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Bend Into Shape

Techniques for Bioenergetic Therapists

Psychosozial-Verlag

Bibliographic information of Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (The German Library)
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Worldwide version of 2nd edition
© 2018 Psychosozial-Verlag, Gießen, Germany
info@psychosozial-verlag.de
www.psychosozial-verlag.de

This edition is a conformed copy of the 2nd edition
that is sold in the United States of America and Canada.
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In the United States of America and Canada, copies can be purchased by visiting
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ISBN 978-3-8379-2762-7 (print)
ISBN 978-3-8379-7384-6 (PDF ebook)

DEDICATION: I dedicate this book to my mentor in Bioenergetics, Eleanor Greenlee, who has always believed in the power of this form of psychotherapy and who inspired me to believe in myself. I also dedicate this book to my father, whose enthusiasm emboldened me to wade into deeper waters from the time I was 6 years old. He has provided me a lifetime of unconditional love, support and encouragement.

Vincentia Schroeter, PhD

DEDICATION: I dedicate this book to my husband Bill, who displayed great patience and encouragement through the writing of this book. I would also like to dedicate this book to Bioenergetic healers who have, through their caring and compassion, guided and supported the inner growth of their clients.

Barbara Thomson, PhD

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Foreword

When Vincentia Schroeter asked me if I would give her and Barbara Thomson my opinion on several chapters of a first draft of their book on the use of techniques in Bioenergetic Analysis, I immediately realized that I was looking at the project of a textbook that would be a major contribution to our field of work.

As a bioenergetic therapist and trainer who had the privilege of witnessing and experiencing the intensity of Dr. Alexander Lowen's work in various workshops, as well as in individual sessions with him over the years, I have been impacted by his faith in the healing power of the natural energetic processes of the organism. My belief in such a healing power has only grown over the years, as I have witnessed in my own practice how in-depth work with these organismic processes can result in life-changing experiences.

I deliberately use the word "organism" here instead of "body", because as we all know, the work we do in Bioenergetic Analysis is not uniquely about "body work". It encompasses much more than that. As Bioenergetic analysts, when we work with the body, we are simultaneously concerned with the interconnection between the body, the emotions, the mind, and in many cases I would add, the soul or inner spirit of our clients. The quality of the relationship we establish with them has also become a major factor in our work, as we have integrated more and more of the latest contributions coming from attachment theories as well as from the field of neuroscience. Consequently, ours is a very complex task and this is why, as psychotherapists, we need to develop all the tools and all the skills that we can in order to support our clients healing process, in a respectful and well-attuned way.

In this context, *Bend Into Shape* constitutes an impressive contribution in our field of practice. This is not merely a "book on techniques". In addition to presenting a very wide repertoire of body work techniques, from milder to stronger techniques, *Bend Into Shape* goes well beyond the technical aspect of the work. It devotes a significant part to the understanding of characterological issues, in order to promote the use of techniques based on a careful understanding of each set of issues. It also addresses fundamental aspects of the work, like the ethics related to the use of body work techniques; assessment of the client's characterological issues and needs in terms of energetic work; contraindications to take into consideration in the choice of strategies; and the transference and countertransference issues that can be triggered during the work.

The structure of the book easily guides therapists towards a wide range of body work techniques according to character structure, for specific issues and even for special populations. The strategies are in no way presented as "quick recipes" to fix a problem. Rather, the therapist is being offered insightful information related to each topic, is prompted to reflect upon the use of the various strategies and is invited to remain attentive to its impact on the client's process. Consequently, the use of one's clinical knowledge, intuition and creativity, as well as one's ethical sense when making use of the techniques is encouraged every step of the way. What is implicitly valued throughout this book is not so much the result, as the process itself.

