

## Holistic Health Practices – Part 8

# What are Bioenergetics and Reichian Therapy?

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### What are bioenergetics (neo-Reichian bodywork) and Reichian therapy (orgonomy)?

Bioenergetics or neo-Reichian bodywork was developed by Alexander Lowen, a disciple of Wilhelm Reich's *Orgonomy* or *Reichian Therapy*. Reich (1897-1957), who dabbled in the occult, wrongly believed that the cause of many physical and mental disorders and illnesses was the inability to achieve a satisfactory orgasm. Thus, supposed sexual dysfunction helps produce "character armor" and a psychological-physical response to the stresses of the outside world. Character armor could allegedly be loosened through "full orgasmic gratification." In other words, Reich believed that for a patient to be cured he must be able to achieve gratification in the sexual act. He was convinced that blocking of sexual "bioenergy," which he called "orgone," was due to armoring—a condition that results from energy being bound in a muscular contraction and not being allowed to flow through the body. Reich proceeded to explore the therapeutic use of so-called orgone energy, which he also believed was the alleged "life energy" of the universe. In this sense, orgone is similar to other mystical energy concepts within New Age medicine such as *prana* and *chi*.

While Reich attempted to demonstrate both the reality and healing powers of this orgone energy, Alexander Lowen, a committed student, revised Reich's theories in accordance with his own findings. Rejecting the theory of orgone, he still accepted the concept behind it of a "life force" based upon mystical energy. Thus "bioenergetics" or neo-Reichian therapy involves the study of the human personality in terms of the alleged energetic processes of the body.

Bioenergetic therapy has two aspects. The first part involves the physical bodywork—bioenergetic exercises—in which the individual assumes yoga-like postures and performs breathing exercises in order to allegedly help relieve muscular tension which is obstructing the flow of energy.

Second, bioenergetic therapy utilizes counseling to discuss and analyze the individual's feelings before or after he has been treated. Bioenergetics is also based upon helping an individual to expand his mental consciousness by supposedly increasing his body consciousness. It attempts to go beyond both mechanical and mystical consciousness to unify mind and body consciousness toward more

“awareness.” The goal is to expand consciousness downward bringing a person closer to the “unconscious” in order to produce a new heightened consciousness of the unity and purpose of life. Nevertheless, these bodywork methods can also produce mystical experiences, and many patients seem to have some kind of transcendental experience in the course of therapy.

The effectiveness of bioenergetics has never been established and these therapies may encourage a client toward occult pursuits.