

A Therapist's Understanding of Bioenergetics

Historical Perspective

(Taken from the Introduction to a research project by Dr. Ulrich Gudat, Munich, Germany, 1997)

Bioenergetic Analysis has developed out of psychoanalysis. Freud's student, Wilhelm Reich began to work directly with the body as a psychotherapeutic technique in the 1930's. In his "Vegetotherapy" he particularly worked to deepen and liberate breathing in order to improve and intensify emotional experience. Reich's students Alexander Lowen and John Pierrakos further developed and expanded this method into what today is called Bioenergetic Analysis. (Lowen 1958, 1975).

The basis of the bioenergetic method is the tight interweave of mental-psychic and physical processes (Reich, 1971, speaks of "functional identity" of mind and body). The most important human life experiences find expression not only in mental-psychic functioning but also in the body: in posture, in reaction patterns and also in inhibitions of motility, breathing and expression. These embodied patterns represent a "character structure" which influences physical self-perception, self-esteem, self-image and basic patterns of interchange with the environment.

Broadly speaking, in its theory Bioenergetic Analysis corresponds to the psychoanalytic approach. The essential difference lies in the method of treatment. The bioenergetic therapist possess in his/her use of body-related therapy, a "second language" with which to communicate with the patient.

While the patient in his physical actions displays the basic patterns in which he interacts with the world and with his relevant reference persons, the bioenergetic therapist can respond on the body level as well, giving support, confirming, encouraging, offering resistance or frustrating. In this way, a body-oriented dialogue comes into being which, in accordance with the patient's current ability or readiness, complements, accompanies and substitutes for verbal communication with the patient. (1)

This "second language," experience shows, often speaks to the preverbal experience of the patient and thus revives early object relationships. In this way one succeeds more easily than in purely verbal therapy in reaching a sufficiently deep level of experience at which the basic structure of the acute problem or disorder becomes visible and can be treated.

Body-related work becomes efficient psychotherapeutically in two complementary ways:

First: Previously avoided movement, feelings and experiences are (re-)activated by body-related therapeutic interventions. This allows unconscious psychic material to come to light and to become accessible to mental-psychic elaboration and treatment. Body-related work is thus a means to access the unconscious material of the patient comparable to the interpretation of dreams in classical psychoanalysis. All the while the body makes its' appearance as a phenomenological reality, as a space for self-

experience and as a bearer of expression and meaning in a symbolic enactment. The curative effect is based upon a new-found possibility for processing early experience, thus making possible their re-evaluation, completion and integration within the therapeutic process.

Second: Although what was said above would seem sufficient to justify the use of body-oriented methods of psychotherapy, Reich and Lowen suggest yet another mode of operation; the mobilization of healing energy by energetic activation on an immediate body level. Essential techniques in this respect are the deepening of the breathing, releasing muscular tension by special breathing and expressive techniques and muscle release interventions. Techniques are also designed to enhance physical relaxation and motility in general, as well as encouragement and support of such unconscious physical processes as the free and deep expression of feelings. In doing so, intellectual mental processes are by-passed for the time being and only the physical changes of the aforementioned kind are attended to. Even more importantly, the newly gained access to deep emotional experience changes a number of physiological parameters along with the self esteem of the person as well as many other intellectual mental processes. Connected to this process, the person's contact with his social environment also changes. In accordance with the underlying hypothesis, all these changes take place as a consequence of the energetic (that is physiological, muscular, etc.) occurrences.

In addition, Lowen has established the concept and practice of Grounding, which occurs first of all on the physical level. Being grounded is to have a physically secure but flexible stance. Phenomenological this means to be connected to reality. The emphasis on grounding and on contact with reality leads in therapy to working on the social directness of nearly all emotional movements. Thus the social, familial, professional, political and ideological relatedness of the person also become the focus of attention in therapy.

Bioenergetic therapy as taught by Lowen and his collaborators combine these methods of body-oriented work with a consideration of the social system as it relates to a therapy process organized flexibly according to the development of the individual case. This combination of inner psychological-phenomenological, physical-energetical and social-systemic work is the real characteristic feature of bioenergetic analytic therapy. Lately, increasing importance is being attached to working with the therapeutic relationship in the sense of object relations theory. The enormous complexity involved in this undertaking makes far-reaching demands upon the therapist while on the other hand it also makes understandable why attempts at systemizing descriptions of this therapy method are scarce.

