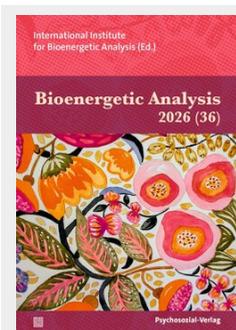


*Camila Macedo*

## Adolescence and the clinical work of bioenergetics today



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# Adolescence and the clinical work of bioenergetics today

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## Abstracts

Embodied communication represents the primary form of expression when adolescents enter therapeutic settings. They arrive depleted, anxious, or constricted, presenting themselves for initial contact that initiates a journey of bodily self-discovery. By incorporating contemporary understanding of adolescent embodiment in the digital age, this clinical approach emphasizes body recognition and self-perception, valuing movement and understanding how this occurs within shared networks of virtual relationships, addressing associated pathologies such as fragmentation and derealization.

This paper presents exercises adapted from Lowen and contemporary body therapies to demonstrate the importance of somatic work with adolescents. Clinical experience demonstrates that bioenergetics provides an essential therapeutic framework for developing integrative pathways that combine sensations, images, and emotions. This approach intensifies interpersonal affective registration, validates individuation, respects expressive boundaries, accommodates emotional fluctuation, and enhances the self-acceptance necessary for identity formation.

*Keywords:* adolescence, embodiment, bioenergetic exercises, body psychotherapy, digital age, therapeutic intervention

## Adolescência e o trabalho clínico da bioenergética na atualidade (Portuguese)

A comunicação corporal representa a principal forma de expressão quando adolescentes entram em contextos terapêuticos. Eles chegam esgotados, ansiosos ou retraídos, apresentando-se para um contato inicial que dá início a uma jornada de autodescoberta corporal. Ao incorporar a compreensão contemporânea da cor-

poreidade adolescente na era digital, esta abordagem clínica enfatiza o reconhecimento corporal e a autopercepção, valorizando o movimento e compreendendo como isso ocorre dentro de redes compartilhadas de relacionamentos virtuais, abordando patologias associadas, como fragmentação e desrealização.

Este artigo apresenta exercícios adaptados da abordagem Lowen e de terapias corporais contemporâneas para demonstrar a importância do trabalho somático com adolescentes. A experiência clínica demonstra que a bioenergética fornece uma estrutura terapêutica essencial para o desenvolvimento de caminhos integrativos que combinam sensações, imagens e emoções. Essa abordagem intensifica o registro afetivo interpessoal, valida a identificação, respeita os limites expressivos, acomoda a flutuação emocional e aprimora a autoaceitação necessária para a formação da identidade.

### L'adolescence et la pratique clinique de la bioénergétique aujourd'hui (French)

La communication corporelle représente la principale forme d'expression chez les adolescents qui entreprennent une thérapie. Ils arrivent souvent épuisés, anxieux ou repliés sur eux-mêmes, se présentant au premier contact qui initie un voyage de découverte corporelle de soi. En intégrant une compréhension contemporaine de l'incarnation adolescente à l'ère du numérique, cette approche clinique met l'accent sur la reconnaissance corporelle et la perception de soi, valorisant le mouvement et la compréhension de son intégration dans les réseaux de relations virtuelles, et abordant les pathologies associées telles que la fragmentation et la déréalisation.

Cet article présente des exercices adaptés de Lowen et de thérapies corporelles contemporaines afin de démontrer l'importance du travail somatique auprès des adolescents. L'expérience clinique démontre que la bioénergétique offre un cadre thérapeutique essentiel au développement de voies intégratives combinant sensations, images et émotions. Cette approche intensifie la relation affective interpersonnelle, valide l'identification, respecte les limites expressives, s'adapte aux fluctuations émotionnelles et renforce l'acceptation de soi nécessaire à la construction de l'identité.

### Adolescenza e attività clinica della bioenergetica oggi (Italian)

La comunicazione incarnata rappresenta la principale forma di espressione quando gli adolescenti entrano in contesti terapeutici. Arrivano esausti, ansiosi o limitati, presentandosi per un primo contatto che avvia un percorso di auto-scoperta corporea. Incorporando la comprensione contemporanea dell'incarnazione adolescenziale nell'era digitale, questo approccio clinico enfatizza il riconoscimento

del corpo e la percezione di sé, valorizzando il movimento e comprendendo come questo avvenga all'interno di reti condivise di relazioni virtuali, affrontando patologie associate come la frammentazione e la derealizzazione.

