

Self-Sabotage Series Part II
Making Sense of Self-Sabotage
with Mike Bundrant

Making Sense of Self-Sabotage

Compartmentalization theory is one way to make sense of self-sabotage.

Compartmentalization is a subconscious psychological defense mechanism used to avoid cognitive dissonance or the mental discomfort and anxiety caused by a person's having conflicting values, cognitions, emotions, beliefs, etc. within themselves.

Compartmentalization allows these conflicting ideas to co-exist by **inhibiting direct or explicit acknowledgment and interaction between separate compartmentalized self-states.**

Leary, M. R., & Tangney, J. P. (Eds.). (2012). *Handbook of self and identity* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.



Compartmentalizing is a normal thing. We all do it to one degree or another, as it seems essential to organize inner life. It works on a similar principle as file folders. To keep them organized, we label the folders and keep the contents of each folder separate from the others. Otherwise, we'd just have a drawer full of scattered paper.

*According to University of Pennsylvania evolutionary psychologist Robert Kurzban in *Why Everyone (Else) Is a Hypocrite* (Princeton University Press, 2010), the brain evolved as a modular, multitasking problem-solving organ—a Swiss Army knife of practical tools in the old metaphor or an app-loaded iPhone in Kurzban's upgrade. There is no unified “self” that generates internally consistent and seamlessly coherent beliefs devoid of conflict. Instead, we are a collection of distinct but interacting modules often at odds with one another. The module that leads us to crave sweet and fatty foods in the short term is in conflict with the module that monitors our body image and health in the long term. The module for cooperation is in conflict with the one for competition, as are the modules for altruism and avarice or the modules for truth-telling and lying.*

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-minds-compartments-create-conflicting-beliefs/>

If we take compartmentalization into account, we can suddenly understand how self-sabotage works. It involves motivation from **conflicting** parts of your mind that never take each other into consideration. The problem is held in place by the **lack of interaction** among the compartments. There's no file sharing! **We can successfully alter this inner segregation**, however. When we do, solutions are forthcoming.

Examples

Marco is impatient with family at home but has a lot of patience with his co-workers and employees at work.

During the day, Jasmine finds it relatively easy to eat healthily but during the evening she stops caring and eats all the junk food she wants.

Steven is a mature adult who handles responsibility well but ends up acting like an irresponsible teenager around his guy friends.

Karen loves the security of her full-time job but longs for the freedom of running her own business.

Jules tells himself that he deserves respect and swears he will stand up for himself but when he's around others, he freezes and doesn't speak up when it matters most.

Claudia spends most of her time meeting the needs of others but secretly feels resentful because her own needs remain unmet.

Aidan feels guilty after yelling at his kids, but his anger comes to the surface so quickly that he can't control it.

More examples?

Parts Affect Multiple Levels of our Life Experience

Identity

Every part of you is a little piece of who you are as a total person. When you are associated with that part, it can feel like it represents more than that, however.

Beliefs

Each part is capable of holding its own beliefs. This is why you can start the day determined to act a certain way, then abandon the goal at a moment's notice. Your beliefs change to match the part you're associated with at any given time.

Capabilities

Capabilities are accessible by all parts but some parts use some capabilities and not others.

Behaviors

Behaviors are often prompted by parts and their beliefs. Different parts with different beliefs inspire different behaviors.

Environment

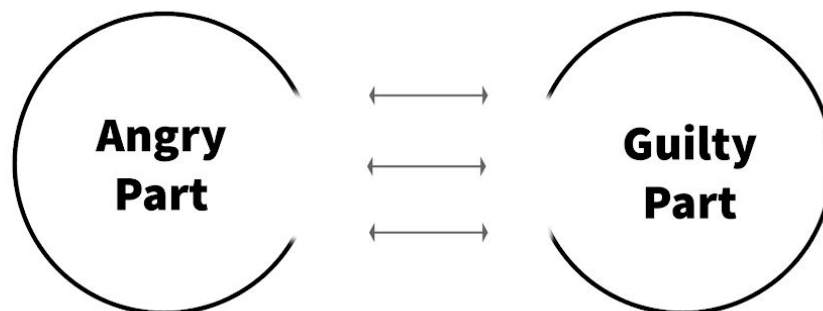
The environment often acts as a trigger to associate with specific parts.

Aidan feels **guilty** after yelling at his kids, but his **anger** comes to the surface so quickly that he can't control it.

Problem



Solution



How do you get your parts to talk to each other?

First and foremost, make sure you believe that both parts have good intentions, regardless of their behavior.

1. Relax and enter the present moment, aware that you are 100% here, now. Access your mature, open-minded self.
2. Ask each part (each side of the conflict) to appear out in front of you. Notice how they look, where they are located (right/left) and make sure you remain in a mindfully present state.
3. Say hello to each part to establish communication.
4. Introduce each part to each other and ask them to recognize the other's presence, along with yours. Each part should recognize that you are the present-day, current-age you.
5. Hang out. Talk. Negotiate. Listen. Discover an agreement frame; a point on which both parts agree with you and each other.
6. Speculate together how both parts can get what they want.
7. Keep communication open as you move forward.