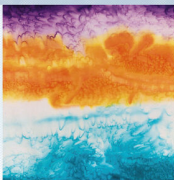


Robert Coffman

Brief History of Bioenergetic Analysis

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Abstracts

This paper traces the history of Bioenergetic Analysis from the origins in Freud's psychoanalytic method, through the development of theory and technique of working directly with the body as introduced by Wilhelm Reich, then covers the contributions of Alexander Lowen, who created Bioenergetic Analysis. The differences between Reich and Lowen will be presented, as well as the differences between Bioenergetic Analysis and other body-oriented methods, and why the others, while valuable, are not as comprehensive.

Keywords: Bioenergetics, Reich, Lowen, Freud, psychoanalysis

Uma breve história da Análise Bioenergética (Portuguese)

Este artigo traça a história da Análise Bioenergética desde sua origem, do método psicanalítico de Freud, continuando com o desenvolvimento da teoria e do trabalho com o corpo, introduzido por Wilhelm Reich, até a contribuição de Alexander Lowen – que criou a Análise Bioenergética. Serão abordadas as diferenças entre Reich e Lowen, assim como entre a Análise Bioenergética e outras abordagens corporais, além das razões pelas quais estas – embora importantes, não são tão abrangentes.

Breve storia dell'analisi bioenergetica (Italian)

Questo articolo ripercorre la storia dell'Analisi Bioenergetica dalle origini del metodo psicoanalitico di Freud, attraverso lo sviluppo della teoria e della tecnica del lavoro con il corpo come introdotto da Wilhelm Reich, e ripercorre i contributi di Alexander Lowen che ha creato l'Analisi Bioenergetica. Verranno presentate le differenze tra Reich e Lowen, così come le differenze tra l'analisi bioenergetica e altri metodi orientati al corpo, e del perché gli altri metodi, sebbene preziosi, non siano così completi.

Brève histoire de l'Analyse bioénergétique (French)

Cet article retrace l'histoire de l'Analyse Bioénergétique depuis ses origines dans la méthode psychanalytique de Freud, en passant par le développement de la théorie et de la technique du travail direct avec le corps tel qu'introduites par Wilhelm Reich, puis couvre les contributions d'Alexander Lowen, fondateur de l'Analyse Bioénergétique. Les différences entre Reich et Lowen seront présentées, ainsi que les différences entre l'analyse bioénergétique et d'autres méthodes orientées vers le corps, et les raisons pour lesquelles les autres, bien que précieuses, ne sont pas aussi complètes.

Eine kurze Geschichte der bioenergetischen Analyse (German)

In diesem Beitrag wird die Geschichte der Bioenergetischen Analyse von den Ursprüngen in Freuds psychoanalytischer Methode nachgezeichnet über die Entwicklung von Theorie und Technik der direkten Arbeit mit dem Körper, wie sie von Wilhelm Reich entwickelt wurde, bis hin zu den Beiträgen von Alexander Lowen, der die Bioenergetische Analyse schuf. Die Unterschiede zwischen Reich und Lowen werden dargestellt, ebenso wie die Unterschiede zwischen der Bioenergetischen Analyse und anderen körperorientierten Methoden und warum die anderen zwar wertvoll, aber nicht so umfassend sind.

Краткая история биоэнергетического анализа (Роберт Кофман) (Russian)

В данной статье прослеживается история Биоэнергетического анализа от истоков психоаналитического метода Фрейда, через развитие теории и техники работы непосредственно с телом, представленной Вильгельмом Райхом, затем рассматривается вклад Александра Лоуэна, который создал Биоэнергетический анализ. Будут представлены различия между Райхом и Лоуэном, а также различия между Биоэнергетическим анализом и другими телесно-ориентированными методами, и почему другие методы, хотя и ценны, но не столь всеобъемлющи.

躯体动力分析简史 (Chinese)

本文追溯了躯体动力分析的历史,从弗洛伊德精神分析的起源,到赖克提出的直接与身体工作的技术及其理论发展,然后包括了创办躯体动力分析的亚历山大·勒温的贡献。讲述了赖克和勒温理论的差异,也是躯体动力分析和身体工作的差异,那些方法虽然是有价值的,但没有那么全面。

Introduction

There are two different branches of body psychotherapy. The first branch is psychoanalytic and insight oriented and the second branch is experiential, and

technique driven. The more well-known branch, developed as an offshoot of the deep psychoanalytic therapies, was developed by Wilhelm Reich, who was originally inspired by Freud's early recognition of the bodily roots of mental disorders. The innovators in this movement created somatic practices of breathing, movement, touch, and muscular release that were conceptualized and taught within pre-existing psycho-analytic theory, with articulated energy constructs and detailed categories of character structure. Bioenergetics is one of these psychoanalytic schools of Body Psychotherapy.

Bioenergetic Analysis is a psychodynamic psychotherapy which combines work with the body and the mind to help solve psychological problems. It is a form of psychotherapy that uses a developmental model. Things that happen to one as a child affect a person's adult self-perception and their behavior towards others. The thing that is special about bioenergetics is that it focuses on how psychological issues affect the body as well as the mind.