Questo articolo presenta esercizi adattati da Lowen e dalle terapie corporee contemporanee per dimostrare l'importanza del lavoro somatico con gli adolescenti. L'esperienza clinica dimostra che la bioenergetica fornisce un quadro terapeutico essenziale per lo sviluppo di percorsi integrativi che combinano sensazioni, immagini ed emozioni. Questo approccio intensifica la registrazione affettiva interpersonale, convalida l'individuazione, rispetta i confini espressivi, accoglie le fluttuazioni emotive e migliora l'accettazione di sé necessaria per la formazione dell'identità.

### Jugendliche und die klinische Arbeit der Bioenergetik heute (German)

Verkörperte Kommunikation ist die primäre Ausdrucksform, wenn Jugendliche therapeutische Einrichtungen aufsuchen. Sie kommen erschöpft, ängstlich oder verkrampt an und präsentieren sich dem Therapeuten für den ersten Kontakt, der den Beginn einer Reise der körperlichen Selbstentdeckung markiert. Dieser klinische Ansatz, der das zeitgenössische Verständnis der Verkörperung von Jugendlichen im digitalen Zeitalter einbezieht, betont die Körperwahrnehmung und Selbstwahrnehmung, legt Wert auf Bewegung und untersucht, wie diese in geteilten Netzwerken virtueller Beziehungen stattfindet. Dabei werden damit zusammenhängende Pathologien wie Fragmentierung und Derealisation thematisiert.

Dieser Artikel präsentiert Übungen, die von Lowen und zeitgenössischen Körpertherapien adaptiert wurden, um die Bedeutung der somatischen Arbeit mit Jugendlichen zu verdeutlichen. Die klinische Erfahrung zeigt, dass die Bioenergetik einen essenziellen therapeutischen Rahmen für die Entwicklung integrativer Wege bietet, die Empfindungen, Bilder und Emotionen verbinden. Dieser Ansatz intensiviert die interpersonelle affektive Wahrnehmung, bestätigt die Individuation, respektiert expressive Grenzen, berücksichtigt emotionale Schwankungen und fördert die für die Identitätsbildung notwendige Selbstakzeptanz.

### ПОДРОСТКОВЫЙ ВОЗРАСТ И КЛИНИЧЕСКАЯ РАБОТА БИОЭНЕРГЕТИКИ СЕГОДНЯ (Russian)

Телесная коммуникация представляет собой основную форму самовыражения, когда подростки попадают в терапевтическую среду. Они приходят истощенными, тревожными или скованными, открывая себя для первого контакта, который инициирует путь телесного самопознания. Включая современное понимание подростковой телесности в цифровую эпоху, этот клинический подход делает акцент на узнавании тела и самовосприятии, ценя

движение и понимая, как это происходит в общих сетях виртуальных отношений, работая с сопутствующими патологиями, такими как фрагментация и дереализация.

В данной статье представлены упражнения, адаптированные из теории Лоуэна и современных методов телесной терапии, чтобы продемонстрировать важность соматической работы с подростками. Клинический опыт показывает, что биоэнергетика обеспечивает необходимую терапевтическую основу для разработки интегративных методов, объединяющих ощущения, образы и эмоции. Этот подход усиливает межличностное аффективное проявление, подтверждает индивидуальность, уважает границы самовыражения, учитывает эмоциональные перепады настроения и способствует самопринятию, необходимому для формирования идентичности.

### El cuerpo adolescente en la terapia bioenergética hoy en día (Spanish)

La comunicación corporal constituye la forma primaria de expresión cuando un adolescente inicia un proceso terapéutico. El paciente adolescente suele llegar agotado, ansioso o contraído, y el primer contacto marca el comienzo de un proceso de autodescubrimiento corporal. Al integrar la comprensión contemporánea de la corporeidad adolescente en la era digital, este enfoque clínico enfatiza el reconocimiento del propio cuerpo y la autopercepción, valorando el movimiento y la conciencia de cómo estos procesos se despliegan dentro de redes sociales y vínculos virtuales. De este modo, se abordan problemáticas emergentes como la fragmentación, la desconexión emocional y la desrealización.

