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PHIL'S CLARIFYING NOTES ON COUPLING DYNAMICS

Written 2025-05-05 Mon during Intermediate II in Sean Frankino's NYC SE professional training.

A coupling issue (over- or under-) is usually between two elements or two clusters of elements.

So, let's define "the elements" for coupling purposes. "Elements" can be any kind of SIBAM, including trigger stimuli and bodily reactions, emotional states, but also situations, people, anything really, even like your overall being or your daily experience.

Over-coupling means over-association among elements: When X is here, Y shows up. for example:

- Sean's pink house example: When a pink house is there while driving, huge activation shows up
- Social phobia: When in social situations, client's anxiety state shows up
- When client's anger is here, client's yelling behavior shows up
- When client's anger is here, client's feeling of powerlessness shows up

Under-coupling can mean any of:

- (a) lack of access to or awareness of an element. for example:
 - Dissociation: Client is a "dissociated state", roughly defined as in detached-seeming state, not present or able to sense their body, and probably displaying multiple under-coupling examples listed below
 - Client can't feel anything in chest
 - Client's voice gets loud and client says mean things but isn't aware that they're angry
 - Can recognize some SIBAM around an experience but not others
- (b) lack of ability to experience an emotion, feeling or sensation. for example:
 - Client tells story of trauma but can't do it with real emotions, feels disconnected
 - Client is very fatigued, doesn't recognize emotions and experiences causing fatigue
 - Around a topic or event, client has a vague and confused experience, not able to tell what they're feeling or separate out any distinct emotions
 - Can have the experience of some SIBAM around an experience but not others
- (c) lack of ability to deploy a behavior. for example:
 - Client can't deploy healthy fight or flight response
 - Client can't visibly share an emotion or healthily express it

If I were re-making SE, I might remove the coupling terms completely because they're imprecise and not coherently defined. Sometimes the coupling words are used in ways that can't be fit into *any* consistent definition.

I would focus on a concept of **healthy flexibility** (or the rigorously-defined "psychological flexibility" from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy). Then, you'd just need to know that:

- Any of the coupling issues we've learned about indicate a lack of healthy flexibility
- What we do in SE is support clients to arrive at healthy flexibility with all elements that are important to their nervous system and in their life

What is healthy flexibility?

- "Healthy coupling dynamics" are defined in SE manual (Beginning I page 19) as: <<

- *Healthy coupling between different elements of SIBAM can be defined as flexible, variable, congruent, and non-fixated in relation to arousal and activation.*
- *While elements of SIBAM may link together, they are not stuck together.*
- *This allows for curiosity, multiple possible outcomes, creativity and staying within the range of resiliency of the ANS. >>*

Also see:

- For over-coupling, also see Pavlovian conditioning. It's a similar idea: A stimulus inherently causes a response in client, and then new different stimuli also start to cause that response just because they've co-occurred repeatedly with the original stimulus