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Psyche and Soma for Mental Health Professionals

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Reichian Therapy, developed by Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957), is an analytic and biophysical therapeutic method that provides character and biophysical restructuring. It recognizes the essential functional identity of the mind and body. Also known as Medical Orgone Therapy and Orgonomic Therapy, Reichian Therapy recognizes how “armoring” against the free flow of life energy blocks full authenticity and open emotional/biophysical expression. Reich’s work became the classical foundation for somatic therapies that followed.

Wilhelm Reich was an analyst and initially a student of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). He parted ways as his theories embraced a more active approach of engagement, both verbally and biophysically, with the patient. He created a unique character typology and map of body armoring and with his discovery of *Orgone* energy, the energetic principle became fundamental to his application. Reich understood that there is a universal energy that pulses throughout all living systems and the universe and that for health to be achieved it must remain in a freely moving state.

Reichian therapy focuses less on the story the patient relays but rather on *how the patient actually is*, how he relates and how he functions. The therapy focuses on defenses that impinge on the developing authentic self — as defenses become distortions

that contort the mind, the body and impede pulsing energy flow.

For energy healers, coaches and other professionals the study of Orgonomy and character typology will increase skill level and provide a critical framework and lens to view the client.

In my book, *Whole Therapist, Whole Patient: Integrating Reich, Masterson and Jung in Modern Psychotherapy* I update Reich’s work to include attachment theorist and personality disorders. My book explains the method in guidebook fashion.

Orgonomy embraces health with a functional mind-body approach that helps patients access their naturally abundant free-flowing energy and couples it with capacity for lively contact and clarity of perception in an unarmored body. This approach is distinguished from other therapies by its energetic concept of functioning. When there is blockage in our mind and body, our capacity to function at our fullest is limited by both aspects. Our physicality is part and parcel of the health equation. As mental health professionals — why not work with the body directly? Why not expand treatment beyond a strictly verbal analytic therapy model, as we increasingly realize the importance of body-mind components that factor into the etiology of physical disease, stress-related



symptoms and capacity to heal. I am incredulous that the vast majority of analysts never engage the patient's body in the process, likely because somatic interventions are rarely taught in a methodical way that is congruent with theoretical principles of analysis. With verbal therapies, the mind and emotions are engaged, but not the body; therefore, the mind-body split continues.

With over 40 years in private practice, it is apparent to me that impressive and powerful mind-body alterations result from engaging the patient's body in the treatment. Our life-long memories are housed in our

a seated upright position that relies exclusively on cognitive and verbal communications, leaving the defenses more intact. Many patients have difficulty expressing feelings and have never cried as adults even when they desperately wanted and needed to. Others have been warned early not to raise their voices or get angry and that inhibition has had deleterious effects on their own ability to be assertive and communicate openly in relationships.

When patients experience biophysical work on the couch and are given permission and instructions that facilitate emotional expressions and permit new

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body; our physical structure reflects our genetics, our historical experiences and is a template carved out of our life situations and events. Many aspects of our physical health in maturity are directly related to our early psychological history. A research study in the New York Times, confirms the long-term physiological effects of stress in childhood.¹ This study shows that early stress may be linked to hardening of the arteries in adulthood. Finnish researchers studied 12-18 year-olds across many social, emotional, economic and stress measures within the family and studied the group again at ages 40-46, measuring coronary artery calcification. Controlling for other contributing causes, the research found that "the higher the childhood stress score, the greater the risk for coronary artery calcification."¹ Orgonomy addresses the historic stress embedded in all physical systems and creates a vehicle so that the material can be psychologically and biophysically metabolized and released.

With the Orgonomic biophysical treatment modality, the body is mobilized as a vehicle of expression for deeply held emotions. With strictly verbal work, the physical expression is contained and inhibited by

expressions of long-held feelings, they feel liberated. Their awareness of self and what has occurred in their lifetime grows from the inside out. They experience deep release and relief as their physical tension and contraction gives way to energetic movement and expansion. As Wilhelm Reich states, the natural state of the organism is pulsation: expansion and contraction — and the natural healthy organismic pulsation is reinstated through consistent sessions of bodywork. As constriction, tension and blockages are released through expression of real feeling coupled with physical movements, the body can let go and the patient may experience pleasurable streaming (energetic waves from head to toe) and deep relaxation that becomes integrated into their nervous system.


Historically, our survival depended on developing a coping style that resulted in the least amount of adversity; the character structure embeds in the psyche and becomes the individualized defensive style of the patient. That same defensive structure is the organizing template for all bodily processes and felt physical experiences of the patient. This is what is meant by the term "body armor;" the ways that the character



armor is expressed in the body including: the nervous, hormonal, immune and circulatory systems, the flexibility or rigidity of the musculoskeletal system, sexual responsivity and performance and felt sense of health. Our body-mind is one so we can create improvement by working directly with both parts. Unfortunately, the majority of mental health therapies do not approach this obvious relationship. Focusing just on talk therapy leaves half of the equation ignored.

When we intervene directly with the body, we unwind and release bound muscular tensions, realign the autonomic nervous system so the sympathetic (fight, flight or freeze responses) balances with the parasympathetic functions (digestion, relaxation responses) lowering chronic stress reactions and reducing inflammation leading to overall better health. The autonomic nervous system is an example of expansive and contractive systems within the body. We are changing a patient's approach to life at its root — how the patient exists within his body-mind.

Patients feel enormous relief as they develop a new sense of freedom of expression and release long-held feelings as they recapture archaic memories.

They experience a growing capacity to deeply relax afterwards as their parasympathetic system learns to give-in to the relaxation response. They become able to express their strength and power as well as give-in to vulnerability. The energy flows throughout their body rather than remain blocked (trapped) in their head, chest, diaphragm or abdomen, which prevents a flow (streaming) to the limbs. These are some benefits of biophysical treatment interventions. 



Author Patricia Frisch can be found at www.OrgonomicTherapy.com.

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