

## Celebrating the Unburdened System: A Talk with Mariel Pastor

*This is IFS Talks, an audio series to deepen connection with the Internal Family Systems Model through conversations with lead trainers, authors, practitioners and users.*

Mariel Pastor is an IFS lead trainer based in Portland, Oregon, who began her IFS journey back in 1998 with Richard Schwartz. She trains across the United States and internationally, and she is widely known for her clarity, warmth and humor. Mariel recently wrote and edited the new Level 1 Training Manual and has created advanced workshops designed around the Unburdened Internal System Mandala. Prior to becoming a psychotherapist, she worked in the entertainment industry in Hollywood. Her love of working with artists has inspired her most recent project called Character Mapping, a psychological toolbox for actors, writers, and directors to build deeper characters and to find themselves. In her private practice, she works primarily with individual adults and provides consultation for other therapists.

**Tisha Shull:** Thank you, Mariel, for being here with us today on IFS Talks.

**Mariel Pastor:** I'm very happy to be here with you both. Thank you for inviting me.

**Aníbal Henriques:** Thanks much, Mariel, for willing to sit with us. What parts come up today for you hearing this bio?

**Mariel:** Oh, I think I was, let me take a second and see, I think there's a polarization. There's both some pride around, wow, I actually have done some of that. That's a little doubt that there's some timidness, little bit of it. A little bit of shyness, like, oh, let's just do the interview. And then at the end there was, well, that just kind of says it all. I think we answered all our questions. Are we done?

**Aníbal:** We're done.

**Tisha:** Oh, thank you for the heartfelt response, going to your parts.

**Mariel:** This was a trap. If you did this to just get trainers on here and like, see they've got parts.

**Tisha:** That's right.

**Aníbal:** We need to have fun.

**Mariel:** Good.

**Tisha:** All trainers' parts are welcome.

**Mariel:** Oh, good.

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**Tisha:** Will you tell us about your journey to becoming a therapist?

**Mariel:** Sure. It's a great segway. My parts drove me to it and my Self was an exile. So, I was in the entertainment industry, as you read, I worked in the music business for a long time in Hollywood and had a really great career and was in entertainment in other ways before that. But I was hating who I was becoming. I was becoming aggressive, really competitive, frustrated a lot. And part of that's because of gender issues.

**Anibal:** This was, Mariel, the movies industry, or it was the music business?

**Mariel:** The music business. And before music, I was in public relations for movies and television actors and things like that. And then I went into music because I had a background as a pop singer. I was a rock and roll singer in college and after college. And I don't know which parts of me ever did that, frankly.

**Anibal:** But you did.

**Mariel:** But I know which ones had a hard time. Anyways, I didn't like who I was becoming. It drove me into therapy. And at one point I did some volunteer work. Cuddling babies in a hospital, and my therapist asked me, I just knew I couldn't keep doing what I was doing. And I felt so good doing the volunteer work. And I was trying to find a way out. And she said, well, have you ever thought about doing this, being a therapist? And I asked two questions. I said, really, do you really think I could do it? And she said, yeah, I think you'd be really good. And then I said, do I have to take entrance exams? Because I didn't want to go to school. And so that was my journey, my Self-energy, when I look back, there were only a couple people that I would be deeply revealing to, in terms of my spirituality, like really just a couple people. And then in graduate school, towards the end, Richard Schwartz had just started writing about IFS. It was in a few paragraphs at the end of one of my textbooks. And I just zoomed in on that. I thought, what is this? And then he wrote his first book a couple years later and I have tenacious parts. I thought, oh, he's at Northwestern university. I can find him. And then the rest was just the journey to become an IFS therapist really early on. I liked parts work.

**Anibal:** That was the nineties?

**Mariel:** It was the mid-nineties. I was in graduate school in 93, 94, 95. I started seeing IFS written about a little bit in other books. And then his textbook came out shortly after that, his first textbook. And I was in the first training on the West coast in Seattle, which is three hours away from where I live. And I waited a long time for it. And I was doing IFS based on the textbook, but it wasn't until the training and having something big happened in my life where I needed inner work that I realized, oh, you can't learn this from a book. There's no way, you have to have a direct experience. And then that just changed everything.

