

Self-destructive firefighter behaviors often take over the living room to block out the painful feelings of the exiled parts when managers fail to keep them exiled.



ordinary distracter can't block it out, and so the distracter parts take on an extreme form. Schwartz calls them "firefighters" because they douse the fire of the pain by completely taking over the living room of consciousness.

Firefighters, although they are trying to help the system by keeping the pain away, create their own harmful results. Firefighter behaviors include anorexia and bulimia, substance abuse, extreme sexual behavior, and other self-destructive behavior, which can temporarily block out the psychological pain carried by the exiles. What all these behaviors have in common is that they completely fill the living room

with sensory experience. This leaves no space for the painful feelings to flood the system. The problem with this strategy is that it is only temporary: eventually the stimulus conditions can't be sustained. When they are exhausted, a revived set of managers is likely to enter the living room. These are often harsh judges with recriminations about firefighter behavior, and firm resolutions not to let it happen again.

An Example of Firefighting: The Bulimic Loop

One of the more common Firefighter patterns is seen in bulimia. In fact it was working with a bulimic client that led Richard Schwartz to discover

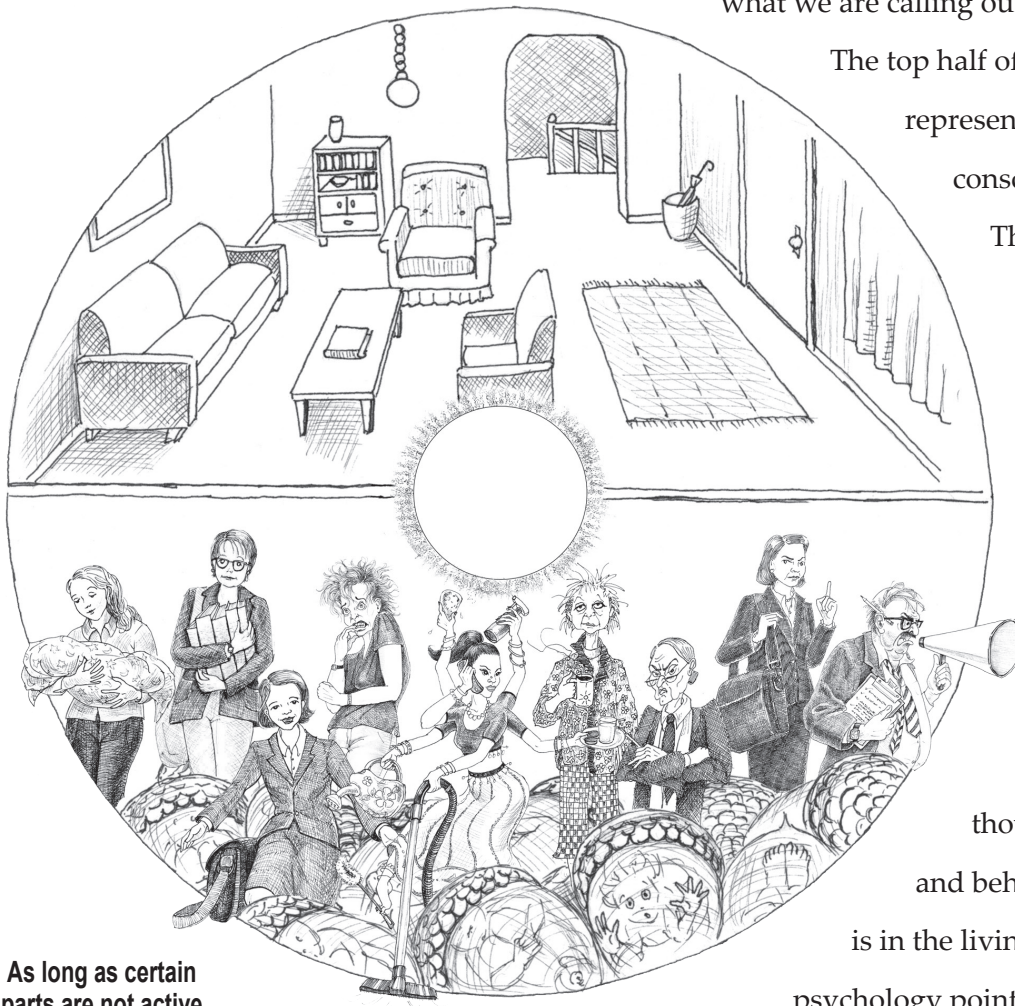
The bottom half of the circle represents the “store consciousness”. In it are stored the seeds that contain all of the potential states of mind that we human beings might have. Some of these states of mind seem to occur over and over again in our lives. These regularly occurring states of mind are what we are calling our parts.

