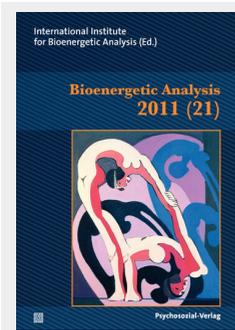


James L. Allard

What Has Changed for Clients of the Bioenergetics Approach to Therapy in the Realm of Their Relationship with God?



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WHAT HAS CHANGED FOR CLIENTS OF THE BIOENERGETICS APPROACH TO THERAPY IN THE REALM OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

James L. Allard

ABSTRACTS

ENGLISH

This article is an abridgement of a 112-page doctoral phenomenological research paper bearing the same title. The research was based on five case studies and answers the questions of whether and how Bioenergetics therapy influences one's relationship with God. Using John Conger's *Jung and Reich*, Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Alexander Lowen's *The Spirituality of the Body* and many other of their writings, it systematically compares the participants' testimonies to the literature concerning grounding, selfhood, relationship, love and faith. It also answers the question of who or what God is in parallel to what Jung, Reich and Lowen have written on the subject and explores the topic of the discovery of God through a connection with the body.

Key Words: love, trust, faith, God

WAS HAT SICH FÜR KLIENTINNEN, DIE MIT BIOENERGETISCHER ANALYSE BEHANDELT WURDEN, IN IHRER BEZIEHUNG ZU GOTT VERÄNDERT? (GERMAN)

Dieser Beitrag ist die Kurzfassung einer 112-seitigen Dissertation über ein phänomenologisch ausgerichtetes Forschungsprojekt mit demselben Titel. Die Untersuchung basiert auf fünf Fallstudien und beantwortet Fragen, ob und ggfs. wie Bioenergetische Therapie die persönliche Beziehung zu Gott beeinflusst. Unter Verwendung von John Congers *Jung and Reich*, Jungs *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Alexander Lowens *The Spirituality of the Body* und einer Reihe von anderen Schriften dieser Autoren vergleicht der Beitrag systematisch die Aussagen der StudienteilnehmerInnen mit der Literatur bezüglich Erdung, Selbstbewusstsein, Beziehungen, Liebe und Glaube. Er beantwortet auch die Frage, wer oder was Gott sei im Vergleich zu den schriftlichen Äußerungen von Jung, Reich und Lowen zu diesem Thema und untersucht die Frage, ob und wie Gott durch eine Verbindung zum Körper entdeckt werden kann.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Liebe, Vertrauen, Glaube, Gott

QU'EST-CE QUI A CHANGÉ POUR LES CLIENTS DE L'APPROCHE BIOÉNERGÉTIQUE EN THÉRAPIE DANS LE ROYAUME DE LEUR RELATION À DIEU (FRENCH)

Cet article est un résumé d'un article de Recherche phénoménologique doctoral de 112 pages portant le même titre. La recherche était basée sur l'étude de cinq cas et répond aux questions: si et comment la thérapie bioénergétique influence la relation de la personne à Dieu. En utilisant John Conger's *Jung and Reich*, Jung: *l'Homme Moderne à la Recherche de son Ame*, Alexander Lowen *la Spiritualité du Corps* et beaucoup d'autres de leurs écrits, il compare systématiquement les témoignages des participants à la littérature concernant l'enracinement, l'individualité, la relation, l'amour et la foi. Il répond aussi aux questions de qui ou quel Dieu est en parallèle à ce que Jung, Reich et Lowen ont écrit

sur le sujet et explore le thème de la découverte de Dieu à travers une connexion avec le corps.

Mots Cle: Amour, Confiance, Foi, Dieu

QUÉ HA CAMBIADO PARA LOS CLIENTES DEL ENFOQUE BIOENERGÉTICO A LA TERAPIA EN LA ESFERA DE SU RELACIÓN CON DIOS? (SPANISH)

Este artículo es un resumen de una investigación fenomenológica de doctorado con el mismo título. La investigación se basó en el estudio de cinco casos y responde a las preguntas de si y cómo la terapia bioenergética influencia la relación de uno con Dios. Utilizando Jung and Reich, de John Conger, *El hombre moderno en busca de su alma*, de Jung, *La espiritualidad del cuerpo*, de Alexander Lowen y muchos otros de sus escritos, compara sistemáticamente los testimonios de los participantes con escritos referidos a los conceptos de enraizamiento, el sí mismo, la relación, el amor y la fe. También da respuesta a la pregunta de quien o que Dios se corresponde con lo que Jung, Reich y Lowen han escrito sobre el tema y explora el tema del descubrimiento de Dios a través de la conexión con el cuerpo.

Palabras Clave: amor, confianza, fe, Dios

COSA È CAMBIATO PER I PAZIENTI DELL'APPROCCIO BIOENERGETICO PER QUANTO RIGUARDA LA LORO RELAZIONE CON DIO? (ITALIAN)

Questo articolo è un'edizione ridotta di una tesi di dottorato basata su una ricerca con lo stesso titolo. La ricerca era basata su cinque casi e risponde alla domanda se e come la terapia bioenergetica influenzi la relazione con Dio. Utilizzando il libro di John Conger *Jung e Reich*, il libro di Jung *L'uomo moderno alla ricerca di Dio*, e *La Spiritualità e il corpo* di Lowen oltre a molti altri loro scritti, vengono sistematicamente comparate le testimonianze dei partecipanti con la letteratura sul *grounding*, il senso di Sé, la relazionalità, l'amore e la fede. Risponde

anche alla domanda di chi o cosa sia Dio parallelamente a quanto hanno scritto Jung, Reich e Lowen sul tema, ed esplora l'argomento della scoperta di Dio attraverso la connessione con il corpo.