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**Anibal:** And then you took the trainings?

**Mariel:** Well, yeah, it was in the training, that first weekend, coincided with an unexpected divorce of mine. I have a good relationship with my ex-husband, definitely, but it was a shock. And then a lot of losses in my life. And I don't know where I would be if I hadn't had this model and this community to help me through that. So, my parts drove me to become a therapist. My Self was in hiding and I made a big career change and was so lucky to find the IFS really early on.

**Tisha:** Yeah. You never had to unlearn another model.

**Mariel:** That's right.

**Anibal:** A huge transition for you that time.

**Mariel:** That's right.

**Tisha:** What was the process of bringing your Self out of hiding, like?

**Mariel:** You know, it felt like courage. It felt like the clarity and courage, you know, we talk so often about different C words a lot, but for me, those two are really tangible in my body as well. And when I knew, when I was holding those babies, it just instantly, it's like, I have to do something of service. I love people. I loved music and people. And like, I don't know what else I'll do. I loved bringing music to people, but that wasn't enough. And it just felt so clear in me. And when I was getting ready to leave records where I worked, and again, I had a well-paying job and I went into social services where I made my expense account, basically. You don't make money as a new therapist, especially. But when I told them I was leaving, right before then, they gave me a big offer to stay. And I said, no, I can't, I can't do it. I actually stayed for about six more months to help a couple artists. I worked with Sheryl Crow really closely. So, I thought, okay, I'll stay for her, but that's it. I could not leave. So, to me it felt like, I need to have the courage to take this path, this step, even though I will make hardly any money. I don't know what the future will hold, and I never regretted it. Everything seemed to work well. And so, it just felt like I was going to follow my intuition versus some other false promise of success, which is what I felt entertainment offered.

**Tisha:** Wow, what an incredible journey and trust.

**Anibal:** So, you have done some IFS, personal work or therapy as much as we are following you. And then you became a Lead trainer. How long it took you to become a trainer?

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**Mariel:** Well, it took a long time. However, and it's true Dick... So, there were too many people. I was in like maybe the second or third training outside of Chicago where Dick was.

**Anibal:** It was the beginning.

**Mariel:** At the beginning. And he was already working too much. And I remember telling him, you know, how are you going to do this? You know, this is a lot of work. He asked me if I wanted to be a trainer in 98. And I said, no, because I had too many parts that were insecure. I thought, who are you? This was the voice inside. Who are you to be a trainer or a teacher? You know, I just, I didn't have the confidence.

**Anibal:** It was too early.

**Mariel:** It was too early, but it was also, you know, my grandmother's voice. It was, you know, don't be proud, don't shine, do not shine, keep it down. I just was too insecure. And I said, no, but what I told him I would do, I wanted to help promote the model and him, which was what I had background in from entertainment. I was good at promoting artists. So, I was involved with Dick and before CSL became CSL, just now the Institute. And so, I was helping move the model forward or trying to, even though I lived in Oregon and then suddenly there were a lot of people that were getting on the trainer track. Susan McConnell was already a trainer. Let's see, Michi and Dick, Michi Rose was my trainer with Dick for several years. And I was a PA. We didn't actually, in my training, we didn't have Program Assistants. It feels like when people say back in my day, we didn't have the internet, but we didn't have Program Assistants. Then there were Program Assistants in the early 2000's. So, in 2006, I realized if I wanted to stay involved and connected to the community, I needed to be a trainer.

**Anibal:** Yeah. You should move forward.

**Mariel:** I had to move forward. And by that time, there was a long line in front of me. And I was okay with that because I thought, well, I can learn from all the things they already discovered. They already did the hard work. So, I was an Assistant Trainer for a long time. The thing is there weren't that many trainings. There wasn't work for all of us. So, for a long time, there were more trainers than there were opportunities. And now it's the opposite. So, I became a lead trainer. I don't remember when, it might've been 2011, eight years ago, something like that, but there still wasn't enough work for a while.