The top half of the circle represents our everyday consciousness, what Thich Nhat Hanh calls the “living room” of our consciousness.

When the state of mind or part of us comes into the foreground, taking over our thoughts, feelings and behaviors, we say it is in the living room. Buddhist

psychology points out that when internal and external conditions support it, a particular state of mind will arise; when those conditions no longer support it, it will go back down into store consciousness.

In the store consciousness are seeds of all of our parts and potential parts which have yet to emerge. Some parts are temporarily in “storage,”



As long as certain parts are not active in our everyday consciousness, they reside in the store consciousness.

Parts that Help us Adapt

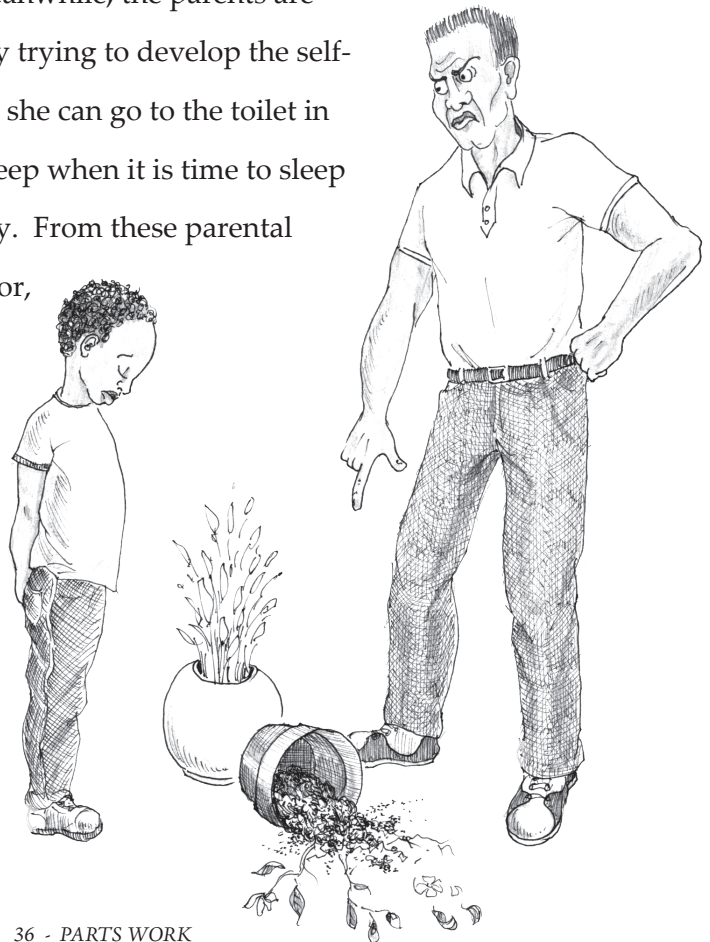


Parts which want to please others are important for coming into right relationship to our environment.

