MIND-BODY INSIGHT
COACHING

Independent Study

Note: I gathered these reading/watching/listening resources and reflection prompts as part of a group healing process that I was leading. I have adapted them to be used for individuals who want to accelerate their recovery with learning experiences in between sessions (this is 100% optional and self-directed). If you notice some language that applies to a group process, that is a vestige of the original purpose for which the program was created. -Kent

Session 1 -> 2 Homework

This week's homework:

1) Engage with the concept of predictive coding by reflecting on it during your day-to-day experiences, either about pain/fatigue perceptions, or any other perception, thought, emotion, or interpersonal experience.
    a) Some sample exploratory questions to adapt to your experience:
        i) Did you expect the fruit you just bit into to taste one way, and were confused for a moment and had to reconfigure your expectations? This is the predictive brain in action.
        ii) Did you think you saw a bird flying and realized it was just a shadow tracing over a building? This is the predictive brain in action.
    b) Spend a minimum of 20 minutes engaging with the new videos and/or articles in this predictive coding document to deepen your understanding of the predictive brain: Predictive Coding
    c) Be able to answer the question: "Why are my **prior beliefs** about the health and safety of my body important for recovery?"

2) Spend about 30-40 minutes reflecting on **perfectionism**, putting **pressure** on yourself, and **people-pleasing** (the 3 P's) and its relationship to shame, self-esteem, and self-compassion by journaling about the following questions.
    a) In what ways do I get caught up in patterns of perfectionism, applying excessive pressure on myself, and/or people-pleasing?
    b) What are the social contexts in which I'm most likely to be oriented to please others rather than tend to my own needs and feelings? When am I most vulnerable to this pattern?
    c) In what contexts do I put a lot of pressure on myself without regard to the suffering I'm causing?
    d) What internal experience might I be trying to unconsciously skip over when I prioritize other people's feelings or comfort, or when I focus on achieving at the expense of my wellbeing?

e) Who did I learn these patterns from during my childhood and early adult life? Who has benefited from these patterns?
f) What messages would I need to hear about my self from my wiser, more compassionate parts in order to begin to unwind these patterns?

(Note: theoretically it is possible to have chronic pain/fatigue without any of the 3 P's.)

Session 2 -> 3 Homework

➢ **READING** - Spend about 45 minutes reading the first 15-30 pages of my PDF handout of Suzanne O'Sullivan's book, *Age of Diagnosis: How Our Obsession with Medical Labels Is Making Us Sicker.* I'm including the prologue, introduction, and Chapter 2: Lyme Disease and Long Covid

a) Download link for PDF of excerpt from the book:

PDF Suzanne O'Sullivan Age of Diagnosis - How Our Obsession with Labels Is …

i) ALTERNATIVE TO READING: If you struggle to read, or feel like you need to listen/watch something, then you could watch 45 minutes of this youtube interview:
Doctor SPEAKS OUT: "They're Quietly Labeling You Sick—Even W…

b) For conditions that you don't have, please consider what the medicalization process is like when it is not affecting you directly. Sometimes it is easier to see / understand the power of medicalization to induce negative expectations and a spiral of ill health when it is not directly about your own sensations, or your own relationship with the medical industry.

➢ **WRITING / REFLECTING** - spend about 15 minutes or more reflecting on the following questions.

a) As you pay attention to patterns of people-pleasing and perfectionism this week, have you noticed anything? Are these patterns associated in any way with unpleasant physical sensations?
b) In what way have your unpleasant sensations been medicalized? Did medicalizing your sensations create a "nocebo effect" where negative expectations (enabled by a predictive brain) made your fear worse, which then worsened pain/fatigue sensations?
c) What medical treatments have you tried? Have the medical treatments worked? Did they work for a while, and then stop working? Do you attribute that temporary improvement to a placebo effect or something else?
d) How has a psychosocial, or mind-body perspective shifted things for you, both currently in your daily life, and about the story you told yourself about how sensations (pain/fatigue) affected you and your medical history?

Session 3 -> 4 Homework

- **READING / WATCHING (40 mins or more)** - More on the process of medicalization, de-medicalization, de-pathologizing.

  a) 10-min Youtube Video on Sociology of Medicine: Medical Dominance and Medicalization
  b) Finish reading the handout from last week:
     i) Suzanne O'Sullivan Age of Diagnosis - How Our Obsession with Labels Is…
  c) Start on learning about the triangle of conflict / change triangle
     i) What Is the Change Triangle (aka triangle of conflict).pdf

- **WRITING / REFLECTING (20 mins or more)** - spend about 20 minutes or more reflecting on the following questions.

