

Somatic Patterning

Supplemental Instructor Materials

Chapter 1: Fundamentals of Somatic Patterns and Movement

Note: Numbered points in the chapter's reading list, objectives, and summary are correlated and focus on topics that I think will be most relevant for massage students.

In brackets after suggested readings and objectives, you will find an occasional reference from a subsequent chapter that expands on material introduced in this chapter. Please contact your education director for answers to the chapter questions.

Chapter 1 Suggested Readings

1. Somatic Patterning, pp. 8-9
2. Somatic Patterning, pp. 8-9
3. Somatic Patterning, pp. 8-9
4. A Historical Perspective, pp. 9-10
5. Posture and Attitude, pp.11-12
6. The Human Movement Crisis, p.12
7. Somatic Patterning Approaches and Pattern Recognition, pp. 12-14
8. Biological and Behavioral Foundation of Movement, pp.14-18
9. Sensorimotor Learning, p.18-19
10. Imprinting and Family Patterns, p. 20
11. Defense Mechanisms, Fight, Flight, Freeze Responses, p. 24, [*Stress, pp. 321-322*]
12. Muscular Armor and Bracing, p. 24, [*Reichian Therapy, pp. 352-358*]
13. Habituation and Holding Patterns, The Startle "Reflex," pp. 25-26
14. Emotional Tone, p. 27
15. Parallels between Human and Other Animal Movements, Prevertebral Patterns, and Vertebral Patterns, pp. 28-30
16. Postural Integration, pp. 32- 34

Chapter 1 Objectives

1. Define somatics.
2. Define patterning.
3. Define sensorimotor amnesia.
4. Compare external and internal models of illness.
5. Define posture.
6. Explain the role of stress and modern lifestyles in body and movement problems.
7. Define pattern recognition and provide an example.
8. List four human adaptations that shape our movement patterns.
9. Define the sensorimotor loop and sensorimotor learning.
10. Discuss how family patterns shape posture and movement.
11. Describe defense mechanisms and fight, flight, or freeze patterns.
12. Describe muscular armoring.
13. Define habituation and holding patterns.
14. Describe the origin of emotional tone in holding patterns.
15. Describe the sequence of movement patterns in early motor development.
16. Describe how the postural muscles maintain postural tone.

Chapter 1 Summary

1. In the context of body therapies, somatics refers to body patterns that are outward reflections of mental and psychological patterns, including thoughts, emotions, belief systems, family patterns, injuries, and traumas. The term “somatic” is synonymous with “body-mind.”
2. Patterning refers to any method of changing body patterns of posture and movement in order to improve overall well-being as well as specific joint and muscle functions.
3. Sensorimotor amnesia is a term coined by the Feldenkrais teacher Thomas Hannah to describe a condition in which a person has poor body awareness that results in the loss of control underlying poor posture and faulty movements.
4. Before modern allopathic medicine, illness was thought to always be caused from an invasion of outside organisms such as viruses and bacteria. The modern view of illness recognizes that many illnesses develop from the internal source of the body’s response to stress.
5. Posture is the relative alignment of the body parts. It is also the stance a person takes in life, which reflects attitude, psychological issues, and even one’s family history.
6. Stress and modern lifestyles have created a sedentary culture in which people have become overactive mentally and underactive physically, which creates a body-mind split. As a result, people suffer from a widespread condition of faulty body patterns.
7. Human beings have an innate ability to recognize patterns of posture and movement. A person can take in the overall body pattern at a glance. In addition, the eye is drawn to breaks in the flow of movement and distortions in shape. In somatic patterning, it is important to develop recognition of the overall pattern before analyzing its parts.
8. Human patterns of movement have evolved through four general adaptations: Upright posture, which affects the efficiency of all movement patterns; opposable thumbs, which allow the hands to move in an articulate range that requires highly mobile arms and shoulders; neoteny, which gives us the ability to learn throughout life; and the cerebral cortex, which provides humans with the unique ability to think reflectively and to be aware of awareness.
9. The sensorimotor loop is the ongoing circular process of receiving sensation from the environment or from within the body, then responding with motor responses via movement. Sensorimotor learning is the initial stage of learning in which an infant continually interacts with the environment, responding to each new perception through movement exploration. Sensorimotor learning underlies and shapes neuromuscular patterning, which is observable in patterns of posture and movement.

