

# the space between (part 2)

navigating shame and  
cognitive dissonance in  
animal-assisted services

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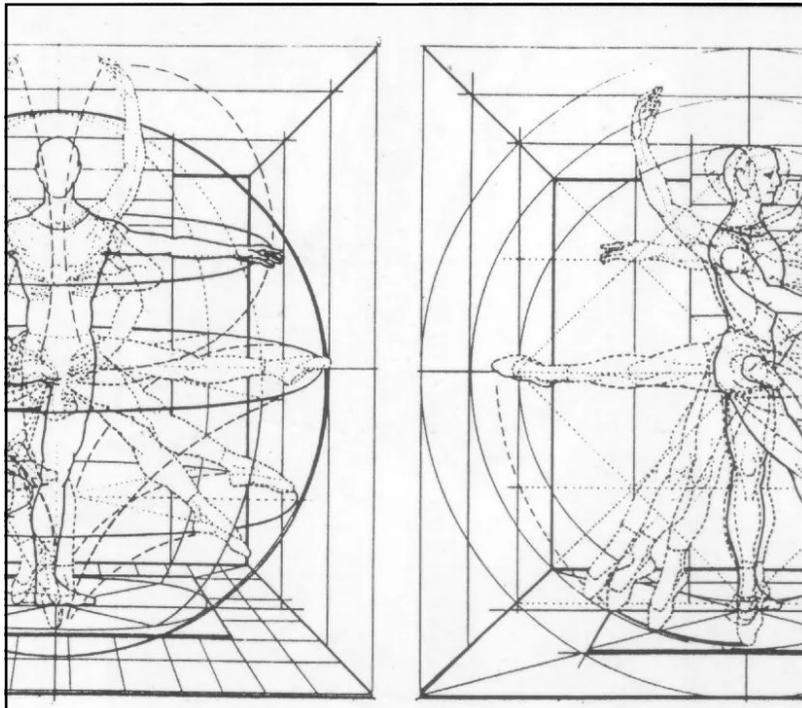
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## preamble

- The Space Between (Part 1) took place in June 2025
  - Video link: <https://www.human-animal-interaction.org/webinars/the-space-between/>
- Part 2 builds on Part 1
- If you missed Part 1:
  - This webinar will be a mix of top-down instruction and bottom-up invitations
  - Follow-up support

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## kinesphere

“the space around the body whose periphery can be reached by easily extended limbs from that place which is our support or stance”

-Rudolf Laban (1966)

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### SIBAM

(Adapted from Levine, 1997, 2010)

- **S – Sensations**
- **I – Image** (Sensory Impression)
- **B – Behaviour**
- **A – Affect** (Emotion)
- **M – Meaning** (Cognition)

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## fostering curiosity



- What external and internal conditions allow you to:
  - Be curious
  - Be present
  - Be connected
  - Be attentive
  - Be creative
- What is different in your body when these are available?
- What happens if you take a moment to set these conditions?

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## reflections since part 1

What have you been curious about?

What has caught your attention related to...

- Boundary rupture and repair?
- Relational rupture and repair?

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## review: animal-assisted services (Schlote, 2019, 2020, 2023a, 2023b)

- May involve...
  - Animals and humans that may have histories of adversity, trauma, and unmet needs
    - Humans and animals that may have trauma in relation to one another (e.g., falls, kick/bite, impacts of head and bodily injuries, boundary and relational ruptures)
  - Humans who may turn to animals as surrogate attachment figures
  - Wonderful intentions
  - Settings and perspectives that are anthropocentric that may or may not fully meet the needs of humans and/or other species
  - A greater risk for re-enactments of familiar patterns, dynamics, and misattunements

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## overview of part 2

Continuing education is essential for practitioners, facilitators, and volunteers in the field of animal-assisted services (AAS). Regardless of their role, engaging in lifelong learning relies upon the service provider's curiosity and willingness to have a beginner's mind. However, the process of growth and development can at times put providers in contact with information about their clients, the animals, and themselves that challenges their beliefs or worldview, which can be uncomfortable or activating. This webinar will introduce some frameworks and concepts from various approaches to help providers understand what comes up in the space between them and their response to new information. Practical skills for resourcing and regulation will also be introduced that can support **a nervous system state that makes curiosity more likely.**

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*Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom.*

