



Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute

...because words are not enough

The Role of the Body in Group
Psychotherapy:
A Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Approach
Australian Childhood Foundation Conference
Melbourne, Australia
July, 2018
Pat Ogden, Ph.D & Bonnie Goldstein, Ph.D

The Body is Experience Dependent:

Postures and movements that are most effective in producing desired outcomes, or at least minimizing negative repercussions, are repeated over & over.
Ogden et al 2006



The "Somatic Narrative"

Reflects and sustains the implicit self

Reflects trauma and attachment history, related beliefs, expectations, emotional biases, and affect regulation capacities

Continuously anticipates the future and powerfully determines behavior

Communicates implicitly to self and to others
Ogden 2015





Basic Premises of Sensorimotor Psychotherapy for Groups

- Since the body reflects and sustains the implicit self, movement and posture – the somatic narratives of members -- are viable targets for group intervention.
- A group context offers a unique opportunity to identify and change the implicit self by addressing somatic narratives.
- The somatic narrative is integrated with cognitive and emotional correlates.

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Ogden & Goldstein in press

Possible Physical Correlates Related to Group Themes

Posture: Assertion, self-confidence/esteem, depression
 Proximity seeking actions (reach, eye contact): social connection, support, friendship, intimacy
 Mobilizing actions of defense: Trauma, freezing, helplessness, shut down, empowerment
 Boundaries: Preferences, relationship, differentiation, identity, conflict
 Group support for positive emotions: Fun, pleasure, joy, laughter and other positive emotions

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Posture

Postures are positions from which only select emotions and behaviors can be possible (Barlow, 1973).

Habitual postures, such as a chronically slumped spine or "military" posture, influence our emotions, relationships, self image how we think.

Different postures are adaptive in different contexts (familial, cultural, professional, etc).
 Ogden 2014



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The brain as an “anticipation machine” (Siegel)

The well-traveled neural networks enable the brain to predict the future and anticipate experience.

Physical structure and posture also predict the future and turn the future into a story that reflects the past.

Ogden 2014

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The brain develops in response to

“the unique demands of a given environment to express from its broad genetic potential those characteristics that best fit the child’s world; different genes can be expressed, and different neural networks can be organized... to best fit that family, culture, and environment” (Perry 2009, p. 245).

Group interaction offers opportunities for experiences—through the lens of interpersonal neurobiology, our brain adapts to our environment and become increasingly efficient within that particular context.

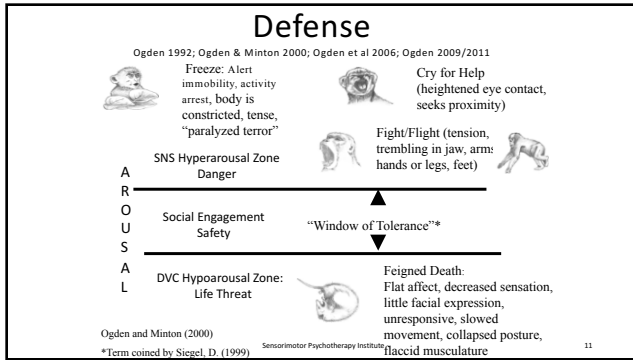
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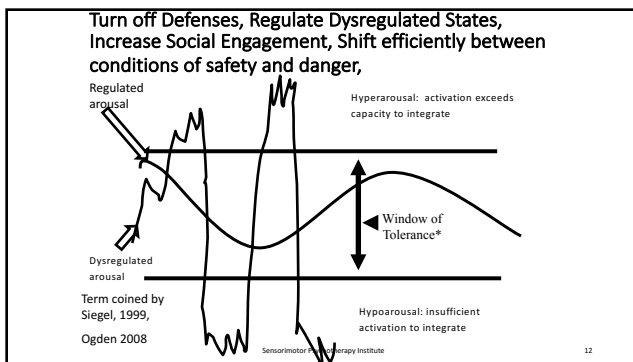
The Implicit Self is Reflected and Sustained by Physical Patterns