Wilhelm Reich

Wilhelm Reich, MD, was an Austrian psychoanalyst who immigrated to the United States in 1939. Reich fought in World War One and returned to Vienna to study medicine. While in medical school he discovered the work of Sigmund Freud. He sought Freud out and studied psychoanalysis with him while he finished his medical degree. He was a brilliant, creative, and original thinker, who at the age of 22, without a medical degree, was invited by Sigmund Freud to join his most prestigious analytical supervision groups, which included several famous psychoanalysts such as Carl Jung and Karl Abraham. Reich soon became a prominent teacher and supervisor in the psychoanalytic field. He wrote his first book at age 23, *The Function of the Orgasm*, which is a biological and psychological exploration of Freud's theory of libido instincts. Reich's book, *Character Analysis*, a classic study of personality types, which is still used today, followed 4 years later. While Freud initially ventured into working with the somatic dimensions of mental illness, he gradually withdrew from the biological side of the equation and focused solely on that is call the "talking cure", meaning verbal interpretations only. Reich ended up going in the biological direction.

Reich was the first psychoanalyst to focus on "resistance" by the client to the therapy process. This was a resistance to letting interpretations awaken the unconscious. This resistance often stopped psychoanalysts from successfully

treating of their patients. While working on resistance, Reich discovered that clients resisted not only verbally but also physically. This was a completely new pathway of understanding. He saw the resistance to analysis revealed not in what the client said or talked about, but by the way he said it or did it, by not *what* they said, but *how* they communicated. He began to focus not so much on the words or stories a client told him but on how the body told its own story, for examples, the client's body language, their body animation, their body attitude, their body energy level, and their body mannerisms. As he turned his focus on what was happening in the body, he became aware that different psychological conditions went along with specific types of body reactions. When these various reaction patterns got addressed in therapy the clients smooth body muscles relaxed in areas of the body that Reich began to theorize were holding blocked emotional impulses.

Reich associated the muscular relaxation with the softening of these defenses, except they were now viewed as body defenses. He realized that these new and different defenses required new and different interventions. These newly found unconscious muscle reactions seemed to arise from wounds from childhood where the child had been denied satisfaction of some vital psychological need. Reich called the psychological part of resistance CHARACTER ARMOR and he called the body part of resistance MUSCULAR ARMOR. It made sense that the psychological process of repression was connected with a physical process of repression. The muscular blocking of impulses that were moving towards action and towards expression were shutdown. Reich believed that these patterns of armoring form in the early years of a child's development and become a powerful force that creates the personality. When used early and often by the child these muscular tensions became chronic. This is why he began working with the physical defenses in therapy such as loosening tense muscles or opening up restricted breathing, while also doing normal talk therapy. Reich was convinced he had discovered a valuable new way of working and was excited to present it to Freud.

Freud wanted nothing of this approach. Freud had forged ahead and had gotten the repressed memories on board mentally. He thought making conscious, through interpretation, the repressed feelings was enough for successful therapy. Reich argued that understanding was not enough and pushed for relaxing the physical defenses and inviting the hidden emotions to come up. Reich was interested in sexual health and became active in promoting sex counseling in mental health clinics all through Berlin. Freud was against this and pulled the plug to separate from Reich.

Reich theorized that chronic tension in the muscle served as a form of psychological armoring and thus began the work of focusing more and more on the body. As a result of working physically with his patients, he discovered different types of energy and noticed that when this energy is constricted by muscular armoring, neurosis develops. Interventions were developed to help open energy that is blocked in the musculature of the body. This blocked energy is felt as tension, pain, or numbness in the body. When the muscular contraction released through a variety of different therapeutic interventions, often emotions emerged, sometimes followed by feeling of relief, aliveness and improved vitality. Reich worked with people who were lying on his couch, as he sat across from them making them aware of their bodies, opening up their breathing and encouraging them to freely express whatever emotions came up.

Lowen meets Reich

The founder of Bioenergetic Therapy is Dr. Alexander Lowen. He was born in 1910, and has written numerous books for the layperson about the body and its relationship to mental health. Lowen was a brilliant theoretician, clear writer and the major pioneer of Body Psychotherapy in the West after Reich. Lowen started the International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis in the late 1960's to train therapists in this method. He passed away in 2008. How did Lowen find this path?

Lowen was introduced to body-oriented therapy as a young man in 1940, when he attended a seminar taught by Reich at the New School of Social Research in New York. He was so interested in Reich's fresh and unusual views that he entered therapy with him and began to study his work. After three years of therapy with Reich, Lowen decided he wanted to practice Reichian therapy. Even though Lowen was a working lawyer, he switched careers and went to medical school in Europe. Upon graduation six years later Lowen returned to New York to treat patients. But upon his return he found a cult of followers around Reich who rubber stamped all of his ideas and Lowen did not like that. Lowen decided to part company and develop his own techniques and treatment approaches.

