

Bioenergetics and Rolfing®

An Interview with Chuck Lustfield

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by Bill Harvey

Chuck Lustfield, 58, of Dallas has been Rolfing for 20 years. He is also a Bioenergetics therapist. He sees about 20 Rolfing clients and 10 Bioenergetic clients a week.

BH: Were you a Bioenergetics therapist before you were a Rolfer, or did you decide to become one since you became a Rolfer?

CL: I was in Bioenergetic therapy and was introduced to Rolfing when people told me that Rolfing should be part of my therapeutic process. In therapy, I got Rolfed and then became a Rolfer. I stayed with that direction until 1981 - 82 when I started in the training program here in Dallas in Bioenergetic Psychotherapy.

BH: When you started doing Bioenergetics as a second profession, were you drawing from your Rolfing clients for your Bioenergetic clients?

CL: Some of my first clients were Rolfing clients, but I also built a practice from co-leading a group.

BH: Is doing Bioenergetics work in the same way that Rolfing is work? Are you tired at the end of a session?

CL: Actually I'm usually energized. For me, even when I'm Rolfing, or when I'm doing psychotherapy, I get drained when I'm not careful about my own personal boundaries, and I let my energy get zapped. Most of the time, I feel pretty energetic. At the end of the day I'm tired. I don't have

any problem sleeping. I work hard, and I really enjoy what I do, so I look forward to my days. There are some clients that you are more happy to be around than other clients, but overall I enjoy what I'm doing.

BH: Do you use the Bioenergetic framework?

CL: Yes. When I look at the body, when I'm doing Rolfing, or when I'm doing Bioenergetics, I'm really looking at a whole-person process. For me, my own Rolfing was one of, not only physical well-being, but there was an emotional and spiritual change. I mean I really felt different as a whole person from my Rolfing. And I also experienced that in Bioenergetics, so I really see both Rolfing and Bioenergetics working with the full person—mind and body.

BH: They're both holistic perspectives. Bioenergetics has categories, a developmental schema which can identify where a person has gotten stuck. You could be schizoid, you could be masochistic, you could be oral, you could be rigid...

CL: Yes. It's a developmental process. Actually, now we try to get away from those names because we don't find it very helpful to be categorizing

people with stigmatizing names, but look more at holding patterns in the body.

BH: Given these categories exist, they must affect your thinking and your vision, the way you look at a client. How have you approached Rolfing differently because of these categories? How would Rolfing a person who is an oral compare to Rolfing a person who's a rigid?

CL: Those are the extremes.

BH: Well, that's why I did it that way.

CL: Basically, an oral structure is a structure that doesn't have enough support. There's a lot of collapse throughout the body. The way they interact with the world reflects that. Bioenergetics provides a process of energizing the structure, and organizing it so that they feel more internal support.

Most people are mixtures of structure, because we all go through developmental stages, and some of our needs are not met in the various stages. We get fixated a little bit in each of the stages. So rarely do you see someone who is the classic this or that.

A rigid structure is essentially very structured but with little flexibility. They have not much sense of their core. They're doing everything externally for the movement that they do have. For people with a rigid structure, Bioenergetics provides a

process of releasing a lot of their superficial structure and having them find an internal sense. It's getting them in touch with the visceral part: your heart, your belly, the feelings felt, because they hold themselves away from the feelings.

BH: Rolfing, in some ways, works the least with rigids of all the categories. They're the toughest nuts to crack. They're the hardest people to get some lasting results.

CL: My experience has been that almost anybody who has been successful, has to have a certain amount of rigidity. They can't be stuck in their pregenital phase. Part of our drive comes from the later stages of development. The rigid structures are slow to change, but actually the structure that I find the most difficult to accept change both working Bioenergetically and working in terms of Rolfing is what we call the masochistic structure, or the structure which holds in. The amount of change they get may appear minimal if you're looking at their bodies or behavior, but they experience it as quite large because they are so compressed that any kind of movement feels like a lot of movement to them. Rigid structures are very slow to change. It really is a hard process. Actually, I find each of the structures presents unique problems...

BH: Challenges.

CL: Challenges is a nicer word.

BH: Do you ever get to a point where you say, "I can't go any further with you until you get some Rolfing." Or vice versa.

CL: Sure. That can happen in either direction.

BH: And are you willing to work with people in both modalities?

CL: Yes, I am. I look at what my

relationship is with the client. It's a dual relationship, and I have to be real clear with myself as to how I see myself with the client. How do I sense the client's needs? Is it appropriate? Because sometimes, and depending on the issues emotionally, they may need to work with a woman, on the emotional stuff. Or, I

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may think it's important that if I'm working with them Bioenergetically, that another Rolfer would be working with them. The hard thing is that even when I want to refer them to someone else, usually there's a bond that is already formed. And they say, "Well you know me, and I feel comfortable with you." In some sense you have to give them some really good reasons why someone else might be appropriate. But there are certain clients that I work on both ways, and everything's worked out pretty well. I evaluate each relationship I have with a client.