To my knowledge, this is the first time that we have been offered such a comprehensive book on bioenergetic techniques. Not only does it present the reader with a detailed set of instructions on how to properly use those techniques, but it provides substantial clinical information in order to ensure that they will be used in a constructive way. The authors of this book have done a masterful job of collecting, synthesizing, organizing, describing and commenting on an impressive range of techniques. By drawing on their own vast clinical experience, on material that has been developed over the years in our bioenergetic community as well as in other approaches, they have succeeded in putting together an awe-inspiring piece of work.

I am confident that *Bend Into Shape* will become a major work of reference for all of us, students as well as seasoned therapists, who wish to expand the range of our interventions and deepen our understanding of the significance of the techniques we use.

Louise Fréchette,

Faculty member of the IIBA

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to provide a source of techniques for Bioenergetic therapists and for students in Bioenergetic certification training programs. The techniques presented in this book are not for use by psychotherapists, other than those trained or training in Bioenergetics. This book is also not intended for the general public. Alexander Lowen, who developed Bioenergetics, has written a manual of Bioenergetic exercises called, *The Way to Vibrant Health*. His book is written for the public and includes exercises that any individual can use.

The IIBA (International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis) is the professional body that mandates certain rules, standards and curriculum to be followed by IIBA affiliated training programs. Bioenergetic training programs in different regions of the world may vary somewhat. However, all affiliated training programs provide four to six year courses, whose purpose is to create professional, ethical and competent psychotherapists. Training includes learning theory, developing personal and professional growth, and acquiring and applying techniques. In terms of techniques, Bioenergetic trainees gain proper understanding in:

- Safety factors of the techniques
- The ethics of touch
- The relational dynamics of transference and countertransference

The techniques in this book come from many sources. They are by no means a comprehensive list of all techniques devised by Bioenergetic therapists. Many Bioenergetic practitioners have added to the repertoire of techniques in the years since Alexander Lowen formed the Bioenergetic Institute in 1957. Techniques have been taken from written sources, such as material from Lowen and other authors, as well as from teachers, workshop leaders, colleagues and students. Some techniques are standard classic moves that all students learn. Some have been passed down through the years, and the authorship has been lost. Some are innovative variations on classics. Some are completely new creations by the authors, and by other practitioners. The authors do not have knowledge of the origin of every technique. However, when the origin is known, the developer is acknowledged in these pages. There is no intention to ignore any contributions that do not make it into these pages. This manual is designed to make accessible many old and new techniques in one comprehensive volume.

HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL:








- Read cover to cover to gain knowledge of various Bioenergetic techniques
- Look up an area of interest and review techniques in that category
- Search for techniques by character type
- Search for techniques by special issues

- Search for techniques by special populations
- Search for techniques by body segments
- Search for techniques by emotional issues

When the therapist has a client in front of them, they may have questions that this book can answer. They may want to know where to go to look up useful information, or find a helpful technique. Here are some possible scenarios and where to find help in this book:

Therapist's Thought Process

Where to find answers in this book

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| ○ The Client is Sad |  | ○ Techniques by emotional issue (Chapter 13) |
| ○ The Client appears Borderline |  | ○ Techniques by character type (Chapter 6) |
| ○ The Client is complaining of neck tension |  | ○ Techniques by body segment (Chapter 12) |
| ○ The presenting complaint is trauma |  | ○ Techniques by special issues (Chapter 10) |
| ○ The Client shows symptoms of an eating disorder |  | ○ Techniques by special populations (Chapter 11) |
| ○ I don't see how this new Client's presenting problems relate to their history |  | ○ Techniques by character types (Chapters 4 – 9) |
| ○ I am not sure how the Client's issues manifest in their body |  | ○ Assessment Techniques (Chapter 3) |

Chapter One provides crucial information on legal and ethical considerations for the proper use of Bioenergetic techniques. The authors recommend reading chapter one before proceeding to the descriptions of the actual techniques. Chapter Two introduces the theory of Bioenergetics and the dynamics of energy. Chapter Three discusses Bioenergetic assessment tools. These tools can help the therapist understand the client's personality, as well as aid the therapist in discovering issues for therapeutic exploration. Chapters Four through Nine provide dynamics of and techniques for each character structure. Chapters ten through thirteen present techniques by special categories.

