

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND: DREAMWORK/BODYWORK

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In a time before psychological trauma was defined as an area of study, German psychiatrist, Wilhelm Reich, M.D., wrote in his seminal volume *Character Analysis* in 1933: “We can conceive of the character of the ego—perhaps the Freudian ego in general—as an armor protecting the id against the stimuli of the outer world. In this sense, the ego is a structural agent. By character, we mean here not only the outward form of this agent, but also the sum total of all that the ego shapes in the way of typical modes of reaction, i.e., modes of reaction characteristic of *one* specific personality. By character, in short, we mean an essentially dynamically determined factor manifested in a person’s characteristic demeanor: walk, facial expression, stance, manner of speech, and other modes of behavior.” (*Character Analysis*, 190-191)

With these words, Reich defined an approach to psychotherapy which takes into account the changing dynamics of the body in relation to stress such as psychological trauma.

“Reich approached the study of character,” says Alexander Lowen, M.D. in his 1958 book *The Language of the Body*, “not from theoretical considerations but as a practical problem in analytic technique. He did not isolate the traits, but he attempted to understand the character first in its role as a resistance to analytic interaction, and second to comprehend its function in the libido economy of the organism....”

“It is important to recognize,” Lowen goes on, “that however we define the character it is the basic attitude with which the individual confronts life whether in the analytic session or in the external world. Once the character is understood the nature and

meaning of the resistance which the patient sets up is readily appreciated.” (*Language of the Body*, 120-121)

From his study with Wilhelm Reich, Alexander Lowen developed a well-known psychotherapeutic approach known as Bioenergetics or Bioenergetic Psychotherapy. This approach, as it developed, addressed the subject of psychological trauma, defining categories of physical response to trauma in five distinct “character types.”

According to Hector Kuri-Cano, Ph.D., the psychotherapist with whom I studied: “Character problems are the result of psychosocial development. They fall into five basic patterns, each determined by a *typical way of holding* against the flow of feelings or impulse.”

Character Type	Holding Pattern	Fear Of
schizoid	holds together	annihilation
oral	holds on	abandonment
masochist	holds in	humiliation and shame
psychopath	holds up	submission/subjugation
rigid	holds back	surrender

In other words then, this approach to psychotherapy allows the clinician to go beyond words, to read and work with the effect of trauma on the body and related systems.

In the case of DreamWork/BodyWork, through which the study of Bioenergetic psychotherapy and dream work is combined, an interesting development can be seen. When we identify with or “become” the body of a dream character, even if that character

represents “me” in the dream, the dream body often portrays quite a different stance or response from that of the physical, waking body.

Interaction in the form of physical movement between the waking aspect and the dreaming aspect of the body can inform the healing process and often transform the perspective of the dreamer.

RECOMMENDED READING

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