Integration: A Whole-System Approach

Karen L. Bolesky

Karen L. Bolesky has been practicing structural integration (SI) since 1986 and is owner and director of Soma Institute of Neuromuscular Integration®, a licensed 750-hour program that teaches SI and massage. She has her BA in fine art and her MA in counseling, and a private practice in psychotherapy and SI, in addition to her role as a core instructor at the Institute. She has written a book, Bony Landmarks: Making Somatic Connections, which is available through soma@tx3.net. Her website is www.soma-institute.org.

Abstract

I assert that the structural integration process increases cooperation and harmony in the whole person dynamically through integration. This will be reviewed through the lens of the five elements of integration that are my focal points. The results of this cooperation and harmony will be functional advantages of complexity. This allows a greater collaborative response within the differentiated individual. This response is not only self-enhancing but will be enhanced in behavior with others. The bodymind is one. The synergy in an integrated bodymind produces a unified whole greater than the sum of the individual parts. This can “explain the progressive evolution of complexity in living systems.” Synergistic effects have been the drivers of cooperative relationships of all kinds at all levels in living systems.

A Whole-System Approach

Integrating structure is the pinnacle of all the work that we do. “Integration is not a function of the self; it is what the self is.” Integration makes SI stand completely apart from all other bodywork. All the release, the attention to symptoms, the attention to pain and dysfunction, the comprehension of how the body releases, all of what we do without integration would not hold or transform us to a coherent, well-organized self, able to function in interconnected behavior. The highly functioning body system depends on integration. Psychological or structural imbalance represents a threat to the evolving ease, harmony and self-organization possible.

“Integration allows a coherency throughout the (body) mind. It is how the mind creates a coherent self-assembly of information and energy flow across time and context. Integration creates the subjective experience of self.” This does not mean perfection. This means that this particular body and mind are working together to optimize the whole. The failure to integrate creates disorganization. We see this disorganization in the analysis of structure; however it exists psychologically and mentally simultaneously. Disorganization shows up in behavior and in the inability to think abstractly and creatively and respond clearly.

The mindset in the allopathic professions and much of the mindset in our own touch field are reflected in our “medical treatment work” and “fixing a problem.” This approach to bodywork is based on the cause-and-effect model, which is how we measure what happens in stimulus and response. This model is too simple, and it can hinder our efforts with an individual, because it leads us to forget that the whole bodymind is responding and adapting to forces that are internal and external simultaneously.

The breakthroughs that we have had in technology, especially quantum physics, call us to examine the cause-and-effect model and notice there is an inference that parts of the whole are separate and unrelated. Our whole thrust in structural integration is more related to the chaos theory which is a much clearer explanation of the body as a whole system. The thinking in chaos theory is more synergistic: that the parts are working together and cooperative rather than simplistic and predictable. The synergetics in any system is the explanation that the cooperative action of two or more stimuli results in a different or greater response than that of the individual stimuli. Observable change occurs. We are recognizing that our bodymind is much more complex than the cause-and-effect model implies.

Fascia and the inner architecture of the body are appropriately described as a tensegrity structure that works mechanically with the tension and compression continuum. In looking at the geometry of the body, we can reference the octahedron that possesses symmetry in all three axes and is a stable tensegrity structure. This is a clear comparison to the mechanical and tensional structure of the body and mind in a whole-system approach and particularly...
through the lens of optimizing symmetry and balance mechanically in the series and integrative work.

Integration is a balance that maximizes the whole system to allow greater complexity and diversity, from rigidity to excessive mobility and to awareness. This enhanced complexity allows the being to achieve not just stability but the felt sense of grounding and levity which supports the connection of bodymind.

As we consider Newton's first law of inertia: an object will remain at rest or in uniform motion unless acted on by an unbalanced force—we are encouraged to integrate. This is a profound reminder of the importance of releasing and integrating as we do with the ten series.

**Elements of Integration**

Structural integration brings all the segments of the body into an alignment that is integral with the line and working functionally within the gravitation field. Functionally we are optimizing the dynamic line of inertia. We have the line. That line is a straight line in the gravity field (vertically) unless the force is unbalanced; hence inertia. The line changes with an unbalanced force acting on a segment.

