Drawing the ache in my head

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Jane, a pseudonym for a client of mine, mentioned her migraines to me during our first session. I have permission from "Jane" to write this article. Usually, during a first appointment, I do a lot of listening so that I can gain a clear picture of what's happening. This time, I interrupted, and I heard myself instinctively suggest, "What if you tried drawing your migraines?" We continued with the intake after this interruption seamlessly, and we later realized that this was an important to explore.

We continued to meet for weekly sessions. She started drawing her migraines at home as a regular practice. We took a two-month break from our sessions, and when we spoke last, she hadn't needed to take her medication for migraines in weeks. Jane asked over the phone, "How did you know this would work?"

I had no idea it would work! But it's so cool that something so simple has been so beneficial.

I've dealt with anxiety in the past and drawing my discomfort has really helped me through it. It was a suggestion from a therapist that wisely instructed,

"Give the chaos in your body a new place to be."

I like to think of this concept in an energetic sense. If chaos exists in me, I would prefer to channel it and see it with my eyes rather than feel it in my body. In the moment when my client told me about her migraines, I thought of this approach. I suggested drawing because it's harmless, satisfying, and a practical thing she could do.

The science behind this solution interests me, but I'm also intrigued by the mystery of it. I spent hours researching and doing in-depth reading about migraines. I came across a fascinating article by beloved neurologist and writer, Oliver Sacks, called A General Feeling of Disorder.

In this article, Dr. Sacks writes about the autonomic nervous system and its relation to migraines. He so eloquently states that, within a migraine:

"Indeed, everything comes and goes, and if one could take a scan or inner photograph of the body at such times, one would see vascular beds opening and closing, peristalsis accelerating or stopping, viscera squirming or tightening in spasms, secretions suddenly increasing or decreasing—as if the nervous system itself were in a state of indecision."

Scientific research indicates that the anatomy in a high percentage of people who suffer from migraines differs from people who do not. We know that something is different physiologically, but modern science doesn't have a clear picture of what it is yet. As a practitioner that works with physical structure, I know anatomy. However, I don't suppose that anyone's anatomy is a static object. We are living organisms; our anatomy is always in flux. As a whole, the body is moving in one direction and many directions at the same time. Function and structure intimately connect in our bodies. Our structure essentially demonstrates how our anatomy behaves over long periods of time. Since medical data generally shows anatomical differences in people who suffer from migraines, there is reason to assume there are also differences in function in those who suffer migraines.

What could be the difference in function? Hopefully, scientific researchers will find out soon! From my experience as a practitioner, I know that symptomology does not directly reflect the origin of the problem in the body. The language of the physical body is more complex than that. In reality, most chronic issues result from the perfect storm of original problems that set the body on its course, which leads to a chronic symptom later. It can seem particularly spooky that most of this process happens beneath our awareness.

The Circle of Willis

The difference form for those who suffer from migraines might be found in the vascular network beneath and around the brain. The Circle of Willis is an arterial network that surrounds the stalk of the pituitary gland beneath the brain, regulating oxygenated blood to the brain. Research on migraines has identified some physiological components of the cause. Many articles have been written about an incomplete Circle of Willis and how it relates to migraines. People who suffer from migraines are predisposed to having a different structure for this arterial network, which looks like a circle, only not fully closed. Other sources contradict the theory that the Circle of Willis is involved in migraines. An article from the National Library of Medicine states:

"For much of the later part of the twentieth century, a rather straightforward concept dominated thinking about migraine [...The incomplete Circle of

Willis...] It is now clear that [this] "Vascular Hypothesis" is untenable as an explanation for migraine pathophysiology."

Researchers who study migraines are working hard to develop and progress treatments. Meanwhile, people continue to suffer from migraines, which produce a general feeling of disorder. The autonomic nervous system is not behaving harmoniously, and as a result, chaos in the vascular structures to and from the brain ensues. I think this chaos within the body accumulates overtime. So, how does a general feeling of disorder, manifested in migraines and other issues, come to be a part of our internal behaviors?

This chaos may be the object at the end of the path that our vascular system has become accustomed to taking. New behaviors in the vascular system can be developed and can become automatic. My client is training her autonomics to behave differently. If migraines result from the nervous system's indecision, the act of drawing the headache potentially creates a new, more pleasant pathway, changing its course enough to elicit relief.

Migraines are a response to unfortunate fluctuations in how our autonomics behave. We are each unique, and this unfortunate fluctuation in our autonomics is a subject of continuing study. Each person should explore and discover possible solutions for themselves, ideally with the help of a loving friend, family member, or therapist.