Bioenergetic Analysis was primarily developed as a method of treatment for persons with neurotic disorders (depression, anxiety) and for persons with problems concerning sexuality and relationship. Because of the access to bodily experience, it is good for the treatment of pre-verbal personality disorders (like narcissistic and borderline) and of course for the treatment of psychosomatic diseases, especially functional ones. People without any clinical disorder can undertake a bioenergetic analysis to find a satisfying way out of a life crisis, to deepen their way of feeling or to free their experience of joy and creativity.

(1) {Physical interactions should not simply be equated with touching. Apart from touching interventions such as massage, pressure upon certain muscular areas, physical holding, supporting, etc., there are also many kinds of bodily interventions which do not involve touching the body; e.g. the invitation to perform certain movements, take certain postures, feel oneself in relation to imagined or substitutionary objects, or as an experiment to interact with the therapist in a particular kind of way.

References

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What is Bioenergetic Psychotherapy?

Bioenergetic Analysis is a psychodynamic psychotherapy which combines work with the body and the mind to help reduce psychological problems. It is a form of psychotherapy that has a psycho-developmental basis. Things that happened to one as a child greatly affect one' s adult self-perception and one' s behavior towards others. That is, traumas that happen in childhood affect one' s way of interacting in their current life and relationships. Bioenergetic analysis sees these traumas affecting one' s thought processes as well as their body.

Bioenergetic psychotherapists believe that there is a correlation between the mind and the body. The individual is viewed as a psychosomatic unity. What affects the body affects the mind; and what affects the mind affects the body. The psychological defenses one uses to handle pain and the stress of life as they grow up; rationalizations, denials, and suppressions, are also anchored in the body. They appear in the body as unique muscular patterns that inhibit self-expression. These patterns can be identified and understood by a bioenergetic psychotherapist who knows how to look at the structure, movement and breathing patterns in a person' s body.

Bioenergetic psychotherapists, unlike other therapists, focus special attention on the muscular patterns in a person' s body. They are interested in these patterns and their relationship to movement, breath, posture and emotional expression. Every physical expression of the body has meaning; the quality of a handshake, the posture, the look in the eyes, the tone of the voice, the way of moving, the amount of energy, etc. If these expressions are fixed and habitual, they tell a story of past experience.

The bioenergetic psychotherapist attempts to read these muscular patterns and introduces the client to physical expressions or exercises to help them experience in present time these patterns of constriction in their body. The psychotherapist explores with the client what it would feel like to begin to release these patterns and recover some of the feelings they have repressed during childhood and continue to repress in

their adult life. The bioenergetic psychotherapist also helps their client come to understand how and why their patterns of constriction developed; how these very defenses that are hindering their life today, allowed them to survive in an early environment that was not supportive of their being.

As these repressed emotions emerge, the client often begins to realize that these patterns inhibit their capacity for spontaneity and creativity in self-expression. They begin to understand that as these defenses became chronic, so have the muscular patterns in their body. These somatic defenses affect their emotional well-being by decreasing energy level and restricting the capacity for genuine self-expression in relationships; they are not free enough in their body to feel joy, happiness, love, sadness, fear, sensuality and anger. As the client progresses in bioenergetic psychotherapy, old, ineffective patterns of blocking connection, pleasure, spontaneity and joy slowly dissolve. Through the release of body work and the experience of a safe, healthy, supportive connection with a therapist, the bioenergetic client relates to his/her self and others in new, more satisfying ways.

Through identifying patterns of blocked self-expression in the body, the bioenergetic psychotherapist develops a clearer understanding of the various personality types and their corresponding psychological problems. Understanding a person's specific patterns of blocked self-expression suggests the basic defensive structure of the individual which developed as a result of their personal psychological history. In the context of bioenergetic theory, discovering patterns of blocked self-expression and their corresponding connection to personality type, allows the emergence of a potential framework for the course of therapy.

The bioenergetic psychotherapist utilizes body work methods and exercises to help a person become aware of tensions and release them through appropriate movement. Verbal exploration of emotional conflicts and their relationship to an individual's personal history is also an integral part of bioenergetic psychotherapy.