**Tisha:** What do you enjoy most about being a lead trainer?

**Mariel:** That's a great question. I love, at the end of the training when, and we do usually in the States six weekends. So, it's a year, but I love at the end...

**Tisha:** I liked that model.

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**Mariel:** Yeah. When you hear people at their graduation, talk about how much they've changed and how much more self-acceptance and understanding they have and the risks they will take to be very vulnerable in a training where, when you've met them on the first day, they were mostly trying to make sure they looked good. It's beautiful. I like that people make peace on some level and feel inspired to bring it elsewhere. Fantastic.

**Anibal:** And you keep enjoying it. You do it a lot right now.

**Mariel:** You know what? I think I finally really enjoy it. People are often surprised, this is a confession, but I often say I could leave teaching tomorrow. Like, that early story I had about not wanting to be a trainer or a teacher. I never wanted to be a teacher. And yet, here I am doing, I never wanted to be a writer. I have done a lot of it. And while I'm teaching and training, people are always surprised. They're like, you look like you're having so much fun. And it's because I love people. So, to me, it's a relationship and I'm an extrovert. So, I can like a lot of people at once, but I also like to be in the garden alone. So, at this point, I think all my other insecurities are questioning. It was just doubt that I don't think needed to be there, but it was, I'm the youngest of seven. So, I'm used to having everybody else ahead of me. So then once I was in the leader seat, I'm like, really? So, at this point, I don't worry about any of that. There's been hard things that have happened in trainings. And now I feel, knock on wood, a lot more confidence and everything will be okay. One thing I love is that in my staff with Program Assistants, there are a lot of talented people in that group. So, I never feel like I have to know everything, ever. It's like, I have a team and we're all there together.

**Anibal:** You feel well assisted.

**Mariel:** These are seekers and people who have a lot of experience. So, I don't feel the same amount of pressure to like, keep everything together.

**Anibal:** And did you see the trainings develop? I mean, you are there since the beginning, almost. You saw some development on the trainings. How was it for you? I mean, the trainings are as good as they were even better than they were at the beginning.

**Mariel:** You know, the essentials have always been there. It's always been a mix of different ways of learning the model, a demonstration, practice and different kinds of experientials. And then some teaching, depending on the trainer, you'll get different combinations of that. They have different specialties. So now the way I look at it, it is we have a much bigger menu of items, because there's so much creativity, there's a big talent pool. So, the basics are there, the same mix of ways you learn, but it's so creative. And when I go to the conference, it just, it's reflected there. It's like, wow, IFS is still the biggest approach to the mind and to the spirit, with the mind and body that I've seen. I've studied other approaches since I became an IFS therapist, I have enough of a skeptic, or open-minded part that wants to keep learning. And it's still the best. I

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think or it's the biggest that many other things fit. So, the bigger the community becomes, the more creativity I think there is.

**Anibal:** Yes, I totally agree.

**Mariel:** The trainings themselves, I really credit the early trainers with Dick, and him for being open-minded, but Susan McConnell and Barb and Kate Gardner and Cece Sykes, but Susan, especially coming from Hakomi, I think she really knew early on how to keep that balance happening. And she wrote the early, the first trainer manual. Yeah. I think it's always been there, and she had a lot to do with it, I think.

**Tisha:** I really appreciate how fluid and continually evolving the model is.

**Mariel:** Right?

**Tisha:** It's just kind of this open evolving, growing community

**Anibal:** Yes, Art Mones calls IFS a metamodel. And I think he is right, is really a model that integrates so much of other models. So, it's huge, large and integrative. Yes. And creative.