Seasoned therapists often create their own techniques, or let them emerge from contact with the client. During a session, the therapist sometimes has an impulse that leads them to create an intervention or new technique. This is a valid way for techniques to arise. One purpose of this book is to provide the experienced therapist a reminder of some old techniques they may find useful. It also provides some variations on old techniques, as well as access to new techniques.

When a client needs help, the therapist may have an idea of some intervention that might be healing. A Bioenergetic therapist may think about which energetic intervention might work best. It is our sincere wish that this manual becomes an informative and easily accessible guide to be used in service of finding the best tool to help a client in need. However, a technique is just a tool in a toolbox. The real healing comes when two people meet at the edges of who they both are and weave something together. There is no manual for that. Healing is dependent on the myriad relational dynamics between the two weavers, the therapist and the client. Delving into the complexities of each therapist and client dyad is beyond the scope of this book. Our mission in this manual is the narrower one of providing access to a convenient and useful box of tools. Open the box, examine the tools and use the ones you need.



ALERT

Some techniques should only be utilized after being demonstrated by an experienced Bioenergetic therapist. This can occur in training programs, conferences or in supervision.

Learning techniques is not enough. The quality of the relationship and following the heart are what truly guide the therapist in the choice of interventions with each client.

Included here is a copy of a contract to emphasize restrictions in use of techniques, even within the training program. Notice that the student is restricted from using simple breathing, grounding and body awareness techniques outside of training until their second year. Of particular importance, other techniques, which include any **techniques involving touch, are not to be used until the third year and only under proper supervision.** This contract comes from the SCIBA four year IIBA affiliated training program. The next chapter will elaborate issues related to Ethics in Bioenergetics. The following is a copy of the first and second year trainee agreement that states the standards for utilization of techniques by trainees.



Southern California Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis

CERTIFICATION PROGRAM FIRST AND SECOND YEAR TRAINEE AGREEMENT

As a new student, I understand, accept and agree that the following SCIBA training program requirements have been explained to me:

1. The first two years of training do NOT qualify me to use Bioenergetic techniques outside of the training days themselves, except for basic breathing, grounding, and body awareness which may be used starting in the second year.
2. I understand that I am not to use any other Bioenergetic techniques without being in supervision with a trainer or SCIBA supervisor/consultant. This process must begin in the first semester of the third year of training. A minimum of five supervision sessions must be completed by the end of the third year.
3. The personal Bioenergetic Therapy requirement throughout the four years can be met only by individual psychotherapy. My Bioenergetic therapist must be certified and an active member in good standing of a local Bioenergetic society.
4. I can be certified as a Bioenergetic Therapist, after all qualifications have been satisfactorily met and approved of by the SCIBA Faculty, only when I have a license in the State of California which enables me to practice psychotherapy independently.
5. The first half of the training program (years one and two), are NOT clinical training. The last half of the program (years three and four), are clinical in nature; thus I am required to either be licensed as a psychotherapist or registered as an intern/assistant. This requirement enables me to begin the use of Bioenergetic work in a clinical setting while under the supervision of a trainer or SCIBA supervisor/consultant.
6. I have received a copy of the booklet, "Professional Therapy Never Includes Sex." Its relationship to Bioenergetic techniques and touching, especially with regard to definitions of sexual contact described on pages 1-3, has been explained in detail by my trainer. I understand that it is my responsibility not to use outdated Bioenergetic techniques, which might in any way violate the current legal/ethical standards of California psychotherapists.

If I have any questions with regard to the above, I have been encouraged to discuss these with my current trainer or any member of the SCIBA Faculty.