**--Viktor E. Frankl**

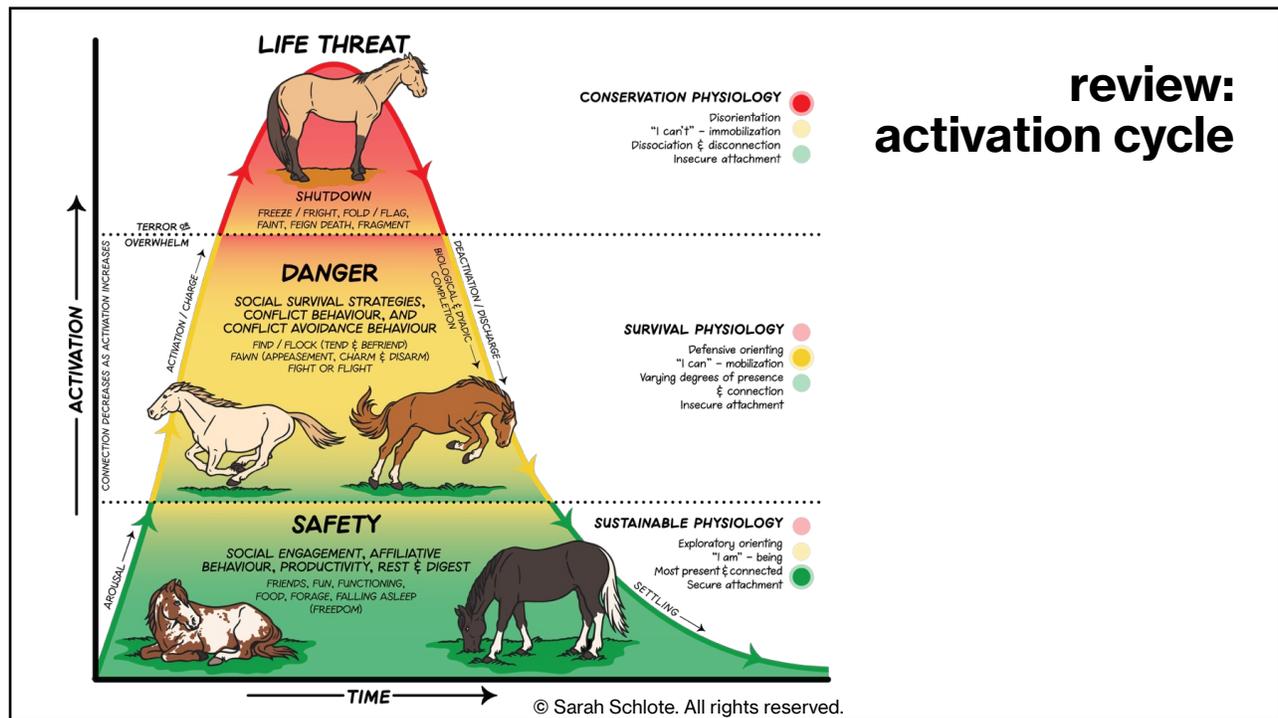
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## invitation

- Think of a time where you were presented with information that challenged your beliefs about yourself, your role/work in AAS, the participating humans and animals, and/or the world at large.
- What do you notice...
  - In your bodily sensations and nervous system state?
  - In your emotions?
  - In your sensory perception?
  - Are there any impulses to react or respond in a particular way?
    - Be curious in relation to your kinesphere specifically (e.g., impulse to look towards/away, other shifts in gaze/vision, bracing, blocking, stiffening, fidgeting, impulse to dismiss / discredit, etc.

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## neuroception (Porges; Kain & Terrell)

- The ability to detect safety, danger, and life threat
- Porges proposed that it is separate from sensory perception
  - Risk is largely evaluated by unconscious processes / neural circuitry
  - Does not require cognitive awareness
- We can become aware of some processes and states associated with neuroception
- Influenced by the neuroception of caregivers in early development

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What do you notice as you observe this image?

Emotions, sensations, thoughts, behaviours?