After separating from Reich, Lowen joined with two colleagues, William Waller and John Pierrakos, and formed a psychotherapy practice in the early 1950's and called their work Bioenergetics, after Reich's discovery of bioenergy. Lowen and colleagues rapidly developed their own contributions to the theory

and practice until Bioenergetic Therapy differed in significant ways from Reich's original work.

How Lowen Differs from Reich

At the time when Reich was doing psychoanalytic therapy, he was using Freud's early drive model which incorporated the libido as his source of energy. The libido was associated with a sexual charge. Lowen de-emphasized the sexual component and broadened his definition of energy to include aliveness and spontaneous self-expression.

Lowen also shifted away from the drive model by including concepts from Object Relations. Patterns of child and parent relationships were also explored and developed.

While Freud did his therapy with patients on the couch as he sat behind them, Reich moved his chair next to them so as to see their body. Lowen did that as well but he sometimes got them up right and standing. This change supported working with more autonomous personal boundary issues such as having the client stand and face life in a more adult way.

Lowen developed a concept of Grounding which involves having people stand, feel their feet, their ankles, and their legs in order to make better contact with the ground, which supports their somatic therapy work.

Reich's character structure descriptions were narrow and non-inclusive. Lowen expanded them, streamlined them, and organize them into specific character structure categories. He explained the different developmental traumas that caused these structures and provided techniques to address each of these different wounding experiences. Some such interactions are very mild where the therapist merely perceives a reoccurring gesture of the client and can make the client aware of this, who can often connect the gesture with something happening in their life. Such an insight on the part of the client can already change something in his body. Other treatment approaches used with different character structures are more active in addressing activities that were blocked at their specific developmental stage. In each case, therapy works to open up the blocked expression to increase the client's own physical, self-expressive capacities.

Lowen wrote his books for the general public. He let go of the technical psychoanalytic jargon and explained his views in a way that allowed the average person to understand his ideas.

When Lowen developed Bioenergetics, he developed a series of active exercises that clients could perform to create energy changes, increase respiration, and promote expressive movements. While Reich encouraged his clients to express their emotions, he was never as active as Lowen in getting his patients to feel and move their bodies. Movement for Lowen involved the complete body in his expressive work. Lowen had people use their arms, legs, trunks, and their shoulders in a variety of expressive exercises. In each case therapy works to open up the blocked expression to increase the clients own physical self-expressive capacities. Each character structure has a set of preferred techniques that work best to address their specific developmental wounding.

And finally, Lowen developed pieces of equipment used to assist the client's work. As an example, he created the breathing stool to expand the muscles in the thorax and chest area to increase breathing volume.

How Bioenergetics Differs from Other Body-Oriented Modalities

I would like to now turn to what makes Bioenergetics different from other body treatment modalities. Many advertise as being a form of psychotherapy, when they are more a singular somatic technique approach. The nature and effects of these practices are not easy to articulate. They do not fit within a psychodynamic framework, even though they do have psychological implications. These somatic treatment modalities usually are based on a singular technique or methodology that has a "one size fits all" approach to it. They have been called "theory-free body techniques". An example of that would be EMDR, which can be learned in one weekend and views the body as a neurological switchboard. Others include Focusing, Sensory Awareness, Feldenkrais, Rolfing, Alexander technique, Continuum, Body-mind Centering, Authentic Movement, and many others. Most of these methods do not systematically address and integrate the psyche in their methodologies, do not directly make psychological experience the focus of their therapeutic work, and do not highlight nor clinically manage the client-therapist relationship. Often the body work that is performed by these practitioners is useful, but not anchored in psychodynamic training. By that I mean, to be defined as a body psychotherapy school one has to have a theory of the development of the human personality, of the stages of growth that a child goes through, of the origins of psychological pathology, an understanding of the therapeutic relationship, and a huge repertoire of treatments and techniques that can be used

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in the context of the therapeutic process. Bioenergetic Analysis meets all that criteria.

Bioenergetic Analysis was inspired by the psychoanalytic method of Freud in the 1930's, moved into direct work with the body by Wilhelm Reich in the 1940's, and then was refined and more deeply developed and expanded by Alexander Lowen in the 1950's–1980's and is a comprehensive form of psychotherapy up to the present day.

The author

Robert Coffman, PhD, is a California licensed Clinical Psychologist, a certified Bioenergetic Therapist, and a Somatic Experiencing Practitioner, with private practices in Redondo Beach, California. He has been in private practice for over 48 years. Bob was trained as a humanistic psychologist, turning to clinical psychology in the late 70's while studying with Dr. Althea Horner, an object relations psychoanalyst. After he completed his PhD he worked for 10 years as a clinical psychologist at Rancho Los Amigos Rehabilitation Hospital. He became interested in Bioenergetics during his schooling at USC, which led to him training with Dr. Robert Hilton, in the first Bioenergetic training group in Southern California in 1973. He has been an international trainer in bioenergetic analysis since 1992, training and supervising students in somatic psychotherapy. As a professional clinical psychologist, specializing in psychoanalysis, he integrates the body into his therapeutic work with all his patients.

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