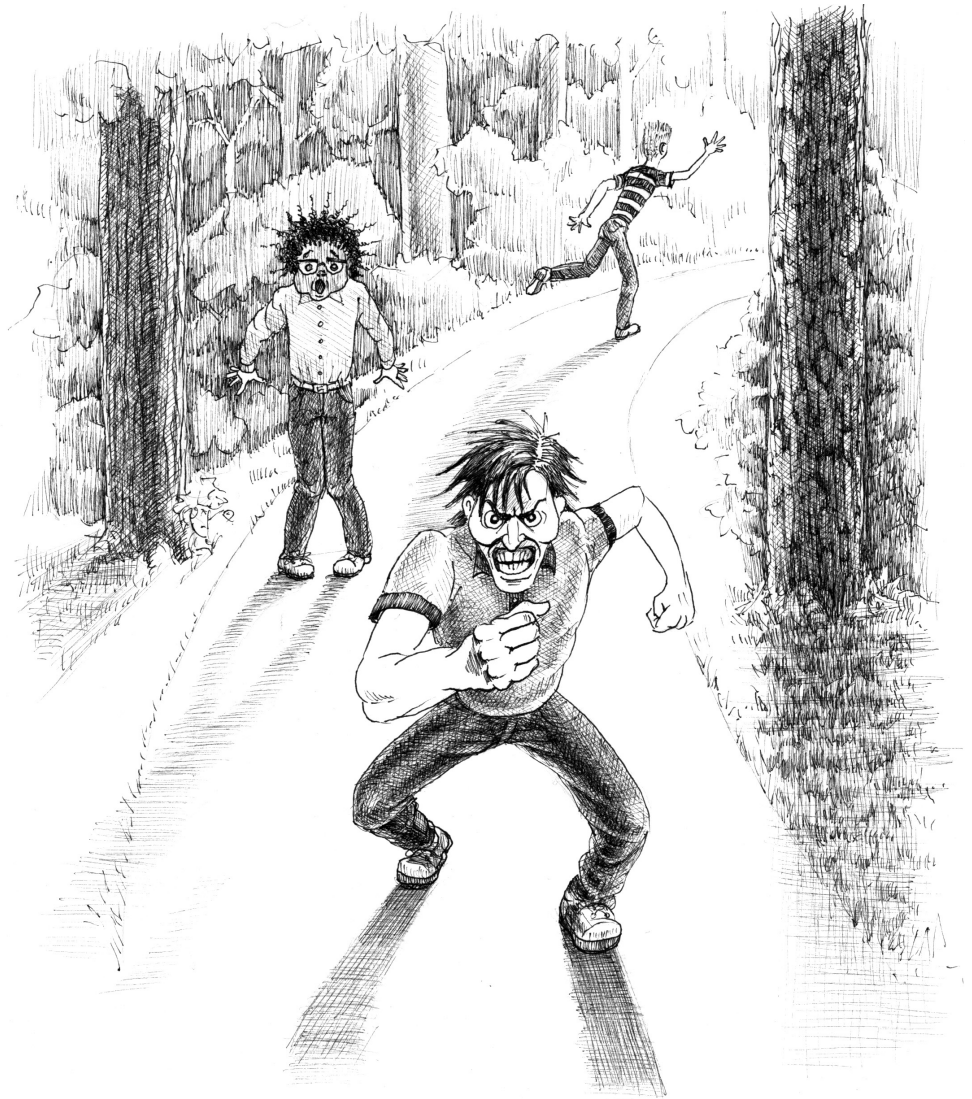
Meanwhile, the parents are busy trying to develop the self-regulatory parts of the child so she can go to the toilet in the toilet, eat at dinner time, sleep when it is time to sleep and play when it is time to play. From these parental responses to the child's behavior, internal parts develop in the child: manager parts who know what is safe to touch and what is not, what you can say and what you can't say, what is "good" and what is "bad," what makes you a "good child," and what makes you a "bad child."

While hunger, fear and anger are related to our physical survival, we also have other parts whose function as we grow is to help us succeed in our social world. Early in life there are responses by the baby which activate the parents' caretaking parts. Initially aimed at keeping the nurturing parts of the parents involved to ensure survival of the infant, they are internalized into the mind of the child and shape the character of what we call approval-seeking parts.

