

MODULE 3.3

A REFLECTIVE PAUSE

A DEEPENING EXPLORATION OF YOUR DECISION MAKING PROCESS, DOMAIN PRIORITIES, AND BUILDING BLOCK PREFERENCES

KNOW THY

DECISION MAKING PROCESS

DOMAIN PRIORITIES

BUILDING BLOCK PREFERENCES

Overview, Module 3.3. This module is devoted to a further exploration of the decision-making process, domains, and building blocks, both with reference to your self-management project, and, more generally, to your preferences, attitudes, style, and goals. Our goal in this material is provide you with an opportunity to reflect in more depth on these issues, to help make the way in which you personally decide where to intervene (i.e., what domain(s)) and how to intervene (i.e., what combination of building block strategies) a clear, conscious process.

The first section of the module focuses on the process of decision-making from the perspective of Control Therapy. The next two sections provide an opportunity to examine more fully the nature of the domain(s) you selected for your self-management project, as well as a further exploration of your views of optimal control in each domain. The final section explores your personal preference(s) for building blocks, and looks at when building blocks can be troublesome, as well as when they can be helpful. Although the discussion in this module will be more complete than you will likely need to engage in with each client, our belief is that this in-depth self-exploration and self-knowledge can only have a positive benefit--both for you personally and for facilitating your working with clients who have a diverse array of domain, building block and decision making perspectives and styles.

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INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL TO BEGIN MODULE CLASS 3.3: (REVIEW FROM MODULE 3.2)

SHOW AND TELL: XUJING/DONGJING. This is an opportunity for a few members of the class to share with the group (or to break into dyads and each person share) a situation or example where you engaged in the xujing (centering)/dongjing process (i.e., selecting the best response-- the right amount of yin and yang for a situation). Were you able to take the time to try to center yourself? How centered were you able to be? What were the “dongjing” options you created? Did it help to generate a list of potential alternative responses from yin (yielding/accepting) to yang (more assertive)? Which one did you choose? How did the cycle work out? What did you learn.

SELF-MANAGEMENT PROJECT. As part of your homework from Module 3.2, you were asked to explore in your control diary your experiences with different interventions—noting not only what you think and feel during the intervention, but also what your expectations are *before* you begin, as well as what you’re feeling before, during, and after. This is an opportunity to share any insights, thoughts, experiences. Did you notice any changes as a result of your practice? Is there any difficulty maintaining adherence and commitment? Are there any questions, comments, insights or thoughts you’d like to share regarding the project? How is it going?

This “pause” we are doing now to reflect on your self-management project is also one that can be helpful in general, a topic to which we now turn.

3.3.1 THE PAUSE: A TIME OF REFLECTION AND CHOICE

One of the advantages of the “pause” —for example, after the inbreath and outbreath in our breathing cycle—is the metaphoric opportunity to assess and reflect on a situation and our typical style of responding. In order to develop increased self-control, whether of an assertive or a yielding mode, it is necessary to pause and assess. This pause gives us an opportunity to “interrupt” automatic behavioral, cognitive, and emotional patterns and sequences and then to choose how we would like to respond.

It is during the time of pause that we can assess and reassess where we are, where we want to go, and how well we are moving along our chosen path. There is a saying (from Paul Reps) in Zen:

When you sit, sit,
When you walk, walk
Above all don’t wobble.

What is implied in this saying is the essence of self-control:

Decide what you want to do, and do it.

As we discussed in Module One, critical to the development of self-control and the use of self-control strategies is the concept of choice, or decisional

control. In fact, the domain you have focused on for your self-management project; the goal you have selected in terms of mode: change or accept (or both); the building blocks you utilized to formulate an intervention to address your concern are all decisional choices.

CONTROL THERAPY VIEWS OF DECISION MAKING

As we have pointed out from Module One onward,
CT believes that we make better choices by being aware of our decision-making process, and the factors that influence that decision-making.

One of the principles of Control Therapy is that it is always a skillful strategy and attitude to believe that there is a way to gain a positive sense of control in any circumstance and situation.

This principle is itself a “choice” in the existential sense. As discussed in Module Two, William James stated that his first act of free will was to believe “as if” he had free will and believe in human choice. CT posits that we need to have certain skills and options in order for us to truly use our “choice” and free will most wisely. That is why we have spent so much time exploring your views about different control modes, agency, and now domains and building blocks. As should be clear, YOU have the opportunity to decide which domain area is the one to begin working on first; where and how you focus your attention; which cognitions and images are used for what goal.

To decide what we want to do, we need to be aware of when we are acting by habit and reflex. We also need to be aware of the many choice points that exist at each moment. We have to be willing to take responsibility for our actions and choices. Finally, we need the skills to perceive increased alternatives. *To do* what we want to do, we need the self-management and self-regulation skills to carry through with our decision.

Of course, this explanation makes the model seem so much simpler than it sometimes is. Sometimes we do indeed “wobble” about our decisions (and also, once we have made them, in the learning process of trying to carry them out.). That is why we have added a footnote to Reps’ saying:

“When you wobble, wobble well!”

There are times when we need to step back, pause, and consider our decision-making process and choices, before we once more proceed forward. To take an interpersonal example, how might you respond if someone were to say something to you that is critical, accusatory, commenting on what they see as “bad behavior” in you, treating you with what you see as “disrespect”?

Often we feel threatened in this situation, and thus our reaction will be reflexive, defensive, angry, attacking back. If we can learn to pause, we can then place the issue into perspective, re-center, consider our alternatives and how we would like to respond. We will almost invariably choose a more carefully thought out, less counter-attacking,

wiser response. The pause gives us an opportunity to consider alternative solutions, (along the dongjing gradient from maximum yin to maximum yang).

As noted in Module 1, CT believes that although there is individual variation, each of us has an ability to

- *learn to pause, reflect, consider and reconsider our thoughts, actions, and behavior,*
- *learn to choose, if we so wish, to interrupt and override reflexive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral impulses and sequences*
- *learn to create alternative ways of responding---behaviorally, emotionally, and/or cognitively. that we feel are more in our (and others') best interest.*

We have discussed the decision making process in Module 2, including the control mode dialogue, and various relevant forms in Appendix 3 (e.g., 3.9 Decision-making Process: Prioritizing Domains and Choosing Modes.) The following two sections give you an opportunity to take a pause, and provide an opportunity to explore in more detail and delve a little deeper into your preferences in terms of domains and building blocks. Not only can this be helpful in exploring what this means about your view of your “self,” but it can also help make as conscious as possible your preferences and beliefs, which effect your decision making process.

3.3.2 EXPLORING DIFFERENT DOMAINS: PREFERENCES AND VIEWS OF “OPTIMAL CONTROL.”

In terms of your self-management project, in the first two modules, you were asked to select an area of concern to observe and set a goal.

Does the area you selected fit into one of the primary domains: i.e., is it related to your **physical bodily wellbeing** (e.g., exercise, weight, physical appearance, eating behavior); is it related to your **mental/emotional well-being**—(e.g., stress, sadness, fears, anger, thoughts, attention/concentration); is it related to your **relational (intimacy) well-being** (friends, significant other, family of origin, children)? Your “global” **self**; your **work** situation; something in your **political, social community**; or does your area of focus involve primarily the **existential, religious/ spiritual domain**?

These domains are listed on the horizontal axis as “contexts” in Figure 3.3.1 below.

Recall the hour glass in Module Two. The top (and bottom) of the hour glass is meant to represent your highest goals, values, and beliefs. The middle of the hour glass represents the specific goal you have selected as your self-management project, and the intervention techniques you have selected and begun to practice in order to address it.

As we come to the end of the “self-exploration” part of the manual, this is a good point to once again take a step back, pause, and reflect at a deeper and broader level on where you focus and why, to become more consciously aware of your priorities, and to ensure that where you place your focus is as congruent as possible with your highest goals and values. The domains mentioned above are

really aspects of life that fall somewhere between the top of the hour glass, and the narrowest point. When you prioritize your areas of concern, why do you select one domain over another? Please take a few moments now, either in your journal, or in dyads in class, to explore on *why* you picked the particular area you did for your self-management project. Does your selection say anything about which domain is most important to you in the “big picture” of your life, or was this choice a temporary acute concern?

Further, as we’ve discussed under the step of “desire” in Section One of this module, was your choice of area the result of self-directed internal reasons; or of external “pressure”? Was this an area that felt less in control, that was causing you suffering? Do you, did you have a story: “If only I could gain more control of x, then I’d be happy,” as we’ve discussed under control stories in Module Two?

Sometimes we choose an area because that domain is especially important to us in and of itself. Sometimes we select an area because being out of control in that area seems to “leak” into other domains (over-generalization). For example, gaining weight (the body area) could cause us to focus excessive attention on the body, affect the serenity of our mind, create negative thoughts and uncomfortable emotional feelings of being out of control, influence our view of our global “self,” impact our interpersonal relationships, and create a sense of overall dysphoria —a general domain sense of losing control

At other times, we can experience “battles” between domains, as each one “anthropomorphically” fights for its own turf, and we select an area (or a couple of areas) because we’re trying to resolve a power struggle between domains. For example, this can occur when we struggle with how to prioritize work “versus” relationship; “self” versus relationship, or work versus spiritual values.

Do your goals and values lead you to focus on one domain vs. another? As you look back on your life, do you notice that at different times you might focus on different domains, as your goals, values, and priorities change?

REFLECTING ON YOUR VIEWS OF DIFFERENT DOMAINS.

Allow yourself to examine these questions in the following progression:

1)*Baseline: Reflexive “as is” Answer.* Do you have a (reflexive) **organizing principle**? Without thinking too much about it, when things start to go wrong, or when you want to see if everything is in control, is there a particular “domain” where you prefer to “check in” and place your attention? For example, do you think about how much money is in your bank account? Do you focus on your relationship? Your weight? Your degree of professional success? Your family? Your political and social community? Your religious and spiritual beliefs?

An organizing principle it is your “default” mode that you look to reflexively, out of habit. **What are your priorities**-- not as you would “like” them to be or feel they “should” be, but as you feel they are now, in your life—just noticing “what is” in terms of your belief system. Is there a conscious or non-conscious “rank ordering” that you hold? Being as honest as you can be, how important is each of the different domains on the vertical axis of Table One? For example, do you place relationship above work, or

vice versa? Self above relationship? Do you identify more with your body or your mind? Where does the spiritual domain fit in terms of your identity?

Approximately how much time in a given week, do you spend on each of the above activities? Assuming eight hours sleep a night, that leaves 112 waking hours. How many of those do you spend “working”; how many related to your physical well-being; mental and emotional well-being; relational well-being, and so forth. How you spend your time is a reflection of the middle of the hour glass—the nitty gritty of day to day existence. The answers to these questions give you a baseline of “what is” so that, in question two, you can explore and evaluate whether “what is” in the middle of the hour glass, is congruent with what you believe and value (the top and bottom of the hour glass).

2) ***Evaluating your question one answer: Is “what is” what you would like it “to be?”*** Now, looking back at what your current priorities (and time allotments), how do they feel to you? Freud talked of the importance in life of “love” and “work.” Defining those broadly in your own life, how do you feel about the balance you’ve achieved? Does the very juggling of domains sometimes seem like a problem—as though something is always in the air, and things aren’t quite “in control?” How do your priorities and values match how you actually are spending your time? Does it sometimes feel as if there are “control battles” between domains competing for your time? Again, spend a few minutes discussing and exploring these issues.

3) ***A gift of a day.*** Now, imagine that you are given a gift of a day to spend any way you wanted. What would be some of the activities you would do in that day? As you write down (or discuss) this, note which domain each activity might fit into.

For example, if you say you would want to take a walk, hike, bike-ride, mark that down as something in the body domain. If you would want to read, think, do a crossword puzzle, mark that down in the mental domain. If you would want to spend some time with a friend, loved one, mark that down in the relational domain. What else? Would you want to take some personal time for being in nature, meditating, peaceful reflection? Would these be related to the religious, spiritual domain? The emotional domain? Would you want to take a few moments to contribute something to your community or the larger world (e.g., pick up a piece of litter, doing something to better the lives of others). Again, how would you spend your day?

4) ***Optimal control in each domain and balance across domains.*** Now recall the discussion of optimal psychological health and well-being, and your view of optimal control in each of the domains. What would like your organizing principle to be? What are your values, your passions, your skills? Does your organizing principle have to do with love and belonging? With a feeling of competence, a feeling that your life is having a positive impact on the world, that you are making a difference? What gives you a positive sense of control? To be heard and understood; by others; by yourself? To bring some good to the world, to be a healing force even in small ways, to make others wiser, kinder, more compassionate? How does your day, or week, or “life” reflect your values and goals?

One idea is that domains can represent threads of life. They obviously can't all be paid attention to simultaneously—and sometimes it definitely may feel like a juggling act (with something always in the air!). But, by setting priorities, and exploring our goals, it may be possible to consider how to create a weaving of our life each day (or week—you select the time frame) that incorporates a certain amount of attention (decisional control) paid to each of the aspects of our life that we feel important. In this way we can create a tapestry of our life as congruent as possible with our goals and values.

5) *Skillful choices in when and how to focus on different domains.* Although the idea of an integrated tapestry woven from each of the domains may be a goal, this does not mean that this is an easy idea to implement. Each time we focus on one domain, other domains are in fact, if not “neglected,” then at least not attended to. Further, sometimes it may be important for our overall sense of control to draw a “firewall” between a domain where there is a concern, and other domains—to learn to bracket an area which is not in control, and not let it “drip” too much into other areas.

In the “weight gain” example mentioned above, sometimes we may overreact to a feeling of loss of control in one area, and overgeneralize to feeling out of control in several domains. Therefore, a wise “choice” may be to focus our attention in a narrow, reductionistic way and bracket certain domains for the sake of our well-being and sense of control. For example, we may not be where we want to be in one area, e.g. weight, but we can remind ourselves that that area is only part of our “self” and identity; we are body, but not just body; we are more than our weight—our self also includes our mind, our emotions, our compassion, our relationships as father, mother, daughter, son, friend; our work and contributions to society.

Or, in another example, when the economy is bad (something you may not be able to control), it is possible to gain a sense of control by focusing on a domain where you can maintain some control—e.g., developing and maintaining a healthy exercise program (even as you do what is within your control in the economic arena).

Whereas sometimes we need to bracket a domain, at other times, we need to be careful that we do not become too focused on a particular area. For example, we might gain a sense of competence from our work, but we also may need to take a step back every so often and make sure we are not “neglecting” other domains to our detriment: e.g., our bodily health, our relational domain. Or, we may be developing our “body” strength and endurance, but that may be taking too much time from relationship and work.

OPTIMAL MODE CONTROL IN EACH DOMAIN

Which mode or combination of modes is involved for you in terms of optimal control in each of the domains? In Modules One and Two, based on your Control Profile and Control Story, we have already explored your preferred mode for addressing the domain of concern—change, and/or acceptance; as well as your preferred “agency” self and/or other. We also explored your control stories about the modes, and asked you to examine whether you felt it was best to go with your preference, or whether you should consider stretching yourself by learning an additional mode.

