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- 2026 -

Stories & Beliefs

How Meaning Making Impacts Us



Your body lives inside the meaning it has learned.



Introduction

Every moment of your life has two layers:

1. What actually happened or is happening
2. The meaning your system assigns to the event / experience

Your nervous system responds not just to the events, but to the story wrapped around them. This module explores how meanings—personal, cultural, inherited—shape your physiology, your reactions, and your lived reality.

How Meaning Creates Biology

Meaning can:

- ◆ Increase stress hormones, vigilance, and muscle tension.
- ◆ Soften the body, regulate the nervous system, and reduce stress chemistry.

Meaning is not fixed; it is:

- ◆ Subjective
- ◆ Inherited
- ◆ Culturally created
- ◆ Somatically stored
- ◆ Updateable

Your body lives inside the meaning it has learned. Sometimes the event is long gone, but the meaning remains active, shaping your daily physiology.



How Meaning Making Impacts Our Lives & Healing

Often what lingers after an overwhelming event is not the event itself but the story:

- ◆ "I am not safe."
- ◆ "It was my fault."
- ◆ "People like this always hurt me."
- ◆ "If I relax, something bad will happen."

These meanings create:

- ◆ chronic tension
- ◆ hypervigilance
- ◆ shame
- ◆ avoidance or shutdown
- ◆ addictive or compulsive behaviors

This work isn't about denying the past.

It's about noticing: Is my body living in the old story or the reality of now? And how much of my "now reality" is being shaped and informed by the past - is it possible there is another more REAL reality available to me, less wrapped in story, fear and meaning making from the past?

For example:

If you were endlessly bullied when you were young, you might have subconsciously developed a meaning about yourself and the world around you (life & others), as well as developed a posture congruent with a freeze - an attempt to become invisible (not a threat or an interest to anyone). Over time the meaning you might make from those experiences would be that you feel unwanted, disliked and threatened, even in situations where you're totally safe & loved.

In this case learning the difference between the reality of what you lived through (being bullied) and the meanings you've drawn about yourself (there's something wrong with me, I am unwanted, disliked) would be vital for you to become free from painful stories and meanings you made from those experiences.



Inside the Golden Path, we will call meanings -> “overcouplings”.

Over Coupling: How the Body Creates Meaning

In somatic work, the process of linking past meaning to present cues is called over coupling.

An over coupling happens when:

- ◆ A present cue (a smell, tone, place, person)
- ◆ Triggers an old meaning and bodily response
- ◆ The nervous system can feel like the past event is happening again / brought into the present moment.

Over couplings can be:

- ◆ Negative – constriction, fear, freeze.
- ◆ Positive – warmth, ease, familiarity.

Examples:

- ◆ Positive: Your chest softens when someone spoons you because your grandmother held you that way.
- ◆ Negative: Clicky shoes make your stomach tense because they were present during childhood chaos and abuse.

This is somatic conditioning—your whole system responding like Pavlov’s dog.

Over Coupling Can Be Survival Mechanism

Inside the Golden Path, we remain steadfast in our truth that our bodies' responses are benevolent. Over couplings have kept you alive. And they are benevolent acts meant to help you learn, upload important information and use it well.

For example

- ◆ Touch the hot stove □ get burned/hurts □ never touch it again.

This is wisdom.

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However, overcoupling becomes complex when we use it with people. A hot stove/fire behaves consistently. However, humans do not. Each human is very different, even if they have similar traits, behaviors and so on.

When overcoupling for survival - your nervous system tends to turn people into archetypes. For example:

- ◆ "Men are dangerous."
- ◆ "Women abandon me."
- ◆ "Authority humiliates me."
- ◆ "Raised voices mean violence is coming."

The body doesn't see the actual person. It sees/feels the familiar pattern and responds for safety.

Relational Over Couplings

These are the hardest to untangle because the body responds to:

Someone now based on Someone then.

Relational over-couplings are the moments when your body confuses "today's beloved or the present moment with yesterday's wounding"

This is when your system reaches into the past and lays it over the present, so someone who is safe, kind, or genuinely available gets met with armor, fear, or vigilance that can feel unfounded, disorienting, or even unfair.

This can be heartbreaking inside relationships of any kind.

When you meet your partner, friend, child, parent, or client as if they are the old figure your system learned to brace against, they may be met with reactions that don't actually belong to them.