10. A baby initially instinctively learns and takes on the parents' and/or caregivers' somatic patterns through the process of imprinting, which is the process of imitating parents' speech, posture, mannerisms in movement, and so forth.
11. Defense mechanisms initially develop and become patterned into the body when a child does not feel safe, which triggers stress responses that occur during a fight, flight, or freeze response. These responses are states of muscular readiness that provide energy to fend off threats.
12. When a person's defense mechanisms are repeatedly triggered, they habituate into muscular armoring, which is an unconscious pattern of holding the muscles in a state of continual contraction.
13. Habituation is the process of learning through repetition. Holding patterns are the chronic muscular contractions from defense responses that have become so habitual they feel normal.
14. Because muscular armor develops when a person is under both physical and emotional stress, holding patterns usually have a psychological component, which gives them an emotional quality or tone. *[For expanded material on this topic, see Chapter 15: Body-based Psychotherapy.]*
15. Every infant goes through the same series of developmental movement patterns from birth to walking. These early motor patterns, which include prevertebral patterns such as naval radiation and vertebral patterns such as spinal, homolateral, and contralateral patterns, are important for establishing the neuromuscular pathways that underlie all movement. *[For expanded material on this topic, see Chapter 7: Developmental Patterning.]*
16. Postural muscles situated along the core of the body work in light isometric contractions to hold the body upright. A postural reflex called postural sway causes a subtle swaying motion that assists the return of venous blood from the legs to the heart and can be used to promote a fluid, natural postural stance. *[For expanded material on this topic, see Chapter 9: Postural Stabilization.]*

Chapter 1 Questions

*Note: Make sure to pay attention to the italics in some of the questions because they ask you to identify the statement that **does not** refer to the topic of the question, or to identify the **ineffective** or **false** answer.*

1. Identify which of the following statements *does not* describe somatics.
 - a. Somatics is the body-mind connection.
 - b. Somatics describes how body patterns reflect psychological patterns.
 - c. Somatics was coined to describe the body-mind therapies.
 - d. Somatics refers to the soma, which is the torso without the limbs.

2. Identify which of the following statements *does not* describe patterning.
 - a. Any method or process a person uses to change body-mind patterns.
 - b. Visualizing other people's body patterns getting better.
 - c. Movement exercises practiced to improve joint and muscle function.
 - d. Movement and self-awareness exercises used to improve posture.

3. Sensorimotor amnesia is
 - a. the process of relearning how to walk after an injury.
 - b. undeveloped body awareness that results in faulty physical patterns.
 - c. losing body awareness after hitting and injuring one's head.
 - d. neurological damage from injury that results in movement dysfunctions.

4. Many body problems result from internal sources, which are
 - a. viruses and bacteria that invade the body.
 - b. chemical pollutants in the water, air, and food.
 - c. general stresses that cause defensive muscular holding patterns.
 - d. overexposure to environmental extremes, such as wind and sun.

5. Which of the following statements *does not* describe posture?
 - a. Posture is the relative position of the body and alignment of joints.
 - b. Posture is an attitude, the stance that a person takes towards the world.
 - c. Posture is a physical state that reflects a psychological state.
 - d. Posture is the movement of the body from one position to the next.

6. Which of the following statements describes an *ineffective* use of pattern recognition in massage and bodywork.
 - a. You should always look at specifics of a body pattern before looking at the overall pattern.
 - b. By recognizing your own body patterns, you can begin to change and improve them.
 - c. You can see the client's whole body pattern at a glance.
 - d. Your eye will be naturally drawn to breaks in the overall pattern, which can point to areas of muscle and joint imbalance.