We also asked you to consider in Module Two what your vision of psychological health and optimal control are for each of the different domains—body, mind, and so forth. Now we’d like to give you an opportunity to explore in more depth the question we initially raised in Module Two regarding optimal psychological health and well-being, and your view of optimal control in each of the domains. As you review these domains on the horizontal axis of Figure 3.3.1 below, please spend a few moments discussing with your dyad partner (or in your journal) your views of optimal control for each.

FIGURE 3.3.1 MULTILEVELS AS CONTEXT AND CONTENT ¹²

		CONTEXT						
		BODY	MIND	EGO	PROFESSIONAL	INTIMACY	POLITICAL	RELIGIOUS
CONTENT	BODY INTERNAL: PHYSIOLOGICAL CUES SENSATIONS REFLEXES EXTERNAL: OVERT BEHAVIOR							
	MIND PERCEPTION ATTENTION COGNITIONS IMAGERY AFFECT							
	EGO (SELF) (IDENTIFICATION)							
	PROFESSIONAL (CAREER)							
	INTIMACY WITH LONG TERM SIGNIFICANT OTHER WITH FAMILY WITH CHILDREN WITH MALE AND FEMALE FRIENDS WITH OTHERS							
	POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL							
	RELIGIOUS, SPIRITUAL EXISTENTIAL							

You can look at each of the domains and decide, do you want to learn to better accept that domain, or transform and change it? If your concern is the ego itself, then one question could be do you want to develop a “thicker skin”—to not take things so personally, be more self-protective, and increase your self-esteem? Conversely, do you feel sometimes your ego is “too large” and gets in your way; that you are too self-focused, self-protective, and too ego-oriented; that you would like to get out of your own way and focus more empathically and compassionately on others?

What you’ll notice is that although we can—and have-- made the distinction between self as agent and other as agent, when it comes to exploring what it means to have a goal of changing yourself or accepting yourself, it actually becomes operationalized into focusing on a component, i.e., changing my thoughts, accepting my feelings etc. Thus, if your concern is to the left of ego (“self”) on the top line in

Figure 3.3.1, your goal would be attempting to exercise “self-control”—either learning to exercise self-control over your thoughts, feelings, body - to break habits you dislike and cultivate habits you want to increase -- and/or to develop increased acceptance of your “internal” environment.

If your concern is to the right of ego (“self”) across the top, your goal could be either to develop greater “other” active control and change: in your interpersonal relationships, work, or community or to become more accepting of the external environment—the yielding mode.

Optimal control in the body domain. Please relook at your comments and thoughts from Module Two about what constitutes optimal control of the body. Did you explore qualities such as balance, flexibility, coordination, strength? As you think about the techniques we have discussed, consider how they might be helpful in facilitating not only aspects of your self-management project, but also in attaining what you consider to be optimal bodily control. The body is the physical vessel that carries us through this world. What is your relationship to your body? In terms of your overall “identity” as a “self,” how do you understand your body as part of your self? How important is this domain to you in terms of your “identity” (compared to others, such as your mind, relationships, work)? (e.g., “I” am my body, “I” am more than my body). Are you at “ease” and have a friendly relationship with your body? Are you sometimes not at ease, and feel angry and “at war” with your body, as if it were an enemy?

Based on the SCI domain-specific scale, and what you have learned through self-observation, are there aspects of your body that are of concern: e.g., weight, eating behavior, physical appearance, exercise, sexuality? For those areas that are of concern, would optimal control involve increased acceptance in certain areas? Increased assertive change in others? Some combination? How much does optimal control involve an assertive/change mode (quadrant one)—exercise, healthy diet, stress management, flexibility, strength, balance; how much a yielding accepting mode (quadrant two?)—acceptance of the body and its limits and imperfections, including the aging process, illness?

In terms of the latter, although there are steps we can take to keep our body healthy, and to maintain as good an attitude as possible about illness, no matter how positive our attitude, and no matter how conscientiously we exercise-- do yoga, strength training, cardiovascular training-- the mortality rate is still 100%. Each of us faces the challenge of creating religious/spiritual/ existential beliefs that incorporate the loss of the physical body as part of the inevitability and reality of “optimal body control.”*

It is helpful to ask this same question of each of the domains: e.g., what is involved in a healthy relationship in terms of the assertive mode and the yielding accepting mode. We raise these issues regarding domains not because they will necessarily need to be addressed by every client you see, but because they can be

* Interestingly, some use spiritual beliefs to become more accepting of death and end of life. Others who believe in divine intervention are more likely to want CPR, and mechanical ventilation because of the belief that God can heal patients, and see refusing treatment as the moral equivalent of euthanasia. They want to buy time for prayers to be answered. They may also seem themselves as expressing faith by enduring pain—they are suffering as Jesus suffered. They may want to show they fought until the end and did not abandon faith.

important in our own lives. It is worthwhile for our own self-exploration and self-understanding to know how our values and priorities are expressed in the various domains of our lives, and the time, attention, and care we give to each.

What is optimal control of the mind? When you explored this question in Module Two, what did you include as “mind”? Thoughts? Attention? Consciousness? Decision-making? Let’s look at each of these in turn.

Thoughts Several traditions and therapeutic approaches posit that our “thoughts” are who we are, such as Descartes’ “I think therefore I am,” or Buddha’s, “We are what we think.” It’s been said that we shouldn’t let the mind control us, we should control the mind. When you practiced meditation in the previous section, and observed your thoughts, what did you notice? Were they as “in control” as you had previously imagined? Did you notice that they seemed to jump around? (This is sometimes referred to as the mind acting like a drunken monkey?)

What is your relationship to your thoughts? In terms of your overall “identity” as a “self” how do you understand your thoughts as part of your self? How important is that domain area to you (compared to others, such as your body)?

Attention refers to where and how awareness is focused. This includes what is attended to and self-observed (whether intentionally or reflexively), and how it is focused on. Attention determines whether and to what extent we are focusing on our body, our emotions, our thoughts, our work, our relationships, or our spiritual life. As the proverb goes, “What a person attends to is who a person becomes.” A somewhat different twist is found in the idea that “Where attention goes, emotions follow.” What contents do you “naturally” focus on? Does your attention go to areas, thoughts, and feelings that are in your best interest?

As we have seen, attentional focus can be narrow and reductionistic (focus on the tree); it can be broad and holistic, like a wide angle camera lens (focus on the forest). It can be soft, allowing, and non-evaluative, as in mindfulness meditation; it can be pinpointed, focused, unwavering as in concentrative meditation; it can be analytical and precise, looking for cause and effect, as in behavioral self-observation. As you examine your attentional strategies, notice your own particular style.

Do you generally have a concrete narrow focus (the tree); or a more abstract, broader focus (the forest)? In your view, what are the pros and cons of each, when might be a time for each? It may be helpful here to recall our discussion of the hour glass, which attempts to integrate the broad overview of an issue at the top of the hour glass with the narrow focus of a specific goal at the middle of the hour glass.

In terms of specific focus, again you have a choice. Let’s start with the proverbial glass of water. Do you see it as half empty or half full? Both are true. It becomes a choice of where we wish to focus our attention. Does your “natural” style have strengths; weaknesses? Would this be an area where additional “training” would be helpful? Let’s say you receive feedback from a teacher. Ninety percent of what you did is praised; ten percent receives constructive criticism. Where do you place your attention—what percent on the positive, what percent on the negative? How does that make you feel? You can choose, as Naomi Remen points out, to look at the dust on the table or the flowers in the vase. What is the “right answer”? It may be both/and. If we only look at the beauty of the flowers, we miss the dust that needs to be cleaned. (Think

metaphorically of the “dust” on the mirror as part of our nature). Focusing on the dust might give an incentive to “clean” what needs cleaning. However, if we only look at the dust, we may feel that there’s always a problem to be addressed, thus missing the beauty that also exists.

How much of your focus is on positive assertive (what needs to be done, what is lacking, where you want to go, change, accomplish); how much is on positive yielding and accepting (counting blessings, feeling gratitude)? How much time do you focus on the “awareness” that holds all thoughts and feelings: e.g., just noticing, like a mirror, everything in life: a thousand joys, a thousand sorrows.

As you think about it, what would optimal control of attention mean to you? Where do you think the wisest focus might be? Now that you have had a chance to reflect on “attention” as part of your assessment, goal setting, and interventions, do you have any further thoughts and feelings about what “optimal” attentional control might mean—in general? To you specifically?

What is optimal emotional control? It’s been said that the heart wants what the heart wants, and that the brain sees what the heart wants it to. In other words, we create “stories” to justify and be congruent with our “feelings.” As we have discussed, there are many theories about emotions—whether they are separate from mind and body; part of and arising from the body and physiological cues; part of and arising from the mind--judgments and cognitions; or some interaction among some or all of these. Control Therapy treats emotions as a separate component, as well as an interactive one.*

An emotion can be defined and exacerbated by cognition. If a car cuts you off and you say “That thoughtless s.o.b.,” the physiological arousal “becomes” anger; if the statement and focus is “I was almost killed,” that may create fear.

At other times it seems thoughts are a “tail” on emotions, created by the emotional arousal. We may create stories to justify and explain our emotions

Your relationship to your emotions? What is your relationship to your emotions? In terms of your overall “identity” as a “self,” how do you understand your emotions as part of that self? How important are your emotions to you?

What is your “emotional” self-assessment? How do you “know” you are “feeling” something? What is your first signal? Is it from your body? In a specific place in your body? Are there cognitions in your mind, e.g., “Things are falling apart, I’m losing my grasp on things.”

What would optimal emotional control mean in your view? If you examine the different emotions that you have, what is your goal regarding them? When do you feel you can just enjoy certain emotions, and might like to find ways to have such emotions occur more frequently? When do you feel that emotions are a helpful cue that you can learn from-- that something needs to be attended to (e.g., fear, sadness, anger, stress). When do you feel that these emotions are no longer helpful, and may even be getting the best of you, clouding your judgment, immobilizing you or causing you to act in ways that you do not feel are skillful?

Is your goal to be more accepting and allowing of your emotions? More feeling? Are there times you’d like to acknowledge and express emotions (love, fear, joy, anger),

* Although we have placed “affect” under mind in Figure 3.3.1, it could also have been its own category, and have been placed between “body” and “mind.”

rather than “holding them in?” Some of us are “hot” reactors, our emotions instantly going into high gear in response to an event. Others have a greater “latency period” before an emotional reaction to an event surfaces. Are there times when you’d like to embrace and accept your emotions but don’t know how? Do you sometimes feel you are too detached and cut off from your emotions, too emotionless, thinking more than feeling—talking about emotions rather than experiencing them? Are you afraid to feel emotions and try to distance yourself from them? Do you feel disconnected from our emotions, and would like to be more emotionally sensitive, allowing yourself to “feel” more?

Do you sometimes feel you get “too” emotional and that clouds your judgment, that you would like to better be able to keep your emotions bracketed so you can better focus on the task at hand; divorce emotion and sentiment from your thinking process? Do you see yourself as too emotional, too sensitive and would like to better curb your emotional impulses, to have more emotional self-regulation?

Do you feel you lose control of your emotions too often (whether anger, fear, or love)? Do you have a fear of losing emotional control? Are you seeking to regulate and manage your emotions? Are there times when you have reflex emotional reactions (fear, stress, anger) that you feel are not in your best interest and that you’d like to manage better?

Anger as an example. Take anger as an example. We may feel anger toward others when we do not get what we want, or are treated in ways that cause us to feel threatened and out of control. We may have anger at ourselves when we feel we do not meet our own standards and expectations, or make mistakes that seem unworthy of us—e.g., how could I let this happen? Some have argued that anger is born out of helplessness—e.g., yelling is a reaction of people trying to mitigate their powerlessness. Some posit that sadness or fear lie beneath anger, and that it is important to get in touch with these deeper emotions. Some that anger is a way to break out of sadness.

Optimally, how would you like to deal with anger? Partly that may depend upon your understanding of the situation, what is “causing” you to feel anger, and what “anger” means to you. Is there an underlying emotion—fear, sadness—that you may also need to address?

Your SCI responses regarding anger will tell you whether you want to express anger more; or to control it better. Negative ways of dealing with anger include giving in to it (quadrant three, negative assertive) --lashing out at self and or others; or squashing it (repression, denial) and feeling like a victim (quadrant four, negative yielding).

Would you like to calm your anger and learn to accept the situation, deflect and talk yourself out of the anger, quiet your body (positive yielding)? What about channeling your anger as a way to increase your determination and emotional toughness for taking constructive action (positive assertive)?

In terms of emotions in general, what are positive assertive goals you have for your emotional well-being? Would you like to be more emotionally resilient and

**For example in some sports, such as tennis and golf, it helps to remove emotions—certainly during the execution of the strokes and swings-- as they can interfere with your performance and goals. As former tennis stars Steffie Graf and Andre Agassi told their children “Crying on the court isn’t going to help.”

tougher, recover faster from setbacks? What are your positive yielding goals? Would you like to feel less agitated, less helpless, calmer? And finally, do you have combination goals: for example, would you like to also actively cultivate more positive emotions: joy, happiness, compassion?

What is optimal interpersonal control? There is an office slogan that says, “It’s hard to soar like eagles when you’re surrounded by turkeys.” Who surrounds you? To what extent do you see those around you as obstacles and hindrances that keep you from “soaring”; to what extent do you see them as supportive and helpful?

Part of your answer to that question may depend upon your own goals and motivation. On the achievement end of a continuum, if you want to stand out and be successful, you may sometimes view others as “obstacles,” as means to an end, and you may favor an assertive (positive and negative) mode. On the affiliative end of the continuum, if you want to feel kinship, belonging and connectedness, you may choose a more yielding-- go along to get along—mode (with both the positive and negative aspects of that).

See if you can find small “metaphoric” examples in your own life when you view others in each of the above ways. For instance, if you’re trying to achieve a specific goal-- e.g., do aerobic exercise, such as walking at a certain pace, you may have one view of individuals who “get in your way” and impede your speed and progress. If you’re taking a leisurely walk in the park, you may enjoy seeing others, and feel a kinship and interconnectedness with them and, rather than seeing them as an obstacle or impediment, be happy to accommodate their pace and style.*

Given your values and views, what does optimal interpersonal control mean to you? How much of a healthy relationship involves Quadrant Two, acceptance and positive yielding toward the other? How much of a healthy relationship involves Quadrant One, positive assertive mode, feedback to encourage change and growth in the other? Do you look to surround yourself with others who accept you for who you are? Who are able to give you honest feedback to help you grow? Do you try to accept them? Change them? Do they accept you? Want to change you? When others try to get you to change, which strategies are most effective for you? What strategies are *least* effective, or most alienating? Does the nature of the relationship (e.g., family, friends, significant other, colleagues at work) influence your answers to the above questions?

One way to approach the topic of optimal interpersonal control ^(1, chap 7:) is to explore times and situations when it is not optimal, and to reflect on how it might be improved. Below we focus on relationship with a significant other. You can decide how and to what extent these views of optimal control might apply to other relationships, as noted above.

