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**Alexander Lowen and Bio-Energetic Analysis:
Keystones in the Foundation of a Science of Subjective Experience
By Frederic Lowen**

Introduction

I want to thank Luciano Marchino for providing this opportunity for me to speak with you about something that is rarely discussed: subjective experience and its place in science, and how my father's work in Bioenergetic Analysis provides insights and tools to evaluate subjective experience scientifically.

Consider the miracles that modern science has brought us: food productivity so that people who were starving can now eat; medical advances that mitigate infectious disease and repair damaged organs and broken bodies have remarkably improved health worldwide; the internet which has enabled a global collective consciousness that may have evolutionary biological implications; to name only a few.

On the other hand, while many believe technology is the key solution to many of our problems, few recognize that the explosion in science and technology actually correlates with an unprecedented explosion in social problems, especially so in the past 30 years. Unprecedented environmental problems such as species extinction rates, atmospheric pollution of CO₂, ocean acidification, sea level rise, and weather extremes, are but a few examples. Also, increased stress, anxiety, mental illness, and substance abuse result from varieties of socio-political-economic factors, all of which are informed by science to varying degrees.

For all the technical achievements of modern science, it has failed to guide us into a sustainable living environment. I will show how a scientific treatment of subjective experience is possible, and is necessary to enable scientific investigation and discovery to guide us towards life positive rather than life negating activities.

Modern Science

Psychology, economics, sociology, political science and other areas are considered "soft sciences." They do not lend themselves to the rigorous control modern objective science demands. The soft sciences may be characterized as "informed guesses," because the necessary quantification and numerical analysis cannot capture human behavior, motivation, and emotion. If science restricts its view of nature solely to phenomena that may be measured and quantified, much of nature and reality will not be investigated.

If the universe consists of only energy and matter, I contend that science has investigated matter, but has left energy relatively un-explored.

Science has no way to measure or quantify energy directly. All our measurements of energy only measure the effect energy has on matter: scales can measure the effect kinetic and potential mechanical energy has on a body; electrical instruments such as ammeters and voltmeters measure the effect energy has on an iron bar with copper coils; chemical laboratories can measure the chemical energy contained in substances by measuring the heat conversion of chemical processes; even heat energy, is not directly quantified: only its' effects on mercury, bi-metal, or infra-red thermometers, may be measured.

We have become masters of utilizing energy since we first gained control of fire. We harness it electrically, chemically, thermally, atomically to do work and gain power, but we know very little about energy itself. Especially little is known about the energy and energetic processes in living things.

Energy & Energetic Processes

As human beings, we all know another's energy. We feel excited, or withdrawn, or encouraged by others. We intuit each other's energy: good and bad, over-bearing or open, restricted or free, contained or depressed. The best doctors utilize their subjective sense to aid in their patient evaluations. Yet, modern science has few tools to directly evaluate the energetic processes that are emotion, feelings, perception, expression, and motivations.

We can measure and photograph areas of excitement and blood flows in the brain; we can calculate energetic processes of chemical energy absorbed or expended, electrical energy associated with the operation of the neurons and the nervous system, thermal balance, and mechanical energy required by muscle activity; we can even exert some control over energetic states such as anxiety, depression, psychosis with medications or shock; but mainstream science has been unable to work with energetic states directly, as they are not directly quantifiable.

As an example, consider a "mind-game:" we may currently have the scientific ability to construct a synthetic heart in all material respects, but are we able to infuse the heart with an energy that will sustain itself? Batteries not included or permitted. I believe the limitations on our modern scientific approach with its single focus on structure and detail, mechanical cause and effect, will preclude such ability.

My father, Alexander Lowen, and Wilhelm Reich before him, building on the work of Sigmund Freud, have invested their professional lives in the study and use of energy and energetic processes in humans. I refer to such energy as bio-energy, or simply "energy," and the energetic processes as "bioenergetics," although it is

the same as Reich's orgone energy and Freud's early concept of libido, as well as Eastern concepts of chi (qi), prana, etc.

The energy work of Freud, Reich, and Lowen was developed to solve psychiatric problems of neurosis. While all three pioneers concur that human energy is related to sexual drive, it also drives all human motivation, perception, sensations and emotions. As long as we live, we are energetic beings, relating to the world and each other energetically.

Life is Pulsatory

What has emerged from Reich's work, clinically validated by Lowen, is that life is fundamentally pulsatory and vibratory. Life is in movement, and only in death is there no movement. While we do not know the source of this pulsatory energy, just as we do not understand the "dark energy" of astrophysics, it is characterized by a rhythmic vibration and/or pulsation inherent in all living tissue.