Parole chiave: amore, fiducia, fede, Dio

O QUE MUDOU NOS CLIENTES DA ABORDAGEM TERAPÊUTICA BIOENERGÉTICA NA ESFERA DE SEU RELACIONAMENTO COM DEUS? (PORTUGUÊS)

Este artigo é um sumário de um documento de 112 páginas de pesquisa fenomenológica de doutorado com o mesmo título. A pesquisa foi baseada em cinco estudos de caso e responde às perguntas sobre se e como a terapia bioenergética influencia a relação com Deus.

Usando “Jung e Reich” de John Conger, “o Homem Moderno em busca de uma Alma” – de Jung, “A Espiritualidade do Corpo” de Alexander Lowen e muitos outros de seus escritos, ele compara sistematicamente os testemunhos dos participantes com a literatura sobre grounding, individualidade, relacionamento, amor e fé. Ele também responde a pergunta de quem ou qual Deus está em paralelo com o que Jung, Reich e Lowen escreveram sobre o tema e explora o tema da descoberta de Deus através de uma conexão com o corpo.

Palavras chave: amor, confiança, fé, Deus

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Given Lowen's (1990) thoughts on the subject of God, I wanted to explore what had changed for clients of Bioenergetics in the realm of their relationship with God. The project developed in the context of a doctoral program leading to a *Diplôme de 3ème cycle d'anthropologie spirituelle* at the *Université de Sherbrooke* in Sherbrooke, Québec, Canada. I noted statistics that confirmed an intuitive perception that religious practice had declined in my country over the course of 20 years whereas

the use of alternative or complementary health care services including various forms of counselling therapies had increased. Were people looking for healing in their lives through a relationship with God via modalities other than organized religion? With Lowen's (1990) thoughts on the subject of God as background, this state of affairs moved me to want to explore further the subject of God in relation to Bioenergetics.

There was no particular hypothesis to prove, only a wish to explore and better understand the phenomenon called "God" (in our culture) in light of Bioenergetics theory and therapy. Hence, instead of the usual quantitative approach to research based on a hypothesis, I chose a particular type of qualitative research called the phenomenological approach. Out of my findings could result a hypothesis for further quantitative research but that would come later.

An ethics committee approved the research proposal in February 2008 and the data was collected in March and April 2008. The final report was submitted for evaluation and was accepted in December 2009. The complete text of the report covers 112 pages, including 54 pages of data, and can be found at the library of the university or can be found at either *Library and Archives Canada* in Ottawa or at the *Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec* in Montréal under the title, "What Has Changed for Clients of the Bioenergetics Approach to Therapy in the Realm of Their Relationship With God?" and bearing ISBN 978-0-9866054-0-6.

1.1 THE THEORY

Reich (1973) postulates that man's distress might be attributed to his relationship to the cosmic energy that governs him. Conger (2005) points to Reich's idea that if the body were released from its armour, life would be immediately present and would be the answer to religious quest and hunger. Conger (2005) also states that Reich, the scientist and atheist throughout much of his life, discovered in the latter part of his life a spiritual orientation and experienced a direct intuitive apprehension of God, Life, Nature, Brahma, and Cosmic Orgone. To that effect Reich (1973) concludes that God exists as Reich becomes aware of the existence of an objective functional logic in the universe.

Jung (1933) states that a religious attitude is an element of psychic life whose importance cannot be overrated since many neuroses are caused by the fact that people blind themselves to their own religious promptings because of a passion for rational enlightenment. He notes that a truly religious person harbours a respect for the secret of human life and senses in everything the unseen presence of God. In his discussion about God, Jung (1973a) (Conger 2005) says though the God-image is a psychological fact, the psychologist cannot say anything about the metaphysical reality of God. Jung (1933) concludes that he cannot determine the nature of God and yet notes that while human beings resist learning that God is their father, successive generations who have understood what is meant by the fact that God is our father have arisen. Jung (1956) is of the opinion that psychic energy or libido creates the God-image by making use of the archetypal patterns contained in the collective unconscious. His conclusion is that the God-image is a real but subjective phenomenon. Jung (1973b) (Conger 2005) says that sexuality is of the greatest importance as the expression of the other face of God, the dark side of the God-image.

Jung (1933) recognizes the unity of body and spirit. Reich (1970) (Conger 2005) sees mind and body as functionally identical. Like Jung and in the wake of Reich, Lowen (1970) believes in the functional identity of mind and body. Jung (1933) acknowledges the modern tendency to view the psyche as primarily a product of the body but goes on to postulate that the psyche could instead arise from a spiritual principle which is as inaccessible to our understanding as matter. Jung (1933) equates the psyche with the soul, understood as the source of life and points to the fact that the word "soul" implies a moving or life force. Jung (1933) concludes, as does Lowen (1975; 1977), that breath and movement in a body are taken for life.

Lowen (1990) notes that human beings are viscerally connected to other living organisms and to Nature. Spirituality derives from that sense of connection to a force greater than ourselves. Lowen (1990) states that when a connection to the outer world is broken there is a parallel loss of connection with the bodily self as reflected in a loss of connection between the body segments, such loss of connection underlying both depression and the schizoid state. He points to when a conflict between

a child and its parent becomes a power struggle, the loving connection between parent and child is broken resulting in a damaged spirituality for the child. He describes the mechanics of Nature for passing life from mother to child, refers to such mechanics as a loving connection, and views such as the initial model for connection in a person's life.