If we want a truly vital life, we must integrate our structure and function. Ida Rolf stated that “structure is behavior,” indicating that when we integrate structure, we will affect behavior.

There are five separate elements included. All five need to be in focus as we work to integrate the whole. These are the five elements that I personally like to see strengthened in my integrative work.

1. **Dynamic Equilibrium**

Dynamic equilibrium is the synergy where all parts are in balance. We see a person move and the body flows through space with ease and grace. This moment captures a sense of beauty, unity and strength, and our attention!

I just came through a period of having vertigo. Everything in my whole body lacked dynamic equilibrium. I walked like a “drunken sailor.” Nothing felt flowing and easy, including my mind and psychological level of irritation. It was a personal reminder of how our body feels when acted upon by an “unbalanced force.” As the vertigo abated, I could feel the verticality and ease move back into my whole self.

Forces are constantly acting on our structure. This requests the structure to change. The SI goal of balancing segments across the joints requests the shifting of the dynamics in the whole structure. The tensegrity of the integrated body will be more effectively capable of responding to the forces acting on it as the whole system maintains its equilibrium in the gravity field. In joints and segments, constant velocity occurs infrequently, mostly in connective tissue and extracellular matrix. The force of gravity is always vertically downward. Everything that contacts a segment creates either a static, translatory motion (vertical, or horizontal) or a rotatory motion. “A small change in the balance of forces can result in a substantive change in the static or dynamic state of the segment.”

This small change can change the integrity of a tensile structure. Any force on a balanced tensegrity system will be dispersed throughout the entire system evenly. If the integrity of the system is compromised, distortion occurs in the structure.

The line of gravity tends to act on segments across joints. The joint has a specific mobility and as long as nothing is out of balance in the mobility it will work dynamically. When a force acts on the joint that unbalances the joint, then the downward compressive force of gravity begins to have an effect on the dynamic equilibrium and our verticality. This force is often a tear, sprain, or strain in tendon or ligament.

Ligaments are more variable than tendons in that they are designed to withstand both compressive, shear force (an attempt for the body to move parts) and tensile force (elongation always). The work of the ligament is to stabilize joints.

This information gives us a hint about why we would want to balance segments across the joints in integrative work.

2. **The Soma Three Brain (Perceptions)**

The Soma Three Brain (perceptions) is a true model of an integrated self. This is a model used in the Soma Neuromuscular Integration® teaching to make observable to the client the various perceptions that we tend to operate using. This allows the person to have volition over their state of being, which can reduce stress and overwhelm. We can always opt for a more effective behavior if the current one is not working optimally. Using this model encourages a wider range of options than the dominant left-brain perception.
This brief outline gives an overview of the three perceptions that would increase integration and harmony in the person. My intent is not to teach this model in this article.

**Left-brain perception** is our linear mind that controls what we conceive of as consciousness. It is where we are achieving and trying to improve and do better.

**Supports:**
- Stability and grounding
- Linear organization
- Duty and goals

**Core-brain perception** is our body and how we live in our own body, our feelings and felt sense. When we lose our mind and come to our senses, we are in the core brain.

**Awakens:**
- Mobility
- Body orientation
- Experience and action

**Right-brain perception** is where we drift off and daydream, and all is wonderful. Studies have indicated that optimally a human should introspect every 60-90 minutes. This is our place of rest and inner connection.

**Releases:**
- Levity
- Spatial orientation
- Inspiration and compassion

3. Cross-Lateral Movement

In an integrated body we will see cross-lateral (athletic tradition) or contralateral (dance tradition) movement. Cross-lateral movement gives us access to the horizontal plane and emphasizes diagonal connections through opposite body quadrants, as well as diagonal lines in space. Also, in integrating all three planes (axes), spiraling movement is made possible. With cross-laterality we cross the midline of the body and integrate the two sides of the brain simultaneously. This underlies the integration of complex ideas. There are multiple crossovers in the body and brain. I want to illuminate one. We know that the right hemisphere of the brain crosses over at the eye and is connected to the left side of the body. Conversely, the left hemisphere of the brain crosses over at the eye and is connected to the right side of the body. Simply stated, this contralateral connection across the torso unites the two hemispheres of the brain within the body. This allows an availability of a wider range of complexity within the body which is not isolated from the perceptions that accompany these hemispheres. Cross-lateral movement has the possibility of allowing a “seamless perception of the world.”

