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Book Review of: Bend into Shape: Techniques for Bioenergetic Therapists



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Cover image: Drawing of the Bioenergetic technique *towel pull sketch* by Vincenia Schroeter

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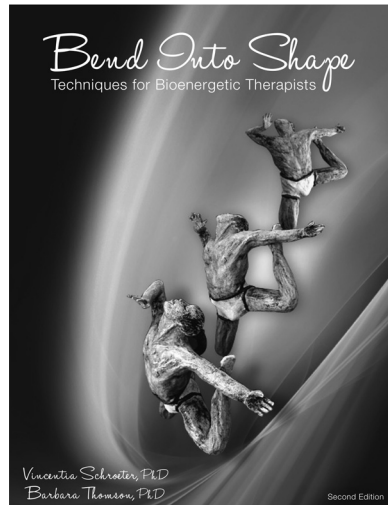
Book Review

Bend Into Shape: Techniques for Bioenergetic Therapists

Jacqueline Mills

*Bend Into Shape: Techniques for Bioenergetic Therapists*¹, by Vincentia Schroeter, PhD and Barbara Thomson, PhD, is a treasure trove for bioenergetic therapists, whether they are certified or in an IIBA approved training program. This book looks at the multilayered approach bioenergetic analysis takes to helping people heal from a variety of presenting issues and breaks it down into digestible parts no matter where your starting place.

What I love about this book is that it is to the point. The authors make sure to say what they mean simply and directly and get to the heart of the treatment issues that all bioenergetic therapists encounter. Even better, they offer a plethora of techniques with illumination as to when, why and how to use them. They have also taken the time to articulate things we need to be cautious about and things we need to watch for, which I am sure comes out of their combined vast experience both in working with clients and in training therapists seeking bioenergetic certification. These “caution” and “watch for” sections are set apart in boxes which



¹ *Bend Into Shape: Techniques for Bioenergetic Therapists*, was published in October 2011. The second edition is available at vincentiaschroeterphd.com.

makes for easy identification and inclusion into the practitioner's awareness.

In the first chapter they clearly state the ethical concerns of a body-based approach to psychotherapy. In the second chapter, Doctors Schroeter and Thompson talk about energy from a bioenergetic perspective, reviewing the unique contributions of Wilhelm Reich, Alexander Lowen and Robert Hilton. The third chapter is a rich description of the purpose of assessment techniques and details about how to read the body in both the natural pose and the charged pose. This includes an explanation of the exaggerated body stance and how moving from the exaggerated contracted posture to the exaggerated reverse posture "often reveals a hidden, unconscious aspect of the self that is in conflict with the preferred adaptive or contracted style." What follows is an explanation of assessing aggression, reaching, and alignment before going into detailed descriptions, including illustrations, of the stress positions. The last area of assessment in chapter three is relational assessment where the authors offer several techniques. The next six chapters cover the character structures, which are schizoid, oral, borderline, narcissist, masochist, and rigid. For each of these character structure chapters, the authors have given us an illustration of that structure's posture, the Hilton diagram depicting both the mental and the body adaptation, a description of how the character develops, what the potential transference and countertransference issues might be, tension patterns with the breath and techniques for working with the breath, and each character structure's relationship with grounding, energy, relational issues, expression, and sexuality, and techniques for working bioenergetically with each of the aforementioned areas. The visual summary of techniques by character types showing and describing blocks and then "corrective" techniques is a great reference!

Chapter ten covers special issues including developmental and acute trauma, shame, abuse and anxiety, where the authors share bioenergetic techniques and helpful clinical examples. Chapter eleven is organized similarly with a focus on special populations including eating disorders, medical conditions and chronic pain, alcohol and drugs, children, seniors and couples. Chapter twelve is rich with techniques by body segment and techniques by emotional issues make up chapter thirteen. These last two chapters are great for quick reference on very specific interventions either by body segment or emotional issue.

In my opinion, the authors have more than achieved their goal of providing a source of techniques for Bioenergetic therapists and students. To say

that they have been thorough is an understatement. While their disclaimer is true that they could not, of course, include every intervention available, I have found this book to be an extraordinary resource. Not only for its content, which is incredibly helpful, but also for the way in which it is organized. It is a great reference guide and educational tool chock full of intelligent information!

About the Author

Jacqueline Mills, PsyD, is a licensed marriage and family therapist with a private practice in Hermosa Beach, California. She received her doctorate in psychoanalysis from the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis and trained at the Southern California Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis, becoming a Certified Bioenergetic Therapist (CBT) in January 2011.