Part I

Foundations In Bioenergetic Work with Clients

Chapter 1

Ethics in Bioenergetic Interventions

This section will examine issues related to ethics, particularly the ethics of touch, including who can use these techniques and why. A myriad of issues related to risking touch will be addressed. A clinical case will be included. A code of ethics from SCIBA (Southern California Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis) is included in the Appendix as an example of the ethical standards in Bioenergetic training and practice. These standards involve competence, as well as moral, legal, and ethical responsibilities to clients and colleagues.

WHO CAN USE TOUCH TECHNIQUES

This book is intended for Bioenergetic Trainees and Certified Bioenergetic Therapists throughout the world. In order to become a Certified Bioenergetic Analyst, one must be a licensed therapist according to the standards in their state or region. These include ethical standards that must be followed. **A therapist is allowed to use any techniques, as long as they can prove to their *licensing body* that they have training in the proper and ethical use of those techniques. The judgment on the ethical use of certain techniques rests in the legally sanctioned licensing body in the therapist's state or region.**

Alexander Lowen intended for Bioenergetic therapists to touch their clients:

Bioenergetic therapists are trained to use their hands to palpate and sense muscular spasticities or blocks; to apply the necessary pressure to release or reduce the muscular contraction with sensitivity to the patient's tolerance for pain; and to establish contact through a gentle and reassuring touch that provides support and warmth.”¹

Hands on techniques cannot be used in California, USA, by any student in their 1st or 2nd year of training in IIBA approved Bioenergetic training programs. “Hands on techniques” (any techniques that involve touch) may be used by students beginning in their 3rd year of training. Students are required to sign a consent form that indicates an agreement to use these hands on techniques only if in supervision. (A copy of this contract is included in the introduction to this book.) Students must also be licensed therapists or licensed interns, at least by the beginning of their third year of training. This allows the student to be covered by the standards of the license under which they are operating. Once a student

¹ Lowen, A. (1975) *Bioenergetics*, (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc. New York), pp.27-28

completes training and is a Certified Bioenergetic Therapist (CBT), they may use any techniques they wish.

This book can be utilized as a textbook in the curriculum of IIBA approved training programs. It can be used to help students learn and practice techniques and used later as a reference for therapists, once they become certified. First and second year trainees, while ethically bound to avoid using the techniques in this book that involve **touch**, can use these techniques on each other as they practice **within** their training programs.

WHAT TOUCH CAN EVOKE AND PROVOKE

Since Bioenergetics consists of techniques and interventions that involve touch, it is important to understand the dynamics of touch in psychotherapy and to have tools to apply touch appropriately. The original “touch taboo” started by Freud was due to the potential for sexual exploitation or invasiveness. These issues still mark the potential dangers in touch.

Jaffy Phillips² states the following in her article, “Somatic Tracking and the Ethical use of Touch”:

(Touch) is a powerful intervention with the potential to heal many of the difficulties for which people seek psychological help. However, as revealed by years of cultural, theoretical, and ethical controversy surrounding its use, the use of touch is relationally and ethically complex and requires skillful assessment and application. This complexity results from the fact that touch is a physical and relational experience that is generally imbued with layers of cultural and psychological meaning. The meanings invoked by touch are often unconscious or non-verbal, and they often manifest somatically and/or relationally before the client is able to articulate anything about them.

Phillips goes on to insist the therapist be cognizant of and address boundary issues, transference issues and countertransference issues or risk damage to the client.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKING WITH TOUCH

BOUNDARIES: It is useful to be cognizant of boundary violations experienced by each client. Use both external and internal clues to see if and when it is appropriate to touch a client. Follow the internal cues from your own body by registering any impulse toward action. Sense whether you feel drawn to move or not to move toward the client to make physical contact. This is referred to as “body sense”. Next, pause and breathe to contain the charge or impulse, long enough to consider the other clues. Follow the external clues based on what you observe in the client and know about their boundary issues. Tracking your client’s body and slowing down to meditate on your own body sense are techniques for assessing the appropriateness of touch.