Meanwhile, the parents are busy trying to develop the self-



When our fear part is operating effectively it notices danger and activates our fight or flight response. This response has the strong biological component of the adrenal hormone release, which raises the arousal level of the system. In this activated state we have the energy to run or to fight. If the fight response dominates, then the anger part could almost immediately take over the living room.



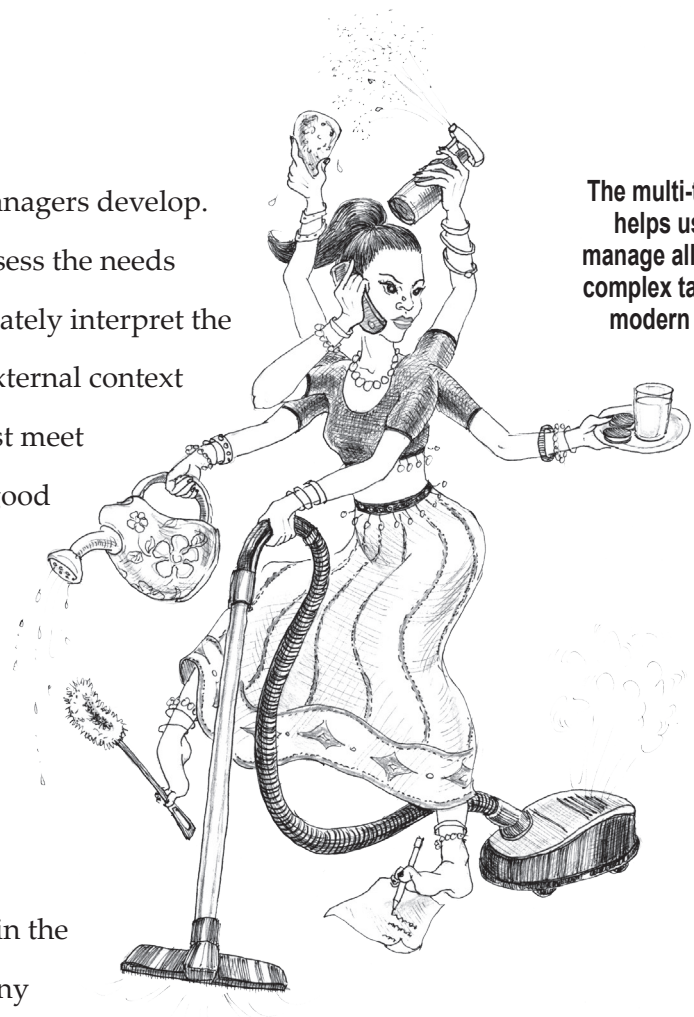
Fight, freeze or flight are three parts which might be activated when we are frightened.

Anger gives us the energy to protect ourselves. While this raw energy was useful in primitive societies for the fighting process, if it takes over the living room in present times, we often lose judgment and do things that hurt ourselves and others. In a later chapter we will look at how anger can be transformed from a rage state to its optimal protective and boundary-setting role.

Manager Parts

As we grow up, parts called managers develop. The functions of these parts are to assess the needs and capacities of the system, to accurately interpret the demands and the conditions of the external context and to develop a plan of action to best meet internal and external conditions. A good example of a manager part is the multitasker:

This part helps us get done what needs to be done. With the large number of roles that must be filled in today's world, especially by women, many people need this part in the living room to help manage their many internal and external demands.



The multi-tasker helps us to manage all of the complex tasks of modern life.



The priority manager loves to make "to do lists," so we can organize our day.

Managers can take on many forms: for example, a list maker helps to prioritize tasks. Other manager parts organize other people, reminding them of what must be done. The women on the right could be called the delegator.