  a) Reflect more on the process of labeling and how it changes our experiences. What happens when you give yourself or your sensations a negative label (*pain, fatigue, crash, injury, wrong, broken, bad, such-and-such syndrome, disorder, etc*.) ? Does anything change? How does it change? What are the short and long term consequences of buying into a label?
  b) How are experiences different when you use a more neutral label? For example, *sensations, coldness, warmth, pulsing, heaviness, lightness, etc.*
  c) Have you noticed any friends or family identifying strongly with a medical label and starting to form an identity around it? Has this tended to benefit them or worsen their problems? In what ways are diagnoses and treatments similar to brands and products?
  d) Consider an emotional event or conflict from the past six weeks. See if you can analyze it to differentiate between (1) stimulus and internal responses (being criticized versus getting angry), 2) thoughts from feelings (thinking "they did that because they are fragile and unable to communicate well" versus feeling angry (heated, vibrating, etc) 3) anxiety, defenses, and feelings

Session 4 -> 5 Homework

- **READING / WATCHING (~40 mins)** - Working with the triangle of conflict by accessing and welcoming anger.

  a) Working with anger, breathing deeply, and feeling sensations of anger using Hilary Jacob Handel's lessons:
     i) Anger Part 1: How do we safely work with core anger
     ii) Anger Part 2: Being with the body
     iii) Anger Part 3: Clearing out angry energy for peace of mind and body
     iv) Anger Part 4: Thinking through actions to take

- **WRITING / REFLECTING (~20 mins or more)** - Take some time to reflect on and make a list of the 3-4 most common defenses you use. A partial list of defenses includes:

  a) intellectualizing, ruminating, denying, rationalizing, projecting (ascribing internal experience to other people), detaching from physical sensations, judging,

dissociating, splitting self or others into all-good and all-bad entities, self-doubting.

i) Here is a list of additional common defenses: https://www.hilaryjacobshendel.com/common-ways-to-avoid-emotions

b) **Explore the change triangle.** If you spend time ruminating about your symptoms, worrying your body may never be the same again, or other similar concerns that are common for people with neuroplastic pain/fatigue, see if you can use the change triangle to notice which defense your thought patterns exemplify (e.g. ruminating, worrying, self-doubt).

i) After identifying the defense, see if you can notice the felt sense of physical anxiety that the defense is often covering over. Feel the anxiety physically. (What do you notice.. is it buzzing? vibrating? pulsating? What can you feel physically?) Sense into it, and explore it with curiosity and open-mindedness. Feeling sensations in the body often works as an antidote to obsessive thinking.

ii) Lastly, ask yourself if there is an unexpressed feeling under the surface. Has there been a conflict in the recent past that has been gnawing at you? Can you identify and express feelings about it?

Session 5 -> 6 Homework

➢ **READING / WATCHING (~40 mins)** - driving home lessons from Nonviolent Communication (NVC).

a) Listen to the first 40 minutes of this 3 hour lecture from Marshall Rosenberg, as audio or video. (Yes, it is a bit cheesy and some of Rosenberg's politics around race and international relations are outdated or may be offensive to some, but I've found that these recordings still have practical usefulness.)

i) **Audio Link:** https://www.dropbox.com/s/x5cz9rc97joyual/Nonviolent%20Communication%20-%20San%20Francisco%20Workshop%20-%20Marshall%20Rosenberg%20-%20CNVC.org.m4a?dl=0

ii) **Video Link:** https://www.dropbox.com/s/e09ui1hc3d749v4/Nonviolent%20Communication%20-%20San%20Francisco%20Workshop%20-%20Marshall%20Rosenberg%20-%20CNVC.org.mov?dl=0'

➢ **WRITING / REFLECTING (~20 mins or more)** - Take an instance of interpersonal conflict and write down how you would typically speak up for yourself. Next, using the principles of assertive communication, how would you break down what to say in terms of observations, feelings, needs, and requests? How would you do it in your own style? Please bring examples of conflict and communication struggles to our sessions. As a reminder, for many people, unrecognized needs and unexpressed feelings can lead to chronic pain/fatigue, so this is why we're exploring these themes.

Session 6 -> 7 Homework

- **READING / WATCHING (~40 mins)** - Read psychiatrist Sami Timimi's chapter "What is Mental Health?" from his book, *Searching for Normal*
  a) Timimi, Sami, chapter- what is mental health from Searching for Normal.pdf

- **WRITING / REFLECTING (~20 mins or more)** Reflecting on the lesson on anger and aggression, reflect on the aggression in your life and in your history, both the kind you experience and that you experienced in the people around you. Do you judge your aggressive impulses? Do you judge your anger? Can you be more aware of your aggressive impulses and anger with love, with compassion? What would that look like? How would that affect you? Can you be aware of the anger, aggression, and competitiveness of the people in your life? How do their anger and aggression affect you? Do you often notice it or do you filter it out?