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## snake or stick? (Ratey, 2008; Kain & Terrell, 2018)

### **Hypervigilance (everything is a snake):**

- Can lead to false positives (over-responsive to cues of danger or threat)
- Vigilance and hypervigilance are not the same

### **Hypovigilance (everything is a stick OR “I’m checked out”):**

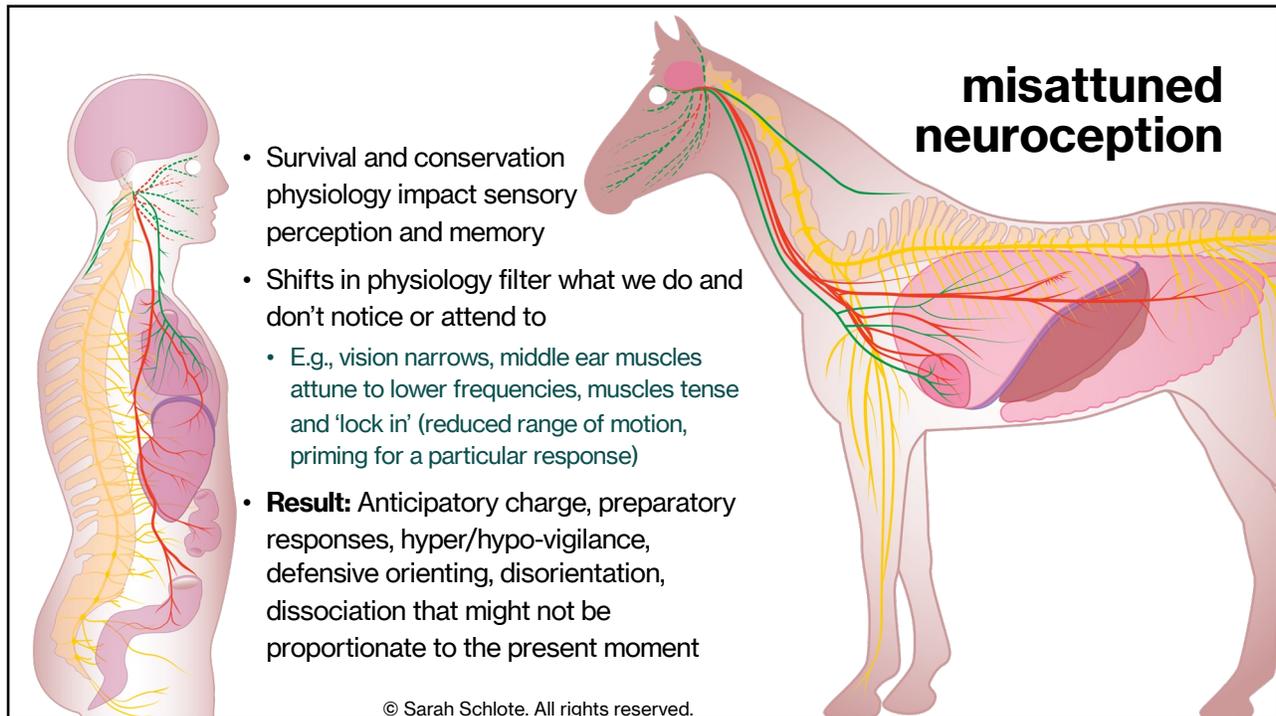
- Can lead to false negatives (under-responsive to cues of danger or threat)

### **In both cases:**

- Internal referencing system (our “witness”) is unreliable
- Misattuned neuroception and difficulty trusting others, ourselves, and our nervous system