Lowen (1990) understands the process of making connections with the outside world as an energetic process and points to the feeling of being connected as absolutely vital to healthy life. He therefore understands energy as the basis for the body's spirituality. Consequently Bioenergetics is a form of treatment based on an understanding of the energetic processes in the body. Lowen (1990) notes the spirituality inherent in the body's urge to reach out. He defines spirit as a force that acts within us or through us, a force that has a mind of its own with an awareness that is deeper and broader than our consciousness, but also a force that is not recognized as the self. He notes that the spirit of a person is to be recognized in that person's unconscious and that such spirit is inherent in the living tissue of a person's body. For Lowen (1990) the spirit is like fire that transforms matter into energy, not the matter nor the energy but the process of transformation itself.

Lowen (1990) notes that a body's need for excitement gives rise to an impulse to reach out for contact with another body. But Lowen (1990) also speaks of a loss of connection, to God, life and Nature, through a drive for success to fulfill an underlying wish that was forfeited in the early relationship with parents, a wish to be loved. Lowen (1990) states that emotions are the direct expression of a person's spirit. But since emotions result from physical feeling in the body, feeling is the key to the spirituality of the body. Lowen (1990) sees in chronically tense muscles the body mechanics underlying the loss of feeling, and therefore underlying the loss of connection. He explains that the will underlying the drive for success separates the head from the body as it separates the individual from the community of fellow human beings or from identification with the universal. Lowen (1990) notes that the rigidity related to less feeling in a person's body parallels an increased brain activity to the point that the person derives a sense of self from the thought processes that are occurring instead of from feeling in the body. He describes control and faith as opposites.

Reminiscent of Jung's collective unconscious and of Reich's orgone energy, Lowen (1990) speaks of the pulsation at the core of one's being that unites one to the universe, of an animal soul in harmony with Nature. Lowen (1990) states that whatever means are used to establish a feeling connection to the infinite, it must involve the body if it is to be more than an idea in one's head. Says he, to become one with God, human beings must surrender their ego. Lowen sees in the heart, the organ that unites spirituality and sexuality. He notes how the heart, through the flow of blood, connects energetically the two ends of the body, the brain and the sexual or reproductive system, which represent the two opposing forces acting in the body, one that draws the organism upward and one that draws it downward. He introduces the idea of grounding as meaning the connection to reality, to one's body, to one's sexuality and to the people with whom one has relationships. Without grounding, a person's spirituality is a lifeless abstraction.

Lowen (1990) points to love, a deep heartfelt connection to another person or persons, to a different creature, to Nature or to God, as the essential nourishment to sustain the human spirit. Says he, love is a bodily feeling and faith a bodily attitude. An animal's faith is characterized by its unconscious acceptance that its world is right. Lowen (1990) points to faith as the state of being open and allowing the natural excitation to flow freely through one's body. Lowen (1990) recognizes a communion with God in the love felt in one's heart. He states that at the core of a body's operations lies the mystery of love. He points to the ability to feel a resonance between the pulse of the heart experienced in the feeling of love and the pulse of the universe as an indication that the heart is the temple where God resides in the human being.

Lowen (1990) states that the process of industrialization has gone so far as to undermine the faith of most people in the rightness of their world and in the existence of a beneficent force in the universe that would ensure their survival and well-being. He notes how in so many cases faith has turned a fatal prognosis into a seemingly miraculous cure and how such miracles are not due to mysterious forces from outside the body that can enter and cure illness. Says he, faith operates from within, though it may be evoked by an experience of love. Opening one's self to God's love has a very positive effect on the body through its exciting and expansive effect.

Lowen's (1990) description of human beings as connected to other living organisms and to Nature, as well as his description of Nature's mechanics for passing life from mother to child establish the grounds upon which the relationship essential for the attainment of selfhood needs to develop. A healthy relationship with mother brings about a healthy relationship with self, meaning self-awareness, self-expression and self-possession (Lowen 1985). In the counselling enterprise the relationship with a counsellor brings about a deepening of that relationship with self. Lowen's (1977) tools for a relationship with self are physical through body exercises but always in the context of a relationship with a counsellor. He recognizes a communion with God in the love felt in one's heart. Love is what is felt when life is passed on from mother to child. Faith is what develops through that love. A relationship with self therefore precedes a relationship with God and a relationship with self develops through a relationship with someone else.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

I interviewed five clients, their principal characteristic being that they had chosen to do therapy with this particular body-oriented approach. I chose them through the convenience of their availability for interviewing. All were female clients of the same female Certified Bioenergetic Therapist. To avoid influencing their answers, participants were told in broad terms that the gist of the research was to study their development in the realm of their relationship with God as a result of their investment of time and energy in therapy with Bioenergetics. I approached the question, **first of all**, by examining what had changed for these clients of the Bioenergetics approach to therapy in the realm of their relationship with self and, more specifically, in terms of self-awareness, self-expression and self-possession. **Secondly**, I examined what had changed for these clients in the realm of their relationship with others. **Finally**, I examined what had changed for these clients in the realm of their relationship with God. Regarding this latter aspect I introduced the subject by asking questions concerning love and faith in the lives of the persons interviewed while taking care not to define God

in any particular way. I then asked these same persons to describe their relationship with God in a fashion that allowed them to define, in their words, their understanding of God.

Participant 1 was a woman who would not be any more specific than to say that she was between 45 and 50 years of age. She had experienced approximately 160 sessions with Bioenergetics spread over four years. **Participant 2** was a 59 year-old woman who had experienced approximately 320 sessions with Bioenergetics spread over eight years. Prior to this, she had also experienced what she called “dream therapy” with another therapist for an undisclosed amount of time. **Participant 3** was a 64 year-old woman who had experienced over 245 sessions with Bioenergetics spread over nine years. She had originally begun therapy with a counsellor from an Employee Assistance Program who referred her to a female Bioenergetics therapist because she needed to feel “free to discuss more personal issues with a woman instead of with (a man).” She also had seen a psychiatrist because “doctors thought (she) should be on meds.” The participant had also taken part in occasional workshops with two other female Bioenergetics therapists. **Participant 4** was a 46 year-old woman who had experienced approximately 90 sessions with Bioenergetics spread over three and one half years. Prior to Bioenergetics, she also “did talk therapy occasionally over the years.” Finally, **Participant 5** was a 59 year-old woman who had experienced approximately 135 sessions with Bioenergetics spread over four and one half years.