7. Which of the following statements *does not* describe the upright human posture?
 - a. Human beings are the only animals with a vertical posture.
 - b. Patterns of posture have no relationship to patterns of movement.
 - c. Upright posture gives people the ability to freely turn the head.
 - d. Upright posture underlies the uniquely human pattern of bipedal gait.

8. Which of these statements best describes the sensorimotor loop?
 - a. The continual process of receiving sensory input and having motor responses.
 - b. Being aware of your bodily sensations and describing them.
 - c. Describing reflexive movements that occur automatically.
 - d. Reflective thinking about what you feel in your body.

9. Which of the following statements is *false*?
 - a. Imprinting is the process of learning body patterns by imitating caregivers.
 - b. Habituation is the process of learning body patterns through repetition.
 - c. Defense mechanisms trigger muscular relaxation through the whole body.
 - d. Sensorimotor learning is a learning process involving movement explorations.

10. Which of the following statements describing defense mechanisms is *false*?
 - a. They occur when a threatening feeling triggers a fight, flight, or freeze response.
 - b. They trigger muscular armoring and bracing to help a person fend off the threat.
 - c. Prolonged muscular armoring develops into a holding pattern.
 - d. Holding patterns have absolutely no effect on personality or posture.

Chapter 1 Suggested Learning Activities

Note: Any exercise titled “Patterning Exercise” can be found in the current edition. Page numbers for these exercises (inserted in parentheses) are included to help instructors utilize activities during lessons based on other segments of the book. “Skills Exercises” are not found in the current edition but will be included in the 2nd edition of SP.

Patterning Exercise #1: Family Trends in Somatic Patterns (p. 16)

Objectives:

- To reflect on how their family experiences helped shape their somatic patterns.
- To develop compassion for the difficult body patterns with which other people struggle.
- To set boundaries about what they disclose when discussing individual body issues.
- To practice communication skills for talking about another individual’s somatic patterns.

Exercise:

Have students write a about how their family patterns have shaped their posture (in a paragraph or a single page). Instruct the students to use descriptive language, such as “My dad tends to slouch, and I picked up this habit,” or “My parents yelled a lot, and as a result, I carry a lot of tension in my shoulders.”

Set up parameters by talking about self-disclosure. Tell your students to disclose *only* the information about family patterns that they think will help them learn about body patterns and that they are comfortable discussing with others. Disallow information that is mocking, rude, or negative, or that breaks the confidentiality of any member of the student’s family.

Lead a group discussion and talk about the student’s papers. Direct the discussion toward objective descriptions of body patterns, which areas of their bodies students think could benefit from massage, and how they want to receive the massage.

Doing this exercise will help students learn that it’s okay to share personal issues in class if they carefully set boundaries to protect their own feelings and privacy.

Skills Exercise: Picking up information about body patterns from off-hand client comments

Objectives:

- To improve communications skills.
- To help students recognize and interpret information about body patterns that clients share in indirect ways.

Writing exercise:

Have students write down short phrases that describe their own body patterns or body patterns they see. These phrases will reflect the kinds of phrases a client might use during the interview process at the beginning of a session. If students have cell phones and want to text comments describing body patterns to each other, this could be fun. Just remind them ahead of time that their texts may be read aloud in class by others.

Group discussion:

1. Ask students to share several of the comments and briefly discuss what they might mean in terms of somatic patterns. For example, someone might say, “My body has a mind of its own,” which could indicate that the student has body patterns over which he or she does not feel a sense of control. Or someone might say, “I’m carrying the load for everyone else,” which could indicate a pattern of shoulder tension and compression.
2. Discuss several of these phrases in class to help the students interpret them. Suggest that student always observe the body pattern of the person making the comment to see how the two relate.

