Body Language – What Is Your Body Saying About You?

Did you know that our body, mind, and spirit work together to reflect what is happening with each other? One of my clients was struggling with self-esteem and confidence at our first meeting; it was evident by how she held herself before she even spoke a word. Her head was dropped, she was slouched over, her back was rounded, her eyes were downcast. The message her body was sending to the world (whether she knew it or not) was that she wanted to hide, be small, go unseen.

Only months later, I sit across the table from a confident, vibrant gal. She has a boldness that manifests in her posture. Her head is held high; her shoulders are back and down. She appears taller, larger, and has so much joy it is evident. The remarkable thing is that she is the same woman, but if you had met her in both scenarios, you would never make the connection.

Somatics was founded by Thomas Hanna (1928–1990). Hanna was known for his ideas around Sensory-Motor Amnesia, a situation in which the body forgets how to move normally. But, what does somatics mean, exactly? Soma is "the body as perceived from within." Cool, huh? Somatics comes from the Greek, somatikos, which stems from soma, the body.

Greek, shmeek…what does it really mean? As much as we try, we cannot separate the inner and outer landscapes of our body.

Hanna's ideas were based on those of Hans Selye and Moshé Feldenkrais. They believed, and built practices around, the idea that there is an innate and intuitive interconnection of body to our mind/spirit. Our body is telling us our story all the time. Are you listening? It's the most fascinating story of our lives. Here it is.

Your body, your posture, and your energy are constantly communicating. They are telling you (and the whole world) what is really going on. Do you know what story you are telling? Are you confident, happy, self-assured, and easy going? Or, maybe something else.

Think about the body in the context of dating. Why is that two equally attractive women can enter a bar and yet one is hit on and approached by men while the other is not? Or, why is it that we are put off by one individual but feel interested or drawn in by another, regardless of how they look objectively?

Of course, there could be a host of reasons why this could be. But, have you ever felt as if your inner message or dialogue is being translated by your body and broadcast for all to see (and have you ever received someone else's message, regardless of what they are saying with their words)? Well, that is what is happening whether or not your are aware of it. We are sending messages whether we are aware of them or not. So, what are you putting out there?

Part of being self-aware is being aware of what you are saying with your body. It's often an area of challenge for individuals who are especially logical, left brain dominant, or rely heavily on their intellect functioning. We all have parts of ourselves that we are more confident in displaying or more comfortable with, and those other parts of us are speaking, too.

Our body not only communicates but has memory. Peter Levine has been a pioneer in our decade of such findings. We are finally making that mind/body connection in issues like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or anxiety disorders, and pretty much anything that the body/mind/spirit experiences as a shock to their combined, integrated, and whole system. For some people, it takes something big, all encompassing, such as battle in a war, a near death experience or accident, whereas others may find something more subtle and intangible—like an

emotional blow—is what knocks them flat. It could look like abandonment from their father, an emotionally abusive relationship, or being bullied as a child. We each have a different experience of what is traumatic. It has nothing to do with strength or willpower. Things you won't understand at first, seemingly simple or small things, can be a mind/body/spirit turning point.

These wounds run deep, and the body holds them until you are ready to process them more consciously. For some, this maybe sooner than others. Other people hold on to trauma for years, and sometimes the body protects itself by not allowing the conscious mind to process these traumas. Remember our body's main job is protecting us and loving us up.

Fibromyalgia is often one of these situations where there is physical pain without a known cause. As something that is not easy to see, not easy to test for, and is often caused by something non-physical, it has left modern day conventional clinicians baffled. Syndromes like Fibromyalgia and other mind/body syndromes are rising to the surface and gaining more credibility in our society. The stigma that has been around emotional trauma and the physical disease it can cause is lifting. There is more awareness of these issues as we continue to recognize this intense mind/body connection.

The body has memory, just like the mind, and when we allow for these memories to come forth, we can release them and allow for more space for new memories and goodness. As a gal who has lots of memories in this bod of hers—having overcome my share of anxiety, stress, and a handful of near death experiences and medical interventions—I want to share what has allowed for levity and sweetness in my mind and my muscles.