Participants were solicited verbally for an audio recording of an interview. Their information was transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Questions were geared to the theoretical constructs of Lowen and can be found in section 2.1 of this article. The data was analysed based on Lowen’s theoretical constructs occasionally augmented by constructs from Reich or Jung. The software Atlas.ti was used for the purposes of analysis.

2.1 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. If you refer to your original objective in therapy, what has changed in your life over the period that you have experienced therapy? Specifically:

- a) What has changed in terms of awareness of your self?
 - b) What has changed in terms of whether you express your self or not?
 - c) What has changed in terms of how you express your self in the context of other people?
2. What has changed in your life over the period that you have experienced therapy in the realm of your relationship with others?
 3. Over the period that you have experienced therapy, what has changed with regards to love in your life? Specifically:
 - a) What has changed with regards to feeling loved or cared for?
 - b) What has changed with regards to loving or caring for someone else?
 4. Over the period that you have experienced therapy, what has changed with regards to trusting your own impulses?
 5. What has changed in your life over the period that you have experienced therapy in the realm of your relationship with God? Specifically:
 - a) Describe your relationship with God before beginning therapy.
 - b) Describe your relationship with God currently.
 - c) Is there a particular event or happening in your therapy that stands out in the way that it influenced your relationship with God? Describe that event. What did you experience in that event that influenced your relationship with God?

3.0 THE RESULTS

The full report contains 54 pages of data, which, for the sake of brevity, cannot be reproduced in this article. The full data is available for public scrutiny by requesting the full report from the libraries mentioned in section 1.0.

The original study examined the aspects of grounding, selfhood, relationship with self and others, love, faith, and relationship with God for each of the five participants. In this article I describe only the essential

elements of love, faith, and relationship with God, the latter aspect being developed as follows:

- 3.3 Who or What is God? Interpretation of the Data
- 3.4 Discover God through a Connection with the Body: Interpretation of the Data
- 3.5 Influence of an Event or Experience in Therapy on a Relationship with God
 - A) Summary of the Data
 - B) Interpretation of the Data
- 3.6 What Has Changed for Clients of the Bioenergetics Approach to Therapy in the Realm of Their Relationship with God: Summary of the Data (Only).

What follows is excerpted from the full report. Whenever quotes are used, the words contained within are taken directly from the participants.

3.1 LOVE: INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

Participant 1 felt loved by her animals before beginning therapy, an example of Lowen's (1990) idea that love can involve a connection to a different creature. **Participant 4** feels love as coming from "the Earth, (...) the Universe," an example of Lowen's (1990) idea of a connection to Nature, though the words used are different. **All participants** noted the love, care or support that they felt from their therapist or therapists. That love or care has allowed them to identify love from their families and others. Also, **all participants** have grown in their ability to love others. By mentioning their therapist and others as the source or the object of love, participants have confirmed Lowen's (1990) idea of love as a heartfelt connection to another person. Though there are still some areas of resistance, **Participants 1 through 4** have developed their ability to love themselves by accepting their emotions, illustrating Lowen's (1990) idea of a parallel between a connection to the outer world and a connection to the bodily self where the participants' connection to the outer world is seen in their relationship to their therapist. **Participant**

5 illustrates the same idea though less explicitly when she allows herself to receive love from her therapist, thus connecting to the outside world and simultaneously to herself.

Participant 2's childhood experience of having to “keep on working” because no one was going to support her, led her to become sick. This illustrates what Lowen (1990) meant when he spoke of a loss of connection, to God, life and Nature, through a drive for success to fulfill an underlying wish that was forfeited in the early relationship with parents, a wish to be loved. **Participant 4** illustrates Lowen's (1990) idea of a drive for success leading to the separation of the head from the body when she notes that she progressively came down into her body with Bioenergetics. I come to this conclusion by interpreting Participant 4's statements that she “worked out things on (her) own for a long time and relied on (herself) to figure things out,” and that, for her, therapy was the opposite of “striving to be something or do something”, as indications that she was driven to achieve success. Lowen's (1990) idea of the loss of connection resulting from a loss of feeling and in turn resulting in chronically tense muscles is the implicit conclusion that I derive from the fact that **all participants** experienced the body work of Bioenergetics exercises which are designed to reverse this process by releasing muscle tension and, concomitantly developing a connection to their therapist and to others.

3.2 FAITH (TRUST): INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

Bioenergetics has enabled all participants to learn to trust their impulses, meaning that they have allowed the natural excitation of their body to flow freely in their body, which corresponds to Lowen's (1990) understanding of faith. In so doing, they have further developed their unconscious acceptance that their world is right, the characteristic that, according to Lowen (1990), defines an animal's faith. Lowen (1990) notes that faith operates from within and, indeed, by trusting their impulses participants have demonstrated that faith is a force that operates within the person.

Participants 2 and 4 illustrate what Lowen (1990) means by the ex-

pression “faith (...) in the rightness of their world or in the existence of a beneficent force in the universe that would ensure their survival and well-being.” Prior to therapy, Participant 2 feared “stopping doing,” implying a lack of faith or trust in the World to take care of her and yet, with therapy, came “to trust that everything was OK.” Participant 4 had “to let it all go and accept the fact that (she) may never come back,” implying a trust or faith in such a beneficent force.