Pulsation is expansion alternating with contraction. Most obviously present in heartbeat, breathing, and digestive (peristaltic) activity, it is also inherent in all muscular and cellular activity, and in our feeling states.

On the level of the organism, expansion is generally associated with pleasure and openness to the world, and contraction is associated with fear, pain or withdrawal.

An important aspect of pulsation and vibration is how clearly it demonstrates both unity and duality. Expansion and contraction are simply the opposite dual poles of the unity. In his second book "Love and Orgasm," Lowen demonstrates convincingly that consciousness arises from an awareness of opposites, beginning with the awareness of "self" as distinct from "other."

The duality is important because it implies that life is characterized by polar opposites. Healthy energetic functioning requires a constant oscillation, or movement from one pole to the other. Being stuck in one state or the other is inherent in dysfunction.

Knowing that expansion is associated with pleasure and the desire to reach out and engage the world, and contraction is a fear response, we can see human behavior is governed by two *energetic* motivations: fear of pain, and desire for pleasure. As the poles of a unified organism, both fear and desire are important to the health of the organism. As stated above, dysfunction occurs when the energetic pulsation ceases, and the energetic functioning becomes stuck with all energy focused towards only one pole. From an energetic perspective, it is the role of health workers, and psychotherapists in particular, to help the client restore the pulsatory, vibratory nature of their energetic functioning, thereby regaining freedom from dysfunction.

Duality and Morality

Because energetic pulsation is characterized by the duality of its polar states, and all phenomena and living things are manifestations of energetic processes, it implies a basis for morality; that is, the distinction between good and bad has a basis in reality. Modern, “objective science” based on logic, rationality, and numerical analysis has no such basis. I argue that it is this lack of a basis for evaluating good and bad, or for distinguishing between life-positive and life-negating activities and behavior that has resulted in the massive dysfunctions we face today in health and well-being, and social and economic affairs.

The basis for morality is not simply that good and bad exist as polar opposites in life, but that “good” is associated with healthy energetic functioning, while “bad” is associated with energetic functioning that has become stuck, blocked, or diminished; leading to a deadening of energetic functions. This then is the distinction between life-supporting and life-negating activities and states; and the basis of morality from an energetic perspective, not just an intellectual, logical perspective.

Characterology and Subjective Experience

Over the past one hundred years, characterology, or the study of character, was developed by Reich and Lowen to understand how human development affects personality, character, and health or neurosis. While characterology may be understood intellectually, it is purely an energetic phenomenon, Firstly, character is formed by subjective, energetic experiences during child development, from the womb through the Oedipal period ending approximately age 8.

The character types recognized in Bioenergetic Analysis: schizoid, oral, masochist, and rigid, result from the energetic dysfunction in the relationship between child, mother, and father. The energetic development of humans begins in the womb, where the child is passively dependent on the mother for sustenance. Disturbances in this energetic relationship create a threat to survival for the child, who’s only means of defense is to dis-associate from the pain and fear, leading to the schizoid character structure.

After birth, the child’s focus is the mother’s nipple, via the child’s mouth, for sustenance and fulfillment. Disturbances that occur at this time are referred to as “oral.” Oral characters have body types that tend to be thin and elongated, tending towards thoracic (chest) collapse as sustenance of food and love was not freely provided by the mother. The oral attitude and behavior may express an independence, but only as an over-compensation for the unfulfilled need to be taken care of. A need un-met in childhood cannot be fulfilled by another; only by acknowledging and re-experiencing on a feeling level, that is, energetically, the

pain, hurt, and abandonment in relation to the mother can the oral character emerge from unconsciously re-living the traumatic pain and fear of the early years.

From two to three years after birth, the child's energetic focus moves from the mouth to the anus as the child is "toilet trained." Disturbances in this period result in "masochistic" traits, including a desire to please and comply accompanied by a passive resistance to the other. The resulting body type is often constricted at both the throat and neck, and in the pelvis, expressing the fear of violation and discharge.

The rigid character, notably including the narcissistic personalities, result during the period when the child's energetic focus again moves, now from the anus to the genitals. This accompanies an awareness of sexuality, expressed in the sexual attraction between the child and the parent of the opposite sex, along with a potential conflict with the parent of the same sex. This mostly occurs unconsciously: typically neither child or parents have a conscious awareness of this dynamic as this energetic Oedipal relationship unfolds.

Where the mother and father's relationships are secure and fulfilling, and the child's needs for love and self-fulfillment are met, the child will pass through the Oedipal period with a healthy sexuality. If such conditions do not exist, the child becomes the subject of the parents' insecurities. For example, lacking a fulfilling relationship with the other parent, the boy child becomes the energetic focus of the frustrated mother. This focus includes a sexual component. This in turn creates a sexual excitement in the boy during the time of his sexual self-discovery, where it is dysfunctionally integrated into his emerging personality.