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## coupling dynamics

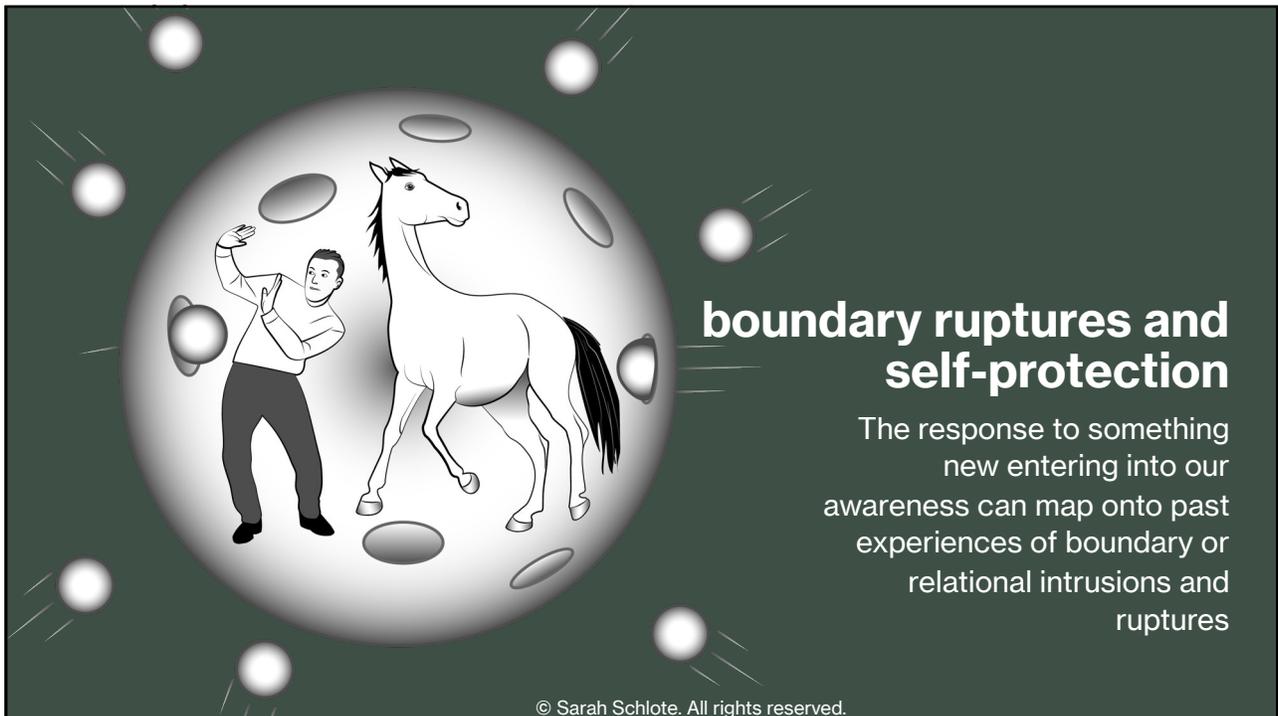
- Complexity when encountering situations that have familiar cues:
  - Familiar NS patterns and sequences play out, leading to re-enactments and self-fulfilling prophecies
  - Over- and under-coupling can occur (certain aspects of our SIBAM experience are amplified, while others are not accessible)
  - What we perceive, believe, and recall can be distorted or skewed (subjective experience does not always line up with objective fact)
  - If part of the trauma was being gaslit or invalidated, discovering that our perception and memory might not be entirely reliable due to being in survival or conservation physiology can feel like more gaslighting or invalidation
  - This can result in cognitive dissonance, increased activation, or overwhelm

