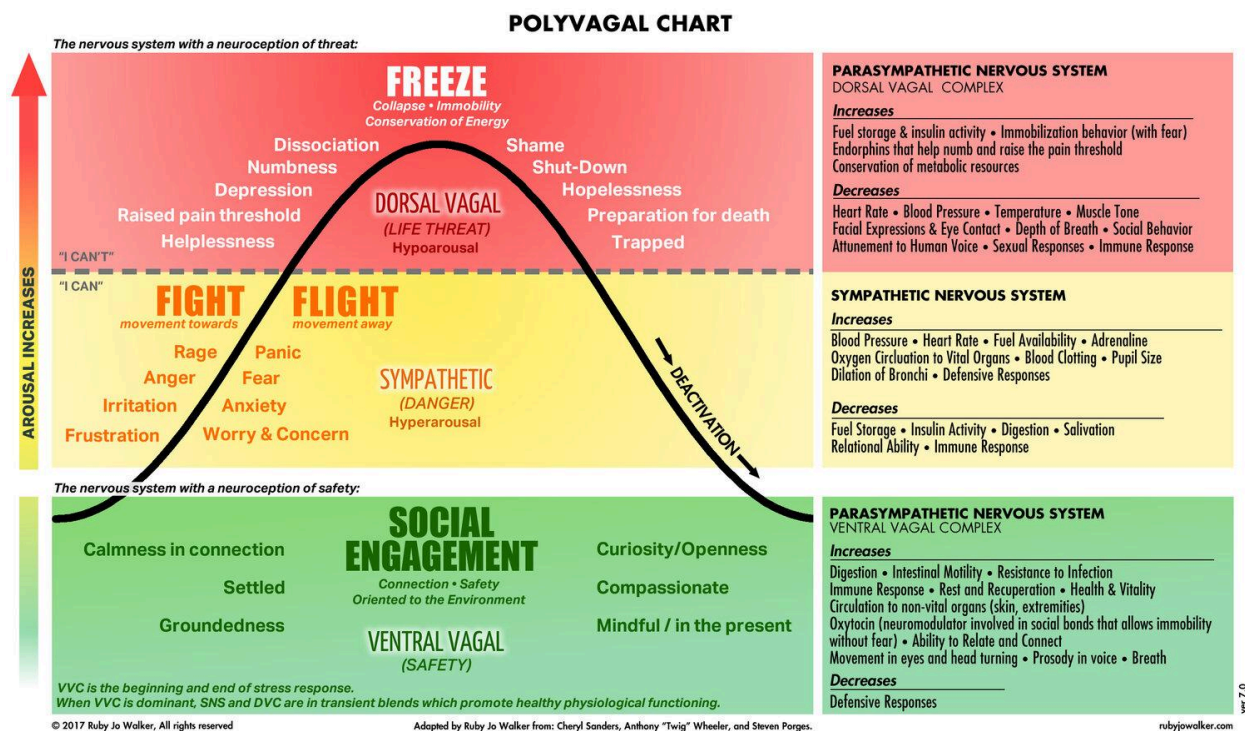


Understanding Trauma Week 2: Trauma and Coupling Dynamics

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."

Overview of SEEMS Model

There are different elements of experience that can become coupled in traumatic events. And when I say coupled I mean both under- and over-coupled.

SEEMS model: Soma Environment Emotions Meaning or Metaphor Social

"If you start working with the over-coupled elements, you will end up having to work with the under-coupled elements, and vice versa."

Ex: Overcoupled theme of powerlessness, undercoupled theme of autonomy

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

Small Group Question: What is coming up for you as we talk about this? Any resonance with this? Any noticings of what might have been coupled together? Maybe choose something a 6 or less on the triggering scale if possible, not the hardest trauma. What might be overcoupled? What might be undercoupled?

SEEMS in Practice

Can use these as check-boxes for understanding traumas and experiences. If anything is left out in the present moment experience, might be undercoupled.

Ex: work to disconnect a sense of being helpless from the experience, and helping recognize their own strength, and identify that there were people who did help, who were on their side?

When working to repair and restore healthy coupling dynamics, each of these SEEMS elements can also be considered as an inventory of how things might look if things went well, not only about when things went awry. What were the resources that were - or are now - available?

What capacity do we have now that would change the outcome now - or if not the outcome, then how can we integrate the experience?

looking back and seeing what opportunities were missed, where I could have done some reworking to restore positive coupling dynamics. Linking together strength and capacity with the fact that the person survived, for example.

Client Skills Development Practices:

Finding Differences and Similarities to uncouple and re-couple

This is again a chance for us to be creative and experimental in noticing things that are similar or different, and then how they have a local or global quality. You are focusing on practicing the skill of noticing, rather than following the content. This will be a brief exercise, so there is no need to focus on resolving anything – it's a way to practice the empowered client skills.

1. Choose a symptom or past experience they want to explore (again a 6 max on the triggering scale), and we will proceed with that exploration with the focus/ invitation of supporting their capacity to notice ways to be specific in finding both similarities and differences using SEEMS.

Each of us is typically more proficient at some of these types of tracking of awareness. It is often challenging to focus on those that don't come naturally to us. If any sense of frustration is escalating into anxiety or activation we can adjust the focus and pacing as needed, go slower, titrate, back off. Noticing any changes in client appearance, voice tone, etc. as exercise progresses.