**Mariel:** Very creative. And we can... I'm never bored as a trainer. I've been in now, I don't know, 25 or more level one trainings either as a, you know, my first one in the late nineties, mid-nineties, and then a participant as PA. But at this point it's been 25 or more level ones and I'm never bored. Every time I teach it, I just, there's a new angle or there's a freshness every time.

**Anibal:** You keep enjoying the trainings.

**Tisha:** And you've brought recently a huge contribution in your collaborative work, in creating the level one Training Manual. Can you talk to us about the manual and the process?

**Mariel:** It was a lot gestation period. The baby is born, and it feels heavy. It's heavy.

**Tisha:** Oh yeah. You've got it right here.

**Mariel:** So, I hold it for the first time in my hands.

**Anibal:** Congratulations.

**Mariel:** It came out. It was born two days ago, finally, and it it's heavy.

**Anibal:** Long process.

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**Mariel:** Long. So almost eight years ago, I was on the trainer council, which was a group of trainers that would talk with CSL about how things were going or the Institute. I was a member of that council for several years. And I had just known as a trainer, we needed a new manual for the students. It just wasn't serving us anymore. At that point, the existing manual was 10 or 12 years old. So, we came together. Then finally it was put on the list of priorities and a group of trainers got together. And so, Toni and Chris Burris and I think Nancy Sowell. Yeah. She was a part of it. Ann Sinko... anyways, a number of us, Paul Neustadt met and talked like a couple of times about how we should do the process. So, Nancy Sowell and I then worked on the learning objectives with Dick. And somewhere along the way, as Nancy and I were putting together the next phase of what it should be, we realized, oh, this is a bigger project than we thought, the trainers need a new manual and the participants need a new manual. And we realized, wait, we can't make that the same project. Those are two things. And we had been trying to make a trainer manual. Well, oh, wait, wait, wait, somewhere we got confused. So, we pulled it apart. So, this was maybe 2014 at this point. And we decided, okay, let's just get the one going for the students first. We'll get the trainer one. And then we had groups of trainers work on each weekend. And then in 2016, Nancy had other projects. She's was starting to look at her book that she was going to write, and I kept going. And then we brought another writer on named Jennifer Gauvain who's from St. Louis, Missouri. And she was on staff with me in Colorado. And I found out she was a published writer because Nancy and I discovered, wait, you can't just take all these pieces from all the trainers and put it together in a book for the students. There's no unified voice. I was naive. We didn't know.

**Tisha:** You discovered you needed continuity.

**Mariel:** Oh my God. Yes. After all, a couple of years work, we're like, oh my gosh, it's not going to be so simple. So, Jen and I started to try to piece it together. And then we had to start from scratch, and she is skilled as an IFS therapist, but she's not a trainer. So, I ended up writing it. We pulled together some pieces, what's central. And then I was so, I'm the principal writer, but we wanted pieces from other trainers to be sprinkled in it. So, Ann Sinko has a couple pieces. Pam Krause has a few pieces. Toni does, Nancy Sowell, Susan McConnell, for sure.

**Anibal:** It looks like a book with chapters, but it's not a book with chapters.

**Mariel:** It is written. It kind of, it's written according to the modules of the level one training. So, it's module one, two, three, four, five, and six, and it's broken down. It's like a specialized workbook, almost like a textbook for the training itself. So, it talks about all the main things that people have to learn but with the voices of the trainers in it. And the unburden system, I would say weekends five or modules five and six have the greatest changes compared to the first manual. So, the first manual I think was about 30 pages and bullet points. This one's, I don't even know how many, this one's 200.

**Tisha:** Oh wow.

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**Anibal:** And how does this manual compare to the one that Frank Anderson and Martha Sweezy and Dick just published recently? I understood that this one is maybe for applying IFS to whoever needs IFS. And this one that you are talking is for training, for trainees.

**Mariel:** Yeah. You know, I should look at that one again, but Jennifer and I looked at that actually, since this project was so long, I remember when that was starting and they asked initially, if I would be a part of that, so I could help bring things from this. I said, oh, you have no idea how far behind we are. I said, I'm not ready. So, it's like, oh wow, they finished their book. Martha Sweezy is a workhorse. She's a writer, she's a real writer.

