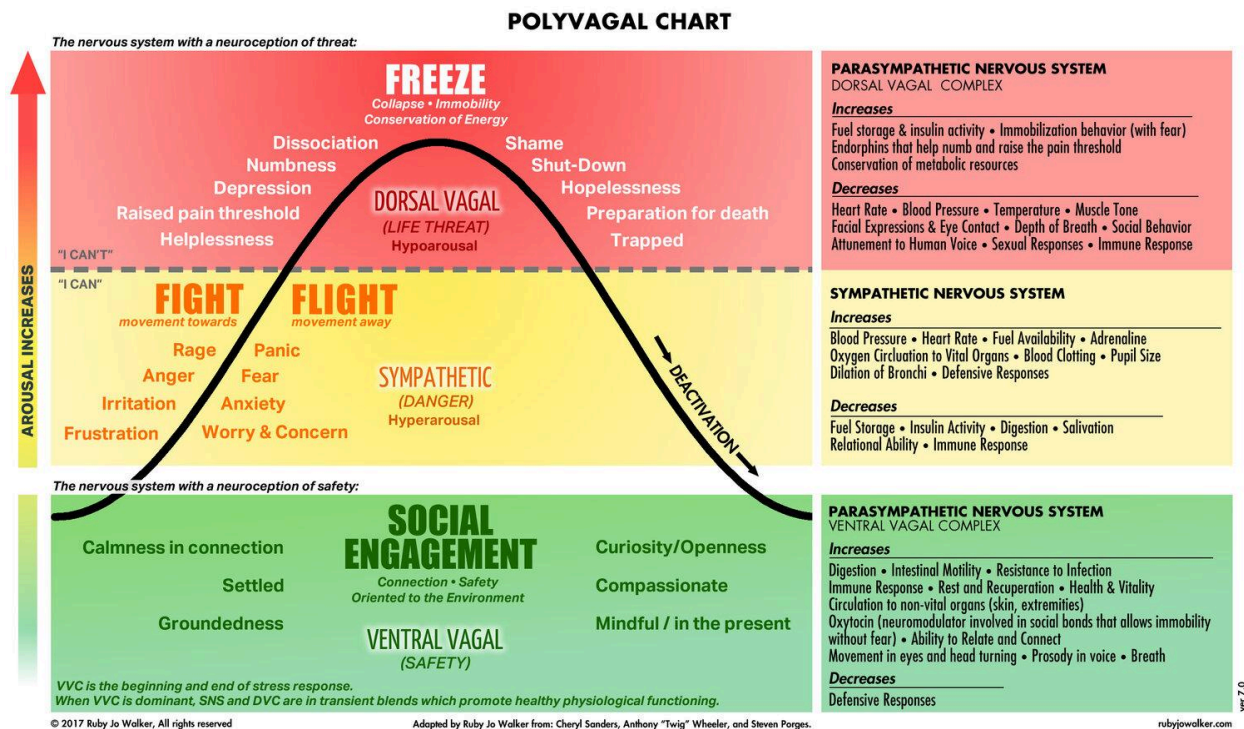


Understanding Trauma: Week 3

What is Somatic... (from Laura Fuller, therapist)

The word "Somatic" means "of the body." As it is our felt-sense of life, the somatic is the fabric of our being. It is our primary experience of life - underlying thoughts and words. It is becoming more widely understood that **the effects of trauma are in the body, not just the mind**. The physiology of trauma and the symptoms that result are in different systems than cognition. While putting things into words and being received is incredibly important, it is not enough to simply talk about what happened. And sometimes, that can be triggering.



Introduction of Coupling Dynamics (Kathy Kain, therapist)

The concept of coupling is not unique even to psychotherapy. It's also used in other fields such

as engineering and physics. At its most basic level, it's a model for understanding how things get linked together, or how they become disconnected. Sometimes you want things linked together: they belong together, or it's helpful for them to be connected. Sometimes you don't want things linked together: they don't belong together, or they may cause issues if they are connected.

An example would be Pavlov's experiments with dogs.