The study of cross-lateral movement is a large and very involved topic of study. The aspect where I often find my clients need attention involves the connections through the torso. Cross-lateral movement is apparent when the opposite arm and leg move simultaneously. If the movement stops at the shoulder and hip, the trunk is held in a fixed position. To achieve true cross-laterality a flow from one shoulder through the torso and pelvis to the opposite hip must be operational. Functionally, these diagonal movements aid optimal use of the limbs particularly in large, forceful movements like kicking or throwing a ball.

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Expressive movement that is fully supported through the torso reveals a fuller and clearer communication of feeling. A true cross-lateral movement pays particular attention to the rotary process through the torso, which optimizes the counter-rotation of the spine. We know that the head and arms are considered most expressive in communication of feeling. The availability of the rotary function encourages greater expression through the arms and head. Exaggerated examples of inhibited cross-lateral connections with less expression of feeling are: someone with arms crossed across the chest (heart), walking with limited movement in the arms, or holding the breath, which is one of the primary expressions of resistance.

4. Breath

In order for the person to integrate the integration, the breath must be a felt sense. There is so much information about breathing; I want to just focus on encouraging integrated breath. The normal pattern of quiet breathing can consist of combined shallow and deep. The shallow or thoracic breath consists
of an upward and outward movement of the chest as a result of contraction of the external intercostal muscles. The abdominal breath is the result of the descent of the central tendon of the diaphragm. It is prudent to mention here how important the released diaphragm is to integrated breath, both inhale and exhale.

In the integrated breath we are looking for a combination of thoracic and abdominal breathing to create balance in the autonomic nervous system. This balance reduces stress.

**Thoracic breath**
- Thoracic breath is sympathetic, action-oriented (tonic).
- It is about orientation to space (levity).

**Abdominal breath**
- Abdominal breath is parasympathetic.
- It is about weight-sensing (grounding).

We do not have to be thinking consciously to breathe. We do have to feel our body breathing. Our breath happens automatically. Breath is our first experience of our inner space, our first awareness. It brings life and aliveness within us. In light of this early memory with our breath, it is vital for ease within the bodymind to have a deep connection with our own breath.

5. **Introspection and Awareness**

The ability to introspect profoundly influences a self-organization process. This internal integration opens space for vital interpersonal connections. We call this a felt sense. I cannot have a felt sense unless I am capable of feeling myself, through my breath, my senses or my emotions. I must be in touch with introspection and self-awareness first, before I see it in others.

A feeling is an emotion. It is what you feel when you are emotional. Emotions generate feelings. In our interactions with the mind we can move beyond circular definitions and embrace the metaphors of emotion in a deeply impassioned and integrated manner.42

Self, in fact, refers to the integration and organization of diverse aspects of experience, and dissociation can be defined as the failure to integrate experience…When experience is acknowledged and accepted, integration inevitably follows, because the self cannot help seeking meaning and coherence from experience. When experience is dissociated, however, integration is not possible and to the extent that dissociation prevails, there is fragmentation of the self. A coherent, well-organized self depends on integration, and thus psychopathological dissociation represents a threat to optimal development of the self.43

Please remember that the body and mind are not separate and when the body is integrated, so is the mind. As we become self-aware, and have an internal felt sense, our whole experience becomes self-acknowledged. The experience of bodymind is not a duality when we are integrated. Cooperation and harmony represent the power of integration.

The information on joints and dynamic equilibrium that influenced my thinking came from Joint Structure & Function.

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References
4. Wikipedia. Retrieved 12/11/12 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaos_theory. Chaos theory is a field of study in mathematics, physics, economics, and philosophy studying the behavior of dynamical systems that are highly sensitive to initial conditions. In other words, the deterministic nature of these systems does not make them predictable.