Bioenergetic Analysis and The Person

Dr. Alexander Lowen, founder of Bioenergetic Analysis writes that we have each participated along with our parents, heredity, nature and the environment in forming a way of being in the world. The tangible record of this evolving, dynamic process is our body, which is composed of living cells, muscles and organs that pulsate in expanding and contracting ways.

Our personality is an embodiment of the interplay between the pulsatory forces of life and the conflicts, demands, restrictions, stimulation and excitation that arise out of the relationships that we have thus far encountered. The interplay among these forces influences us in the creation of our personality. In simple language, our personality reflects the way in which we attempt to avoid distress and establish a sense of well-being and control in the world by creating a working balance between possessing and expressing ourselves in relating to others. The complexity and originality of this creative life triumph is more fully disclosed when we understand the developmental

history of thoughts and actions in regard to self and others and how this history is revealed in the form and motility of our bodies.

Our total person, mind and body, is functionally one in its expression of our struggle in being an autonomous, loving person. When the personality balance we have established becomes sufficiently disturbed or it no longer gives us former benefits, we begin to feel anxious, compulsive, depressed or generally dissatisfied. We enter therapy looking for a way to change. We slowly begin to understand our old way of being as containing costly compromises that have resulted in a life which now feels limited, constricted or unfulfilled.

Bioenergetic Psychotherapy Offers Hope for Change

People enter psychotherapy looking for a way to change. In Bioenergetic psychotherapy, as we talk about our life problems that bring us into therapy, we begin to recognize that our current condition is directly related to our inability to respond to new situations in our life. Our physical form and corresponding personality pattern is not physically and emotionally flexible enough to move with and integrate the excitation produced in some new situation. We are therefore unable to respond appropriately or in a fulfilling manner to our life' s demands. While we must respect the creative solutions that we found to childhood conflicts and emotions around terror, abandonment, manipulation, and rejection, our stereotypical ways of being must be analyzed and understood as survival patterns. The modification of these patterns requires an intense, long term relationship with a skilled therapist, where the underlying anxieties associated with change can be carefully confronted and new, more appropriate means of relating to these anxieties can be achieved. This change is effected through both an active understanding of how the body is an expression of the personality and through a healing, empathic therapeutic relationship.

Bioenergetic Psychotherapy and Personality

Bioenergetic Analysis is a technique for

- 1) Understanding the personality in terms of the body;
- 2) Improving all functions of the personality by mobilizing the energy bound by muscular tensions; and
- 3) Increasing an individual' s capacity to experience pleasure by resolving the characterological attitudes that have become structured in the body and that, therefore, interfere with its rhythmic and unitary movements.

All distortions and denials of reality are compensated by special body attitudes. For example, the neurotic individual who is afraid of his feelings of fear, covers them by an exaggerated expression of courage which is manifested in a fixed postural attitude. His shoulders are squared off, his chest is inflated and his belly is sucked in. The patient is not aware that his attitude is a defense against fear until he finds that he cannot drop his shoulders, relax his chest or let his belly out. When the muscular tensions are released, the fear and its historical cause often rise to consciousness.

Every physical expression of the body has meaning; the quality of a handshake, the posture, the look in the eyes, the tone of the voice, the way of moving, etc. If these expressions are fixed and habitual, they tell a story of past experience. The interpretation of fixed, physical attitudes and the work upon chronic muscular tensions which underlie them add a new dimension of reality to the therapeutic experience.

In working with the body, two principles are paramount:

1) Any limitation of motility is both a result and a cause of emotional difficulties. It arises as a result of an unresolved historical conflict, but the persistence of the tension creates present-day emotional difficulties that clash with the demands of adult reality. Every physical constriction interferes with and prevents a unitary response to a situation.

2) Any restriction of natural respiration is both the result and cause of anxiety. Anxiety in childhood situations disturbs natural respiration. If the anxiety-producing situation persists and is prolonged, the disturbance of respiration becomes structured in thoracic and abdominal tension. The inability to breathe freely under emotional stress is the physiological basis for the experience of anxiety in such stressful situations.

Unity and coordination of physical responses depend upon the integration of the respiratory movements and the aggressive movements of the body. To the degree that respiration and motility are freed from the restrictions of chronic tensions, the physical function of the client will improve. To that degree, his contact with reality on the physical level will expand and deepen. But this will happen only if there is a commitment to and corresponding improvement in his grasp of reality on the psychic and interpersonal levels. One should not be misled, however, by seeming improvements in a client's functioning on the psychic level and interpersonal levels which are not accompanied by an analogous improvement in the physical functioning.