Participant 4 illustrates Lowen’s (1990) idea of a person deriving a sense of self from the thought processes that are occurring instead of from feeling in the body since throughout her life she tried to “figure things out analytically” whereas with Bioenergetics she tried to integrate “on a feeling level” what she knew intellectually. **Participant 5** illustrates Lowen’s (1990) idea that control and faith are opposites when she “pays (...) more attention” to impulses that “don’t sound that illogical but still (...) sound like a long shot” and appear “out of the blue” since control through logic is a product of the intellect.

3.3 WHO OR WHAT IS GOD? INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

Although I did not ask a specific question concerning who or what God is, I found that participants implicitly addressed this topic as they answered other questions concerning their relationship with God. This section deals with the participants’ current understanding of who or what God is, i. e. subsequent to therapy.

If at first sight **Participant 1** appears ambivalent in her understanding about who or what God is – is it spirit or is it what she sees in Nature that makes her feel good? – She tells of the therapeutic experience where she revealed the “monster” part of herself and as a result felt “at peace.” She then says: “Maybe that was the day that I stopped hating God,” and “Maybe God does love me even though I am a lesbian,” and “Maybe He was really there for me.” “God” is the word that she uses, as if, beyond the ambivalence of her intellectual understanding, she is trying to tell us that this was her experience of God.

Participant 2 discovered that God communicates with her through her dreams. She has a sense that God is to be found inside rather than

outside of herself, and in the people that she meets rather than “up there like a big judge.” She uses words describing feeling to elaborate on her experience of God.

Participant 3 left the confines of the definitions of God put forward by her denomination to find Him “outside the perimeters.” She cannot define Him anymore but instead experiences Him “in the internal talking and the dialogue that (they) have together, and (in) the softening of His presence inside of (her), (meaning) that He accepts (her) in spite of the flaws that (her husband) and (her) kids and the Church and everyone believes that (she) has.” She feels “there are moments (that) (...) He utterly delights in His creation of (her).” Finally, she notes how “amazing (it was) to know the sense of God’s spirit” in a workshop where, according to the perimeter in which she was brought up, God would definitely not be present.

Participant 4 intellectually defines God as “the energy or the essence of a person” but then she recognizes God in “the expression of” “loving someone else” “despite (...) the more unattractive parts of being human.” She adds that “God fits in with love and compassion and how (she) feels towards other people,” insinuating a lived experience. She further and more strongly implies a lived experience when she says: “As I accept myself more wholly, I’m able to accept the other person more wholly.” Like for the other participants, I find Participant 4’s best definition of whom or what God is when I pay attention to her lived experience.

Participant 5 has “no idea (of) whom or what God is” but feeling more connected to her physical reality “feels compatible with whatever God is.” She recognizes God as an energy that she feels as vibration in her body. She recognizes God through “a physical experience of (...) creatively intelligent power,” a “felt phenomenon, (...) not just (...) an idea.” Her experience of God is as if “everything (she) has known in (her) head becomes real in (her) body” such that her body feels something that is “not separate anymore” from her thought. Of an experience where she felt an “incredible kindness” in her therapist’s eyes she says that such “had to do with a relationship with God in the same sense of immanence.”

Each participant speaks of the presence of God in an experience of love, confirming Lowen’s (1990) idea that a communion with God is to be seen in the love felt in one’s heart. **Participant 1** felt “at peace” and

says: “Maybe God does love me”; **Participant 2** speaks of her experience of God as a “caring” presence in her life; **Participant 3** speaks of feeling accepted by God and of God delighting in her; **Participant 4** says: “God fits in with love and compassion and how I feel towards other people”; **Participant 5** notes the “incredible kindness” that she felt in her therapist’s eyes and how such “had to do with a relationship with God in the same sense of immanence.”

Also, Lowen’s (1990) idea that to become one with God, human beings must surrender their ego, is reflected in the participants’ experience with Bioenergetics whose stated purpose (Lowen 1971, 1970) is to soften the chronic tension in the musculature, i.e. to surrender the ego, in order to honour the pleasure principle of the id. Participants surrendered their ego and, as noted previously, felt the presence of God.

Finally, Lowen (1990) speaks of spirit as a force that acts within us or through us, a force that has a mind of its own with an awareness that is deeper and broader than our consciousness. On the other hand, Beauregard and O’Leary (2007) describe the effects on the brain of a mystical condition in which the subjects said, “they felt the presence of God, his unconditional and infinite love, and plenitude and peace.” Though the authors add that the subjects, “also felt a surrendering to God,” they clarify that their findings do not prove nor disprove that mystics contact a power outside of themselves. Despite this clarification, they nevertheless conclude: “The data are consistent with an experience in which the experiencers contact a spiritual reality outside of their own minds.” As noted earlier, each participant speaks of the presence of God in an experience of love. Given that Beauregard and O’Leary’s (2007) research results are “consistent with an experience in which the experiencers contact a spiritual reality outside of their own minds,” I conclude, using Lowen’s (1990) definition, that it is plausible to think of God, “as a force that acts within us or through us, a force that has a mind of its own with an awareness that is deeper and broader than our consciousness” but different from ourselves. Such a statement is as much as can be said in answering the question of who or what God is, and is consistent with Jung’s (1973a) (Conger, 2005) view that though the God-image is a psychological fact, the psychologist cannot say anything about the metaphysical reality of God.