* Of course, this doesn’t have to be an either/or, in regard to values and motivation, and to mode of interaction. Let’s imagine Robin Hood and Little John encountering each other on the bridge. If both are trying to assert their “machismo” then the other is an obstacle, and a control battle ensues. If either one had been more affiliative, then there could have been a “You first, kind sir” resolution of the dilemma. And if they had wanted to combine motivations of both assertiveness and yielding, they could have practiced *dongjing* and tried to create a win-win—affiliation and speedy progress! Do you notice any modern day parallels in your life: e.g., at four way stop signs? ☺

Clearly optimal interpersonal control can involve the topics we have just discussed--our minds, our bodies, our emotions, how we make decisions—and how we seek to integrate our personal styles with those of another. As such it is potentially even more complicated than the topics we have addressed—because it includes and adds an additional element (another human being!). Therefore, this discussion will be longer than the previous ones.

Relationship with a significant other. What is your view of optimal control in relationship with a significant other? The material below builds on and extends our discussion from Module 3.2 where we considered the issue of how to address a “plant” dying with a roommate or partner. Here we are asking deeper (and broader) questions as they relate to a specific committed interpersonal relationship.

As general questions, in a loving interpersonal relationship, what are your views about when and to what extent it is appropriate to just allow and accept what is? If you believe in change, what changes are you willing to make in yourself on behalf of the relationship? When does it feel important to express your concerns and desires to have the other person change? To what extent do you believe it's possible to force (influence) another to engage in change? What are the best ways that you have found to influence change in another? What are the best ways that you have been “influenced” by your significant other to become willing to change? Let's look at the relevance of both assertive and yielding modes in answering these questions.

Yielding and acceptance. How much of the relationship would ideally be based on mutual acceptance and positive yielding? One might see optimal interpersonal control as successful positive yielding: we would not want to ask more of the other person than what they are willing to give, and to receive that with gratitude. In such a maximum yielding relationship, no suggestions for change would be made or asked for. As the t-shirt motto says: “I'm me. I am who I am. I want to be loved for who I am, not who you think I should become.” This model would suggest that we should be happy with our loved one for who they are; and they with us for who we are, without our having to make any changes, not for what we accomplish or achieve. Another piece of advice counsels, don't marry someone because of who you want them to be, marry them for who they are.

Assertiveness and change. On the other side of the equation, the extreme view of optimal interpersonal control from an assertive perspective is found in the following joke: the perfect relationship would be one in which the other person always behaved like a television in response to the channel changer, doing whatever you asked whenever you asked” whatever we would like to happen, happens, and “our wish is their command.” Of course for this to be true in a successful relationship, the other would have to be very skilled at positive yielding and not fall into feelings of negative yielding.

If you're honest, although you might label such behavior as overcontrolling and the person who engaged in it a control freak, is there at least a part of you that sometimes feels that if only the other person would change (to be more in line with your beliefs and preferences), then things would be much better? Is this feeling especially

strong when you're clear on your own desires, wants, and preferences, and/or certain that you are right.? Or in the words of the Broadway play, which parodies an attitude of positive yielding in a character who really wants to be assertive, "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change!"

Finding and integrating the positive of each mode. The above "extremes" of "assertiveness" and "acceptance" are neither realistic nor desirable—especially if you believe that relationship involves mutuality. The "total acceptance" view can be used as a defensive strategy—i.e., never criticize me, tell me I'm totally perfect, never give me feedback, no matter how constructive. The total assertive strategy can end up feeling like an I-It relationship, where one person is just there to "serve" and be shaped and molded by the other. As an ideal, we might say that within a context of love and acceptance (positive yielding), each person has "dust" (unskillful areas) that could profitably be worked on changing (positive assertive).

Control battles and issues. But sometimes, control battles, as we discussed in Module 3.2, in attempting to work out the balance, ***control battles*** can occur when one person in the relationship tries to influence the other to change or to agree to their point of view. As we have seen, a control battle can take the form of negative assertive behaviors on both sides--the more one person resists, the more resistance will be summoned to oppose and a negative escalating control battle may easily ensue. Or negative assertive on one person's part may produce negative yielding in the other, who withdraws, feeling powerless and helpless.

Think about your own relationship for a moment. No matter how similar two individuals are, there will always be unique preferences and differences of opinion about certain topics. How are those addressed? If there are a 100 control points in a relationship, how many do you feel you have, and how many do you feel your partner has? What is your partner's view? Does one person in your relationship make all the decisions, direct the conversation, choose where and when activities occur, how money is spent, and even determines the pace of walking together? When "control points"-- are not "distributed" to the mutual comfort of both parties, control battles usually ensue.

Wisely addressing interpersonal control issues. When you become aware that a control battle is brewing, it is always helpful to try to center yourself (xujing) and from that place first explore what is going on, and then what might be the most skillful way to proceed (dongjing). For example, is bringing up the problematic topic in which you've been "in and through" many times before only going to fuel emotions, scratch an old wound, or pour salt into it without any healing benefit? In this case a more accepting mode of letting go may be more appropriate. If it's an issue that you feel needs to be addressed, then a more assertive mode (one or more yang bars) may be most suited in order to address it.

Look for personal and interpersonal root issues. When a power struggle occurs, it is easy to see where the other person is "wrong" and what their problems are. There may be some truth in the insights you have about the other person, and your partner may indeed have lessons that s/he needs to learn for his/her well-being (and yours). But it can also be helpful to see what you can learn about yourself, and make the power struggle a "teachable moment" through self-reflection—again not only for your partner's well-being and happiness, but for your

own. At the very least, you can see what areas “push your buttons” and how you react to situations in which you don’t like what is happening

In exploring the area of concern, it is important to be sensitive to whether an issue is being discussed only as a content issue on its merits, or whether there is an underlying “root” issue of “gerd” increasing the affect (e.g., desire for power, control—wanting one’s own way; needing to be the decision maker, or needing to have one’s preferences valued because it makes you feel special) separate from the content issue being discussed (e.g., color of drapes, whether pickles or cucumbers are served at a dinner, type of plants for the house, etc).

There also may be underlying personal control dynamics that may be influencing the relational issue. For example, does one person have an underlying “fear of relationship” and the potential loss of control that might entail? Is there a fear of losing personal freedom? Fear of intimacy and loss of personal boundaries? Might this person create a control battle in order to (unconsciously) create distance?

On the other hand, might a root personal issue be an underlying fear of being alone, of not being lovable, not feeling taken care of? Some people collapse from the content issue into a personal root issue (e.g., when content goes wrong, the person brings up a personal root issue – “I’m so alone and no one is here to help me”).

We may also need to explore our own control content issues going on in our own life (separate from the interpersonal) that may be affecting our interpersonal relationship. For example, sometimes in an interaction, one person may be feeling out of control based on other situations that are occurring in her life (e.g., problems at work). At these times the “content” issue being discussed interpersonally may be a “lightning rod” for expressing those other out-of-control feelings, a “foil” for the anxiety about gaining or regaining a sense of control in another domain. If we are feeling chaotic within because of issues on one domain, it isn’t fair to displace this inner chaos onto our beloved. Ideally, the person should try to be aware of this “bleeding” of control issues from one domain to another. If they aren’t, the partner may notice that the affect seems too high for the content issue being discussed, and suggest a time-out, returning to the topic at a “calmer” time

Using both modes, keeping the context. Every relationship involves a give and take. It is an inaccurate belief that healthy couples never disagree. In evolving a relationship, there are two unique individuals, with two sets of goals, desires, and views. No matter how many points of agreement, there will inevitably be areas of disagreement as well. If these are not addressed, and one person is holding back from expressing his/her needs, desires, and goals, this may lead to feelings of hurt, anger, and frustration. A healthy relationship is not one where there is an absence of disagreement, but one where those areas are well-managed. Healthy couples do disagree and have different points of view and preferences, but they a) have these disagreements within a caring context; and b) learn from them, honoring each other’s viewpoints. There is nothing wrong with asking for what you want and trying to influence the other, and then hoping that what is asked for is freely given. But in a healthy relationship, people will be prepared for differences, and know how to navigate them skillfully.

In terms of how control optimally operates in a healthy relationship, it’s important to know how to combine both positive and yielding modes: i.e., keeping a loving, accepting context with a beloved, while also honoring clear, honest feedback that

helps each challenge, stretch, and grow as a person and as a couple—metaphorically like the dyad yoga exercise discussed, or the tai chi dance. One of the advantages of the “tai chi dance” (as well as the Four Mode Dialogue) discussed in Module 3.2 is that it places the different views and perspectives of each person—that could devolve into a control battle—in a harmonious framework.

At the start of a potential power struggle (and as a way to ward one off) each person pauses and takes the time to listen and hear the other person’s viewpoint with empathy and understanding. This does not mean you necessarily do or will agree, but it does make sure the other person knows they are carefully and sensitively listened to and heard.

Careful listening is also a way to further explore the other person’s concerns and see if there are ways they may be met. For example, in a situation where one person feels the other is very controlling, that person might say to their partner, “I hear that you don’t feel you are too demanding and overcontrolling. And I’m appreciative that you hear that I have a different perspective. As a way to help us explore this further, would you mind if for the next week, I let you know in a calm way each time I experience you as being domineering and overcontrolling. That may help you become more sensitive to what is pushing my buttons; and give me a chance to hear how you are intending your comments so I may be able to learn to be less reactive.”

This type of “tai chi” dance is a way to learn to work as a team, within a context of harmony, even while exploring disagreement through airing different points of view, including what’s negotiable, and where there is the possibility of some flexibility and additional stretching over time. And what is non-negotiable (what one person cannot or will not change-- what seems too large a stretch—and where boundaries are draw. Sometimes this involves a gentle but unyielding no--my answer is final.

By discussing these issues within a loving context, the two people are able to keep the content from being seen too narrowly, as the only “star in the night sky,” overwhelming the core context and becoming the only thing that matters (e.g., thoughts such as “this isn’t working”; “the relationship is collapsing;” “I’m not lovable; “you’re too rigid”).

This balanced process transforms the “battle” from a hierarchical, one-up power struggle into a respectful, loving team effort, honoring the context and minimizing an adversarial view of the partner. A lovely metaphor for creating this context suggested by Dr. Robert Kantor is two roller skaters connected by a rope. One is ahead and one is behind, so it looks as though there is one leader and one follower. But as the person ahead pulls the person behind, the centrifugal force propels the second person into the lead. Now this person is leading and in turn pulling the person behind, who again will soon take the lead. By working together, in an interconnected way, each is both leader and follower, and their combined effort creates a momentum that neither alone could achieve.

This of course does not mean that one doesn’t have a right to ask for changes in the other, nor does it mean, even with a beloved, that sometimes a more yang response is needed. Further, there are nuances and gradations in our interpersonal relationships, and our responses will be calibrated depending on the person with whom we are discussing

and dialoguing. *

Reminders. To help remember these lessons during “interactions” and before the battle got too heated, this couple created a t-shirt that they would put on when discussing areas of sensitivity and concern between them. On the front side of the t-shirt, which the wife wore, were lessons that they both had agreed would be skillful for the husband to practice. (At the start of each was also a reminder: *Watch your non-verbals: e.g., sighs, frowns, rolling eyes—make sure how you’re acting matches what you’re saying!—as best you are able!*) Also, *watch your tone of voice: this is not a time for sarcasm, irony, kidding on the sly—anger masked as humor.*) Remember, *if you act kindly and lovingly—even if you aren’t perfectly having those feelings—the feelings will follow. Now, take a breath and smile.* 😊

1. *Before making a criticism or suggestion, provide a safe context of love and recognition of my wife as a beloved, and note her strengths and contributions.*
2. *Be careful of an “interrogatory,” lawyerly questioning style. Try to soften your language: “I’d like to ask some questions to help me better understand how you’re looking at the situation.”*
3. *Be willing to make clear statements of personal feelings: “It would mean a lot to me if...” “I would feel less vulnerable if you could help me understand....”*
4. *When she responds, or gives feedback, before pointing out the weaknesses and limits of her position, paraphrase and let her know that she is heard.*
5. *Pause and center if you feel yourself becoming frustrated, tense, wanting to escalate.*
6. *Remember the context. This is your life partner, your beloved. Be acknowledging, and grateful for all the contributions she makes to your life.*

On the other side, which she wore on her back, and which he wore on his front, were lessons they had agreed would be helpful for her to practice during the interaction.

1. *Take a breath and center. See your husband as the beloved, not the enemy.*
2. *Interrupting, hurried speech, and eagerness to make a point are cues to take a breath.*
3. *When he seems attacking, interrogating, judgmental, try to reframe that compassionately as his vulnerability being expressed.*
4. *Before countering, pause and paraphrase, making sure you’ve heard what he’s trying to say.*
5. *Try to own limitations without guilt or defensiveness, being non-defensive; at the least, even if he’s wrong, it suggests there is a problem somewhere.*

* How you address control issues in relationship will also depend on your view of human nature. If you have a theory one view that people are innately “evil” or amoral; or if you see the world as a “survival of the fittest” struggle and/or a zero sum game, then those views will influence how you see different interpersonal responses. From these perspectives, each “yielding” may be seen as a sign of weakness and losing. If you see the world as more interconnected at the deepest level, that too may influence your response, so that it will be easier to make negotiations more “win-win.”

6. *Remember the context. This is your life partner, your beloved. Be acknowledging, and grateful for all the contributions he makes to your life.*

The two modes and love. Finally, in talking about love and control, it is important also to ask yourself how you believe love occurs, and how it is “maintained.” How much control do you believe you have in the creation of love and intimacy? Do you believe that relationships “just happen”—that they are “meant to be” and therefore you can rely primarily on a positive yielding mode? To what extent do you feel that you need to take active steps to “help relationship happen,” to encourage and nurture it, and therefore need to utilize a positive assertive mode?

How are your views of love similar to your views of self and the nature of the universe as we discussed in Module Two? The existential view is that love, like the self, needs to be created from “nothing”, from the isolation and separateness that naturally exists in a random universe. When that love does occur, it is a miraculous connection, overcoming (at least temporarily) the distances and isolation.

If you have a humanistic/transpersonal worldview, love, like the “self” may be seen as a bud that is already within, and will naturally flower if allowed to. What is needed is trust and patience and allowing (quadrant two, the positive yielding mode); and some might add metaphorically, sunshine, water, and care (quadrant one, positive assertive). This worldview may help facilitate an attitude of trust that love will appear at the proper time in your life, and grow as it is supposed to given the proper nurturance.

How do you feel about Fritz Perls’ statement that in a love relationship, one should “hold the bird in an open hand. If it flies away and doesn’t return, it was not yours to begin with”? Do you see this as positive yielding? Negative yielding?

Whatever the world view, it does seem that love is a mystery, and probably involves both modes at one time or another. Just as you can’t *make* a flower bloom — e.g., try to open the bud prematurely – so it is with love. What you can do is water it, nurture it, provide the proper soil, and make sure there is appropriate sunlight. There is a certain “magic” that happens, with flowers and with love. You can’t “force” love to bloom, or to stay. All we can actively control is setting the best possible conditions—nurturance, appropriate watering, shining light on it—then to have trust and patience and allow for its budding and continued flowering. And be grateful when it does.