**Anibal:** She's a writer. Yes.

**Mariel:** You know, I think they're companions in a way, but this one's really according to the training, that one's more overall on IFS and there might be, well, I would say also this one includes some pieces of Dick's new textbook in it.

**Anibal:** The second edition, yes.

**Mariel:** And it's got some articles from him in it. So, I don't know, this one has more of the voices of the trainers in it. This one feels about the trainings.

**Anibal:** Yes, it makes sense. It's for the trainings. Yes. And I believe the one Frank and Sweezy is for applying when you apply IFS to yourself or to someone.

**Mariel:** Yeah. And they also have a different kind of focus on trauma. We do talk about it a little bit, but I think it's got some info... Well, Frank actually also contributed to this manual. He has a piece on neuroscience, but this one just goes along with the training in particular. It doesn't have as many of the exercises because the trainers will all be able to still have their own signature pieces, even though a lot of us use some of the same ones, but it does have practice sheets and different skill building sheets, like very specifically on unblending or very specifically on the flow of the model and unburdening or practice sheets for when you're in your practice session.

**Anibal:** It looks like a huge change and a huge integrative work.

**Mariel:** Yeah. It's really big. It's really big. It's got folders.

**Tisha:** Oh, I can't wait, it's going to change the nature of the trainings. People are going to really have a lot of clarity as they're learning.



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**Mariel:** Yeah. And people come in knowing a lot more from the Online Circle also. And I, you know, I don't want it to be used as like, you know, the school I went to in grade school where you're reading it, you still have to get practice.

**Anibal:** Of course, it's going to help so much, as I am seeing, the trainings and improve the trainings. So, this is so welcome.

**Mariel:** Good. And it will be translated into other languages. I don't know the schedule for that. And it's important to say that graduates of level one will have an opportunity to buy it.

**Anibal:** Yes. That's important also. Yes. Wonderful. Well done.

**Mariel:** Thank you.

**Tisha:** You shared that you've added a lot more on the unburdened system and you also do a lot of work with the unburdened IFS Mandala. Can you take a little time to share about some of that and why that's important to you?

**Mariel:** Happily. So, the origins of that go back to a session I had with a client, an adult male who had opiate addiction, not severely, but bad enough that it was finally coming out in the open at any rate, he was looking at going into treatment for that. And he and I had done some deep IFS work and some couples work as well, but like a lot of addictions, this was secret. And I don't use handouts with clients, hardly ever. I don't teach the model for years. I didn't have a website. I just told people, I'll teach them how to listen differently to themselves, but he needed some explanation about, he needed some hope and he needed... he's pretty rational. He needed to see something in print. So, I got out the mandala, that diagram we use that has the burden system, which has also been rewritten and is in the new manual. But do you know the one that looks like the yin yang only it's got four sections in it?

**Tisha:** They use it in the logo now. Almost, a version of it.

**Mariel:** Correct. Correct. It used to be part of the original logo. So that was in one of Dick's books. Anyways, I got that out for him and I just kind of explained, you know, this is how their inner system works. And he said at one point, well, I totally recognize myself there, but what am I going to look like when I'm doing better? And I thought that's a really good point. Why don't we have a version of this when people are feeling better? What do our parts look like when they're less burdened? So, I procrastinated on that for about three or four years. And then eventually I sat down and kind of wrote what that would be and about... I don't know, it didn't take long. My heart's just kind of inspired me. And so, then I called Dick or saw him in a trainer meeting, and I said, hey, I've been working on this. He said, that's great, we need that. And so, then he and I started looking at it together. He made a couple of really important contributions to it. Most notably, he wanted to make sure that the new Mandala that has the unburden version

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of our parts surrounded by a glow that suggests that we are all held in greater Self-energy, not only our own. So, what it means to me, and actually I'm remembering when I first met Dick in the nineties and I'm systems trained as a marriage and family therapist, we had a wonderful conversation about Holons. Do you know that term? It's H O L O N S. And that means that a part is within a part is within the whole, they all reflect each other. So, we knew that, you know, that each part has the gift of Self-energy in it because there's no separation, everything comes from consciousness. So that's what this Mandala reflects. We say, all parts are welcome in IFS. And we mean that. It's the burdens that are a problem. And we ask parts to unblend all the time. When is it okay for them to be blended? So, with this Mandala, it reflects, this is what it can look like in daily life. There's a caution, however, with it.