Through special movements and body positions, the client in bioenergetic psychotherapy gains a deeper awareness of and contact with his body. From this awareness and contact, he begins to understand the relation between his present physical state and the experiences of his infancy and childhood which created it. He learns that his denial of the body is a rejection of his need for love in order to avoid hurt and disappointment. He can interpret his rigidities as a defense against overwhelming rage. He can sense that his immobility stems from a deep-seated fear of aggression. Given the opportunity to express his rage by pounding or kicking the couch, and given the chance to voice his negativity, he discovers that he will not be abandoned or destroyed for expressing his feeling. Through the acceptance of his body and its feelings, the individual broadens his contact with all other aspects of reality.

Since the body is the base of all reality functions, any increase in a person's contact with his body will produce a significant improvement in his self image (body image), in his interpersonal relationships, in the quality of his thinking and feeling, and in his enjoyment of life.

The Use of Touch in Bioenergetic Analysis

(Portions of the following text are from *Touching in Psychotherapy* by Robert Hilton, Ph.D., Costa Mesa, California, USA, 1997)

Touching [a client in psychotherapy] revives all of the repressed feelings in the body and is not a panacea. It revives hope but it also revives pain, rage, and despair. Being alive and living without physical contact can be hell. Isolation is a killer. We are all aware of the studies that have been done in orphanages regarding the importance of physical contact for these children. We are also aware of studies that link sociopathy and psychopathy to inadequate symbiosis during the first few months of life. People who commit violent crimes often reveal a history of a lack of physical contact as children, or contact that was so brutal that it created a numbness in them toward the pain of others. Because of this lack of, or misuse of contact as children, they do not have an empathic awareness toward others. Often the misuse of contact comes not in deprivation but in manipulation and seduction.

All of our clients can trace the origin of their problems to some form of abuse in this area. It may take the form of manipulation, smothering, seduction, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, deprivation or simply lack of awareness of the need for contact. The important step for us as therapists is to understand the nature of the individual trauma and thereby prepare ourselves more adequately as healers for the hurt child in our clients.

Once a person has withdrawn and armored himself around a particular loss or deprivation, he seeks to repair this loss in the world. He is also highly defended against ever opening up again to the original pain. By studying the contraction patterns in the body, the bioenergetic psychotherapist can help the patient understand the self and what fears he must face to free himself again.

Psychotherapeutic Touch

When you touch someone you are bringing additional energy into this person's system and are stimulating a particular response in his/her body. You are inviting this person unconsciously to allow the delicate equilibrium s/he has established in his/her energy system to change and to respond to the environment in a way that may appear to him/her to be life threatening. Remember, the equilibrium s/he established is for survival. To change that equilibrium, by responding to your touch may, be asking the person to experience the anxiety that was, at one time, life threatening. When his/her life force was originally open, the environment could not support it. Thus, s/he will be wondering if you really know what you are doing by asking him/her to trust you in a way in which s/he has always been disappointed. You also need to ask yourself if you are ready for the response that may come as a result of your touch.

Touching the client adds warmth to the frozen and contracted area of his/her body. This may help to bring him/her back to life but it will also revive the pain connected with why s/he had to contract in the beginning. Thus, touching, as it changes the equilibrium

in the body, brings back the rage, sorrow, love and fear that have lain buried in frozenness. Touching at times, appears to be cruel because it revives a hope that cannot be fulfilled and yet, not to touch may leave a person lost in his own frozen wasteland.

The original frozenness in our bodies came because of early childhood issues. The melting of that frozenness invites the person to once again experience the blocked sensation in his/her body and to express the repressed feeling. This expression always has a regressive quality to it since it is unfinished business from the past. With our touch we are asking the child within the patient to respond once more to the world. Thus, the patient in a transference relationship with you may interpret your touch quite differently from what you meant it to be. All touching has to be understood in light of the transference and frame of reference of the client.

