT-I™ and who are also Certified Internal Family Systems℠ Therapists/Practitioners as IFS Informed Financial Therapists™.

CONCLUSION

IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ is a new "bleeding edge" approach to building healthy financial behaviors by combining the specifics of a client's finances with the traditional IFS process. Most modalities work only with a person's Managers to address the symptoms of "illogical" financial behaviors. This often does not produce sustainable financial change and only serves to strengthen internal polarizations the clients may have. Many therapists and modalities encourage their clients to stand up to and manage, subdue, or silence these problematic parts.

IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ recognizes that a strong-arm or shaming approach to modifying harmful financial behaviors is unlikely to ultimately succeed in permanent behavioral change. The IFS philosophy of Self energy, "no bad parts," and every part having a good intention helps clients powerfully access the hidden origins of their money beliefs, stories, and emotions to change the distressing financial behaviors keeping them from financial wholeness. This combination can result in "a powerful mechanism for change. I have been amazed by the progress I've made in managing my finances since doing IFS Informed Financial Therapy™," as noted by one client.

Certification in IFS Therapy is available to any CFT-I™ and is a "game-changer" for those that are looking for a non-pathologizing modality that can be mastered and practiced by CFT-I™ not holding a mental health degree or license. It is the belief of the primary author that IFS Informed Financial Therapy™ will be a valuable and effective addition to the field of financial therapy.

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