3.3.3 BUILDING BLOCKS PREFERENCES

In the above material, we have looked at why you have selected a particular domain as the focus of your self-management project, and explored how congruent that choice was in terms of your overall values, priorities, and goals. We have also explored in more detail what optimal control might look like in each of the domains, as an opportunity for you to explore and reflect on your own views.

Now we are going to explore your preferences in terms of the “building blocks” that you believe are most helpful for you in terms of constructing an intervention, specifically for your self-management project, but also in general as ways for gaining optimal control across different domains. This includes reflecting on a) your natural preference and style, including your level of trust in each of the building blocks; b) how

the building blocks can interact with and effect each other and c) the nature and utility of the building blocks for positive assertive and positive yielding modes.

For each domain, area of concern, or “context” we develop interventions based on building blocks—the “contents” from the other domains (listed on the horizontal axis in Figure 3.3.1 above. For example, note in Figure 3.3.1 that the context—area of concern—is the relationship (intimacy) domain. The building blocks that can be used to construct an intervention to address an area of concern and/or optimal well-being in the relationship domain are the contents in the gray shaded area: e.g., what would be the role of body in addressing a relationship issue; what would be the role of the “mind”; the “self” and so forth, even potentially including your religious and spiritual beliefs? (This particular topic of relational health is explored in detail elsewhere, e.g., ¹², and CT, chapter 7).

These building blocks can be focused on individually e.g., how can I better utilize my body as part of enhancing a relationship; and sometimes several can be used at once—as we’ve discussed in the control mode rehearsal -- to accept, to change, and/or some combination. While doing so, no matter what the content area we are focusing on (e.g., weight, relationship), we try to keep a context, remembering all the other domains that are relatively in control and working well (as discussed in point five above, p. 201: Skillful choices in when and how to focus on different domains.).

What is important for our discussion here is that we examine our own preferences, style, and beliefs about each content building block on the horizontal axis, as it can contribute to the “well-being of that domain-- thus exploring how best to create an intervention that most effectively addresses an area of concern.

WHICH BUILDING BLOCK DO YOU TRUST THE MOST TO NAVIGATE THROUGH LIFE, TO HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS?

In Module One we asked you to “please pay attention to your own particular way of experiencing the world”—cognitively, visually, kinesthetically, somatically, and gave the illustration of how might you experience stress if you were confronted with a “pop quiz.” We also asked you to examine to what extent your focus is internal (on your “self”) and to what extent external (on the “other”).

In Module 3.1, we presented the essential building blocks that comprise the interventions for the five steps involved in developing the assertive and yielding modes of control. In that section we utilized all the building blocks as a whole. As a generic strategy, that makes sense. However, here, we would like to give you an opportunity to “pause and reflect” on your own particular inclinations and preferences regarding each of the building blocks.

Which building blocks are you most comfortable using? Which ones do you find most trustworthy?

A teaching approach. In going over this material focusing on each individual building block, we are aware that this is A (not THE) pedagogical approach--more thorough than is perhaps needed for an individual client-- to exploring domains and teaching interventions. Our “teaching approach” here is to try to give a holistic overview; then break things down into their component parts and building blocks, and explore each individually, --uncoupling them, looking at “parts”-- then how they interact, and finally, how they might be put back together again so that the whole is more effective than each

part, and once again the “whole” functions holistically and integratively. It needs to be emphasized that this is only one possible approach. Others may find different ways to teach (or learn) that are more compatible with their style, and that should be honored.

This approach is not dissimilar to what we discussed in learning a tennis volley (start of Module 3.2) by breaking it into components, then reintegrating them. Or we could take tai chi as an analogy. There are many different “forms” in a tai chi practice. ; Each form involves an integration of several body parts: hands, arms, legs, feet, neck, hips, head, shoulders, eyes, and breathing, each which may have contrasting and different aspects (ranging from yin to yang). How would you best learn these forms? One way is to watch someone modeling the form “holistically”; then to isolate and learn each part individually; and finally, to put it all together as an integrated, fluid whole.

We now turn to the individual building blocks.

AGENCY: TRUSTING SELF; TRUSTING OTHERS. One essential question regarding building blocks is the issue of agency: Is your preferred style self as agent? Are you more trusting of your “self” and would rather rely on yourself, or are you more trusting of “others” and would rather rely on their guidance and advice? The question of whom do you trust as agent--self and/or other—is an important question in terms of building blocks. Basically, in this context it asks whether, in general, you prefer to turn to others for support as part of developing an intervention, or you feel more comfortable relying on yourself.

Others As Agent. At the start of module 3.1, we discussed situations when others exerted some influence on your life, and whether that was positive, or whether it resulted in difficulties. In the five steps, we also explored to what extent “others” are part of your motivation for desire for control (either assertive or yielding), and how others can be helpful in achieving each mode.

To examine the extent to which you are desirous, willing, and able to look toward others as a positive building block, several questions are important. These can be discussed either in a dyadic format in class, or in your personal journal.

How do you feel about turning to others for help? Is there a part of you that feels it is a sign of weakness? Does it feel vulnerable? Does it violate an image of wanting to appear “in control”? How well do you learn from others? How do you feel when someone tries to give you constructive feedback? How strong is your freedom reflex, i.e., how likely are you to feel inwardly even if you don’t say it overtly, “Don’t tell me what to do” when given advice, suggestions, and “constructive” feedback from others?

How much are you willing to share (and with whom) about different levels of your self? In “inner circle” terms (Module One), at what levels do you share? We’re not talking here about saying everything to everyone, but we are exploring with whom and at what level you can share. This also suggests knowing yourself enough to know the deeper levels within, or at least being open to feedback about yourself.

When do you turn to others? Is it for emotional support? A feeling of community and belonging? Guidance and help? Do you have an “advisory team” of individuals (living or dead) with whom you consult? A community that provides you support? Do you feel you have others whom you can trust to give you feedback and guidance? When do you allow and trust that process? Do you ever notice defensiveness in yourself when you are given “constructive” criticism from your “team”? How effective is others’

feedback compared to your own self-examination? To what extent are you able to “bypass” your own defenses to know yourself without other’s help? How able are you to be willing to look inward to honestly confirm or reject input from others? How important to you are others in that process?

Exploring these questions may involve looking at times when others have been trustworthy and their advice served you well; and when advice and guidance from others has been troublesome, and therefore may make it more difficult for you to trust or accept others’ feedback.

To repeat what we asked at the start of this discussion, as honest as you can be, do you trust others or yourself more?

Refining what we mean by self: Knowing your “self” and your preferences.
For those who choose “self” as a building block, the question then becomes what does “self” mean-- who is the self--and what does it mean to trust the self as agent? If you prefer "self" as agent, you must then realize the self is actually comprised of other component building blocks. This is the same point we made in number 6 above regarding the “goal” of transforming or accepting “self”—it needs to be operationalized into its component parts. Our intent here is not philosophical, but practical, as should be clear from our questions at the start of Module Three, when we asked you what it meant to have a sense of control when the “self” is the agent, based on a content analysis of the different parts of the self. The self can both be a building block (when contrasted with others); and when we look closely, the self can be refined into its own different building blocks of mind/intellect, emotions, and body.

For example, when you think of “trusting your self,” how do you decide what to do if your mind/intellect tells you one thing, and your heart (emotions) another? Which do you trust the most? Are you a “heart” person, listening to and trusting your heart and emotions? Are you a “body” person, trusting your “gut,” what your instinctual body sensations tell you, listening to your body’s natural wisdom? Do you put primary trust in your thinking processes, having most confidence in what you rationally perceive to be “best” for you?

As an analogy, there are several different schools of yoga, and for the purpose of our discussion here, let’s say the goal of yoga is “union” with the divine, and that each school has the same goal of helping its practitioners achieve this goal. One type of yoga is primarily body focused (hatha); another, emotion focused (bhakti); another is focused intellectually/cognitively (jana). * Similarly, in meditation, there are several different types and styles of practice. Some schools focus visually on an internal or external image; others on a self-created sound (mantra) or external sound. Others on a part of the body.

Assuming each of these “means” has the same goal, the question becomes which practice would you feel most comfortable with—e.g., heart, body, cognitive (of the yoga schools); visual, auditory, kinesthetic (of meditation focusing styles)? Based on your

*The above “schools” are focused on different building blocks of the “self.” In terms of “self” and “other,” as agent,) questions would arise as to what extent you feel more comfortable learning from and having a teacher, to what extent “teaching” yourself. What is your preference (and frequency) of practicing alone, in a group setting?

knowledge of yourself, which “type” would seem most helpful for you? Would you want one most congruent with your style? Or one which could “expand” your style? **

TRUSTWORTHINESS AND TROUBLESOMENESS. Which building blocks seem more troublesome for you, less trustworthy? In formulating an intervention, should you focus on the building blocks that are more trustworthy, and build on your strengths? Should you explore, learn about, and strengthen your less effective building blocks and seek to develop additional skills?

Even in terms of those building blocks which you find most trustworthy, have there ever been times when you noticed either doubts about them, or that they weren’t as trustworthy as you believed? For example, have you noticed times when your initial “natural” reaction, thought, feeling, or body sensation – the one you’re most comfortable with and trust the most - needed to be overruled, altered, or transformed? In the material below we look at each building block, as a way for you to explore and further consider your view of the trustworthiness and troublesomeness of each.

THE BODY

Trustworthy. What we have seen is that sometimes the body is wise and can be incorporated into an intervention as a helpful building block—such as the natural bodily wisdom of diaphragmatic breathing. As we have seen, it can be helpful to learn to accept and trust the body’s natural wisdom as a way to develop a calm, centered body. when we are awake by “getting out of the way” and letting the body just “breathe itself”--trusting the body and allowing and accepting breathing. This allowing and trusting the body is also often important in sports, where we learn to trust our “muscle memory” and keep unwanted thoughts, analysis, and “ego” from interfering with the body’s trained (and natural) skills. Further, sometimes our body has an amazing capacity to self-regulate and heal itself—e.g., to heal a cut, if we just “stay out of the way”—i.e, don’t pick at a scab. Are there times when your body acts on its own—muscle memory, diaphragmatic breathing, pulling back from a hot stove, helping you regain your balance, when it seems it has a life of its own and you trust it and want to keep your mind and emotions out of the way?

The body can also be used a helpful building block in developing many of the other qualities we would want in the domain of the “body”—and overall optimal bodily control. If you believe optimal bodily control involves flexibility, movement with grace, there are many techniques that can be helpful, one of which we have discussed, hatha yoga, which teaches the development of bodily flexibility while maintaining a centeredness and acceptance of the body. Tai chi (or any type of dance movement), which involves the body in motion in a flexible, calm, centered, graceful, balanced way, also improves flexibility. If you believe optimal bodily control includes physical exercise and strength training, for the former, there are obviously a number of options--walking, jogging, biking, swimming, tennis, skiing—and it is important to pick one (or more if

** Using the yoga example, sometimes a highly intellectual, cognitive person may be served best by a cognitive approach; other times, however, a highly intellectual cognitive person can have a “breakthrough” using a different modality e.g., emotional (bhakti), karma (service), or hatha (body) that helps get them “out of their mind.” ☺ !

cross training) that you enjoy, fits your lifestyle, and to which you can make a sustained commitment: i.e., several days a week for twenty minutes. Strength training can involve weights and isometric exercises to maintain muscle integrity and mass. What is important is not the particular intervention that is used, but that it is one that you enjoy and can commit to.

The body can also be an important building block for interventions targeting other domains. For example, sometimes we want a quiet, calm body. It's been said that we should keep our body calm and in control so that it's not at the whim of our emotions. When have you, or do you, use a calm body as an anchor point to "center" yourself; and as a building block to help calm your mind (as domain and context), feel competent about yourself (self and emotions as context), and encourage healthy interpersonal relationships (interpersonal as context)?

Sometimes, for different goals in the other domains, bodily control may involve having the body in more of a state of "readiness" and "arousal." For example, recall that in discussing the assertive mode we described how to develop a "prepared body position" as a building block for engaging in action.

Troublesome: And help from other building blocks. However, are there times that your body does not feel trustworthy? For example, sometimes our body feels "tired" and doesn't want to commit to a program such as exercise. At those times, as we have suggested, commitment to an intervention can involve using other building blocks along the left side of Table One: e.g., mental strategies to create a regular schedule and overcome doubts and procrastination; interpersonal strategies such as exercising in a group, asking for guidance and support from others.

Further, while there are times when signals we receive from our body are helpful in terms of correctly identifying hunger, at other times we may need to override and distrust those signals, both in terms of what we're hungry for (e.g., thrice daily chocolate!) as well as other substances—smoking, certain drugs, immoderate use of alcohol—that the body may "crave" but that may not be in the interest of optimal bodily control and well-being.* Whereas sometimes the cues from the body are too strong, at other times we may inappropriately "cut off" from our bodies cues, and need to pay greater attention to hear them. In each of the above examples, the body, rather than being a building block, may be a "domain of concern" and we may need to use other building blocks to address the problem: e.g., our mind (attentional focus, decisional control, self-instructions), our relationships (for reminders and moral support), and our emotions (feeling proud when we resist an unhealthy choice).

At still other times we may find ourselves acting "spontaneously" without thinking through what we would like to say or how we would like to behave. Are there times when your behavior or speech is something you wish you had given some thought to before you acted—that you had been able to interrupt your behavioral sequence? Again, in those cases, the body (behavior) may become a domain which we may want to address using an additional building block, such as the mind, to which we now turn.

** The same may be said of sexuality. At times the body's sexual urges may be wise and trustworthy. At other times, we may want to learn to work with our "natural" sexual desires so that we have the option of transforming them via practices such as tantra (mental and attentional practices, working with the body's energy) so that the sexual "genital" energy "rises" into the heart—increasing compassion for one's self, and for one's relationship.

THE MIND: THOUGHTS

Throughout this manual, you have explored how you talk to yourself—your thoughts and cognitions, both short specific statements and also longer control stories (that you have identified with and believed in). In your exploration thus far, have you noticed times when your thoughts and control stories seem helpful and wise, but at other times, upon reflection, do not seem to be as helpful as you would have liked?

Trustworthy. Have you noticed times when your thoughts was wise positive cognitions helped you override negative bodily cues? For example, sometimes we have a reflex bodily physiological “fight” response when driving: e.g., when someone pulls in front of us without using the turn signal. Our mind, however, may be able to tell us that this isn’t an emergency requiring “fight”. We can use our cognitions to change our bodily feelings (and our emotions). We might be able to pause, interrupt, and even change the physiological response and potential emotional sequence. We might imagine, for example, that the person is rushing home to a sick child. These thoughts may help “calm” our initial “fight” reaction. Or we might say, “Let it go. I’m safe, s/he’s in a hurry, I’m not, that’s not the type of person or energy I want to engage with.” The Dalai Lama says he always tries to give the benefit of the doubt to the other person, to choose to think thoughts of compassion for that person who is in such a hurry.