Transference and Touch

Understanding the impact of the transference, the therapist must accept responsibility for the response s/he elicits when s/he touches the client. When I {Dr. Hilton} choose to touch a client who is very desperate for contact or who sees me as a love object, I know I am inviting a relationship that will produce pain. Recently, I chose to make contact with a client that I knew was in a desperate situation and saw me as a life line. Later, when she felt better and was angry at me that I could not fulfill her expectations, she said, ' You made me fuse with you and now you tell me you are unavailable.' It would be easy to say to her, ' I didn' t make you fuse with me, I simply touched you when you were desperate. Don't blame me that you interpreted my touch the wrong way or put implications on it that I didn' t mean. I' m innocent.' With knowledge of character and the nature of transference, I must accept her feeling and accept the responsibility of eliciting it even though I did not create it, nor can I fulfill it. But I can convey to her that it was done so that we might successfully live through her disappointment. Of course, touching does not always elicit fusion. Sometimes it will produce rage, fear or other basic feeling reactions which were denied, misused, or discouraged in the client' s family. We, as therapists, need to be aware of the client' s history in order to relate our touch therapeutically to the situation.

Congruence and Touch

Another important issue around touch is congruence. It is important to have a direct relationship between touch and the feeling that is communicated with touch. We often touch our clients and children with only the awareness of what we intend to communicate and do not actually pay attention to what communication is coming back to us as a result of our touching.

Al Lowen {Founder of Bioenergetic Analysis} has often said that it is not enough that we touch our clients but that they also be able to touch us. To be able to make appropriate physical contact with the therapist today is to help them complete the cycle that was interrupted. Since our primary ego was a body ego, at times only physical contact can give the client the experience of our presence that allows him/her to move from his/her infantile hysteria to a state of energetic equilibrium.

We, as therapists, need to provide a safe enough environment to allow the blocked movement in the client to once again be expressed with appropriate contact. I may be touched and loved by my therapist, but I must take the risk of opening and letting my own energy out to her, facing all of the risks that go with that. Reaching to touch from a deeply regressed place may be terrifying, but it is necessary in order for the energy to be released from the armoring of the childhood defenses and integrated into the adult self. Otherwise, it stays stuck in the transference.

Countertransference and Touch

Countertransference reactions are stimulated in many ways and can be used very productively in the therapeutic relationship. As a therapist, I am aware of the difference between insight and the powerful life and death forces in the body. Many therapists, denying or disregarding the power of their own feelings, have been trapped in acting out against their clients. The problem is that prohibition does not stop acting out, even when your reputation and career are at stake. The powerful life forces in the body must be recognized and integrated into the personality. Otherwise, they wait like the soldiers in the Trojan horse ready to overwhelm the unsuspecting citadel of the ego. The greatest safeguard against the misuse of touch is to know your own responses and boundaries in regard to touching and being touched.

Therapists are called upon to deal with the intensity of peoples' passions and yet we have had very little training on how to recognize and deal with our own. When we have been taught simply to control these feelings with our wills, we are subject to great anxiety and failure in the presence of their power. This is especially true when we open ourselves and our clients to physical contact. And yet, touching is part of being human and the way the child in us learns to integrate and trust our feelings.

It was the misuse of touch that created our pain and forced us into developing our defensive structures. It is with the hope of the release of that pain and the recovery of our hearts and lives that we have, as clients and therapists, risked touching again. The heart of that recovery is to be found in the re-enlivening of the body. To be in our body is to live with the desire to love, to touch and be touched. I have found that the most powerful therapeutic modality I know of to help us in that recovery is Bioenergetic Analysis.

Bioenergetic Psychotherapy: A Client's Perspective

"I had been in therapy for problems in my marriage several times over the past five years. My partner and I had seen two different therapists, each of whom helped us explore the issues that were causing problems in our relationship. We learned how to better communicate and listen to each other. Skills to better manage our time, our stress level and our financial disagreements were offered. Things always improved, for a time. But eventually we found ourselves back in the rut of discord and discontentment. Could it be that each time a new or related problem arose, we would need to return to therapy?"

Something didn't make sense to me. It seemed as if we were addressing the surface problems, one at a time, like pulling weeds. But, somehow, the roots were never dealt with and those weeds returned in months or years. I was ready for a deeper exploration of myself and my issues that seemed to cause problems in my life over and over again.