² Phillips, J.(2002) "Somatic tracking and the ethical uses of touch". USABP. vol.1:2 p.64

CLIENTS WITH CONTRAINDICATIONS FOR TOUCH: The dynamics between the therapist and client as a dyad, along with the particular dynamics of the client, should determine allowance or disallowance of touch. Some clients do not appear to have enough self-agency (confidence that they speak from their own needs) to say “No” to physical touch. Some will say “Yes”, but appear to mean “No”. Some clients have difficulty verbalizing their boundaries in relation to physical contact. These clients are not likely to manage your physical contact well. Clients who are not in touch with their feelings must be approached very carefully when considering physical contact.

In order to assess whether touch is contraindicated, examine the following issues: the goal of the touch; the client’s ability to determine and communicate their own comfort with physical contact; your knowledge and sense of the transference meaning to the client; and your own countertransference* with this client.

*NOTE: Countertransference refers to feelings provoked in the therapist by the client, particularly feelings related to the therapist’s own early issues. In the rest of this book, the word, “countertransference” may be referred to at times with the initials, “CT”.

ETHICAL PROTECTION: The therapist should use touch only when clinically advisable and with informed consent. Let the client know they are in charge of the physical limitations of the contact. Invite the client to dialog with you, at any time, about the effects of the touch.

THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP FACTORS: Assess if trust has been established, boundaries are understood, and openness exists to process touch issues, including negative or ambivalent feelings. Consider whether you, as the therapist, or your client experience the suggestion of touch as a demand.

ETHICAL CONCERNS: There is a potential for misuse of power inherent in the therapeutic relationship, which should be discussed openly with the client. There is a potential for touch to lead to or be interpreted as sexual contact. This risk can be minimized by: the existence of a clear contract; clarity about one’s intentions and motivations for touching at the time; clarity about one’s own sexual boundaries; finding other outlets for sexual contact; and scrupulous use of supervision. There is also a potential that touch will be used to gratify the non-sexual needs of the therapist. These needs may include ones for intimacy, closeness, to being seen as a nurturer, and/or needs for physical contact.



TRACKING AND TOUCH

TRACKING THE CLIENT-Watch and sense their reaction to touch.

TRACKING ONESELF-Watch, sense and register in your own body, your reaction to touching or being touched by your client.

TRACK EXPERIENCE OF TOUCH CONTACT-Follow your internal experience as you touch or are touched. Adjust your methods to respect your reaction. Behave ethically within the standards of your profession. Keep the needs of the client foremost in your mind.

ENCOURAGE THE CLIENT TO TRACK TOUCH EXPERIENCE-Invite the client to notice and verbalize their reaction to touching you and/or being touched by you. Be open and receptive to their expression. Work to understand their point of view and respond non-defensively.

For more information see the SCIBA Code of Ethics in the addendum at the back of this book.

Case Example:

This is a vignette from an actual case, using the therapist's body sense to inform the use of touch. A terminally ill middle-aged patient reports that she is terrified of dying. During the session she says that panic wakes her in the middle of the night, and that she rocks back and forth to try and comfort herself.

BODY SENSE: At this point, I (the therapist) feel an impulse to get up, go sit next to her on the couch, hold her hand, and place my other hand over her heart. This was how I registered my "body sense". I began to concentrate on breathing slowly to contain my charge long enough to evaluate the situation.

EVALUATION: I watched my client, considered her issues, the goal, our relationship, and boundary issues. This client tends to be withdrawn, has difficulty reaching out but longs for help. I know that she has become increasingly desperate in the past few months to find some peace in the dying process. The goal of the touch would be an attempt to help her feel calmer. Although she does not often reach out for contact, she tends to brighten when I make physical contact with her. The only CT issues would be risking her rejection, or my worry I might hurt her fragile body. There are no boundary problems. I decide it is appropriate to intervene with touch.