Session 7 -> 8 Homework

- **READING / WATCHING (~40 mins)** - Watch the short film: Life Overtakes Me (40 mins)
  Watch Life Overtakes Me | Netflix Official Site
  Netflix documentary about resignation syndrome, an idiom of distress which affects West Asian immigrant children only in Sweden.

- **WRITING / REFLECTING (~20 mins or more)** Spend some time reflecting on how you absorbed cultural information about the people around you—how they displayed or communicated their distress physically.

  a) Did anyone around you when you were growing up have chronic physical complaints that weren't linked to a clearly defined medical problem?
     i) Examples are concerns like chronic headaches, back pain, fatigue, brain fog, depression, anxiety, or others?
  b) How did those affect you? Did you take care of anyone in that position?
  c) When you developed physical sensations that were intense, how did you know the right thing to do was to have them investigated medically?
  d) Does it make sense to see this process (chronic pain/fatigue/depression/anxiety) through the concept of an "idiom of distress"? (A culturally-understood manner of showing high stress levels through unusual behavior and physical complaints)

Session 8 -> 9 - homework break

Session 9 -> 10 Homework

- **READING / WATCHING (1 hr 30 mins)** - Watch the Social Dilemma
  a) https://www.netflix.com/search?q=social%20dilemma&jbv=81254224

- **WRITING / REFLECTING (~20 mins or more)** Your home study for this week is to view the *Social Dilemma* on Netflix, and to reflect on how social media affects how much in-person time you spend with friends and loved ones and how it affects overall anxiety levels. Also, consider what steps you can take—if you want to make adjustments—to alter the amount of time you spend on social media, and curate the types of content that you allow into feeds, and into your mind.

Session 10 -> 11 Homework

- **READING / WATCHING (~40 mins)** - Continued reflection on what it means to medicalize sensations, and what it means to demedicalize sensations. Reflect on how *placebo* messages and responses compare to *nocebo* or danger messages and responses. (Huntington's disease is *not* a mind-body syndrome, it is a rare, genetically inherited disease of tissue damage, so it is an interesting one to compare mind-body conditions to.)

  a) Read chapter 1, "Huntington's Disease," from *The Age of Diagnosis*, by Suzzane O'Sullivan
  O'Sullivan Suzanne Age of Diagnosis Ch 1 Huntington's Disease.pdf

- **WRITING / REFLECTING (~20 mins or more)**

  a) Continue making a list of past or current conflicts, unresolved hurts, or interpersonal dynamics to discuss, ones that may have underlying emotions that have not been fully worked through. Reflect on how these difficulties connect to the triangle of conflict.

Session 11 -> 12 Homework

Watch this short video and come to the session with a list of your top 3-5 most-used defenses. They are not always easy to identify because they usually operate on an unconscious level.

READING / WATCHING (~40 mins) - Watch (8 mins)

1. ISTDP - What are defense mechanisms? | Dr Sia
2. Read this (10 mins) On Defenses - https://www.hilaryjacobshendel.com/common-ways-to-avoid-emotions

WRITING / REFLECTING (~20 mins or more)

Reflect (10 mins) on your most used 3-5 defenses

Session 12 -> 13 Homework

READING / WATCHING (~40 mins) -

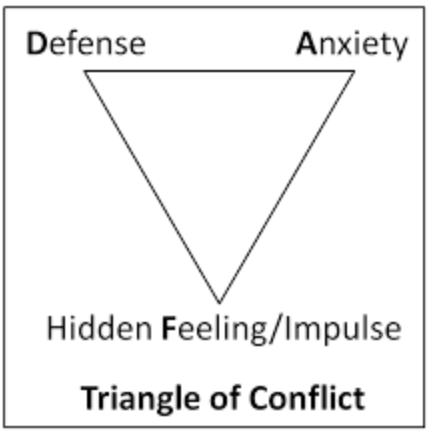
3. Read about group dynamics in the latest *n+1*:
    a. https://www.nplusonemag.com/issue-51/essays/experiences-in-groups/

WRITING / REFLECTING (~20 mins or more)

Continue reflecting (10 mins) on your most used 3-5 defenses.

See if you can trace the triangle of conflict backwards towards becoming aware of unconsciously using a defense, then allowing yourself to feel the physical sensations of anxiety (tension, buzzing, jittery-ness, pain, fatigue), and then posing questions to see if any emotions are under the feelings of anxiety (like sadness, guilt, anger, vulnerability).

Questions like: “What feeling is underneath the felt sense of anxiety?” “What if I let the feeling express itself through my body?”



Triangle of Conflict