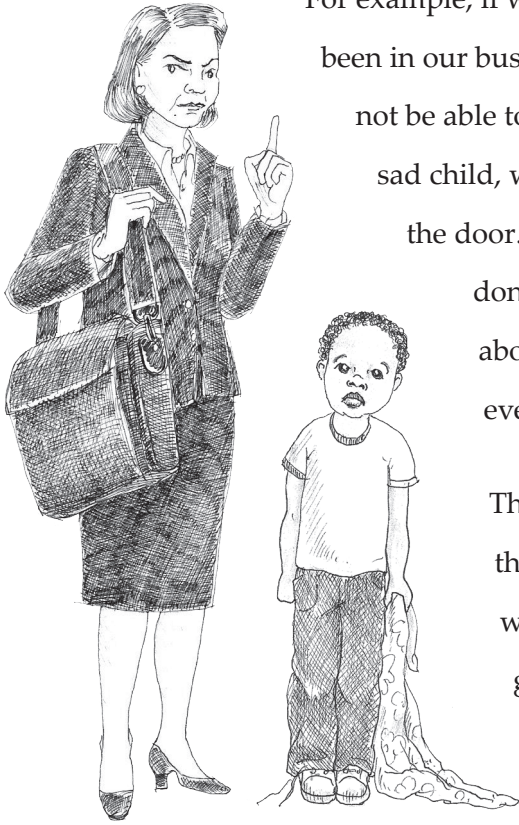


The delegator helps us organize others to do the tasks that need to be done.

Getting the Right Parts in the Living Room

Having the right parts activated when we need them is not always easy.

For example, if we come home from work having been in our business manager parts all day, we may not be able to respond with affection when our sad child, who has been missing us, greets us at the door. Instead, we may ask him if he has done his chores and give him directions about doing his homework before we even greet him properly.



Sometimes we get stuck in parts, for example when our professional parts follow us home.

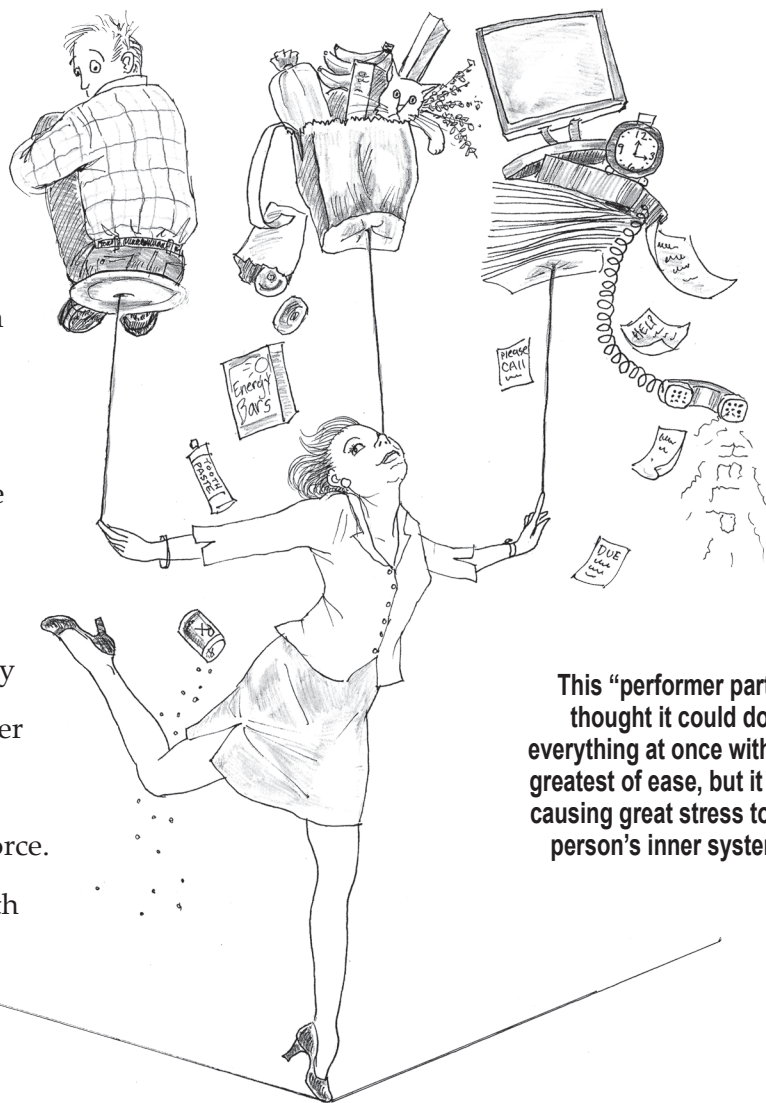
The sad child at the door was hoping that the nurturing part would be available to greet him!