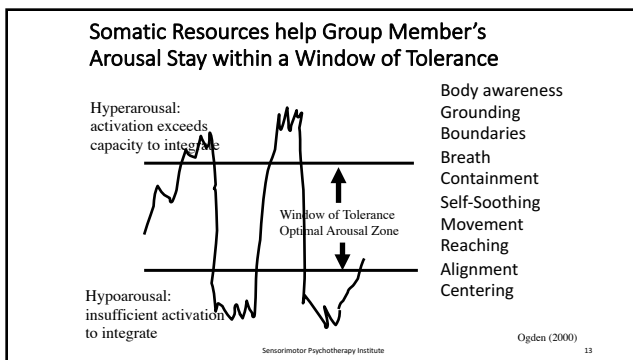
- If **no one is there to reach back**, we stop reaching out (proximity seeking in group)
- If our attachment figures **ridiculed us when we were vulnerable** we stop seeking proximity when we feel needy.
 - If **standing upright with our heads held high brought criticism, unwanted attention, or more abuse, or was not welcomed or desired** by our attachment figures, we will slump and keep our heads down, offering opportunities for posture exercises in group.

Ogden 2014

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Group Psychotherapy-there are Multiple Windows of Tolerance

Member's Arousal

Leader's Arousal

Member's Window of Tolerance

Leader's Window of Tolerance

Hyperarousal

Hypoarousal

Interpersonal neurobiology helps us understand how via relationships, we regulate and dysregulate each other's ANS with facial gestures, actions, expressions and vocal communication. The brain is experience-dependent and group offers myriad opportunities for brain development within the dynamic **interplay of states of arousal**.

A. Weisort, 2014, Ogden 2017

Proximity-seeking Actions

Are organized by the attachment system to secure the nearness of attachment figures.

Cry	Approach
Facial Expression	Cling, hold on
Vocalizations	Eye contact/gaze
Reach	Receive Support

Proximity-seeking actions are modified according to the response of attachment figures. Ogden 2011

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Reach

Proximity-seeking actions are based on predictions of whether attachment figures are accessible and how probable it is that they will be empathic & supportive if needed.

Ogden 2014

"There won't be anyone there."

"I don't turn to others for support."

"I'd like to reach out"

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Working with the Somatic Narrative in Group Contexts

In a supportive atmosphere, group members:

- Learn about their own somatic narrative
- Explore the meaning of their somatic narrative
- Try out new actions
- Teach each other new actions
- Learn new actions through observation

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Ogden & Goldstein in, press

Proximity-Seeking Exercises

- *Through the lens of Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, we co-create an experiment exploring proximity seeking exercises, in which group members practice reaching out, or working dyadically, with push-pull
- * Exploring the edge of moments that arise in group, where this happens in relationship, we look at what happens within, elucidating the organization of experience

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Sensorimotor Psychotherapy in Groups aims to:

- *Facilitate closer observation of other's bodily expressions of their experiences
- *Address the meta level of communication (rather than content) through the physical experiment
- *Create new experiences rather than only "talk about."
- *Enable each member to learn new ways to self-regulate (enable greater self-regulation during group session, especially when triggered).

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Integrate Two Basic Actions

Ogden et al 2006

Proximity-Seeking

- Leaning towards
- Reaching to you with eyes
- Reaching out
- Seeking movement in hands, arms
- Moving closer

Distance Seeking

- Leaning away
- Looking down or away
- Pushing Motions
- Avoidance movement in hands, arms
- Moving away

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Boundaries

"The somatic sense of boundary is based on the felt sense of one's preferences, wishes, and rights, as well as on the felt sense of safety. This somatic sense is differentiated from a cognitive understanding of boundaries."



Ogden, Minton & Pain, 2006

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Match, Mismatch, Rematch

- Matching occurs only about one third of the time between infant and caregiver (Malatesta et al., 1989).
- It is adaptive to make use of a flexible interactive process of *match, mismatch, rematch* (Tronick & Cohn, 1989).