In the true oedipal situation, the father resents the mother's focus of her energy on the son, and unconsciously communicates to the son that the son's sexual energy aroused by the mother will not be tolerated. Although the son's response may be the desire to kill the father, the practical energetic response is to diminish the sexual feeling, the energy. Stiffening the body by tightening muscles is a defensive, fearful posture that diminishes all feeling. On a chronic basis over a period of years, this rigidity is structured into the body, and the boy is not aware of how restricted he has become in later life. His feelings, his body, his perceptions and his ability to express, or even know, his feelings have been diminished or distorted to greater or lesser degree. This is referred to as the rigid, or genital, character.

Characterology may be the first practical product of the science of subjective experience. Not only is character a result of subjective experience, it is best evaluated by subjective experience. Psychotherapists using their own subjective experience in their work with clients are practitioners of the science of subjectivity; as they develop their work for replication by others they become true scientists of subjective experience.

Science and the Mind-Body Split

All of us in modern society are afflicted by these character traits to varying degree, and with unlimited variation of blends. Every individual is unique. However, we all share an affliction we call the “mind-body split.” The mind-body split refers to a disconnect between the mind’s consciousness, self-awareness, and self-image, and the energetic emotional and feeling state of the body.

Accompanying the disconnect is an energetic over-charge in the head and mental activities, with an under-charged body which is also structurally defended against varying feelings, and is energetically un-grounded. This occurs not only in individuals, but also in society, and that includes science. The result is a socio-economic political environment that rigidifies in a structure that supports the status quo and the elites ... at the expense of society at large and the environment. Both are simply exploited. While social challenges increase, the favored political solution is invariably more of the same.

Why do we, the most intelligent creatures to walk the earth, allow such self-destructive activities to occur? Because the mind-body split, a widespread but little recognized affliction in modern culture, precludes us from sensing, seeing and believing the deterioration, and from feeling and expressing our outrage and anger. Instead, without a feeling basis to distinguish right and wrong, good and bad, life-supporting and life-negating activities, our mind intellectually rationalizes any behavior based on the needs and values of the ego, not on the needs and values of the body. Mind/ego self-image is out-of-alignment, disconnected from our body image. Our body is what is, our ego sees what it wants; for most of us, they are not the same.

Obstacles to a Subjective Science

One of the big obstacles to a science of subjective experience is the variability of perception. As discussed above, much of this variability can be shown to be predictable distortions: neurosis is characterized by a repetition of patterned behavior, thought, and perception. For example an oral character will see and respond to a given situation differently than a rigid psychopathic character type.

Additionally, a person’s energy level is generally proportional to perception: a low energy organism is less perceptive than a high energy organism, all else being equal. This provides a basis to begin to understand variability of perception.

Another obstacle is the lack of a benchmark to compare and contrast subjective experience. Bioenergetics overcomes this obstacle in two ways:

Firstly, as a therapeutic modality developed to free a person from neurosis and the effects of trauma, it provides a means by which one can reduce one’s own

distortions in perception, feeling, and emotional response and expression. The object is to get the ego, with its' cultural values, fears, and desires, to align in an un-distorted way with the person's animal-like nature to engage the world for sex, sustenance and security.

Subjective experience, an energetic phenomenon, is un-distorted when the ego is not in control of body experience. It is un-distorted only when the ego is aligned with a person's "core-energetic" motivations to seek pleasure and avoid pain.

Secondly, it suggests that the benchmark to evaluate subjective experience is a human being (not a machine) that has resolved all or most internal conflicts. From such a benchmark one is able to sense and respond to, that is, resonate with external stimuli without energy bound in conflict or distorted by ego needs ... where one is fully engaged in the "here and now," with mind and body in healthy energetic relationship.

Bioenergetic Analysis' Scientific Tools

Disease comes when the energetic functioning is distorted or disturbed, as evidenced in people's difficulty in breathing fully, which also distorts thinking, perception, and behavior. Bioenergetic Analysis provides a means to work directly with the energy of the body to mitigate these distortions, and to understand better how they affect what we see in objective science. Importantly, it is also the means by which we can evaluate subjective experience.

Bioenergetic Analysis gives us tools that have been lacking in our ability to evaluate subjective experience. Firstly, characterology provides a framework in which distortions of subjective experience, in perception, emotional response, and expression, may be understood and predicted.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, neurosis is characterized by limitations. Early traumatic experience limits a person's ability to feel and sense their reality accurately and appropriately. Instead, the accompanying fear creates repeated irrational responses, behaviors, attitudes in varieties of situations; responses governed by fear, that are self-destructive or self-defeating, rather than reacting to a situation spontaneously and appropriately.