Skills Exercise: Pattern Recognition

Objectives:

- Students will recognize that each person’s holding patterns developed for a good reason, often as a defense pattern that helped the person survive a stressful situation. This recognition helps students develop compassion for their own and their clients’ body problems, as well as patience for stubborn body patterns.
- Students will practice keeping the client’s identity anonymous when receiving supervision and peer support.
- Students will practice communicating about body patterns and posture in a respectful, objective, and nonjudgmental way.

Homework:

Have students bring in a photo of a person from their own photo collection or from the Internet. (These will need to be hardcopy photos rather than photos saved on phones or computers so that they can easily be passed around the room as needed.) The person in each photo should have a distinct body posture that either reminds the student of someone or is someone he or she knows. To keep the people in photos anonymous, provide small sticky notes that students can place over the face of the person in their photos during class.

Small group discussion (10 minutes):

Break students into groups of three for discussions. Have one student in each group agree to be the group’s representative. That student will take brief notes of the main topics that come up in the group, then report one main lesson that their group learned from the exercise to the large group. Instruct students that each should take three minutes to show his or her photo to the group and answer the following questions about the postural pattern in the photo:

1. What is the personality or emotional tone of this person's posture?
2. What life experiences do you think this person might have had that shaped the development of this pattern?
3. Which areas of this person's body do you think have tight muscles and holding patterns?
4. Where do you think this person might want massage to release the tension and improve skeletal alignment and muscular balance?

Tell the students that you will tell them when to switch roles.

Entire group discussion (10 minutes):

Lead a group discussion in which a representative from each small group reports several things that the group discovered when looking at postural patterns. After each group reports, recap the main points. During the recap, integrate several main points from the students' reports with the learning objectives.

Patterning Exercise #6: Dynamic Postural Sway (p. 35)

Adapted for a group (15 minutes)

Objectives:

- To increase an awareness of fluid versus rigid posture.
- To recognize the resonance we have with each other's bodies.
- To practice an exercise that relaxes holding patterns and cultivates a fluid posture.

Exercise:

1. Have the group members stand in a circle. Briefly explain the objectives of this exercise, and then assign each student to be a 1 or 2 by having them count off in a sequence.
2. Break the group into pairs with a 1 and 2 in each pair. Have the individuals in each pair stand next to each other, put their arms around each other's waist, and lightly touch their hips together. Make sure they are not leaning into or pressing into each other. They should be connected but each student should also be able to freely sway and walk on his or her own. Then have them walk together to warm up. Instruct them to stop when you say stop. When they stop, ask them to notice the subtle swaying of postural sway.
3. Bring the pairs back to the circle with couples still linked arm and arm, standing with their partners.
4. Instruct them to sway a little with their partners:
"As you sway back and forth, sense your weight shifting between your heels and your toes. Sense the place where your thorax comes over your pelvis, and notice when it goes behind your pelvis. If you are used to leaning back, when you find a plumb posture, it will feel like you're leaning forward. Lightly contract your lower abdominals to stabilize your pelvis and keep your lower back from arching."
5. Instruct the 1's to hold their bodies really still and stop swaying.

6. As the 1's hold still, ask the 2's what it feels like and what effect their partners' holding still has on their own swaying.
7. Instruct the 1's to relax and return to postural swaying, and then ask the 2's what it felt like when their partners stopped swaying. Students usually say things like, "I got rigid to match my partner," or "I felt like a wave hitting a breaker wall."
8. After both members of the pair are swaying again, repeat steps 4-6 but have the 2's hold still so that the 1's can feel the effect, and then release.
9. End the exercise with a short recap. Point out how somatically tuned in we all are to each other's bodies, how we can feel and resonate with another person when he or she is fluid and can also feel muscular holding. Suggest that the students practice feeling their postural sway whenever they are standing around waiting for something. Also suggest that they begin to watch people in public places to notice whether they are swaying or holding.