Troublesome. On the other hand, sometimes our thoughts may not be helpful. For example, are you aware of times when cognitions didn’t seem to work well for you, or even had the opposite effect? This phenomenon has been referred to as the law of reverse effects. For example, for the next five seconds, “DON’T think of PINK ELEPHANTS.” 1...2...3...4...5. What did you notice? The very thing we try not to think about, we do. The same thing can happen when someone is trying to lose weight. To say, “Don’t eat that last donut!” may only make that person want it more. “DON’T think about those luscious thick gooey chocolate éclairs you shouldn’t eat!” may not be the best diet-control strategy.

In the above examples, sometimes we need to draw upon other mental strategies—e.g., to use a distraction or a competing response technique: such as think of blue squirrels; think of the éclairs as some odorous foul smelling excrement, ; or think of a beautiful beach where you are doing yoga! With these types of strategies, you would be using mental building blocks of decisional control (deciding that you want to build a distraction technique), plus attentional focusing, and visual imagery.

What are other examples of when your thinking process may not be in your best interest—e.g., black-and-white thinking without nuance? Irrational beliefs? Unfounded beliefs? Negative thoughts?* (i.e., even though there is nothing you can do about a situation, you continue to rehash it without making any progress). Have you been able to identify situations where you sometimes overreact cognitively: making a speed bump in your life into something much more serious—i.e., catastrophizing, making mountains out of molehills? For example, in the driving example above, our reflexive affect may be anger (and fear) and our body may want “revenge” and we may start to tell ourselves a

* As discussed in Precision Nirvana (ref 13, pp. 202-203), a negative evaluation is a judgment made where action can be taken. A negative thought is continuing to think unhelpful thoughts when no action is planned or possible.

story about what an awful, uncaring, insensitive person the other driver is, and the stories we develop to reinforce our emotions are the opposite of helpful.

Although often difficult to recognize, have you been able to notice when your thoughts may be unhelpful rationalizations and defenses, which though they may have the intention to “protect your self” actually are harmful and self-deluding? How do you deal with thoughts that aren’t helpful.

Help from other Building Blocks. When we become aware that our thought patterns are troublesome, we can use several different building blocks, as suggested above in the discussion of the law of reverse effects (with pink elephants and éclairs) (and as we have also discussed in the previous section under Dealing with Negative Thoughts (see Step Four, Yielding Mode). To briefly review, a body building block can help give us a stable firm posture; or we can use the body and exercise, such as a brisk walk or jogging to “clear our mind.”

Attentional techniques, such as mindfulness and self-observation, can help us observe our thoughts. We can then use thought-stopping techniques to notice, dismiss and let go of negative, unproductive thoughts. We can distract ourselves by looking at a pretty flower or imaging a positive visual image. We can repeat a cognitive mantra to replace/block the thoughts.

We can develop positive affirmations to replace the negative thoughts. As we have noted, these can take the form of the positive yielding mode: e.g., I’m doing the best I can, feel gratitude for what you have,--count your blessings, put things in perspective: e.g. “It’s not worth going there, and getting caught up in a briar patch.” Replacement cognitions can be based on the positive assertive mode: taking doubting or pessimistic thoughts and using them as cues to develop positive, affirming ones: “Stick with it, it’s worth it; you’re making slow, steady progress. No success is ever attained without effort and risk. You’re on the right path.” Affirmations can also be integrative, combining positive assertive and positive yielding, as we discussed earlier in this section: e.g, I’m doing the best I am able to make changes (positive assertive) within my limits and abilities.....that’s all I can ask of myself and I can feel proud and accepting of where I am now (positive yielding).

We can turn to others for guidance, feedback, and wisdom to see where there may be “faults” in our thinking and control stories (such as defensiveness, inappropriate rationalizations, denial, self-deluding thoughts). This may involve, as noted above, developing and rewriting an alternative control story narrative.

Further, as previously discussed, depending upon belief systems about the nature of the universe, some may turn to the spiritual to address negative thoughts, including prayer, asking for guidance, and expressions such as “God loves me, God is holding me” of “trust the Tao” depending upon beliefs.

THE MIND: ATTENTIONAL CONTROL, AWARENESS AS BUILDING BLOCK

To explore this building block involves bringing our attention to the process of how and where we focus our attention, when that serves us well, and when it is not skillful. When is it helpful to allow and trust our “natural” attentional style, and when it is useful to train our attention in more skillful ways? This question involves a choice

(decisional control) about attention, based on awareness and learning about our style, and how helpful different styles are to our well-being.

Trustworthy. Some have argued that awareness is (can be) curative in and of itself. For example, you may have noticed this phenomenon in the positive initial reactive effect of self-observation. Just observing how often you positively reinforce your child, for example, may actually create a tendency to increase the frequency of reinforcement. We have discussed several specific attentional focusing strategies, such as behavioral self-observation (Modules One and Two) and mindfulness (including the big mind game) (Modules Two and Three), which focus not only on the contents of what is attended to, but the vessel, or awareness itself of what/who is doing the attending. In addition, in other interventions, such as the body scan, the focus of attention is also critical. Thus, attentional control/focus can be a building block in and of itself. It helps us recognize that there is a problem, explore and evaluate the nature and dimensions of the concern, and is involved in goal setting. At that point, attention may also be a component of subsequent building blocks.

Troublesome. But sometimes it seems that awareness, rather than being a cure, presents a problem, and the very act of awareness and observation can be interfering and cause a self-conscious stumbling effect. We see this in the story of the centipede who, when asked by the butterfly, “How do you coordinate your legs so well?” looks down at its hundred feet and stumbles! As the Biblical creation story suggests, awareness of “self” can become uncomfortable: Adam and Eve hide when they realize they are naked: an uncomfortable “self-consciousness.” Are there times in your own life when you would like to just “be”—e.g., watching a sunset -- but you notice yourself watching yourself watching the event, rather than just being present? Are there times when you feel you focus too much on yourself and it makes you feel awkward and uncomfortable?

On the other hand, are you aware of times in your life (or in the lives of people around you) when you or they seem to be trying to deflect attention from your/their own “issues” through denial, defensiveness, rationalizations, inappropriately focusing attention on others, blaming them, not seeing what you/they can learn about themselves?

Further, our natural, reflexive, attentional strategy may not always be helpful. For example, let’s say you are driving, and have placed a book on the dashboard in front of you, which, as you go around a curve, starts to slide to the right. Your eyes may want to divert attention from the road to the sliding book, and then behaviorally you may want to grasp it. Our “natural” reaction is for the eyes to follow moving objects. But in this case that would not be a skillful response. Instead, you should keep your attention on the road, and override your “reflexive” desire to shift attention to the book.

You have also seen for yourself at the start of this module what can happen when we initially focus attention on our self—when you were asked to “swallow three times.” There was a self-conscious reactive effect, in which what you were doing naturally and well without attentional focus, became constricted and awkward once your attention focused in that area.

As yet another example, let’s say you receive feedback from a teacher. Ninety percent of what you did is praised; ten percent receives constructive criticism. Where do you place your attention—what percent on the positive, what percent on the negative? How does that make you feel?

Finally, as in the case of the proverbial forest and trees, noted above, sometimes we focus too narrowly on details and miss the larger picture. At other times, our focus is too broad, and we miss important information.

Use of building blocks to help address troublesome attentional focus. Each of us has to learn what our own “natural” strategy is, and when, for a given situation a particular strategy can be helpful—e.g., a broad overview focus, a narrow precise focus. What experience and self-exploration can teach us is to notice when our attentional strategies and focus are reflexive and unhelpful, and therefore when we need to learn to override them and make different choices. In a sense, this is using attention to the process and content of “awareness” to help evaluate the effectiveness of our awareness!

Notice what draws your attention in life. What is your “default mode?” Let’s look at a couple of examples in your own life.

Waking up. Let’s start with how you wake up in the morning and where you focus your attention. What is the first thing you attend to? Is that a helpful place to focus your attention? If not, what might be a conscious choice that you feel would be more in your interest? For example, we have discussed the possibility of taking a moment of pause to focus on what you feel grateful for as a way of beginning the day.

Interpersonal Interactions. When you are talking with someone, where are your eyes focused? Literally? Psychologically? A potential problem is to “give your eyes away,” wondering how the other person is perceiving you. This can create two difficulties. First, rather than fully attending to the other, and really listening in a caring way, you are reducing your “presence” and empathy by wondering what that person is thinking about you. Secondly, you may also be “giving away your power” by worrying about how someone is evaluating you, thus reducing your own self-confidence and inner focus.

In this situation, a focusing exercise might be helpful. Think back to our discussion of the “preparedness posture” for interactions in section one of this module. What is the best way for you to physically, emotionally, and attentionally prepare for an interaction? For example, many martial art techniques encourage us to focus on a point below our navel (tan-tien) and also on the way our feet are rooted in the ground as ways of keeping ourselves grounded during interactions. We would then take a few mindful breaths to help clear our mind. By practicing these body and attentional building blocks, we can keep ourselves centered and calm, with a clear mind, all of which can better enable us to truly focus outward in an open, empathic, and attentive way to the other person.*

Addressing an area of concern. Through your self-management project, perhaps you have begun to notice areas where normally you might not be as attentive as you would like. From a therapeutic standpoint (which we discuss more in Module Four), it is important to note both what you attend to and *what you don’t attend to*. Here it is important to bring both the attentional building block to the process of awareness, as well as the use of self-evaluation and decisional control on where and how attention is focused: i.e., internal versus external; past, present, or future; narrow or wide angle.

* This is at least a “double attentional movement” and shows the potential complexity in interpersonal relations: focusing on oneself to make sure one is calm and centered; focusing empathically on hearing what the other person is saying; not being overly focused on how the other person is perceiving you (giving your eyes away), but also not being insensitive to how what you are saying is being received.

Are there times and situations when you avert your attention and awareness that may not be in your self-interest—e.g., avoiding and distracting yourself from your own emotions by focusing externally on an area, rather than going “in and through”?

Further, when faced with an external difficulty or area of concern, you can learn, for example, when a narrow focus is helpful in addressing the issue and providing a positive sense of control, and when you are using distraction techniques that are avoidant to keep you from facing an issue. Sometimes such distractions can even be self-delusional, such as the proverbial “rearranging deck-chairs on the Titanic.”** In so doing, we may under react to a serious threat, and not give it proper attention.

On the other hand, are there times when you focus too much on an area, perseverating when it would be better to shift attention? Sometimes, rather than being avoidance, this can be a helpful conscious choice. For example, classic research on the cold pressor test, in which a person’s hands are immersed in icy water, shows that a person can withstand pain longer by focusing on a visual slide show—the pace of which they themselves control. Research on concentrative meditation techniques, in which a person focus on a specific object to the exclusion of all other sensations, has been likened to “taking a vacation” so that, after the meditation, the person returns afresh to deal with what is of concern.

Past, Present, Future. Further, sometimes we focus too much on some future goal at the end of the path, and forget to “smell the flowers” in the present along the journey. Sometimes there is nothing we can do about a difficult situation in the present, and it is important to remember to still focus on what is positive in your life in the here and now. Sometimes there is nothing we can do about a situation in the past, and we have to be able to learn from it and then let it go, so that the past doesn’t overly impinge on the present and limit our future possibilities.

When is it helpful to focus attention on the past? The future? To live in the moment? When is it helpful to focus internally? Externally? What type of focus might be most helpful? Figure 3.3.2 ^{13, p. 205} below summarizes some observations about “how and where we observe and place our attention” as it relates to “past and future,” “internal and external,” as well as type of “evaluation.”* Please explore in your journal your views of these topics as they apply to your own attentional style. Also, please feel free to add additional categories that we have discussed: e.g., broad focus or narrow; how and when you focus on other building blocks: e.g., thoughts, feelings, others, that you feel are important for your own attentional style and well-being.

FIGURE 3.3.2: ATTENTIONAL FOCUS: WHERE AND HOW

** Sometimes when there is nothing you can do—eg., you’re under a table during an earthquake—it can be helpful to “distract”—i.e., count numbers—or to switch domains and focus on a mantra or “say a prayer” (depending upon one’s spiritual beliefs) to keep oneself as calm as possible.

* For a fuller discussion of these topics, see *Precision Nirvana* ^{13, pp. 203-205}. For example, the positive of non evaluation and focus on the task refers to being totally focused in the moment, without cognitive evaluative thoughts, as discussed in Herrigel’s *Zen and the Art of Archery*. The negative of non-evaluation refers to not being willing to judge actions as less skillful and unhelpful, and thus learning from mistakes and errors.

<i>Where We Focus</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
external	survival, reducing inputs, keeping from self-ruminating, avoiding pain, giving attention to others	avoiding important self problems, limited view and “repression,” “cognitive avoidance”
internal	awareness of internal cares, hearing body signals, taking responsibility for actions	excessive self-rumination, avoidance of others
past	constructive: learning from mistakes, seeing past accomplishments, getting perspective on progress	destructive: useless dwelling and self-castigation
future	constructive: goal setting, planning	destructive: useless worrying without taking any action
<i>How We Focus</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
nonevaluation	allows us to direct total attention to task	does not provide opportunity for feedback
positive evaluation	may serve as reinforcement, encouragement	may divert attention from task
negative evaluation	gives feedback, may be cue for looking for alternative response	if no action is taken, becomes a useless, negative thought

We end this discussion with a story from the Buddhist tradition. This story may be interpreted as “living in the moment.” That is true. But it is also true that there are a lot of different foci this person may have had in the moment described! So, it was more than simply living in the moment, it was a conscious choice about where to place attention, and how to place attention. The story may remind you of our discussion on “adversity” and the family who celebrated their daughter’s death as a way to choose how they wanted to focus their attention in creating the ending of her story.

There is a Zen story of a man chased by a ferocious tiger. He is so afraid, he runs right over the side of a cliff, only managing to temporarily save himself by hanging onto a frail vine that prevents him from falling into the jagged rocks far below. Two mice, one black, one white, begin gnawing on the vine. The man looks up at the fierce tiger’s sharp teeth, and down at the deadly rocks. Then he notices a strawberry growing out of the cliff. The story ends with the words, “How sweet it tasted.”

EMOTIONS AS A BUILDING BLOCK.

Trustworthy. Have there been times when you have had a “heart reaction” or an emotional intuition and it turned out that it was “truer” and wiser than your thinking processes, and you wished you had (or were glad you had) followed it? How comfortable are you in trusting your emotions in your decision making? It is helpful to explore carefully when your emotions have been trustworthy, and are helpful as building blocks for the other domains.

For example, positive motions can certainly help cultivate commitment and adherence to exercise programs in the bodily domain; and love, joy, forgiveness can certainly enhance interpersonal relationships. Anger, sadness and fear can be helpful warning signs that a problem is occurring that needs to be addressed. Although some many people might call these “negative” emotions, if we look at them with bare awareness, these emotions are telling us we’re not in control—that some aspect of ourselves or our lives feels out of control. These “negative” emotions can be understood

as a “wake up call”—to look, see, and investigate what’s going on. Though they may cause us to feel vulnerable, they are also telling us that something needs to be attended to.

