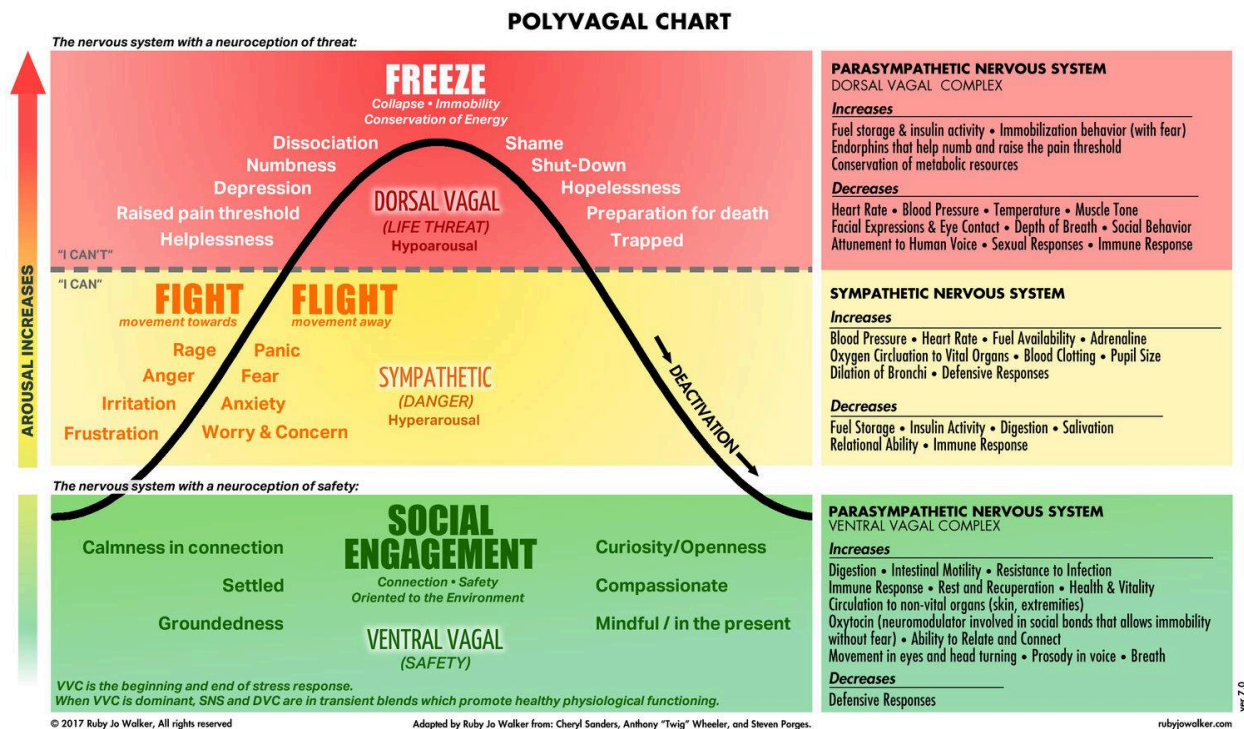


Understanding Trauma: Week 4

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/ under-coupled 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

The SEEMS inventory is not only useful in working with trauma coupling dynamics, but also helpful in guiding us in how to support the restoration of healthy coupling dynamics.

Pause for comprehension/ questions/ comments

Overview of Subcategories of Trauma Coupling Dynamics

It can be helpful to note/ understand different ways trauma coupling dynamics show up.

1. Coupling dynamics of SEEMS elements within a single traumatic experience 2. Coupling dynamics of SEEMS elements across multiple traumatic experiences 3. Coupling dynamics of SEEMS elements as a packaging strategy to limit being overwhelmed by traumatic experience(s) 4. SEEMS elements as they are involved in habitual and repeated responses, such as symptoms, physiology, or behaviors

1. 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 an under-coupling of the injury that preceded the surgery – and a narrative that says the injury happened at a different time. 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 de-couple the over-coupled elements within that experience.

2. Coupling dynamics of SEEMS elements across multiple experiences could be something like working with the theme of helplessness that was a part of an early experience of abuse, a later experience of an assault, and yet another experience of not being listened to by medical care providers when the client was trying to get care. The theme of helplessness joins all of these experiences, potentiating the coupling dynamics of each. We can work with

that theme across all of these experiences to resolve it fully. It won't be possible to work with any of those single experiences individually without encountering the theme of helplessness that links all of them. Again, we will be working to re-couple and de-couple various elements of SEEMS, but that will be happening in relation to multiple experiences, which sometimes took place across many years.

3. Coupling of SEEMS elements as a packaging strategy to limit being overwhelmed by traumatic experience(s) - this is really the story of the dirty laundry that I used earlier. This can be one of the most complex versions of coupling dynamics since it almost invariably has both over- and under-coupled dynamics. In this subcategory, traumatic experiences have been collapsed down to seem like only 1 or 2 events (over-coupling) while other elements of experience are left out and hidden because they are under-coupled. Alternatively, with a primarily under-coupled packaging strategy, the narrative can seem almost completely incoherent, where it's difficult to even figure out how many different experiences there are - we may only have small snippets of various experiences, out of chronological order, so it's hard to know what happened, and when. This under-coupled version of the packaging strategy means the elements of experience have been distributed so widely that developing a coherent narrative is difficult. However, we can be sure that behind the scenes of these widely-distributed elements of experience are the hidden over-coupled elements. Hence the complexity of this subcategory.

4. SEEMS elements as they are involved in habitual and repeated responses, such as symptoms, physiological responses, and behaviors. This tends to manifest as somatic symptoms associated with trauma history, so this category would commonly include working with somatic symptoms and responses, such as recurring migraines, the physiology of anxiety, or pain syndromes. It can also show up as habitual anger, depression, or self-harming.

Practice for Today:

Working with a Theme/ Multiple Experiences

1. Clients please choose more than one traumatic experience to work with in which they feel there are identifiable coupling dynamics - in particular some that link the different experiences. 2. Noticing and bringing together under coupled elements (things we may have missed) and/or take apart over-coupled elements (themes we may have created~challenging them), while paying attention to the titration needed for that to happen without overwhelming/going too fast. We are working with coupled themes or SEEMS elements across multiple experiences rather than staying within one experience. 3. We might use one of the experiences as a way to address the themes or other links between the multiple experiences. If one does not have traumatic experiences they want to work with, they can instead choose non-traumatic experiences that were significant for them, which contain similar themes. Follow the same pattern of the exercise, and focus on the

non-trauma coupling dynamics that you observe. This can also be helpful for titration purposes.

Clients: Please come out of/slow down the exercise and take care if it is becoming too overwhelming. We are tracking the experience in the present moment through SEEMS elements that are linking the various experiences. Notice any responses in your own body as exercise progresses. Notice any changes in posture, sensation, etc. Debrief: spend at least a little time in the debrief identifying the themes or SEEMS elements which linked the experiences.