3.4 DISCOVER GOD THROUGH A CONNECTION WITH THE BODY: INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

Participant 1 sees in Nature, “Spirit’s way or (...) God’s way of showing (her) more love.” She sees it in rainbows; she speaks of hawks and eagles as her “spiritual guides”; “there to help (her)”. She watches them “flying around,” “filling (her) up with (...) freedom”. She feels “amazed” when watching a chickadee at a bird feeder feeding himself. She finds it “mind boggling” to see “a blue jay (...) out in the middle of a snow storm in a tree in the middle of” a large city. If she sees these things now, Participant 1 did not see them before Bioenergetics therapy. She relates to God through the different actions that feel like love or feel like beauty in the World. To reconcile herself with the ugliness that she sometimes sees in the World, she “stops thinking godlike and (instead) thinks just what (she’s) receiving from the earth is spirit.”

Participant 2 senses that “God’s in here (as she points to herself) rather than out there” and “feels like God is (...) all around (her) in the people (she) meets rather than God’s up there like a big judge.” She understands her dreams as her “own customized scriptures” implying a communication from God from within, and she brings her dreams to Bioenergetics because, “the dreams are from (her) body anyways,” meaning that a connection with God happens through the body. She “needed the Bioenergetics to really become comfortable in (her) own skin that (...) (she) was fine with God and God was fine with (her),” again pointing to a connection with God through feeling in the body. It makes sense to her that Jesus would heal someone’s blindness, whether on the Sabbath or otherwise, meaning that she relates to God through what feels right in her body, for example, the healing of someone’s blindness. And it does not make sense to her that God would tell Abraham to kill his only son on an altar, again meaning that she relates to God through what feels right in her body.

Participant 3 is “very conscious of flickering moments” when she “knows of (God’s) presence inside of (herself),” as she feels “great joy and peace.” Noting some remaining resistance to accepting that God loves her, she nevertheless points to the effect of the physical exercises of Bioenergetics in that they “have softened (her) into a place of acceptance,”

meaning that the softening in her body is bringing her closer to God. Noting her initial dread of the mattress as a Bioenergetics instrument of exercise, she now “doesn’t mind being on the mattress and doing the exercises that (she) needs to do for whatever aspect (she) is in on that day.” Of this fact she says that God is “opening up another area in (her) life (that she) hasn’t ever explored,” meaning that she is relating to God by exploring “whatever aspect (for which she) is in on that day” through the physical exercises on the mattress. Prior to therapy, for Participant 3, “sexuality would have been a bad thing because it got you in trouble.” Through the Bioenergetics exercises, she learned to allow her sexual feelings to rise and, as a consequence, recognizes that her relationship with God has changed thus, again, indicating a relationship with God through a connection with the body.

“Therapy has brought (**Participant 4**) back to (her) body” where she realises that she is “part of the One (...) Universal Energy, One Consciousness, whatever.” It has also brought her the realisation that she can “access God more through (her) feelings or (...) (her) body.” Bioenergetics exercises helped her “work through (her) anxiety physically, on a body level” and, in turn, find the “calm or peace” that she was seeking and find God through feeling “more secure in the world.” Further illustrating how she discovered God through a connection with her body, Participant 4 tells of reading a book concerning “the wisdom of the Earth,” which, in turn, motivated her “to focus more on just being grounded in the world.” And, since she felt “so much comfort and peace being around trees in (...) the forest, (...) (she) just started being more aware of those things and less being rattled in (her) head.” Finally, Participant 4 finds God when she “quiets (herself) and just looks really, really deep inside.”

With Bioenergetics therapy, **Participant 5** has “moved closer to being able to integrate a sort of concept or idea of God with (...) a sort of living experience or even (with) physical feelings that (she) identifies as God,” though she is not there yet. She recognizes God as an energy that she feels as vibration in her body. Of her experience of God, she says it is “like everything (she) has known in (her) head becomes real in (her) body.” Her body feels something that is “not separate anymore” from her thought, in fact her body experience “affirms” what she has thought.

Participant 5 feels “more alive, (...) more in (her) body, (...) more on this Earth, (...) more aware physically of weight, of tension, of resistance, of connection, (and of) things like that (...) that (previously) weren’t (...) part of (her) relationship with God.”

All participants attest that they find God through a body experience, the result of working with Bioenergetics, which, since they find God through the life that they feel as a result of releasing the armour, illustrates Reich’s idea that if the body were released from its armour, life would immediately be present and would be the answer to religious quest. They also illustrate Lowen’s (1990) idea that whatever means are used to establish a feeling connection to the infinite, it must involve the body. **Participant 1** relates to God through the different actions that feel like love or feel like beauty in the World, implying that she has softened her armour and is thus able to feel. **Participant 2** discovers God in her dreams, which “are from her body anyways,” and discovers God inside of herself and others. She relates to God through what feels right in her body. **Participant 3** recognizes God’s “presence inside of (herself)” when she feels “great joy and peace.” She discovers God through the Bioenergetics exercises that allow her to open up “another area in (her) life (that she) hasn’t ever explored” before. Bioenergetics exercises helped **Participant 4** “work through (her) anxiety physically, on a body level” and, in turn, find the “calm or peace” that she was seeking and find God through feeling “more secure in the world.” **Participant 5** recognizes God as an energy that she feels as vibration in her body. She is “more aware physically of weight, of tension, of resistance, of connection, (and of) things like that (...) that (previously) weren’t part of (her) relationship with God.”