From this perspective, emotions can be a motivator cue that something needs to be attended to, and also a motivator to do something to address a situation. . In this way, negative emotions too can become part of the building blocks of an intervention. Finally, we have explored in Section One of Module Three how emotional self-regulation can be a helpful building block in developing both the positive assertive and positive yielding modes of control.

Troublesome. When have you noticed that your emotions can cause difficulties? Although emotions can be a cue that there is a problem, think in your own life whether there have been times when your emotions (e.g., anger, stress, fear, jealousy) may have overwhelmed you and made it more difficult for you to act as wisely as you would have liked? Are there times when you have created “more heat” than “light.”

Have you ever experienced a lack of trustworthiness in your emotions?. For example, have you ever had the experience of not being hungry (e.g., bodily wisdom), but you ate anyway—for emotional reasons? There can be times when the wisdom of our body is overridden in an unhealthy way by our emotions.

Have you ever noticed this emotional “untrustworthiness” in other domains and situations as well? For example, do you sometimes notice that you have an emotional reaction that seems out of proportion to the actual event (e.g., impatience while waiting at a stoplight or for an occupied bathroom at a restaurant, or in line at a store)? The emotions can then “drive” your thoughts—e.g., this is taking forever, I’m in such a hurry, this is unfair. (Those thoughts, of course, can in turn exacerbate the impatient feeling). The point to be aware of here is that emotions can influence what we think, and set off a negative sequence.

Do you take more to heart, or feel more strongly, a mistake or criticism than you do positive comments? Even though it may be reflexive, is that necessarily a wise or helpful emotional reaction? This is yet another example of how our emotions can create problems for us.

Using other building blocks to help address when emotions are troublesome. CT begins with the premise that “It is important to honestly and clearly be aware of and acknowledge what you are feeling.” We need to be able to observe what we are feeling, without censoring or judging, but rather with openness, curiosity, sensitivity, even compassion.

Awareness. How able are you to stay with and just observe emotions of helplessness, self pity, feeling victimized, anger, rage, jealousy, hopelessness? Observing and being present with your difficult emotions does not necessarily mean “giving into” them or creating cognitive elaborations to fuel them—e.g., allowing one “slight” that makes you angry to remind you of other slights, exacerbating anger; or having one “loss” remind you of other losses, deepening sadness. Nor does it mean identifying emotions only to dismiss or suppress them. Rather it means actually seeing and recognizing what is there, neither running toward it, nor running away from it. This “mindful” approach allows all emotions, with their nuances and gradations, to be seen clearly, as in a mirror:

i.e., what is. This attitude is helpful in developing an attitude of “curiosity”—“Let me just explore what’s going on, what this feels like,” getting to know your emotions.

Once you are able to clearly discern “what is,” as discussed in Module Two, the next step is to evaluate whether you want to stay there. To answer that question involves the building block of awareness—recognizing when certain emotions are helpful and when they are less trustworthy. We may also recognize through this observation the process by which we can create unhelpful (and often endless variations) of stories to “feed” and “fuel” our unhelpful emotions.

Once it is determined that there are unhelpful emotions (and resulting stories), interventions can then be used to express, transform and/or accept the emotions in question. Interestingly, through this process of just “observing” and learning about our emotions, we may come to the realization that although we tend to feel our emotions will last forever, usually they don’t, particularly if we are able to observe them directly at the “root” level beneath the story-telling. Often, after a time, feelings pass away or transmute into other feelings. Sometimes the very act of mindful awareness can be curative in this regard.. Mindfulness meditation has been compared to a “global” desensitization, where, in a relaxed state, the contents of “whatever is on one’s mind” arise and are just observed.

Additional Building Blocks. At other times, the process of working with difficult emotions can build upon attentional observational techniques, and continue through self-evaluation, goal setting, and finally adding further building blocks as interventions. As we have discussed regarding techniques such as the control mode rehearsal, the emotion can be used as a cue, triggering positive modeling (imagery) of how you would like to act and feel; self-instructions (cognitive building block): and physical relaxation (body building block).

This can also be done *in vivo*. To take the simple example of waiting at the stop light, (the extra credit homework on Module One) in this situation we may feel impatience. To address this negative emotion, we can mindfully observe our feelings; notice where in our body we are feeling “impatient” sensations and bring body scan attention to relax those sensations; remind ourselves not to let cognitions exacerbate our negative feelings by self-instructions such as “Stop lights never last longer than two minutes. Take this as a peaceful time to pause.” You can add “positive images” by thinking about something pleasant. In this way, building blocks of body and mind (decisional control, cognitions, imagery) can be used to address the emotional impatience.

Sometimes the focus may be on how cognitions exacerbate emotional reactivity. For example, have you ever noticed a bodily sensation (stress, pain) and then became “stressed” about the feeling? What initially might be experienced simply as sensation can become worse as a result of our cognitive reaction and commentary, e.g., “My body’s a mess. Things are completely out of control. What if it never gets better?” Some philosophical and psychological traditions make the distinction between “pain” (a sensation in the body), and “suffering” (emotional pain worsened by cognitions and ensuing heightening of the sensations--, e.g., catastrophic or fearful thinking). In this case, the “story” told about physical pain creates additional suffering, and the attentional and cognitive building blocks, as we have previously discussed, can be helpful as part of

the intervention to stop the negative cognitions and reduce “unnecessary” emotional suffering.

Sadness as an example. Similarly, we may feel sadness in response to situations that make us feel we have lost control. Although sadness may be caused by an external loss, we can exacerbate it by the stories we tell. For example, a break-up of a relationship can create a feeling of sadness and loss. However, telling stories such as “I’ll never again have another relationship; I’m going to be lonely and alone for the rest of my life” may make these feelings worse.

Sometimes it can be helpful to uncouple the “emotion” from the story, and look at each separately. Does the emotion make sense? Does the story add anything—e.g., are we learning from the story, or just unhelpfully fueling the emotion?

For example, in this case, sadness definitely “makes sense” after a loss. Further, sadness may be telling us that we need to pause and take care of ourselves, that we are feeling some loss or lack of energy that requires self-care. In this relational example, in the presence of sadness, it may be important both to take time to pause and heal; to seek interpersonal support and guidance, as well as working to cultivate forgiveness of the hurts and pains that may still be present (positive yielding through use of the body, cognitive, and interpersonal building blocks). It may also be important to work on changing cognitions to more positive, hopeful, optimistic ones; to find ways of pursuing new experiences and to see what can be learned to help one grow (positive assertive through the cognitive, body, and behavioral building blocks).

Fear as an example. We may fear those things over which we feel we have no control. If the domain goal is managing fear, what might be steps to address it? As with any emotion, it is important to determine the goal: is the issue that we are feeling too little, and need to pay more attention to the emotion (e.g., fear); do we need to decrease it; or to change and transform the emotion?*

Let’s consider fear of an earthquake. Some people might attempt to cope with fear through denial (it won’t happen to me); others may be fatalistic (what can you do?). In both cases, the task is to not run away from the fear, but to recognize and face it.

Once the fear is recognized, you can decide whether you want to calm the fear, address it, or both. Part of the fear of an earthquake is that it may bring up root issues of mortality and death. Those would need to be addressed separately, as we’ve discussed.

Positive assertive steps that can be taken to address the content fear of an earthquake include obtaining proper survival supplies; knowing how to turn off the gas; planning for how you will take shelter and contact family members. Finally, as noted, it may be helpful to think about what types of cognitive and attentional building blocks one might use as coping strategies during the earthquake itself—e.g., prayer, attentional focus on a mantra, etc. Thus, if an emotion is the domain, a complex intervention comprised of multiple building blocks can be used to address it (i.e., acceptance, tranquility, readiness, competence).

Cultivating Positive Emotions. We have explored above an example when upon receiving both positive and critical feedback, we may spend more time focusing on the resultant negative emotions than on the positive ones. Although it can be helpful to focus

* As the teacher in the movie *the Karate Kid* advised his student regarding an upcoming tournament, “It’s ok to feel fear; it’s not ok to lose because of fear.”

on negative emotion as a cue that something is a problem and we want to learn from it, do you ever notice that too much focus on negative emotions can lead to other negative feelings, such as helplessness and hopelessness, or even feelings of exhaustion and burn out? The question is what might be the proper balance, and whether we are also focusing sufficiently on the positive emotions that may be created by good feedback. Are there times when it is simply discouraging to dwell on the negative, not giving yourself the emotional lift of the positive?

It is important that we seek ways to develop, enhance, and cultivate positive emotions and experiences. At the very least, in the above “feedback” example, one strategy would be to give yourself permission to spend a certain amount of time consciously focusing on the positive emotions created by the feedback that was positive. Allow yourself to feel proud, to think thoughts of accomplishment and how you are helping others. This is using attentional and cognitive building blocks, as well as decisional control to enhance your positive emotions.

To cultivate thankfulness, compassion and love, a variety of building blocks can also be helpful. For example, you can build cues and rituals into the day to cultivate gratefulness (such as the thankfulness prayer we have mentioned); and to practice “loving kindness” toward yourself and others. These are building blocks of positive cognitions performed with a relaxed bodily posture (body building block) and using decisional control to stop, pause, and decide how and where you want to focus your attentional building block.

To cultivate joy, could you build in doing at least “one fun thing” each week? Each day? Do you like to move your body—in dance? To sing? Could you take a moment right where you are several times a day to notice, think about, or imagine something positive that makes you happy? Sometimes acting happy—doing the “behavior”—smiling, saying a kind word to another—even if we don’t initially feel happy, can bring about increased feelings of happiness in us. Are there those with whom you share time who create feelings of uplift and joy in you? Again, notice how you can use the different building blocks -- your body, cognitions, behavior, others—to consciously enhance positive emotions in yourself (and others!).

BUILDING BLOCKS CAN AFFECT EACH OTHER. Although different theorists, therapists, (and yoga teachers) may believe that there is a primary unilateral controlling building block (as discussed in Module Two), notice what your own experience is. As discussed at the start of this module, and as we have tried to explore further in the above material, sometimes a building block may be helpful to facilitate a sense of control in a given domain; sometimes that same building block may be “troublesome” and itself become the domain which needs to be addressed by other building blocks. As we have explored previously, , do you notice that sometimes it is your thoughts (building block) can be helpful in controlling your body (domain)—e.g., your thoughts and self-instructions that help to calm your body? Sometimes it is your feelings that wisely control your thoughts—e.g., you have an emotional reaction that you trust more than you do your intellectual ruminations, and you skillfully bring your thoughts into line with your feelings? Do you notice that sometimes is it your body (building block) that is calm and wise (e.g., when you practice diaphragmatic breathing) and helps to settle your thoughts and still your labile feelings (domain)?

A Tai Chi Example. The following illustration, drawn from DHS' tai chi practice, suggests how the different building blocks (body, mind, attention) we have been exploring may affect each other in order to help us gain or maintain a sense of control.*

Expectations, thoughts, before beginning a practice *I'm curious what my body and mind are going to be like during the practice. I'm glad I'm going to be practicing. This is really a time to notice closely how the parts of my body are working and feeling. It's almost like going in for a lubrication of my joints—I know after I finish they will feel more limber and agile.***

When I notice doubting or tired thoughts that ask me if I really want to practice this week, I thank them for sharing, and then let them go. I tell myself that I know that the exercise, once I start, will propel me forward. I also know that after I finish, I always feel better and am glad I've done it. I've never been less happy or disappointed after doing tai chi. I tell myself I'm lucky I have the time and space to do this, and in such a beautiful setting. (Cognitive thoughts to motivate toward the practice.)

Body building block. *Some days my physical balance is lovely, like a gift of grace. I seem to float, effortlessly, my fluidity and centeredness nearly impeccable. My feet feel rooted in the ground for stability, when appropriate, and yet also able to softly and lightly rise for kicks when needed. Weight shifts from one foot to another feel like they are done with the care and precision of sand pouring from one side of an hour glass into the other. This good balance gives me a sense of control on the body level, which filters up to the mind level and indeed to my view of life. (The body building block giving me a sense of control in the mind domain and giving me a sense of my "self" as competent and in control).*

Mind building block. *Other days, my physical balance is really not good at all, but my mind is still and calm, and my attention focused on the tan tien (energy center below the navel) is clear and consistent. I can observe "body not in control" and still have a general feeling of being calm and in control (The mind building block [attentional focusing, cognitive self-instruction] helping to give a sense of control regarding the body domain).*

"Witnessing mind." *On still other days my body is not in balance and my mind (thoughts, attentional focusing building blocks) is not calm either, but rather like choppy water, with emotional waves of frustration, anger, annoyance, anxiety, even sadness. But sometimes on those days there is still a "detached" part of me--the big mind game-- that can simply observe "unbalanced body, unbalanced mind" like stars in the night sky. This mindful style of observation—with equanimity—allows me to feel "All*

* Learning any new skill can be an opportunity to become more aware of "learning how we learn." For example, in tai chi, the "holistic" flowing motion of each form, for me, was a product of learning movements for individual parts of the body--hands, head, shoulders, hips, feet all doing different things--and then putting them together. This was also a helpful metaphor to see how I seek to create a "whole" from different building blocks, each one both separate and unique, and also potentially able to join and fit with each other.

** One building block that should be stated explicitly at the start of each intervention is a cognitive one: noticing your thoughts and expectations—what you say to yourself right before you begin an exercise.

is okay, this is just the way it is today,” providing a sense of control at a more “meta” level .*

Decisional control: Shifting attention outside the self. *Then sometimes, none of the above works. There is unbalanced body, unbalanced mind, unbalanced observer. Everything gets swirled around and I feel like I’m being flushed down a toilet into the sewer!*

When that happens, I often shift my focus from myself to what is around me. I feel thankful to be there with my beloved partner (feeling a sense of control from an interpersonal building block). I also focus on the beauty of the natural surroundings, ocean waves, birds singing, the colors of the flowers (using decisional control to shift my attentional focus to other sense modalities - auditory—listening to the birds, the ocean waves on the rocks; visual—watching the seagulls floating and gliding in the wind—and trying to feel that same ease modeled by the birds-- to give a positive sense of control).

Interpersonal: *I learned from teachers, and often while practicing I hear their advice and encouragement, see their grace , as well as feel and remember the camaraderie of those in the class. Sometimes I do the practice alone, sometimes with others, particularly my wife. Doing it with her provides an initial motivation and an enjoyable sense of sharing an experience both during and after the practice.*

Contextual beliefs: Other as building block; Nature of the universe.

Sometimes I find myself gaining a sense of control through letting go of “self” efforts and allowing my self to be held by core contextual beliefs about the nature of the universe. From a non-theistic (Taoist) perspective, I image and experience xujing, the cosmic void of the universe before form, and I realize that all the forms and levels are just “games” that emerge from this void.

At other times what "catches" me is a theistic perspective, remembering a story Reb Zalman Schacter-Shalomi told.