A friend of mine was into something called "Bioenergetics." I had watched changes occur in her life, not just her marriage, but in the person she was. I saw that she was gaining a clearer picture of the areas that she personally struggled with and how these areas seemed to get touched, blurring her ability to negotiate through conflict and problems. Rather than just complain about the arguments with her husband, she was talking about what she contributed to the conflict. She seemed to be learning how to derail conflicts rather than helplessly watching them escalate to a destructive argument. I also noticed that my friend was finding deeper joy and enjoyment in her life, her work and her family. When I asked her more about bioenergetics, she told me that bioenergetics was helping her deal with the underlying issues in her life that, time and time again, materialize in problems with her partner, her work or her family and friends. She found a place to deal with the roots!"

Understanding the Connection Between Your Personality And Your Body

Our total person, mind, body and spirit, is functionally one in its expression of our struggle to be a loving, fulfilled, autonomous person in this world. When the personality balance we have established is challenged or doesn't work in our relationships, we begin to feel anxious, compulsive, depressed or generally dissatisfied. We enter psychotherapy looking for way to change. We slowly begin to understand that our automatic way of being in relationship doesn't get us what we want. We discover that in order to survive in our family, we made costly compromises that have resulted in a life which now feels limited, constricted or unfulfilled. Bioenergetic psychotherapy becomes the safe relationship wherein we can discover the parts of our self that was compromised; explore the present day circumstances that trigger us into our compromised way of being and then experience our truer self in a therapeutic relationship and in the world.

In Bioenergetic psychotherapy, as we tell our life story and the problems that bring us into therapy we begin to recognize that our current condition is directly related to our inability to expand and to feel new situations in our life. Our physical form and corresponding personality pattern is not physically and emotionally flexible enough to move with and integrate the excitation produced in changing situations. We are therefore unable to respond appropriately or in a fulfilling manner to our life's demands.

What is Bioenergetic Analysis?

Dr. Alexander Lowen, founder of Bioenergetic Analysis, writes in his book Bioenergetics, "Bioenergetics rests on the simple proposition that each person is his body. No person exists apart from the living body in which he has existence and through which he expresses himself and relates to the world around him. If you are your body and your body is you then it expresses who you are. It is your way of being in the world. The more alive your body is, the more you are in the world. When a body loses some of its aliveness, as when you are exhausted, for example, you tend to withdraw. Illness has the same effect, producing a state of withdrawal. You may even sense the world at a distance or see it as through a haze. On the other hand, there are days when you are radiantly alive and the world about you seems brighter, closer, more real. We all would like to be and feel more alive, and bioenergetics can help us toward the achievement of this goal."

Bioenergetic Analysis is a psychodynamic psychotherapy which combines work with the body and the mind to help reduce psychological problems. It is a form of psychotherapy that has a psycho-developmental basis. Things that happened to one as a child greatly affects one's adult self-perception and one's behavior towards others. That is, traumas that happen in childhood affect one's way of interacting in their current life and relationships. Bioenergetic analysis sees these traumas affecting one's thought processes as well as their body.

Bioenergetic psychotherapists believe that there is a correlation between the mind and the body. The individual is viewed as a psychosomatic unity. What affects the body affects the mind; and what affects the mind affects the body. The psychological defenses one uses to handle pain and the stress of life as they grow up; rationalizations, denials, and suppressions, are also anchored in the body. They appear in the body as unique muscular patterns that inhibit self-expression. These patterns can be identified and understood by a bioenergetic psychotherapist who knows how to look at the structure, movement and breathing patterns in a person's body.

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The bioenergetic psychotherapist attempts to read these muscular patterns and introduces the client to physical expressions or exercises to help them experience in present time these patterns of constriction in their body. The therapist explores with the client what it would feel like to begin to release these patterns and recover some of the feelings they have repressed during childhood and continue to repress in their adult life. The bioenergetic psychotherapist also helps their client come to understand how and why their patterns of constriction developed; how these very defenses that are hindering their life today, allowed them to survive in an early environment that was not supportive of their being.

As these repressed emotions emerge, clients often begin to realize that these patterns inhibit their capacity for spontaneity and creativity in self-expression. They begin to understand that as these defenses became chronic, so have the muscular patterns in their body. These somatic defenses affect their emotional well-being by decreasing energy level and restricting the capacity for genuine self-expression in relationships; they are not free enough in their body to feel joy, happiness, love, sadness, fear, sensuality and anger. As the client progresses in bioenergetic psychotherapy, old, ineffective patterns of blocking connection, pleasure, spontaneity and joy slowly dissolve. Through the emotional and physical release of body work and the experience of a safe, healthy, supportive connection with a bioenergetic therapist, the bioenergetic client relates to his/her self and others in new, more satisfying ways.