**Anibal:** What is it?

**Mariel:** The caution is if you have a spiritual manager or a manager who really likes self-help and growth, don't let it roll it up because it's a poster. Don't let it just take this little mandala and beat you over the head with it. Why are you like this? Why don't you look just like it says on the mandala? It's because this is an ideal and, and we're all evolving and, you know, just hold it lightly. It's what's possible. If we're alive, there's more we can grow into, but it's light.

**Anibal:** Yes, but it brings hope. And I don't resist to read a short header from it, it says the Self-led person looks and acts comfortable in their own being interacting with others from integrated parts and awareness. Parts work more closely together with fewer burdens causing them to overreact. Many parts may be released from protective roles while others will effectively protect only when needed. Over time the person is less easily destabilized and better enabled to recover from challenges. In general, the inherent gifts of each part are more available weaving in and out consciously. The Self-led person brings an abiding sense of curiosity, acceptance and an open heartedness to their relationships, naturally inviting others Self-energy to increase. Self-energy flows seamlessly within a person with a sense of connectedness to the Self-energy that surrounds him. So, this brings a light and the perspective of a landscape where we can be and feel, feels good. And I'm also wondering, do you have a radar for these unburden systems?

**Mariel:** A radar, I do. I sell it for 49.95. You can buy it on my...

**Anibal:** That's what I'm looking for.

**Mariel:** But for you a special deal.

**Anibal:** Let this wonderful Mandala shine. And I think we should read then unburdened managers, the unburdened firefighters, and the unburdened exiles. We should read them because they are so beautiful.

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**Mariel:** Nice. And people can also download this for free on my website.

**Anibal:** The unburdened managers it's beautiful.

**Mariel:** Okay. I should make one other thing around the language. Dick and I went back and forth a lot about, should we call them formerly burdened managers? Do we call them, you know, we didn't know, unburdening managers? And we just left it at this. So, it says unburden managers will take on a balanced approach to daily responsibilities. They're effective and collaborative, encouraging other parts in people. They advocate for growth and contributing talents. They can be lovingly parental and nurturing.

**Anibal:** And it says that they are confident, cooperative, clear, discerning, helpful, creative in problem solving, competent and calm.

**Mariel:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, they can be other things as well as those descriptors, but in general, I think that's true.

**Anibal:** Yeah and we need to connect with these qualities to be able to see them when they are in us or in the room with our clients. So, it's a very welcome description.

**Mariel:** And sometimes people in my trainings on the unburden system, there are different lengths. And I will talk a lot about Self-like parts. And sometimes they're in that realm. I mean, there's different degrees of awareness about them. But when some of our Self-like managers, I mean, mine say, where would you be without me? Why would you want to get rid of me? I can be helpful. And I say, you know, parts help other parts cope, but only Self can help parts heal.

**Anibal:** That's correct.

**Mariel:** So, coping isn't a bad thing.

**Anibal:** Yes. At all. Can I ask you to read for our listeners the unburdened firefighters?

**Mariel:** Sure. They signal Self directly. When stress levels are high, they use effective self-soothing activities and diversions. They add spice to life with passion and adventure, healthy risk taking and humor. They advocate for fairness and stand up to injustices. They learned courage and competence to act briefly in challenging situations. They can be courageous, adventurous, competent, passionate, creative, sensual, and fun.