He was counseling a woman and reminding her that we are all children resting in the hand of God. The woman closed her eyes, and tried to feel and experience this. Then, in fear, she opened her eyes and said ,

“God just threw me out of God’s hand. Now what?”

*“That’s okay,” Reb Schacter-Shalomi laughed, “Because wherever you land will also be God!” **

* In Zen it’s said that one way to “control a cow is to give it a large field.” When I am able to maintain and experience the big mind game—the mind as a vast spacious universe—then thoughts and feelings are merely cows—stars in the night sky to mix metaphors—that are allowed to be present, but don’t disturb the surroundings!

* Each person brings certain expectations to learning a technique. And each “teacher/therapist” has certain beliefs about the utility of the technique they are teaching. Thus, all techniques are utilized within a context. An issue that is beyond the scope of this manual is how important is the original philosophical context in which the techniques were initially formulated—e.g., yoga within Hinduism, tai chi within Taoism and Chinese philosophy, mindfulness meditation within the Vipassana Buddhist tradition. Similarly, some prayers and affirmations may have originally come from monotheistic religious traditions. What can be stated is that the *content* of these techniques (e.g., attentional focusing, cognitive self-instructions, visualizations), can be utilized within a Western psychotherapeutic context and framework In Module Three, we have noted in each case the content of the techniques and the building blocks that

PUTTING THE BUILDING BLOCKS TOGETHER IN THE PROCESS OF CONTROL THERAPY: STRESS AS AN EXAMPLE

*Don't tell me to relax.
It's only my stress that is holding me together.
--Ashleigh Brilliant*

IN AND THOROUGH. At the very least, as we have discussed about emotions in general, stress offers a sign that something may need to be attended to. To end this section, we briefly review how a Control Therapy approach would apply the building blocks discussed above to the issue of stress (assuming, as suggested by the words of Ashleigh Brilliant, that the person is willing to explore self-regulating his/her stress!). *Control Therapy argues that, in general, concerns are most skillfully addressed through awareness (i.e., “in”) rather than through avoidance, distraction, or denial. Going “through” can involve trying to address the concern through change, acceptance, or some combination.*

In this example, we are going to integrate and utilize multiple building blocks, as well as illustrate the general model of how Control Therapy would approach this concern-- what is the stressor, what is your control profile, areas of concern, the extent to which you are vulnerable to stress, internal focusing, external focusing. All of this is “In.” Going “through involves, decisional control, values and beliefs, self and other as agent, setting a goal, developing appropriate interventions, as needed and useful: a) to address the internal feelings of stress, b); to address the external stressors; c) to cultivate gratefulness and joy.

As we go through this example, try to explore a) where and how you primarily experience “stress”; b) continue to note your experiences with different building blocks and your level of trust in each.

Awareness of internal feelings and external stressors. Recall our discussion in Module One of how each of us can favor a certain sense modality (e.g., cognitive, visual, kinesthetic) across a range of experiences, including how we learn, how we express ourselves, and how we experience stress. As one example of this phenomenon, stress can be experienced in many sense modalities

Self-observation, discussed in Modules One and Two, can help us understand how we (and our clients) most commonly experience stress through precise awareness of our internal “environment.” This can be beneficial in several ways. First, as discussed above under “troublesome emotions”, sometimes we notice a bodily sensation, and *overreact* to it: i.e., becoming stressed about our stress. What initially might be experienced simply as sensation can become worse as a result of our cognitive reaction and commentary, e.g., “My heart is racing, my stomach is full of butterflies, I can barely breathe. I’m a mess. Things are completely out of control. What if it never gets better?”

On the other hand, sometimes we are “*minimizers*” and don’t notice sensations of stress until they get quite severe. Self-observation is a way to pay attention to what is,

comprise them. However, we are not unaware that the context of the technique—the philosophy, original intent-- can influence their use and meaning . That is why we spent considerable time in Module Two asking you to investigate your own philosophical and therapeutic beliefs about human nature and the nature of the universe.

not trying to will it away or pretend it doesn't exist. Paying increased attention to tightness in our stomach, or neck, or shoulders can tell us we're getting tense in the early stages of stress before it mushrooms out of control.

Precise awareness also allows you to quantify and pinpoint the stress: Are there areas of the body (and mind) that are stress-free? Does your bodily stress maintain its same level of (tingling, stinging, knotting, knifing) throughout the day (e.g, using a ten point scale)? Are you aware of more stress during certain times of day or under certain circumstances? Are there times when you feel less stress? This precise analysis can help you to provide more nuance to the statement, "I'm so stressed out" to "Parts of my body are sending me signals of stress at certain times or in certain situations." Thus, in this process, you can learn not only how you respond to stress, but also help pinpoint external antecedent conditions—"stressors" that may "create" stress in us.

Self-evaluation and goal-setting. Next we would engage in self-evaluation, as discussed in Module Two. Self-evaluation can help you determine when you experience the stress as positive (i.e., the excitement before a race, the enthusiasm and intensity needed to focus and concentrate), and when stress is negative and unproductive. You may recall from your undergraduate psychology courses the Yerkes-Dobson inverted U-shaped curve showing the association between stress and productivity: very low stress and very high stress are correlated with very low productivity. There is a point at the top of the U when just the right amount of arousal maximizes productivity. Self-evaluation can help you determine when you may need to decrease your stress to increase productivity (in its broadest sense of achievement or accomplishment), and other times when you may need to energize your body to amplify your "positive" stress (e.g., motivation, arousal level, attentional focusing) to increase productivity

Then we would set a goal, as discussed in Module Two; and finally we would target and match interventions in order to achieve that goal.

Let us assume, for instructional purposes, two goals. The first is to reduce unhelpful and unwanted internal stress (see Module Two for creating a goal as a behavioral objective)—that is our reaction to "stressors."

Our second goal is to address the outside stressor in as effective way as possible. deal with and as well as to deal with outside "stressors" in as an effective a way as possible. In order to more precisely set this goal, we would want to determine whether and to what extent the "stressor" is under our control, and whether we want our goal to be to learn how to change the stressor, or learn to accept it.

Interventions in a Control Therapy approach to stress would be many pronged, involving several building blocks, and be matched to the client's Control Profile, and based on self-observation and self-evaluation, targeted to the selected goal(s). Here we deal with our first goal above: addressing internal stress.

Choice: Decisional control. Recall the picture of our two monkeys, (Figure 3.2.2) who are looking at some unseen external "stressor" not see in the picture. This painting suggests that although there will always be "stressors" in our lives, we have the opportunity to learn how we react to those stressors, and some degree of control in terms of how we react—decisional control through choice plus bodily and mental self-regulation.

The monkey in the foreground is upset, (mouth agape, eyes wide open, hands thrown up in fear). The monkey in the background at first may look indifferent. But look

more closely, and note that the monkey's eyes are focused and prepared, the left hand is clenched, suggesting readiness for action if needed. Like the monkeys, we can choose to respond to stressors in different ways.

Looking Inside: Developing centeredness (xujing). Based on the awareness gained through self-observation, you would develop an intervention that matched techniques to the primary way in which you are experiencing stress. Do you experience "stress" primarily in your body, somatically, kinesthetically, sweaty palms, butterflies in the stomach, aches in the back and neck? If you experience stress primarily as a body problem, interventions can include diaphragmatic breathing (a body building block), as well as mental techniques focusing on the body, such as the body scan which, as we have discussed, relaxes the body by breathing a healing energy into areas of tension or pain. You can also use progressive relaxation (attentional focus, cognitive self-instructions, and bodily movement) targeted throughout the body, or addressed to specific areas. In this way, the building blocks of the mind/attention can be helpful in calming the body. It has also been suggested that to quiet the body and achieve serenity, more active strategies than diaphragmatic breathing can be helpful, such as (along a continuum of active movement) Feldenkreis, yoga, tai chi, and running.

Do you experience stress primarily as your mind racing and filled with thoughts? In this case, you would want to use some of the cognitive interventions we have discussed, either alone or in combination with mindfulness meditation. As noted, a general "mindfulness" meditation can be helpful as a way to create a more spacious "mind" in which thoughts, feelings, sensations are attended to in a less reactive way. Further, a calm body (e.g. through diaphragmatic breathing) may help settle the mind, and create a state of mental relaxation.

Sometimes people experience stress as imagery, actually seeing in their mind's eye upsetting images such as a supervisor reprimanding them or seeing themselves getting back a failed exam? Such stressful pictures could become cues for engaging in Control Mode Rehearsal, with specific focus on the creation of positive imagery.

Some further comments on "matching." As should be clear from this manual thus far, Control Therapy argues that, in general, concerns are most skillfully addressed by being faced, rather than by avoidance, distraction, or denial. Facing a concern, as we have seen, can involve trying to address it through change, acceptance, or some combination. Thus, there are several ways to go "*in and through*" in dealing with an area of concern.

Sometimes, however, once you go "in" and carefully observe the nature of the concern, we may get "stuck" and feel ourselves becoming stressed by continuing repetitive and unhelpful thoughts and feelings that don't seem to get us through

One strategy discussed above to deal with this is mindfulness, where thoughts and feelings are "just observed" without further "engagement." Another strategy is a type of concentrative meditation, in which a specific auditory, visual, or kinesthetic object becomes the focus of attention.

Research suggests that one way to address and "block" a sensory style that is generating stress—and where we may be stuck in helpful patterns—is by using the same style in an intervention. For example, for a person who experiences stressful images, strategies that involve kinesthetic and cognitive techniques may not be as effective as imagery ones. Specifically, it may be more effective to choose imagery, such as

meditating on a candle flame (internal or external), or imagining a positive scene (e.g., a beach, or other natural setting) to help remove a negative image, rather than to talk your way out of it, or do a progressive relaxation.

For “somatic” individuals, body-focused strategies such as progressive relaxation or exercise such as jogging may be more effective than a cognitive one such as a mantra (repetition of a word) or imagery (focus on an internal candle). If imagery were used, it might be more effective if it involved the body: e.g., imagining and feeling the warmth of the candle, or noticing the sun warming you, or the coolness of a breeze on your skin. For clients with a primarily cognitive experience of stress, thoughts can often be best blocked by other thoughts (either a replacement cognition, self-instructions, or an auditory mantra—a sound or phrase that is repeated).

In that regard, it is interesting that different traditions have developed specific concentrative focusing targets (internal and external) for auditory, tactile, and visual styles: ¹⁴ p. 28

FIGURE 3.3.3 EXAMPLES OF CONCENTRATIVE MEDITATION

	<i>Auditory</i>	<i>Visual</i>	<i>Tactile</i>
<i>overt, external environ- ment</i>	verbal— Sufi dervish call mantra	kasina mandala cross vase abdomen	touching thumb to each finger
<i>internal environ- ment</i>	verbal— mantra koan	third eye vault of skull symbol of guru (image)	heart beat breathing

It should be noted that the above discussion about how you experience stress and which preferred building block to trust is not meant to imply that all individuals have only one preferred style. As Gary Schwartz wryly noted, some people experience stress both with imagery and cognitions, and for them a helpful strategy can be counting sheep; for those who experience stress somatically and cognitively, it may be helpful to say a verbal mantra while they jog!

These strategies can help reduce the stress, which can have two benefits. First, and most obviously, so that we don’t get stuck with unhelpful stress at the “in” stage, and can become more relaxed. Secondly, as we’ve noted, when we return to address the concern, we may feel like we’ve “taken a vacation” and can focus on the concern with fresh perspective.

It should be clear that we are not advocating a one size fits all approach, but rather a careful and nuanced matching. Because people are different, and in this case, experience stress in unique ways, therefore, what might work for you might not be as effective for a client with a different way of experiencing stress.

Looking Outside: Deciding how to respond to a stressor (dongjing).

We have noted that the monkey picture suggests two different choices in responding to stress: a “fearful, frightened one (suggesting readiness to flee) or a “preparedness” one, suggesting readiness for “fight.” Although fight or flight may be our inborn tendency, as we have discussed, part of dealing with an external stressor is learning a variety of potential different and nuanced responses to addressing external stressors (from

maximum acceptance to maximum assertiveness), depending upon the situation and context. When the stressor is something external to the self (and is not an emergency like being faced with a saber toothed tiger!), we have the opportunity to use our decisional control to explore and reflect on what might be the wisest and most skillful way to address that stressor. We have addressed this topic in some detail in Module 3.2, when discussing how to create a nuanced “dongjing” response ranging along a continuum from yielding acceptance (maximum yin) to assertive and change (maximum yang). We invite you to refer back to that material, as appropriate.

Self/ other as agent. In formulating your looking inward strategy, as well as your “outward” dongjing strategy, you also have the opportunity to decide how much you want to rely on yourself as agent in dealing with the stressor, and how much you feel it would be helpful to seek the advice, counsel, and support of others.

Putting it all together: Inside and outside; Top, middle, bottom. The above discussion stresses (pun intended) the importance of integrating internal strategies where we work on ourselves, and external strategies where we address environmental/ interpersonal situations. In order to do this, we need to understand ourselves—how we experience stress internally, what are our primary preferences in terms of building blocks, and what are the most effective strategies to help us “re-center.” We also need to be aware of the external environment—people, situations—that are “challenging” to us and the most effective we can address those. Finally, we also need to be aware of the larger meta-context. As the cardiologist Robert Elliot once said, there are two rules for stress management: 1) don’t sweat the small stuff; and 2) it’s all small stuff. ☺

There is no question that a lot of what ends up stressing us is “small stuff”—the proverbial mountains out of molehills. Certainly, one important intervention is our ability, from the top and bottom of the hour glass, to keep a perspective on our concerns, even as we use specific techniques and interventions, as discussed in Module 3, to address these concerns at the narrow part of the hour glass.

Further, because there are real and unavoidable stressors and challenges that we all face, part of Control Therapy’s “large perspective” approach to stress “management” involves our view of the nature of the universe, and our ability to discover/create meaning through control stories as a way to understand, explore, and context the difficulties and “necessary” suffering in life. Sometimes that may mean withdrawing from situations in order to recharge ourselves. Sometimes that may mean returning to the challenges and seeking to find joy and meaning and gratefulness wherever we can.

3.3.4 HOW DOES WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED ABOUT OURSELVES INFLUENCE WHAT WE TEACH OUR CLIENTS?

In Module 3.1, we looked to how building blocks could be used in the five steps for the assertive/change mode, and the five steps of the yielding/accepting mode. In Module 3.2, we discussed the different building blocks involved in several integrative interventions. In the above section of this module (3.3.3) we delved further into building

blocks individually, pointing out where they might be helpful, and where potentially troublesome.

Further, the tai chi example in the above section illustrated the influence different building blocks *may* have on each other, and on different domains. What has been your experience as you practiced the different interventions discussed in this module? During certain interventions, have you noticed an interconnection between the building blocks that comprised them? For example, what did you notice in Modules 3.1 and 3.2 doing the hatha yoga exercise, the body scan, or mindfulness meditation, in terms of the interconnection between the different building blocks of body and mind? How did each building block in the practice affect the others that also were involved? Has the experience of practicing these different techniques influenced your views about the primacy of a specific building block in terms of its controlling influence for you personally?