In New Relationships

Your meaning making and somatic response may bring in:

- ◆ mistrust they didn't earn
- ◆ fears they didn't create
- ◆ defenses they don't understand
- ◆ expectations based on someone else's behavior



In Existing Relationships

Your meaning making and somatic response may bring in:

- ◆ mistrust they can't outgrow
- ◆ fears that are no longer valid
- ◆ defenses that push them away even if they've evolved
- ◆ expectations rooted in the past rather than the present

It's disorienting for both people because the reaction isn't actually about the relationship you have now – it's about an old relationship that hasn't yet been uncoupled.

When this happens, everyone and all possibilities are kept inside a cage of the past.

How to Recognize When You're Over Coupled

Some somatic clues to help you recognize when you're over-coupling for survival...

1. Incongruent Tension

Your body reacts intensely even though the environment is not actually threatening.

2. Overreactions

Small experiences trigger huge responses—rage, terror, collapse, closure, ejection, rejection/repulsion. This reaction belongs to an older story and has been reactivated in the now moment.

3. Phobias

Within the Golden Path, we would place (all) phobias as over couplings. Your system reacts to a fear as if your life is at stake.

As an example:

Phobia of Small Spaces (Claustrophobia)

Let's say someone becomes activated by even the idea of getting on an elevator, being in a crowded room, wearing tight clothing or getting into an MRI machine.

Somatic responses:

- ◆ chest pressure
- ◆ feeling "I can't breathe"
- ◆ dizziness



- ◆ urge to escape urgently
- ◆ cold or hot flashes
- ◆ nausea
- ◆ trembling in limbs

The body behaves as if oxygen is running out – even when it isn't.

In fact, for someone with this phobia, simply the idea of having to get onto an elevator to reach their doctor's appointment or stay at a hotel is enough to cause the somatic response cascade.

Again, no actual threat is present, but the very idea of it is enough. This is a sure sign of overcoupling.

Inherited Over Couplings & "Not Mine"

Many over couplings begin generations before you. They come from:

- ◆ Epigenetics
- ◆ Family nervous system patterns
- ◆ Cultural trauma
- ◆ Lineage survival strategies

Scientific example:

Researchers: Brian G. Dias and Kerry J. Ressler at Yerkes National Primate Research Center / Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

Date of publication: December 1, 2013 (online in the journal Nature Neuroscience)

Mice were exposed to the scent of cherry blossoms and then received an electric shock. The experiment found this stress passed down to their descendants. Actually anatomically changing the mice descendants olfactory systems. Meaning, descendants reacted with stress to the scent of cherry blossoms despite never being shocked.

It is an interesting inquiry to consider...where might your system be carrying inherited responses to war, migration, famine, tyranny, religion or other ancestral struggles.

For example, if you have a complicated relationship with food that doesn't quite "fit" you or if you were to look at your lineage, might you find you're only 2 or 3 generations from famine?



For example, if you have an intense fight response, what did your mother and grandmother experience in their lifetime that might inform your DNA to fight to stay alive?

Here in The Golden Path, we bow to these responses — even if we don't like them or understand them, because we know it's a benevolent response of our being attempting to keep us safe and alive. On the same hand, we are honest about who we are (now and in this lifetime) and recognize these over-couplings may no longer serve us.

Uncoupling: How do we update the Nervous System

Uncoupling happens on two levels:

1. Cognitive Uncoupling

Understanding: "This reminds me of that, but I know this is not that and I am safe."

2. Somatic Uncoupling

Staying rooted (or returning often) to the present moment now - in the body (breath, muscular movement, pulse, beating of your heart, orienting to the moment/whats around you, etc)

You cannot force uncoupling. You can only:

- ◆ Offer new sensory information
- ◆ Create safety
- ◆ Bring awareness to the present moment

The body updates when it feels ready.

Uncoupling Takes Time

Uncoupling is developmental work. It softens over couplings from 95% intensity to 20% over time. They may still arise, but you gain:

- ◆ More choice
- ◆ Less overwhelm
- ◆ More presence

You are not erasing your history—you are outgrowing its constraints.

Not All of You Is Over Coupled

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Most triggers involve multiple parts:

- ◆ A scared part
- ◆ A curious part
- ◆ A present, grounded part

Uncoupling asks:

- ◆ "Which part of me is in the past?"
- ◆ "Which part of me can feel the now?"

You don't need full-system relaxation. You just need one resourced part.