**Anibal:** Good to know. It's really good to know. I'm going to read the unburdened exiles. They are beautiful. They are tender and sensitive parts with childlike curiosity and delight, advocating for connection and care. They feel secure with the Self as primary caretaker, feeling freer to reach out to others. They offer intuitions about others' feelings, enjoy being open and

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trusting. They are tender, playful, spontaneous, open, curious, trusting, sensitive, warm, innocent. It's beautiful. Nice to meet you again.

**Mariel:** Instead of stepping back, let them step in when the time is, right?

**Anibal:** Yes. Yes. We don't have to be afraid of any of these parts.

**Mariel:** No. That what basic assumption of the model is it's natural to be multiple. It's good. It's useful. And we just spend time as therapists looking at how to help people heal. Well, healing is a process and along the way, we want to smell the flowers, right?

**Anibal:** And is that multiplicity that your character mapping wants to bring to the acting? Can you tell us more about how did you...

**Mariel:** Just briefly, I'll say that when I got to graduate school, after being in the music business, I kept giving some of the books I had to writers I knew, to actors I knew and musicians, and would say, use this for your characters. This is some insight about people's psychology. And I was really interested in personality testing and or typing systems. And I had the idea about, you know, I wonder if they use this, if they'd get psychology and MFA, Masters of Fine Art' programs and writing programs. And I assumed they did, but then later I found out no, that actors, writers and other kinds of storytellers, directors do not learn about psychology. They have to go and figure that out themselves. They might know a little bit about Freud or Jung, but that was it. So, I created a kind of a mini graduate degree in systems thinking for storytellers. So, it starts with integral theory, but the heart of it is on what I call the system of selves, which is IFS. So, I teach this voice dialogue, which is parts work. So, I want them to understand the inner workings of the mind for their character's sake, but also to understand the characters, outer world too. So, their inner and outer world, but it's psychological tools to help them, you know, to build the character backstory, but also to use their craft so they can heal themselves. Because I worry about storytellers who are maybe taking on dark burdens of a character and not knowing how to de-role or how to get permission from their protective system, how to say goodbye to characters. So, I've got both sort of the teaching about psychology for their backstory, for the character, but also a lot of artistic health practices that involve mindfulness and it's involved. It's taken again a lot of time. Didn't want to be a teacher. Didn't want to be a writer. And yet here I am.

**Tisha:** Do you work with groups or with individuals through the character mapping process?

**Mariel:** I've done both. And I taught on the campus of the American film Institute in 2017. One of my participants from IFS training is a director, her name's Jen Kleiner, and she hosted me there, but I'm taking this. I'm almost done with my first 4-hour online program called The System of Selves. And it involves, like I said, parts work. And I talk about IFS and voice dialogue, also the Enneagram. So, I look at personality typing, actually in IFS we don't do much around

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pers... We don't do anything really around personality types. With Myers-Briggs or Enneagram, I do a little bit, you know, it's fine that we don't, you can apply it, but for a storyteller, they like that. So, I do individual consultations, but this will be sold as an online course because I can't be like Dick. It's not like Dick Schwartz in the eighties where there wasn't an internet. And he to go all over the world to try to bring this onto people. And I hope that IFS therapists at some point might go on and teach this

**Anibal:** And how open are those writers and actors to this multiplicity that IFS is offering?

**Mariel:** They love it. They love it. And they're so easy, when you talk about Direct Access and, you know, just be that part, oh my goodness. They'll do it in no time, flat, actors especially. So, it's different applications depending on the type of storyteller, but they're very, very open to it. And they realize that if they don't look at their own story, who they are as a storyteller, if there are some parts of them that they don't like, they won't do it justice for the character. So, they appreciate that.

**Tisha:** It sounds like it's great for you to synthesize your former career and your current and still be of service. But, bringing this model outside of the psychotherapy world, it must be, it must be good for your system too.