It can take time to shift into the part that best fits the situation.

The opposite situation can also happen: the parents' nurturing parts are so dominant that they can't discipline the child when it is needed. The ideal is that we have access to the widest range of parts at the time we need them, so that we don't get caught with just a few sets of habitual responses we can make to life's varied situations.

Sue's other parts, however, were becoming exhausted through the effort and anxiety required to sustain this act. Through an inner dialogue the Performer agreed to come down off the high wire, but this part then went into a depression. In an effort to help it adjust and find a new and more balanced role, Sue brought the globe of light over to be with the Performer. This had an amazingly transforming effect. The Performer was not only renewed, it actually became an almost superhuman force. This caused a backlash of fear with Sue's other parts. I was concerned about this fear and certainly curious how this would play out, but it was near the end of the session, so I had to leave the work at this point.



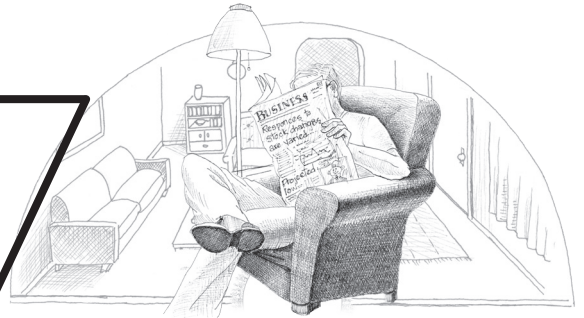
This "performer part" thought it could do everything at once with the greatest of ease, but it was causing great stress to the person's inner system.

When she came in the next week Sue reported being very energized, but also noted some problematic relationship issues that needed to be addressed. In the process of this work we began to identify an angry part that was seen as a bear in a cage. As we began a dialogue with the caged bear the whole image suddenly vanished. When parts disappear it is usually because other parts are blocking them out or stopping the process. It is standard procedure to have the client check to see whether there are any

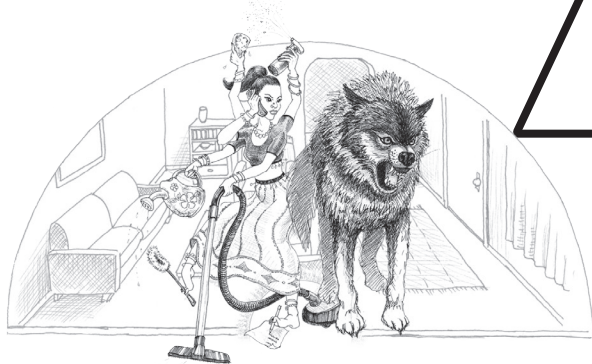
She would clean the house with her
Multitasker part in charge.



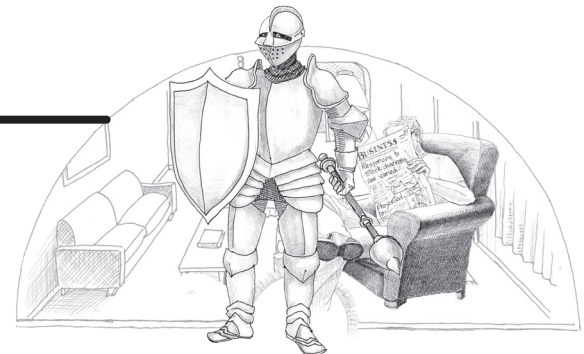
He would do nothing with his
Distracter in charge.



After a time, she would get mad. Wolf part
would take over, ripping into him for not
helping.



He would get defensive; his Protector
would send out remarks about her
compulsiveness.



They would arrive at a frosty impasse.