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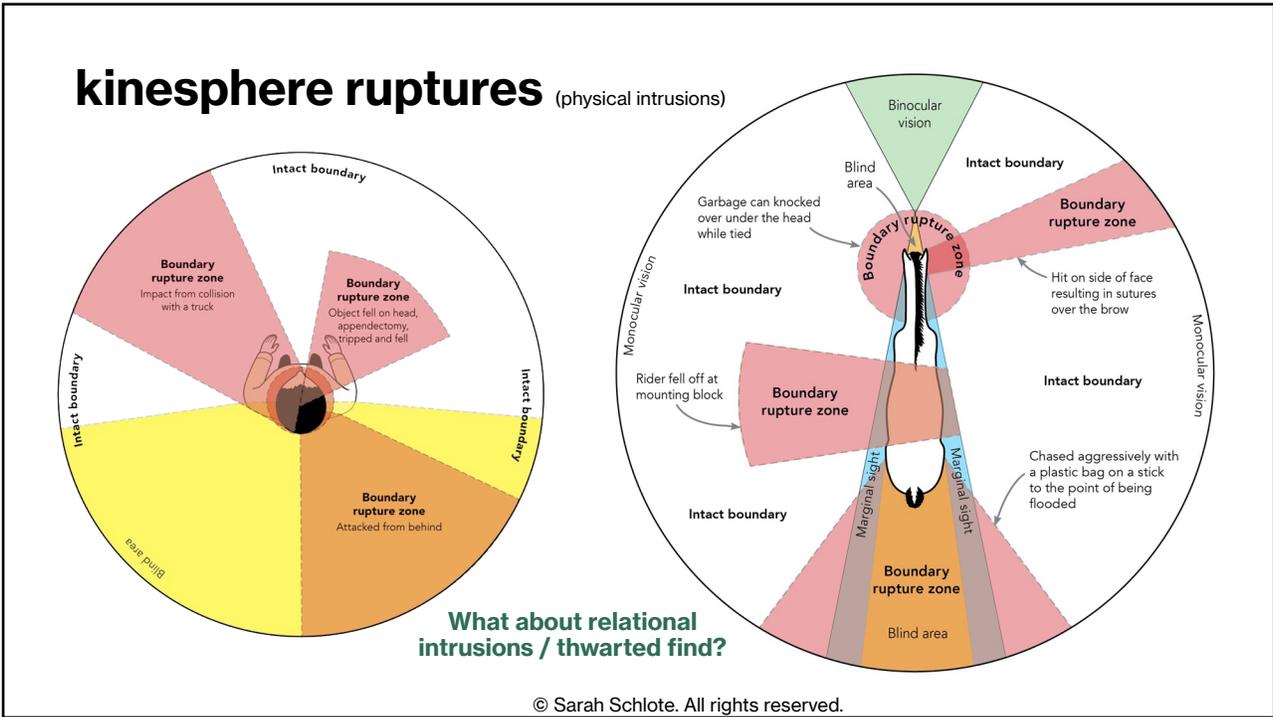
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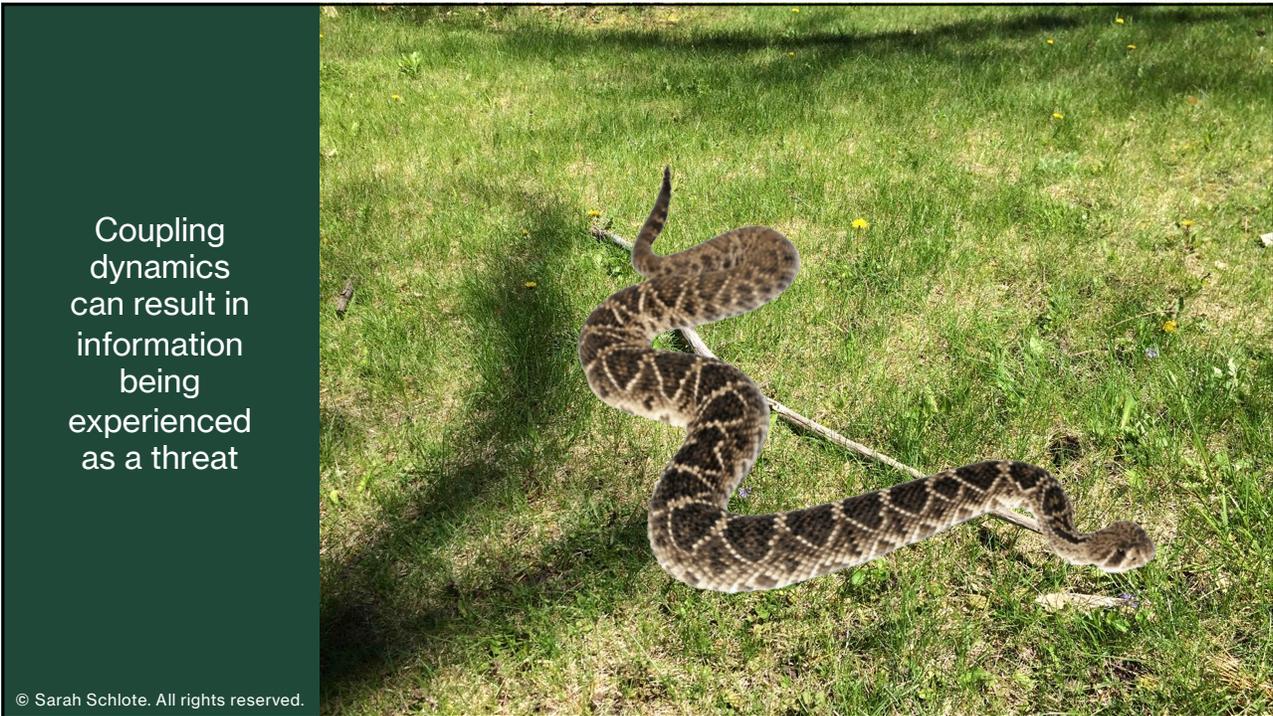
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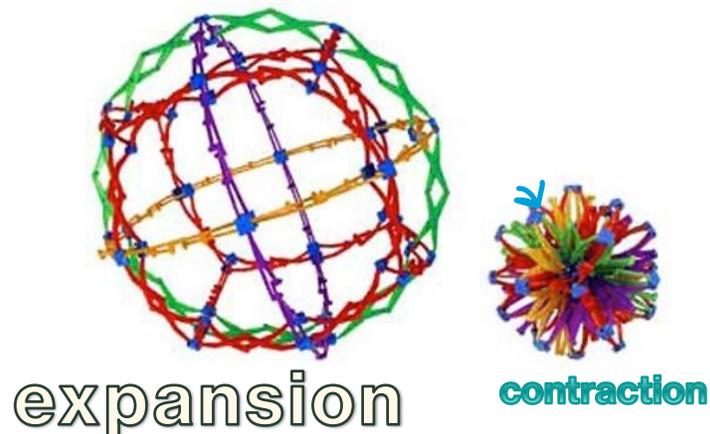
## cognitive dissonance, somatic discomfort