In those experiments, a bell was rung and then the dog was fed. Fairly quickly, the food was no longer needed in order for the dog to react. All that was then needed was the sound of the bell, and the dog would begin to salivate. The sound of the bell was coupled with the anticipation of food. In the model of coupling dynamics that we're using, we will call that over-coupling. A somewhat random sound – the sound of a bell – is now linked with food. It's not that the sound inherently belongs with food, it's been linked via conditioning. EX: Fear and love OR smell and trauma

To describe under-coupling, let's use the sound of a different type of bell: a doorbell.

Normally, if the doorbell rings, it's because someone's at the door. For many of us that means we're going to go to the door and see who's there. But if our doorbell is malfunctioning and it's repeatedly ringing, and we go to the door time after time and no one is there, relatively quickly we'll stop answering the door. EX: "There was someone there who actually tried to help me and I forgot because focused on other experiences."

Quick Review of SEEMS to understand overcoupled/ undercoupled elements:

SEEMS Elements of Experience

Soma:

Interoception (sensation)

Physiology

Reflexes

Postures

Gestures

Equilibrium

Environment:

Exteroception (sight, hearing, olfactory, taste, tactile)

External threats and resources

Near/far

Threat/non-threat determination

Magnitude of the encounter

Emotions:

Affect

Overwhelm

Familiar/habitual feelings elicited

Reading other's emotions

Meaning and Metaphor:

Interpretation of experience
Assessment of interoception and exteroception
Historical meanings
Past experience/filtering meaning
Themes that recur in traumatic experiences

Social

Attachment dynamics
Shame/humiliation
Social threat/resource
Intention (threat/non-threat social response)
Behavioral responses/dynamics
Survival effort

Pause for comprehension/ questions/ comments

New Material Added This Week:

Client Skills

Here are the four skill sets we will be discussing:

- 1) Regulation. This includes physiological regulation, affect (emotional) regulation, and behavioral regulation. It's ideal if we can begin to do something, and then be able to stop doing it. As an example, if we are beginning to become activated, our work is to practice pausing/ interrupt that escalation of activation.
- 2) The second is the ability to access neutral and positive states. One of the common side effects of trauma is that all experiences can start to be understood only from the perspective of trauma and survival. If the only conversations we can have with ourselves is about threat and danger, how will we learn to understand safety?
- 3) The third is the ability to have both a general and specific form of attention. We want to practice the ability to understand experiences from a broader perspective, while also noticing the specifics of those experiences.
- 4) The fourth is to be able to notice both similarities and differences. Notice the ways in which things are connected, but also how they are different.

Single Experience of Coupling Dynamics (Shock Trauma as Example)

Coupling dynamics of SEEMS elements within a single experience could be something like the smells, or sensations of an anesthesia being over-coupled with the fear related to a surgery. Or perhaps the person has under-coupled the injury that preceded the surgery –

and has a narrative that says the injury happened at a different me. We would be working with the elements of SEEMS in relation to a single incident, and supporting to bring together the under-coupled elements, and to decouple the over-coupled elements within that experience.

Skill Building Exercises Skill Building Exercise:

Working with a Single Experience

The goal here is to practice the process of recognizing and gently working with coupling dynamics, without worrying too much about getting results.

1. Choose a single traumatic experience to work with in which we can practice identifying coupling dynamics. 2. The basics of the work will be to bring together uncoupled elements or take apart over-coupled elements, while paying attention to the titration needed for that to happen without overwhelming the system. Again, try not to stress too much about getting it exactly right and instead letting ourselves be creative about how to work with the dynamics of what's happening. If you do not have a traumatic experience you want to work with, you can instead choose an experience that you are drawn to. Follow the same pattern of the exercise, and focus on the non-trauma coupling dynamics that you observe. Clients please titrate/ slow down if anything is happening that is starting to feel overwhelming to you, or too intense, come out of it, open eyes, feet on the ground, look around the room, adjust their work accordingly. Notice any responses in the body as the exercise progresses. Notice any changes in responsiveness, appearance, voice tone, etc. as exercise progresses; identifying SEEMS elements.