El artículo presenta ejercicios adaptados de Alexander Lowen y de terapias corporales contemporáneas para ilustrar la importancia del trabajo somático con adolescentes. La experiencia clínica demuestra que el análisis bioenergético ofrece un marco terapéutico esencial para construir caminos integradores que articulen sensaciones, imágenes y emociones. Este enfoque profundiza la resonancia afectiva interpersonal, valida el proceso de individuación, respeta los límites expresivos, acoge la fluctuación emocional y favorece la autoaceptación necesaria para la formación de la identidad.

### 青春期与当代躯体动力学的临床工作 (Chinese)

青少年在融入新环境时，身体表达是其主要的自我呈现方式。他们带着疲惫、焦虑或拘谨的状态初来乍到，通过身体语言开启自我探索之旅。这种临床方法结合数字时代对青少年身体认知的现代理解，着重强调身体识别与自我感知，重视肢体语言的运用，并理解其在虚拟社交网络中的互动模式，解决相关的病理学问题，例如碎片化和现实感丧失。

本文介绍了改编自Lowen及当代身体疗法的练习方法。证明对青少年进行躯体治疗的重要性。临床经验表明，躯体动力学为发展将感知、图像与情绪相结合的整合路径提供了关键的治疗框架。这种方法强化了人际情感认同，确认个体性，尊重表达边界，包容情绪流动，有助于增强自我接纳，这对身份认同的形成至关重要。

### Adolescencja a współczesna bioenergetyczna praktyka kliniczna (Polish)

Abstrakt Ucieleśniona komunikacja stanowi podstawową formę ekspresji, z jaką nastolatki wchodzą w przestrzeń terapeutyczną. Młodzi pacjenci często zgłaszają się w stanie wyczerpania, z lękiem lub sztywnością, inicjując relację terapeutyczną, która rozpoczyna ich podróż ku cielesnemu samopoznaniu. Dzięki włączeniu współczesnej wiedzy o ucieleśnieniu adolescencji w erze cyfrowej, to podejście kliniczne podkreśla znaczenie rozpoznawania ciała i autopercepcji, docenia ruch oraz zrozumienie tego, jak przebiega on w ramach współdzielonych sieci relacji wirtualnych, a także podejmuje związane z tym patologie, takie jak fragmentacja i derealizacja.

Artykuł przedstawia zestaw ćwiczeń zaczerpniętych z bioenergetyki Lowena oraz współczesnych modalności terapii somatycznych, ilustrując zasadność i skuteczność interwencji cielesnych w pracy z młodzieżą. Doświadczenie kliniczne pokazuje, że bioenergetyka dostarcza kluczowych ram terapeutycznych do rozwijania zintegrowanych ścieżek, które łączą doznania, obrazy i emocje. Podejście to wzmacnia interpersonalną rejestrację afektywną, wspiera proces indywidualizacji, respektuje granice ekspresji, uwzględnia zmienność emocjonalną oraz pogłębia samoakceptację niezbędną do kształtowania tożsamości.

## Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) considers adolescence to be the period between 10 and 19 years of age, followed by youth between 19 and 25 years of age. The differences in the understanding of the interval that delimits adolescence reflect the multiple interactions of biological, emotional and social processes that permeate this phase of human development, with its own internal characteristics and coping with the norms, values and socio-economic expectations of the historical-cultural period to which it belongs. According to Saito (2001), “Western and Westernized adolescence appears to be extremely fickle, marked by susceptibility to both political and technological novelties conveyed by the media”.

The ambiguity of this phase, expressed in its indefinitions and possibilities, can be perceived with negativity or potentialized as a coexistence between the child and adult universes. Cultural strategies present tension between rites of passage and traditionalism, coexisting with new discourses and current practices that redefine this moment of transition, and consequently the anxieties and processes that adolescents experience. Adolescence is a psychological process marked by the vicissitudes associated with the changing body, its body image under construction and the challenges of independence. This does not exclude the variability of aspects related to the intensity and sociocultural context in which they are immersed (Corrêa & Ventura, 2006; Locatelli, 2022).