Through identifying patterns of blocked self-expression in the body, the bioenergetic therapist develops a clearer understanding of the various personality types and their corresponding psychological problems. Understanding a person's specific patterns of blocked self-expression suggests the basic defensive structure of the individual which developed as a result of their personal psychological history. In the context of bioenergetic theory, discovering patterns of blocked self-expression and their corresponding connection to personality type, allows the emergence of a potential framework for the course of therapy.

While we must respect the unique muscular patterns and defenses that we used to solve childhood conflicts and emotions around terror, abandonment, manipulation, and rejection, our stereotypical behavior must be analyzed and understood as survival patterns. The modification of these patterns requires an intensive, long-term relationship with a skilled psychotherapist, where the underlying anxieties and terror associated with change can be carefully confronted and new, more appropriate means of relating to these childhood fears and conflicts can be supported. This change is effected through both an active understanding of how the body is an expression of the personality, and through a healing, empathic therapeutic relationship.

Incorporating the Body in Bioenergetic Psychotherapy

Body work is simply the inclusion of your body in the therapy session. This takes many different forms. At times, body work directs you to become aware of and stay in connection with how your body is responding in the moment. What parts of your body are you most aware of? What sensations are occurring in these parts of your body? What parts of your body are you least aware of? How might you describe the sensations in these, less felt parts of your body? Body work is used to bring increased awareness of your bodily sensations, and to connect these sensations to your feelings and to historical events.

As you become more in touch with your body, the bioenergetic psychotherapist works with the basic concepts of breathing more deeply, grounding yourself more in your body (becoming more conscious of what it really feels like to live in your body; allowing yourself to notice when you feeling nothing, go numb, get anxious, afraid; feel needy, desperate, hopeless - all on a body level), and helps you release a wide range of feelings that have been held back as a means of coping and surviving. From this

increased contact with your self and your feelings, which develops in the safety of a solid, trusting relationship with your bioenergetic psychotherapist, you begin to understand the connection between your present physical state and the experiences of your infancy and childhood which created it.

Body work also involves a unique relationship with the bioenergetic psychotherapist. In bioenergetic therapy, the therapist uses therapeutic touch to facilitate the therapeutic process. Certified bioenergetic psychotherapists have been fully trained to appropriately use touch in the therapeutic setting. Because most of us were wounded either by the misuse of touch or by the lack of touch in our early years, therapeutic touch helps to contact, understand and release contractions in our body. The therapeutic use of touch also helps deepen your feeling of and connection with your own body and your feelings, as well as increasing your connection with your bioenergetic psychotherapist. It is important to know that the therapeutic use of touch is never sexually intrusive or exploitive. Therefore, through this safe physical contact and the corresponding feelings which develop in the safety of a solid, trusting relationship with your therapist, you begin to understand the connection between your present physical state and the experiences of your infancy and childhood which created it. You learn that to deny your body is also to reject your deep longing for love, contact and affection, in order to avoid your fear of being hurt, rejected and disappointed.

The use of body work in bioenergetic psychotherapy moves from little body awareness to conscious body awareness, little body understanding to greater body understanding and little freedom to express to greater freedom to express.

As therapy progresses, you'll realize that the constrictions in your body are really a defense against feeling and releasing a variety of different feelings. The immobility of your body stems from deep-seated fear of such expression. Given the opportunity to express your feelings by pounding or kicking and given the chance to voice your negativity, within the framework of a safe, therapeutic relationship, you discover that you will not be abandoned or destroyed for expressing your feelings. Through the acceptance of your body and its feelings, you will intuitively broaden your contact with all other aspects of reality. Since the body is such an important part of who we are, any increase in contact with your body will produce a significant improvement in your self image, interpersonal relationships, in the quality of your thinking and feeling and in your enjoyment of life. In this way, Bioenergetic psychotherapy works with the underlying patterns that are consistent throughout life and relationship, effecting change in all aspects of interactions, relationships and daily living.