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Why Sensorimotor Psychotherapy For Group Treatment

1. SP Interventions establishing new capacity for effective actions are designed with components that model, teach, and practice, collaboratively fostering integration and generalization of new skills among group members.
2. SP interventions address trauma in the body evidenced in group members' somatic symptoms, arousal patterns, abrupt state changes, posture and movement, relational patterns, avoidance.

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Why Sensorimotor Psychotherapy For Group Treatment (2)

3. The SP therapist is able to titrate interventions in group therapy with emphasis on maintaining playful states and social engagement to address automatic avoidance and hypervigilance associated with treatment post trauma.
4. SP Trauma processing techniques utilize multiple, non-verbal methods of communicating and processing trauma within the group.

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Why Sensorimotor Psychotherapy for Group Treatment (3)

5. SP is developed specifically to address disrupted information processing at sensory, motor, procedural, emotional and cognitive levels, addressing core areas of functioning compromised by early exposure to trauma.
6. SP addresses symptoms of bodily dysregulation through teaching basic body awareness and expanding tolerance for bodily sensations, sensory experiences, and affects through carefully co-created group experiences.

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Why Sensorimotor Psychotherapy for Group Treatment (4)

- 7. SP Provides experiential group education in somatic resources for increased self and co-regulation for group members—and leaders, followed up by repetitive and varied opportunities to practice.
- 8. SP techniques are designed to access and interrupt procedural tendencies, habits and chronic orientation patterns of group members.

Why Sensorimotor Psychotherapy for Group Treatment (5)

- Group format provides an authentic in-the-moment opportunity to form, foster, and sustain relationships, consider new viewpoints and stances, and explore verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Rather than “talking about” it, the significance of the somatic narrative and new experiences are prized in the group setting.

Play, Joy and Positive Emotions


experienced as body sensation, expressed through movement.

[J]oy lowers the neural thresholds for perceiving life events as being positive and hopeful while raising those for perceiving events as negative and hopeless” Panksepp 2000, p. 186



Assisted Jump for Joy

Physically supports high arousal
positive emotion


↑ Pairs high arousal with pleasure in an
experience with others who
physically and emotionally support
your joy.

Ogden 2013

Working Top down and Bottom Up Integrates Brain, Emotion and Body

• **Cognitive Processing**
The Thinking Brain: Conceptual information
processing, reasoning, logic, meaning-making and
decision making.

• **Emotional Processing**
The Feeling Brain: Articulation and expression of
feeling and affect; adds motivational coloring to
sensorimotor and cognitive processing.

• **Sensorimotor Processing**
The Doing Brain: Processing of the body; sensory
and physiological sequences, fixed action patterns,
defensive responses, and motor actions.

Ogden & Minton,
2000

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Top Down

Bottom Up

Ogden & Minton,
2000

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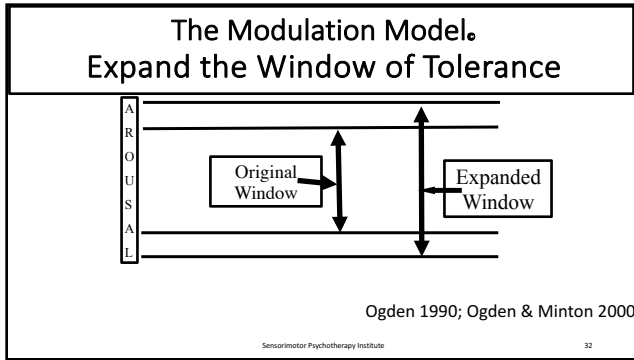
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Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Group Approach

- Attend to both the somatic and verbal narratives
 - Identify themes in the group
 - Track for somatic signs of the implicit self related to themes
 - Work Bottom up: Explore themes through movement, posture and gestures
 - Use SPs embedded relational mindfulness
 - Integrate beliefs, emotion, and the somatic narrative
 - Create experiential homework to practice new competencies and ways of being
- Ogden & Goldstein in press

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Pat Ogden Ph.D. Founder

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