- Well-established or incomplete self-protective / self-preserving responses and defense mechanisms can emerge in relation to anything that is approaching the kinesphere (whether physical, relational, **or informational**) – such as data that does not align with or that challenges our beliefs or world view:
  - Resistance (“fight”) and/or avoidance (“flight”)
  - Contraction (physical, mental, emotional, relational) in the face of what is expanding
  - Merging and/or disconnecting
  - Drama triangle dynamics

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## hoberman sphere

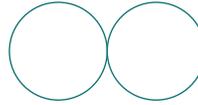


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# coupling and relational dynamics (Somatic Experiencing®; FHE, 2007)

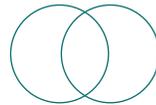
**Joining**  
(curious presence)



**Disconnection**  
(under-coupling)



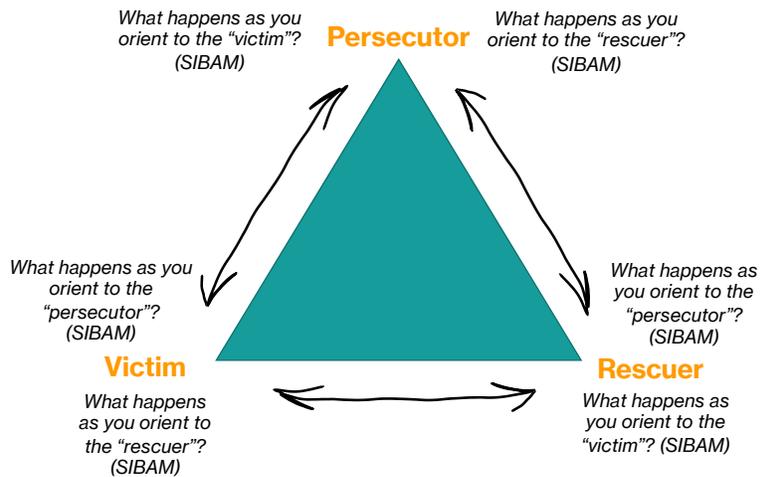
**Merging**  
(over-coupling)



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# drama triangle (adapted from Karpman, 1968)