Finally, based on our discussion of the stress management example in the above section, did you have any thoughts, feelings and/or insights in terms of your own ways of coping with stress? For example, in which building block do you primarily experience stress? What do you find to be the most effective ways of using different building blocks individually and integratively, to address different stressors in your life?

Please take a few moments to discuss the above topics in your journal, or, as appropriate, in a group and/or dyads in class. Are there differences in what each person feels is his/her primary preference in terms of building blocks? As we discuss below, and as part of our transition to the next module—control and the therapeutic encounter--it is important to a) recognize our own styles and preferences; b) recognize that others (e.g., fellow students, clients) may have different styles and preferences.

WHICH BUILDING BLOCKS TO CHOOSE (AND HOW)? WHICH BUILDING BLOCKS TO TEACH (AND HOW)? We have now explored your views of the different domains, as well as of different building blocks. We have examined strengths and troublesome areas of building blocks, and shown their potential interactions. However, even if building blocks do interact, this does not mean that you personally don't have a particular one that is most congruent for you. Or that you may have a particular decision making style that suits you "best." That is important information for you. As a transition to Module Four, Control and the Therapeutic Encounter, the next question is, from a "therapeutic standpoint," what does your own personal experience mean in terms of teaching others? Do you believe your view of what works for you is necessarily the "best" model for others?

We ask this question now as a prelude to Module Four, where your theories will be put into practice in working with clients. Our view is that there are many paths up the mountain, and that we need to be careful not to assume that what works for us will necessarily be best for our clients. That's why we have tried to carefully develop individual "control profiles." If we seek to impose our "preferred building blocks" on a client, we can get a mismatch. To refer once again to the yoga example, let us assume that those who teach each school have had excellent success in their own lives using their particular path; and that they have also had many successes with their students. However, a problem can occur if a teacher of one style believes that **all** people would be best served by that style: e.g., that emotional bhakti is always the best path; or the

cognitive/intellectual (jana) is **the** best path. A mismatch problem might occur if the yoga teacher did not recognize that, despite their belief in their practice, it might not be well-suited to the needs and strengths of a particular student.

DECISION MAKING REVISITED

Having looked in more detail at your preferences in terms of domains, and each of the different building blocks, let's now return to the topic with which we began: the time for pause, reflection, and choice—the decision making process.

What do you believe is an optimal decision-making style for you? How much would you want to rely on guidance and advice from others; how much on your “self”? For that part that relies on your “self,” how much would you rely on your intellect and logic; on your emotions; cues from your body? When do you want to listen to, and when do you want to override emotions, intellect, bodily cues, or others?

In making decisions one of the first things we would want to do is to pause and still ourselves enough so that we can hear all the competing voices and options available in a clear, calm way. As noted, it's easier to see clearly what is going on if the lake is calm and still, rather than if the waters are murky, churning, and stirred up.

A process of decision-making that we have found helpful, and which honors all the different building blocks, is to listen to each individually, and then put them together as a whole. For example, in contemplating an action, we can make a list of all the pluses and minuses of a given course. We can even rank how important each plus and each minus seems to be (e.g., on a one to ten scale). This is bringing a cognitive, rational component to the decision making process, while also recognizing that the judgment of “importance” is influenced by our emotions. You can add up all these numbers, and see which choice “wins.” Then, before making a final decision, set all these ruminations aside, and again take a few cleansing breaths. Lao-tzu says,

Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles
and the water is clear?

Can you remain unmoving

Till the right action arises by itself?

The process does not need to be either/or. We can use our analytical minds, our emotions, our bodily cues, and the advice of others. We can lay out different options (such as the *dongjing* gradations). Then we can sit in a calm, centered way, pausing, and seeing what arises from the clear space we've created. We can learn when we feel congruent and clear about a choice (what our body feels like, what our “mind” feels like; what we feel). We can notice where and when our body “contracts”; that constriction can be a cue that something is “off”; and we're not centered (cf *xujing*), and therefore not ready to make the choice, or perhaps there is something in the choice that needs exploring.

In this way, by observing our own process, we can learn how we can most skillfully make the best decisions and choices of which we are capable. In investigating your decision-making process, you can also examine the following:

- What is your tolerance for ambiguity—how long are you able to wait before making a decision? Do you have a tendency to seek closure too soon? To procrastinate and wobble too long?
- How able are you to examine gradations and nuances, and how much do you wish for clear black and white answers? How able are you to hold different ideas, thoughts, emotions, feelings, cues in a “big mind” at the same time?
- How much information is helpful to you in reaching a decision? Do you sometimes feel you have too much information so that you feel overloaded and confused? When should you seek more information before deciding? When do you feel overwhelmed? When do you feel you are overanalyzing?
- How well do you respond to pressure in working toward a decision? When is pressure a helpful goad to maintaining focus? When does pressure impede your decision-making process?
- Is it important for you to feel you have choices and options?
- How much choice do you like? Some people are happy with having a lot of choices. Others confounded by too many choices. When do you feel there are too many options? Not enough options so that you feel trapped and forced? What is your decision-making pace? Are you more the hare, or the tortoise?
- Are you more of a concrete person or more of an abstract person? Is it easy for you to see the whole picture and put parts together? Do you tend to feel more comfortable focusing more on the details?
- How much do you turn to others for guidance and help in making a decision; how much trusting your own judgment?

As part of learning about your own decision-making style, it is important for you to learn to what extent it is in your interest to rely on your stronger building blocks, and to what extent it is useful to build up the weaker building blocks. Further, the decision making process gives you another opportunity to see how well you are able to develop a combination of analysis and feeling, emotion and thought, body and mind; self exploration and guidance and support from others; that might be beneficial and result in the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

Of course, engaging in this decision-making process, no matter how thorough and well done, does not necessarily ensure a successful outcome. Almost all decisions are made on the basis of incomplete information, and involve a certain amount of chance, risk, and luck. But, as noted, if we stay conscious about the process and the outcome, we can face our fears of making the wrong choice, take responsibility for our decisions, feel comfortable in knowing that we have made the best choice of which we were capable at the time, and commit to a course of action (or inaction!). Then, as we continue to

evaluate our progress, if we find our choice wasn't optimal, we can learn from our mistakes, and use that knowledge to enhance the process the next time.

Finally, it should be noted that the above rather thorough self-exploration of the variables involved in the decision-making process is not something that a therapist would necessarily engage in with every client. However, we have examined the process here in some detail because we feel it is important that the therapist him/herself be aware of the complexity of factors that can be implicated in their own decision-making process. This in turn can help make the therapist more sensitive to the potential differences, as well as strengths and weaknesses, in the decision-making styles of their clients.

PRACTICING WHAT WE “PREACH” (TEACH). In Module 3, we have discussed exercises that involve individually, and integratedly, the two positive modes using all of the foundational building blocks that are available: e.g., the body, the mind, and the interpersonal. We have asked you to practice techniques that may not be directly related to your specific self-management project, but which may be important to the clients that you see in order that you have some experiential understanding of it.

One of our beliefs and assumptions, which underlie this manual, is that it is helpful to have practiced a technique before you teach it to a client and ask them to try it. By practicing a technique, especially one involving “self-control,” you are better able to understand some of the challenges and issues that a client may face. Further, if you have personally found a technique helpful, that can help create positive mind set in you as part of the teaching process. Finally, at a deeper level, we believe that we should actually try to “live” and model as best we are able what we are teaching.

A word of caution. After completing these different learning exercises, we hope that you have gained some appreciation and understanding of how you learn best. Do you like to read the material? See it modeled? Model it through imagery for yourself? How important is your “body” in the learning process? Your emotions? The cognitive dimension?

One important caution is that, just because a certain *learning style* works for you, it may not be the optimal style for your client. Therefore, it is important to recognize and explore your client's preferred learning style. Similarly, just because a *technique* has worked for you, it might not work for the next person (based on their control profile, learning style and goal).

However, the opposite can also be true. Even if you practiced a technique that wasn't necessarily a good match for you, you might be able to see how it could be helpful for someone else with a different control profile and goal. Therefore, in terms of teaching a technique to others, personal experience is necessary, but not necessarily sufficient. It is also important to determine whether it is also a good match for your client.

Otherwise, a problem can arise when there is a mismatch between technique used and a person's style. Ideally, in our view, therapy should occur within a “meta-framework” that assesses each client's style, and then matches them with the most effective intervention drawing from a range of interventions and building blocks. This is the model which CT uses. This approach helps avoid “mismatches” and identifies the

interventions that will be most helpful for certain individuals with specific characteristics. As we have discussed, CT believes there are many fingers (interventions) pointing to the moon. The task is to find, tailor, and match the best intervention (finger) for a particular person to reach their particular moon. In some ways, that, too, is “practicing” what we teach: a careful listening to and honoring of each person’s uniqueness, and showing a flexibility and sensitivity to providing the most effective technique(s) available for a specific person’s concerns and goals. To do so requires knowing yourself and your preferences, so that you are able to distinguish them from those of your clients.

FAQ 10. HOW CAN WE PERSONALLY PRACTICE ALL TECHNIQUES?

You’re right! No one can test all interventions personally and in depth. Where does that leave us? What we have tried to do in Module Three is to share techniques we have personally practiced and used in CT to illustrate how they can be used to help achieve success in terms of goals of assertiveness/change and/or yielding/acceptance. When presenting these techniques, we have also tried to “deconstruct” them to show their component building blocks, as well as the goal and intention of the technique in CT terms and why it is being used. This way it is possible to compare the “essential” aspects of each technique discussed with others that you might consider exploring and using as a control-enhancing intervention.

Our goal has also been to provide you with an educational experience in which you can reflect on your own learning style through your self-management project, and in so doing learn new tools that might become part of both your personal as well as your clinical armamentarium. By becoming familiar with these techniques, you can then determine whether they might be helpful for a particular client. If you didn’t feel sufficiently proficient or practiced in a technique, but felt it might be helpful to the client, you could, of course, refer the client for more specialized training (e.g., mindfulness meditation) in a particular area.

A further note on “matching.” We hope it is clear that our intent has not been merely to present techniques, but to provide a conceptual framework within which to fit the interventions, so it is clear when and why to use them, tailoring and refining them based on the client’s control profile and goal.

For example, as we have discussed, research has shown that the SCI can differentiate Control Profiles for clinical disorders—e.g., depression, generalized anxiety, panic attacks etc. While we believe clinical diagnosis is important, it should also be clear that we believe looking systematically at the specifics of the area of concern (the assaults to a person’s sense of control) and then arriving at tailored and matched content building blocks to address those concerns are equally, if not more, important.

In this way, although we did not give you specific “cook-book” answers to your self-management project, we did provide guidelines and principles that hopefully helped you develop strategies and skills so you can come up with your own answers that work best for you. It is our hope that this process of self-examination can help give you a more thorough knowledge of yourself--your values, goals, and style--what works best for you—so that you can then go through the same process, as appropriate, with your clients in the next module. We are aware that the level of self-exploration in many areas (e.g., the top of the hour glass in Module 2.2; the nuance and blending of different modes in

Module 2.4; and the in-depth discussion of decision-making, building blocks, and domains in this Module) is more than will be necessary for many, if not most, clients. However, our belief is that this depth of exploration will be beneficial for you—both personally, and as a therapist who now has a broad, comprehensive foundation on issues of relevance regarding control with which to facilitate your client’s healing and well-being.

HOMEWORK:

3.3.A. After exploring the building blocks in more depth, do you feel you would like to make any revisions or alterations to your self-management contract (Appendix 3.7) showing how you plan to create and match interventions to address your concern and goals.

3.3.B. Domains. In your “Control Diary” are there insights you would like to explore in terms of your own personal domain preferences?

3.3.C. Building blocks. Continue to note your experiences with different building blocks and your level of trust in each, particularly noting when two seem opposed, when one seems wiser than others. Also note when two or more work together particular well. (Do you notice any difference in your answers to the above depending upon the domain/ context/ area of concern being addressed?) How able are you to integrate different building blocks: e.g., analysis and feeling, emotion and thought, body and mind; self exploration, guidance and support from others? In your decision making process? In your development of interventions for your self-management project? In your “life” in general?

3.3.D. Again, in your control diary, please note your experiences with different interventions. Note not only what you think and feel during the intervention, but also what your expectations are *before* you begin, as well as what you’re feeling before, during, and after. How does this change with continued practice?

3.3 E. Either in class, (and/or for a homework assignment) it may be helpful to look back in your journal at your answers to the questions in Module Two, and elaborate on your answers based on what your explorations in this section in terms of

“ Describe what it would be like to have optimal control (using both modes, alone or in combination):

*Of your body?

*Of your thoughts?

* Of your emotions?

*Of your speech?

*Of your behavior?

*In your relationships with others?”

- *In your work setting
- *and finally, what would this mean in terms of self and other/other agency and your beliefs about the nature of the universe

Extra Credit: Monitoring downward and upward comparison: Noting the nature and focus of your attention, thoughts (stories), feelings, and sense of control (increase, decrease, positive, negative).

Downward Comparison. In this third module, we have discussed the pros and cons of downward comparison as a way to gain a sense of control. As an “extra credit” assignment, this week notice and monitor when you use downward comparison to gain a sense of control. Note in particular the antecedents that may “cause” that response to occur in you (e.g., feelings, people, events, situations); notice the story you tell in which downward comparison occurs. Also please observe mindfully with some care and curiosity the “consequences” --all the feelings that engaging in downward comparison might create in you, both positive and negative (e.g., compassion, empathy, haughtiness, superiority, condescension, gratefulness, self-acceptance). After observing several examples of this, are you able to discriminate times when downward comparison is helpful to you without being a rationalization that keeps you from addressing what may need to be faced; and/or without creating pejorative and negative comparisons toward others?

Upward Comparison. Also notice when you engage in attentional focus and stories involving upward comparison: e.g., when you compare yourself to those who have more financially, socially, intellectually, physically, or spiritually than you feel you do. What are the “antecedents” that create these comparative thoughts and feelings? What are the stories you tell yourself? How do they affect your sense of control? Finally, again notice the consequences of the stories and attentional focusing involving upward comparison. Do the stories create in you feelings of jealousy, self-pity, anger, victimhood?* Do they create feelings of aspiration for self-improvement, hope, a belief that there is more to which you might aspire? You may notice that upward comparison can lessen our short term sense of control. Sometimes this can be unskillful; sometimes it can inspire us to better ourselves and be helpful. What do you notice about the examples in your own life that you monitored?

This concludes the personal “self-exploration” portion of the manual. We’d like to say that now you know everything you need to know about yourself! But, of course, we all know that the journey is lifelong. So, as we turn in the next module to the clinical/therapeutic aspects of Control Therapy, we wish you continued growth and wisdom, both personally and professionally, on your journey.

* There is a lovely practice that Dalai Lama recommends to help address some of these negative emotions through cultivating sympathetic joy for others, especially when someone has a success or accomplishment. He notes that if we can be happy for others’ happiness, it will enhance our own many fold. There is, he notes, only one of us—but there are so many others. If we can be happy each time they are happy, think how happy we could be!