BH: It's hard for me to imagine a time in my own life where I had a sort of basic set of explicit assumptions like the ones provided by a

Bioenergetic perspective. So, my own approach has been very different because I start with the question, "What is healing?" "What is health?" And I conceive of the body metaphysical as ever expanding concentric spheres, and each sphere would be representative of something: the intellectual body, emotional body, spiritual body, etheric body, and so forth. And I don't even know what those are. I don't try to. The point is that an insult to the system is going to be in one of those places but it's going to affect all those places.

When I became a Rolfer, I had been working on myself, felt imprisoned by a series of failures that I had had over five years previous, and the one piece that hadn't been addressed was the body. So I got Rolfed and I experienced all this emotional health, as well as physical health, and I thought the Rolfing did that. It hadn't occurred to me that Rolfing was the final piece that needed to fall into place.

CL: Where do you see the conflict, the disparity? I believe Rolfing has some explicit assumptions like gravity, and fascia as the organ of support. You said that your way of doing seemed quite a bit different.

BH: I didn't have a developmental perspective. I'm still trying to develop it. I see whole systems, that's my way of looking at things. I look at the Bioenergetic system and stay back to get a perspective on the whole system. That's why I do these interviews—I'm looking at whole systems, looking at the point where people make explicit their assumptions about what they're doing, and what's at stake. Because when those assumptions are explicit, then you have a chance to say, "Okay, this isn't working. What I'm doing is not working because..."

CL: Your description of the concen-

tric circles, concentric spheres, is one way in which I see the body. It's not my idea, but our physical expression is the condensation point of our energy that we can touch, feel, and see. So that's where we work. Like Ida said, "This is what you're going to get you hands on."

In terms of the Bioenergetic analysis, although we have this developmental system—it's sort of like looking at the template for the Rolfed body. It's something you have in the background. It's not something that you rigidly put on or look at a person. Very few people are categorically one thing. So you have to be with the person, look at their body, hear their story. You look at the way that they relate in the world, and you start to put pieces together. Even when you're working physically with the person, what you're doing is you have an overall objective of organizing around a line, and gravity. What you're doing in each part of the body, and in each one of the structures is what is needed in that particular structure to bring about this overall greater picture.

When I'm working, whether Bioenergetically or with Rolting, my Rolting is clearly affected by my Bioenergetics and my Bioenergetics is affected by what I know from Rolting. So it's a blending. I'm not trapped into looking at this person, or working on this person as a rigid. I work with this person, and see from session to session, what is evolving. Where is this person? I see some overall patterns: overall in his body he carries his pelvis tipped far forward, and his shoulders are way behind his line, that is a chronic pattern that's really slow in changing. The same is true for the holding patterns in Bioenergetics.

BH: One of the deficiencies with the Bioenergetic perspective, and maybe

this is because I don't know it in depth, but it seems like body armoring is one of the more important concepts, and the opposite of that, which is referred to in some other systems as collapse or resignation, is not as much of a concept.

CL: That's not really so. The oral structure, the holding-on structure, is a classically collapsed structure, and the psychopathic structure is a structure that holds up as a defense against the fear of collapse. In bioenergetic analysis, we work along the entire collapse-rigidity spectrum.

You were talking about the armoring. Life is about pulsation, expansion, and contraction. Our life flow is one of continual expansion and contraction, and where there's stress, the body contracts and holds on. That's an appropriate defense. But then, if you're healthy, when the stressor is gone, the body should be able to relax, and then go back to the expansion, contraction and expansion. The Bioenergetics concept of armoring, although we talk about it with the other structures, is really most suited to the rigid structure, the developmental period related to the oedipal struggle. Each of the structures has different defensive holding patterns.

When we're working with somebody, what we're really trying to do is help them to release their holding patterns, and get back to the flow of expansion and contraction, which is appropriate to their external reality, to their environment at the time. If their environment is threatening, then they should be in a protective state. They should be more contracted. If they're in a loving, nurturing environment, they should be able to feel into that, and feel their expansion. What happens for most people is that they get stuck somewhere and they don't have the ability to move back and forth.

BH: When I first became a Rolfer, I ran into a lot of trouble with local Reichian therapists, and a Bioenergetic therapist, who if they found out that their clients were also seeing me, they basically forbade them to go to me. The explanation I was given was that Rolting destroys psychic material.