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## slowing things down

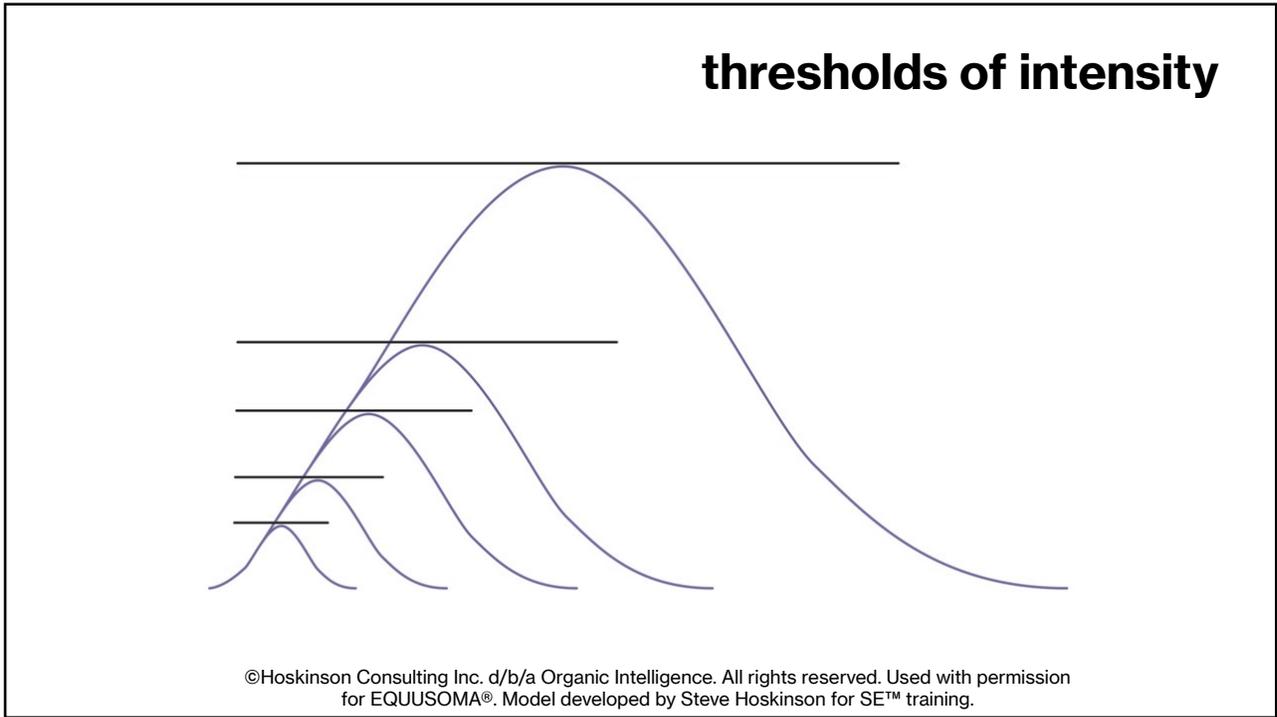
- Being present to the current beneath the words and reactions associated with cognitive dissonance (e.g., the fear, shame, guilt, derealization, grief, etc.) requires:
  - The ability to self-witness and track
  - The capacity to feel held and hold oneself and one's own experience
  - The ability to state shift and access sustainable physiology (so that whatever activates or 'goes up' has something to settle back down into as opposed to shut down)
  - The ability to titrate into a little bit at a time within threshold

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## repair and renegotiation

- **Stop:** *Pause when noticing signs of activation, no, or maybe*
- **Drop** *into yourself; track what is happening internally and in the other, wait until deactivation occurs, orient to resources and pendulate*
- **Roll** *back into the process, relationship, etc. with a course correction, greater capacity, or a yes*

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Adapted from Rector (2005), Levine (2010), FHE (2007)

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## invitation revisited

- Set different conditions / reduce the stacking: Check in and make any adjustments that you need to make to invite more comfort → **What's different?**
- Think of a time where you were presented with information that challenged your beliefs about yourself, your role/work in AAS, the participating humans and animals, and/or the world at large.
- What do you notice...
  - In your bodily sensations and nervous system state?
  - In your emotions?
  - In your sensory perception?
  - Are there any impulses to react or respond in a particular way?
    - Be curious in relation to your kinesphere specifically (e.g., impulse to look towards/away, other shifts in gaze/vision, bracing, blocking, stiffening, fidgeting, impulse to dismiss / discredit, etc.

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## invitation renegotiated

- Orienting to resources in the midst of the activation → **what's different?**
  - This is not the same as avoiding, distraction, or toxic positivity ☺
  - Notice any involuntary or spontaneous orienting efforts or self-soothing gestures
  - Consciously bring attention to resources (internal, external)
- Titrating and tracking the activation → **what's different?**
  - Find the smallest amount you can stay curious about without having to work too hard at it, and hang out with it until it releases and dissipates
  - Alternate your attention between activation and resources if necessary
  - Experiencing activation ('what goes up') deactivating ('comes back down') grows our window of tolerance and our trust in our nervous system capacity

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## renegotiation and repair for all

Supporting a vision for a world where all beings can experience **enough...**

- Feeling safe enough
- Supported enough
- Good enough attunement
- Enough needs being met

...regardless of species, social status, or identity group  
 ...regardless of who is the "identified" client in a service setting

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**Registration extended until January 19, 2026**

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