This is inherent in the different character types, which are created by the chronic response to childhood trauma. Clearly, an oral character type may have a predictably different response to a given situation than a rigid character: narcissist or psychopath for example. Not only will the one person respond to a given situation differently: the oral character may collapse under great stress, while the narcissist or psychopath will redouble their efforts at control. They also perceive a given situation differently. While an angry boss may create despair and depression in an oral character, the rigid character will tend to respond with

charm and seeming self-possession while feeling superior and resentful that the boss does not recognize their superiority. A masochist will respond with compliance and a wish to please, while a passive resentment to the boss grows.

Resonance, Grounding, and Grace

Two more important energetic aspects are resonance and grounding. Resonance is the ability to feel another's energy, whether it is the energy of the environment, an animal, or a person or a population. The word "resonance" implies a vibratory phenomenon. It is dependent on the observer's vibrant health, and un-distorted perception and response. It is the desired state to be a benchmark to evaluate the experience of energetic processes; it is also the state to which all psychotherapists aspire.

Grounding is essential to achieve that benchmark state. Lowen has demonstrated and clinically validated the effect of grounding: one's connection to themselves is mirrored by their connection to the world. Grounding describes a person's energetic connection to the ground through their feet and legs; the lack of which is common and can be readily seen in a person's body and movement.

Being ungrounded is analogous to how science ignores subjective experience. If people don't take their own subjective experience as being real and valid, they are un-grounded. They prefer to believe as they're told to believe (largely out of fear), and they only see what they want to see, not what is.

An important and interesting aspect of grounding is how it affects intellectuality. A grounded person can evaluate whether the ideas and intellectual activity of another is grounded in reality, or is some form of wishful thinking, or an attempt to control people and events.

Grounding has an important correlation with electrical energy: all electrical systems require grounding in order to maintain stability. A household electrical system that runs lights, refrigerators, motors and electronics requires a constant voltage, which is dependent on a proper connection to the earth, the ground. If that ground connection is broken, voltage cannot be stabilized, randomly varying from 50% to 150% of the healthy voltage, damaging many of the connected sub-systems. A person's un-grounded energy is similarly unstable and un-reliable to the degree the feeling connection to the ground is diminished. Importantly, an un-grounded person cannot evaluate another person's grounding; they simply cannot see it. Similarly, a person who has not resolved their own trauma and the resulting internal conflicts cannot accurately see another's neurosis.

Finally, Lowen's "Spirituality of the Body" shows how grace in body and movement is the ultimate indicator of health. I would also propose that grace and beauty represent a benchmark to evaluate subjective experience. I am not speaking of the practiced grace of professional dancers or other athletes. Rather,

I refer to the ego-less movement and inter-exchange with the world as seen in animals as they play, hunt or forage, and mate. The lack of grace in movement, behavior, thoughts and attitude indicate a lack of energetic connection to their own selves, to the world and ground. Grace is an indicator of one's ability to accurately perceive, resonate, and appropriately respond to other people and events, that is, to evaluate subjective experience accurately and precisely.

Conclusion

We know that phenomena such as emotions, feelings, perceptions, sensations, and motivations for behavior, rational and irrational, in individuals or crowds are intuitively obvious but are not definable by measurement, quantification, and mechanistic explanations. Yet, they are important to psychotherapists who explore subjective experience in their work with clients.

To empathize and understand their clients' formative subjective experiences, psychotherapists utilize their own subjective experience to evaluate the quality of the client's energy. As patterns are recognized in solving the client's problems, such as characterology, subjective experience becomes science. In the last discussion I had with my father before his debilitating stroke in 2006, I remarked that it was amazing how he created such a large and far-ranging understanding of life using only his own body as his laboratory, and he replied that "...what is amazing is that anyone can do it!"

In this paper I propose that subjective experience can inform us about phenomena that objective science cannot address, and that subjective experience is valuable in guiding objective exploration. I believe the Bioenergetic work of my father provides a solid foundation for a Science of Subjective Experience.

Frederic Lowen, son of Alexander Lowen, M.D., is Executive Director of The Alexander Lowen Foundation, and Manager of LowenCorp Publishing, LLC holding the Lowen copyrights. From his long term close association with Alexander Lowen, his experience in Bioenergetic psychotherapy, workshops and trainings since 1966, Fred seeks to expand the visibility, appreciation, and use of Bioenergetics.