3.5 INFLUENCE OF AN EVENT OR EXPERIENCE IN THERAPY ON A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

A) SUMMARY OF THE DATA

The therapeutic event or experience that most influenced **Participant 1** in her relationship with God took place when she “just looked at (her therapist) and (...) (speaking of a hidden part of herself) said: ‘It’s time for you

to meet this monster.’ At that moment she accepted the “monster” part of herself, felt “at peace,” and “stopped hating God.” **Participant 2** points to the fact of integrating a sense of acceptance of herself from feeling accepted by her therapists as the most important factor that influenced her relationship with God. She specifically notes that her Bioenergetics therapist accompanied her to her preliminary Court hearing where she opposed a speeding ticket that she had received. To her, it was as if her mother had accompanied her. She felt secure. As her perception of the judge changed so did her perception of God. For **Participant 3** it was more of an experience than a single happening in therapy that influenced her most in her relationship with God. She credits the acceptance that she felt from her therapists. She also notes that with the Bioenergetics exercises she learned to allow her sexual feelings to rise. “(She) could honour that part of (her) being as something that was good and right and holy, not as something dirty, unclean, and (that) should (be done) (...) as quickly as possible and got over with.” She points to her attendance at a workshop offered in a Catholic spirituality centre where, contrary to her expectation, she felt “amazed” by the care she sensed from others towards her. The single most significant experience that influenced **Participant 4** in her relationship with God is the grounding that “brought (her) (...) back to (her) body.” It was during the first six months of her therapy, when she explored her anxiety and thus allowed herself to feel even “more anxious,” that grounding had the most impact. She was further motivated “to focus more on just being grounded in the world” upon reading a book concerning “the wisdom of the Earth.” The event in therapy that most influenced **Participant 5** in her relationship with God took place when, as her therapist asked her to look into her eyes, she suddenly thought, “my mother never looked at me like that.” She felt in her therapist’s eyes an “incredible kindness, (...) and a patience, and a willingness to be silent.” She also notes as another factor that influenced her in her relationship with God, the reassuring “guidance” that she felt from her therapist when she, for the first time, felt the vibration in the back of her legs.

B) INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

The theme of acceptance underlies the event or experience that, in all five participants, most influenced the relationship with God. **Partici-**

part 1 accepted the “monster” part of herself thus allowing herself to stop hating God, the backdrop being the acceptance that she felt from her therapist. **Participant 2** felt accepted by her therapists, which, in turn, helped her face a judge and change her perception about that judge, thus allowing her to change her perception of God. **Participant 3** felt accepted by her therapists and more specifically, in regards to her sexual feelings. She also felt cared for in a workshop where she did not expect such a thing to happen. **Participant 4** singles out the grounding that “brought (her) (...) back to (her) body” i.e. allowed her to accept herself, again the backdrop being the acceptance that she felt from her therapist who introduced her to grounding. **Participant 5** felt in her therapist’s eyes the kindness, and patience that meant she was accepted.

3.6 WHAT HAS CHANGED FOR CLIENTS OF THE BIOENERGETICS APPROACH TO THERAPY IN THE REALM OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD: SUMMARY OF THE DATA

Participant 1’s relationship with God prior to therapy was influenced by her “understanding that (...) (she) was a sinner and (...) would go to hell” because of her lesbian lifestyle and that “there was no turning back.” As a result of Bioenergetics therapy she relates to God through the different actions that feel like love or feel like beauty in the World. In particular, she sees in Nature “Spirit’s way or (...) God’s way of showing (her) more love.” She “sees love and spirit in a bird flying or when there’s an ice storm and (one) is standing beside a tree that’s making creaky noises”. She sees “spirit moving in rainbows”. She watches hawks and eagles “flying around” and that “fills (her) up with (...) freedom”. She feels “amazed” when watching a chickadee at a bird feeder feeding himself. She speaks of birds, especially hawks, as her “guides” since she sees “a lot of red-tailed hawks.” With therapy, and particularly after a specific cathartic event, Participant 1 concluded that “something’s definitely watching over (...) (her).” She has “stopped worrying that everything (she) thought and did was a sin.”

Participant 2’s childhood experience was of a “very punitive” father such

that God was seen as “something out there (...) who is going to be more punitive than loving.” She compares her childhood experience of God to a Courtroom judge who could send her to jail. As a child, “God would seem to be unpredictable” to her. Her experience of God subsequent to therapy is of a “softer, (...) gentler, more feminine (...), caring, less remote (...), closer, warmer (...), less distant and less (...) unpredictable“ presence in her life. Contrary to her upbringing in a “fundamentalist family (where) there were big things (they) weren’t allowed to do (on) Sunday,” Participant 2 demonstrates her current freedom when she reacts with, “Well, so what!” to an Old Testament rule that one was not to heal someone on the Sabbath. In one particular biblical story concerning Abraham being told to offer his son on an altar, she does not feel threatened anymore by something she does not understand. Subsequent to therapy Participant 2’s experience of God is that God is to be found inside of herself rather than outside of herself, “wanting to punish (her).”

She feels accepted by God, and she recognizes God’s action in her life and her occasional blindness to it.

For **Participant 3**, in the past God was “a God of harshness and rules that were to be kept.” If Participant 3 “could fix a picture of Him before,” now she cannot define Him anymore. “He no longer has perimeters in (her) world.” To know God Participant 3 now has “to go outside the perimeters.” In particular, prior to therapy, God’s perimeter was such that He “was outside of sexuality” meaning that her experience of sexuality was filled with “guilt (...) (and to be) within the perimeters (...) of marriage.” However, through the Bioenergetics exercises she “became aware of (her) sexuality, (and aware) that (she) was a sexual being,” and sexuality became “a guilt free pleasure.” Prior to therapy, though God was “supposed to be” in her, Participant 3 kept Him “at arms’ length” but as she experienced therapy, especially Bioenergetics, she concluded that God is “not so far away as he used to be.” In her words: “I know He is within me.” Participant 3 has also “come into the place where (she) believes God actually does love (her) as an individual.” Finally, as a result of therapy, Participant 3 “can be honest before (God).” If she is “thinking something that in (her) world would be bad or not something (she) should be thinking about,” she can now say, “God, this is really how I’m feeling about this.”