CL: Is it true that Rolting destroys the client's psychic material, that Rolting moves the client through some trauma without giving the client appropriate time to process that information? My answer to that is no. It's not the process of Rolting that does that. I think what can happen is that a Rolfer might be insensitive to a client's psychic process and not give the client the opportunity to integrate and organize the psychic material. In certain circumstances, this might even mean stopping a session before you normally would. I once had a psychiatrist tell me that one of his patients had gone psychotic shortly after a Rolting session. Of course, I don't know what really happened, but my hunch is that the person was pretty emotionally unstable to begin with. I do think it is important for Rolfers to ask about a client's emotional history, psychiatric hospitalizations, and current psychological health and treatment. And, of course, it's important to be aware of the client's emotional state during a session. I believe most Rolfers nowadays do these things.

As I said, I don't stop a Rolting session in the middle and get somebody up and throw them over a breathing stool, and say, "Okay, now you're gonna kick, and scream, and beat your mother." When I'm in a Rolting session, I give people time to release emotions, but I don't start doing Bioenergetics in some active way. I use my knowledge of therapy, but I don't interrupt sessions and start a full blown therapy session and

I don't interrupt a Bioenergetic session and stick my finger up their nose either.

BH: Well, that was my next question. I've wondered if you could combine Bioenergetic exercises with Rolfing. Often, it seems that an area that is not releasing via Rolfing might be moved along with these Bioenergetic exercises.

CL: Well there are issues with that. First of all, the energy in the session changes. Many people contract with me to help them get through their bad back. You try and educate them, but they have a mind set when they come in. You can talk to them and say, "You may experience some emotional stuff coming up" and all that, but if you get in the middle of a session and start having them do something expressive in terms of their emotions, it feels like a different contract. It's a different energy that starts to evolve. I find that confusing, and I assume it's confusing for the client. The second thing is in terms of managing your session times in a practical way. If you start projecting some therapeutic work into the middle of a Rolfing session, you'll be into a two hour session. And that doesn't work for me.

BH: Right. Well tell me, do you use Bioenergetic exercises as homework for your clients?

CL: Sometimes I do. I may give them bioenergetic exercises or some movement things to do. Normally, I won't give them exercises that would bring up deep emotional stuff if they're not in therapy. By the way, if they are in therapy, I strongly encourage them to inform their therapist that they're getting Rolfed.

I've worked in collaboration with one therapist where he'd say, "I'm sending this person over. I want you to work with them Bioenergetically

for ten weeks, and after that, I want you to do the first three Rolfing sessions, and then maybe we'll do some more Bioenergetics." So I may split up the Rolfing series, and put Bioenergetic sessions in between, and that works real well. But it doesn't work for me to change gears in the middle of a session. I've tried it. It gets unmanageable, and it gets confusing.

BH: One criticism that is often leveled against expressive psychotherapies is that in encouraging a client to express you're actually setting up some kind of energetic feedback loop. I have a neighbor who has been doing Bioenergetics for about fifteen years. But what it appears to me is happening is that she goes and beats the bed with the tennis racquet, generates a whole lot of energy doing that, and then discharges that energy in something like a catharsis, and feels better. But she hasn't really hooked into the upset, or the insult in the first place. She's discharging only what she had built up in the first place.

CL: That's true. Sometimes clients get stuck in what we call bioenergetic performance. They may want to be 'good clients' and get praise from their therapist. Sometimes they are earnestly attempting to express their feelings but have a hard time really connecting to them. It's the therapist's task to be aware of what's happening and, if necessary, point out to the client the performance stuff or assist the client in connecting with the feelings underneath the physical expression. On the other side of the coin, sometimes the therapist's own impatience or other feelings get in the way of letting the client have the time needed to move through their process at their own pace.

BH: I think I have included the major criticisms of Bioenergetics that you

would find from structural bodyworkers.

CL: Yeah, I'm really glad you asked those questions because I struggled with them when I began considering working in both modalities. Most of the time, when I hear Bioenergetics people criticizing Rolfers, and vice versa, I realize that their observations are based on interactions with one or two persons who have undergone the other process, and they are most often pretty ignorant of the other modality. I know that there have been incidents of inadequate and/or inept treatment in both camps, but I think sometimes we forget that we are all works in process. I know that I've had the experience of someone coming to me for Rolfing and telling me that they've had 10 or 20 Rolfing sessions, and to me the person sure looks like they could use some organization. Does that mean that the work they got was poor? It's important to consider where the person was when he/she started their process. How far they might have come.

When I started my Rolfing training and mentioned to people that I had done a lot of Bioenergetic work, it was strongly implied by several Rolfers that I should give it up. My bioenergetic friends thought I was nuts to become a Rolfer. It was heresy from both camps. I've heard that Ida and Al Lowen didn't have a warm cuddly relationship. So part of the non-acceptance probably came down from the top on both sides. For me, it's worked very well. I like what I do, and my clients seem to like what I do. I'm glad I didn't listen to the sages. □