Get Your Groove On!

Movement and dance can help you become more self-aware and let that body wisdom do its magic. It is very healing to move our

bodies for several reasons, but using our bodies to fully communicate and express ourselves is an important piece in creating that somatic connection and integrating our whole selves fully.

Get In Touch

Massage and touch are another one of my favorite things to do in general, but touch is powerful in creating healing on a deep level. It not only frees up physical blocks in the body's connective tissue, bringing oxygen to all of our cells and decreasing inflammation, it also releases the hormones of connection, love, and trust (oxytocin). If you aren't getting regular touch (like weekly), then save up and get yourself to a good bodyworker. Touch is healing and also deepens the mind/ body/ spirit connection.

Stretch It Out

Stretching is ahhh so good. Taking time out to give your bod a good old ringing out is both cathartic and good for ya. I remember back to when I first started to take yoga. At that time of my life, I was running, doing, spinning to survive. In that dizzying time of life, yoga was the only time I was still, other than when I was flat out in bed, exhausted. We would have a great workout of challenging poses, and I found that I could feel emotions move up to the surface when I was still and in my breath. Some days it was frustration, sadness, or extreme joy—and it always surprised me. Many people say yoga is the only way to get in touch with our deepest selves and let those buried emotions out, but I think it's just one way of doing what people have been doing for millions of years. Breath + Moving = Health.

Give It a Breather

You can push through exercise or running or life and fail to really sigh or breathe. But when you let down and do deep breathing combined with movement like pilates or barre or

stretching and watch the healing begin. Seriously. Taste the richness of deep breathing and exhaling

I used to exercise, lift weights, and move through my day while holding my breath. I would be tense and rigid, ready to react, stuck in fight or flight. Then I started to breathe, not only take in air but exhale and let it go along with releasing it fully from my lungs. Wow, what a difference it makes. I had no idea I had not been breathing properly. Once I became aware of this, I was able to watch for it and check in with my body through the day. So, when things get busy, and stress starts to flow, I do a quick check in and see how I am inside of my body. Am I feeling tight and where are my shoulders? Then I take a big breath, and let it go.

Breathing is supply of oxygen and also the source of relaxation. When we take a big breath, a sigh, we are giving our bodies the message of “hey, it’s all good”, “you are a-okay”, “you have enough” verses what not breathing does. So now you. What gives you the full exhale?

How do you feel when you are breathing and releasing and emptying your lungs? How can you remember to breath today? See how it makes you feel to breath deep down and exhale every bit of from your lungs.

Have a Sit (Or Stand) In

We can change our mood, our outlook, even our ability to complain or gossip by just changing our posture. Try it on next time you find yourself engaging in a regular complaint. Check out how you are using your body and do something radically different, like putting raising your hand or standing on one foot. You will find the complaint vanishes, or your mood changes. Change your body and your mind/emotions will follow.

Talk It Out

Just because your pain cannot been seen by the human eye does not mean it is not real and having a real effect on your life. If you had a broken bone, you would go to the doctor to have it set. Or if you hit your head while playing and needed stitches (like my niece did recently), you would get the care you need, and you would do it now. When there is an emergency, you don't wait for tomorrow. When you are bleeding, you go to someone who can help. It's the same when you can't see it on the outside. Just because you aren't bleeding doesn't mean you aren't experiencing an emergency. Don't wait for it to go away magically. Tell someone – your doctor, your friend, your family member. There is love just waiting for you; so reach for it, dear one.

Your body is always rooting for you, speaking to you, and loving you.

Sources and Further Reading:

- *Emotional Recovery Seen Possible for Victims of Prolonged Abuse* – The New York Times
- *Demystifying Psychiatry* – Psychology Today
- *An Interview with Dr. Peter Levine* – Peoria Magazines
- *Truth Be Told: A Story of Success, Suicide & Survival* – Speakers on Healthcare
- *What Doctors Are Telling Us Even When They're Not Talking,* PAULINE W. CHEN, M.D.