**Mariel:** It is. It is, it was a surprise that it came back to me years later and I had to do a lot of inner work. I had a couple parts that said, why are you going back into the entertainment industry? We couldn't wait to get out. Why are you doing this? That, you know, there's so much narcissism there, vanity. And, but there's also good people. I know that. And honestly, I believe that the arts and storytellers are medicine for our cultures. If I want to help artists, I always have my whole, you know, I just have, they just seem so important to me. And I had a critic or somebody inside me that said, if you don't do this, it will come out somewhere else. It's so obvious. So, after that, I just got on board.

**Anibal:** Mariel, what do you enjoy the most? You are doing so much. You are doing clinical work, I believe, training, writing, and also this character mapping. Is there something that you really enjoy the most or you enjoy it all?

**Mariel:** Well, I am an Enneagram 7. I am Myers-Briggs ENFP. So that means, like an Enneagram 7 or ENFP, we do lots of things. I do enjoy that all. I mean, I'm getting older, right? Like everybody else, but so I want to choose. I love, right now, this character mapping gives me a lot of newness. It's very fresh. It's a whole new challenge. And secretly, now it's not a secret if I'm saying it on a podcast, but I love helping the storytellers find their health. I like helping clients find their Self and their health, but it's really fun to figure out what makes a character crazy, I feel like I get to be naughty therapists aren't supposed to do.

**Tisha:** Oh, you like to excavate.

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**Mariel:** A little bit, a little bit. Let's say they have this burden and now what would their managers do?

**Anibal:** Oh, I see.

**Tisha:** Wow. There is a lot. Let's say frontierless territory.

**Mariel:** Yeah. We're going the opposite direction.

**Anibal:** When you say a bit crazy, are you saying more human in a way?

**Mariel:** More burdened. And how to reveal the burdens. I mean, it depends on the story and how big the character is, how much they're going to need it. It's fun to do. I don't know. I honestly feel like I had to do this, or I wouldn't... My guides, my inner system was awake. They were waking me up at night. Like you have to do this. So, I feel like just like the manual, character mapping. I don't want to die anytime soon, but once that's done or mostly done, I'll feel like why I was here.

**Tisha:** I really appreciate how much you model following your intuition, following your path, listening.

**Mariel:** It's worse if you don't. I know what happens if you don't, right. Don't you?

**Tisha:** Oh yeah. What do you see happening with the model as we evolve and grow and the model ages?

**Mariel:** Probably a big mix of things. I honestly, I think that's such a big question. I don't know, probably more creativity going into new areas, maybe more common areas. Like people being able to use this in everyday life and not having to be specialists like therapists or coaches. I hope it reaches the common vernacular. I hope it doesn't lose some of its initial threads through Dick Schwartz. I don't want to say purity because it's always evolving, but it's getting so big that I wonder, you know, it's going to change. And I hope it doesn't stray too far. Like to know what real Self is, Self-energy, which is not a black or white thing, but I don't know. I just hope that people really do welcome all parts and realize it's the burdens that are a problem and the polarizations.

**Anibal:** We all would love to see that happen in our lifetime.

**Tisha:** I love the idea of it, of it entering households and just becoming part of common language, you know, affecting relationships, and, maybe, you know, even entering the political dialogue.

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**Mariel:** I was just thinking that, I mean, because the activism, you know, it can be Self-lead and being Self-led does not mean saying... I mean on some level, yes, everything is just as it is. There's a greater mystery in the way I look at it, however, while we're here, you know, don't we want to, I would like to promote more connectivity and more peace and generosity than what's happening out there. It worries me quite a bit, but we've just had a lovely conversation and it's, but I'm with you Tisha on that.

**Mariel:** A beautiful sentiment, more connectivity, less polarization.

**Anibal:** Yes. Much needed, yes. So, Mariel, thank you so much for having us. It was a joy to be here with you and Tisha, and I hope we can keep meeting and sharing. This model will work and our lives.

**Mariel:** Thank you so much for the lovely conversation.

**Tisha:** Thank you.

*This was an IFS Talks episode, an audio series to deepen connections with the Internal Family Systems model through conversations with lead trainers, authors, practitioners, and users.*