Healing Addiction with Somatic Experiencing

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My Background:  
-Indiana University graduate with Bachelor’s in Physical Therapy 2002:  
Outpatient PT for 14 years treating a wide variety of orthopedic and chronic pain patients.  
-Yoga Teacher since 2006, developed SE/yoga fusion classes in 2012  
-Meditator  
-Graduated from the 3 year Somatic Experiencing Trauma Institute course in 2014  
-My practice includes working with clients in one on one sessions (either strictly somatic experiencing or combining it with physical therapy to help with chronic pain). I lead experiential workshops at local yoga studios and also for mental health professionals in SE based yoga.

-Disclaimer: I do not teach professionals how to practice SE, as that is a 3 year in-depth program taught only by certified SE faculty.  
Practitioners must be certified by the Somatic Experiencing Trauma Institute.  
-Disclaimer: I am not a psychotherapist and do not have a mental health background. Somatic Experiencing, however is not addressing the content of one’s story, but rather reading body cues which signal the ups and downs of the nervous system.

What is Somatic Experiencing (SE)?  
A technique formulated by Peter Levine to heal trauma, PTSD, and chronic pain  
- Based on the fight or flight response of the nervous system  
- Peter observed how animals in the wild act on their instincts to guide their actions while domesticated animals and humans are trained to override our emotions.  
- SE is a body scanning technique to become aware of the feelings we are storing in our bodies.
**Fight, flight or freeze**
- The fight or flight response is based on the sympathetic and parasympathetic parts of our autonomic nervous system. We go through activation and settling cycles between these all the time.
- The health of our nervous system depends on the flow between these not being disrupted.
- However, in trauma, this cycle is interrupted when our emotions or natural actions are blocked from full expression. Our energetic response to stress gets stuck, causing PTSD.
- PTSD occurs when an event from the past feels like it’s still happening in the present due to somatic memory, which is memory of the body when in a certain place or position.

**How SE works**
- In SE, we are tracking the sensations in our body from the point of view of the observer to integrate our unconscious feelings into our conscious awareness.
- Once we fully feel the emotion instead of running from it or dissociating/distracting/judging ourselves, it usually passes. The body is trying to allow the emotion to fully express and then naturally release. We have been conditioned from a young age to override the body however and most of us in today’s world have lost touch with it. If these emotions aren’t acknowledged or felt, they cannot release appropriately and the unexpressed emotion or action becomes stuck and often unconsciously guides our behavior. We may develop habits from trying to escape these vague feelings we’re unaware of.

**Body Sensations**
- SE deals mostly with the physical sensations of the body. Some examples of body sensations one might feel are tightness, heat, heaviness, tingling.

**SE applications**
- SE has a wide spectrum of applications and can benefit: Anxiety, depression, car accidents, falls, stress, general emotional wellness, PTSD, chronic pain, fibromyalgia, myofascial pain and tension, post-operative pain, medical procedure trauma, pre and perinatal traumas, syndromal conditions, intergenerational trauma, social traumas, etc.
How does SE relate to addictions and chronic pain?
-A multidisciplinary approach is often needed.
-There is physical/emotional pain and then there is our reaction to the pain/unease.
-Specifically, if one can be with the physical sensations of the pain, tightness, discomfort, or other physical symptoms and watch them with neutrality (without the story surrounding this pain), our pain sensitivity can lessen over time with weakening impulses to self-medicate.
-There is a story relating this phenomenon.

How SE is different from Talk therapies
-SE treats the stress response in the present or stored from the past.
-When engaged in dialogue, we are using the neocortex of the brain. Trauma, however, occurs in our emotional (limbic) and reptilian (medulla) centers of our brain.
-Specifically in trauma based wounding, many people end up telling their stories for years without resolution. This is where releasing the underlying emotions can be very effective, sometimes within 1-2 sessions. SE can be a great adjunct to traditional therapeutic approaches.

How does this work exactly?
-Understanding Thoughts and Feelings using SE + Noah Elkrief’s methods

Experience Somatic Experiencing
-We will do a short intro experience of SE if time allows.
-The key here is to turn the mind down and to pay attention to what the body wants to do. There is no mental agenda for this. That’s the conditioning we are trying to break.
-We will be exploring only the layers of emotion and sensation that are ready to come up on their own. Please only do what your body wants to do.

SE techniques we will use
-We will be using SE techniques such as pendulation (our attention moves from pleasant to unpleasant sensations which allows for the “negative” sensations to neutralize over time)
-Titration: only take in a little bit of the emotion at time to not become overwhelmed and to allow for time to process/integrate the sensation.
-If you ever feel overwhelmed by what you are experiencing inside your body, you can come out of your body by opening your eyes and looking around.