Subsequent to therapy **Participant 4** recognizes a different relation-

ship with God from the fact that “the relationship with (herself) (...) has changed.” She further recognizes a different relationship with God in the fact that she is able to be more compassionate towards others but says that is even more so the case as she develops a greater compassion for herself. She always believed “there was something else” but, prior to therapy, that “something else” came through “the traditional ‘God in the sky’ type thing (...) and Adam and Eve and all that kind of stuff.” On the other hand, therapy has brought her the realisation that she can “access God more through (her) feelings or (...) (her) body.” Rather than through “thinking about God,” she now finds God when she “quiets (herself) and just looks really, really deep inside.” The Bioenergetics exercises brought her back to her body and helped her find the “calm or peace” that she was seeking, and thus find God through feeling “more secure in the world.”

Participant 5’s relationship with God prior to Bioenergetics therapy was a “thoughtful, verbal (...) relationship of prayer, of talking, of asking, of thanking.” It was “all head things, (...) not physically experiencing in (a) visceral way.” Now she feels “more alive, (...) more in (her) body, (...) more on this Earth, (...) more aware physically of weight, of tension, of resistance, of connection, (and of) things like that (...) that (previously) weren’t (...) part of (her) relationship with God.” She notes a major shift in the way that she recognizes God. “It’s not that (her) idea about God has shifted, (...) it’s just now it has more integrity.” Her feeling and her idea about God are now “simultaneous.” With therapy she has “discovered (...) God (...) in a kind of (...) reality that wasn’t there before,” a reality that she “can viscerally experience.” She has “moved closer to being able to integrate a sort of concept or idea of God with (...) a sort of living experience or even (with) physical feelings that (she) identifies as God,” though she is not there yet.

4.0 DISCUSSION

Nowhere is the word “God” defined in this research. This was a conscious choice, allowing instead a common cultural background to implicitly define the word without words, and thus appealing to each participant’s internal definition of the word. Cultural backgrounds of participants could

obviously have been explored and thus the results of those findings could have been further correlated to the results of the study. Instead the assumption was that participants' cultural backgrounds were similar and, though religious instruction may have varied, were largely influenced by a prevalent Judaeo-Christian culture. Bioenergetics was born from and developed in a Judaeo-Christian culture. Lowen was Jewish. An extension of this study could therefore involve interviewing participants and therapists who come from non-Judaeo-Christian cultures.

All participants were women and all participants worked with the same female Bioenergetics therapist. Research with an equal number of male clients could therefore be considered in order to compare the results by gender. Research with a male Bioenergetics therapist could also be considered to ascertain if the gender of the therapist is a contributing factor in the results. The situation could also be made more complex by considering male clients with a female Bioenergetics therapist and female clients with a male Bioenergetics therapist. The results obtained from clients of one Bioenergetics therapist could also be compared to the results obtained from clients of another Bioenergetics therapist, in the hopes of ascertaining if individual therapists have an impact on the results.

Although Bioenergetics subscribes to no particular religious denomination and proposes no particular religious view other than what is exposed in this document concerning its understanding of God, another consideration would be the religious background of the Bioenergetics therapist. Does the religious background of the therapist enter the therapeutic relationship, if not consciously, at least subconsciously? And then, does the religious background of the participants affect the therapeutic relationship? In this research neither the religious background of the Bioenergetics therapist nor the religious background of the participants were explored except incidentally. Also, the Bioenergetics therapist whose clients I interviewed clearly stated that she in no way ever attempted to influence her clients' religious beliefs.

This research set out to elucidate the participants' experience of God or not, based on Lowen's understanding of God, and subsequent to experiencing Bioenergetics therapy. It was exploratory research, qualitative in nature, and for that reason was accomplished with a phenomenological approach. Besides contributing data for the understanding of the phenomenon referred to as "God" in our culture, my hope is to, through this article, stimulate discus-

sion and/or further research. As for me, I am satisfied with the definition of God that I arrived at in section 3.3, which is based on Lowen's (1990) definition of spirit, Beauregard and O'Leary's (2007) research results and the data collected from the five participants in this study. It is possible to create hypotheses concerning the subject of God with variables that we can control (for example, gender of clients and therapists; or religious backgrounds of clients and therapists; or cultural backgrounds of clients and therapists etc.) and therefore to produce quantifiable data. However my understanding of Lowen's (1990) idea about God is that God is defined by an experience, not by a yardstick. I prefer therefore to invest my energy at understanding the phenomenon of "God" through the phenomenological approach, a particular type of qualitative research, rather than the quantitative approach to research. Two questions remain for further exploration. Is the phenomenon of "God" simply one to be noted or are there ways that this phenomenon can be helpful to the therapeutic process? And, are there approaches other than the accepted physical approaches of Bioenergetics that we can use to tap in to the phenomenon of "God" in order to help the therapeutic process?

This study has demonstrated that the five participants interviewed found God through a body experience, the result of working with Bioenergetics. Though this study applies to Bioenergetics, the immediate implications of its findings concerning the way to find God are for pastors in their ministry and theologians in their discourse about God rather than for therapists. Statistics demonstrate a decrease in religious practice and an increase in the use of alternative health care services. The questions that instead concern therapists and particularly Bioenergetics therapists revolve around whether and how we can further help the therapeutic process by referring to God.

My purpose as a researcher was not to prove nor disprove the existence of God but rather to document the phenomenon of "God" as experienced or not by clients of Bioenergetics.

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