Bertazzo (2021) highlights how Stanley Hall valued this stage of the life cycle as fundamental for presenting the multiplicity of potency and characteristics of our singular human condition. At the same time, he emphasized that this vision should distance itself from universality by understanding the culture and context that produce adolescences, without losing sight that the body/corporality is fundamental to this phase.

Adolescence as a differentiated stage of human development was emphasized and studied more deeply in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the biomedical and educational spheres. Economic and social changes caused by capitalism reverberated in transformations in family relationships and representations of adolescence. They were considered as a period of social latency, destined for the formation of a person adequate for new forms of work and new technologies, extending the distance between childhood and adult life, according to the privileges and social groups one occupies (Ozella, 2002, p. 22).

Reich (1986) already reflected on the contradictions that arise and the suffering that social conditions impose on adolescents through the gaps in the sexual education they receive, in view of the needs of youth. Coexistence with adolescent corporality is often avoided by family members and health professionals who distance themselves from an education based on body pleasure and spontaneity, neglecting or repressing potentialities and discoveries so important for self-perception and self-expression.

Hormonal changes caused by growth and sexual maturation, triggered by the nervous system, lead to a greater intensity in the perception of states of tension – distension and self-satisfaction, related to corporality and sexuality manifested in adolescence. The trajectories that permeate the exercise of sexuality, in the face of bodily and hormonal changes, social rules

and the management of drives and unknown feelings, increase the acts of contestation and occupation of spaces in society, desintegrating both the body and the bond with the Other (Locatelli, 2022).

The social bond is woven in adolescence through friendship and belonging relationships, experienced online or in person. Recognition and respect for their singularity, crossed by encounters where they perceive their similarities and differences in belonging groups are fundamental characteristics of autonomization and affirmation of their place in society. In this phase, they conquer intellectual space (new cultural interests), affective space (new ways of experiencing emotions) and social space (the diversity of the human universe) (Locatelli, 2022; Nasio, 2011).

Being in the experience, in the present, in the reality of affects is important for the subjective constitution in adolescence – and they often find this pleasure while navigating and existing on the web. The social context of contemporaneity, with its speed and plasticity of information, can cause intense anxiety, affecting self and body perception, but also offers an alternative life space in which they feel, play, fight, love and hate (Locatelli, 2022).

## **What is the body in adolescence?**

The body culture we witness values adolescence like never before: the body, permissiveness, impulses, energy, experimentation, creativity. However, it does not offer space to listen how these pressures have reverberated in their individual trajectories, which involve the integration or fragmentation of these adolescent bodies facing the impregnation of images and aesthetic demands about the “perfect body”, without considering their rhythms and diversities.

Individuality, instantaneity, superficiality produces teenagers who live in the distancing of relationships mediated by telecommunications, between identity coercions and freedoms, affecting self and body perceptions – always in movement. Often making the body optional, foreign, stripped of itself in its cybernetic encounters, neglected of self-care, living suspended and without personal intimacy (Le Breton, 2018).

The rhythm of society based on high-speed technology also affects bodies, accelerating their internal and external reality. It creates a context in which one coexists with more stimuli than it is possible to absorb, accentuated by inconstancy and dispersion of the adolescence, involving the dif-

faculty in incorporate and integrate information, ideas and, even more so, body awareness. This escape from time, which happens with hypervelocity, interferes in project's construction amplifying the future anxiety and compromises the sense of security. Faced with the accelerations of contemporaneity and virtuality, the intrinsic relationship between body/time/space is forgotten in order to internalize new habits and perceptions. Adolescents experience a sensory and thought disconnection, distancing the recognition of reality that affects the body and their self-recognition, the so-called "disappearance of self" (Bertazzo, 2021; Le Breton, 2018).

Disappearances of self affect the body, immersed in automatisms, stiffened and unavailable for integration between sensations, feelings and actions – hindering the repertoire of self-knowledge and emotional modulation. Stress restrains new gestures that would seek their psycho-emotional integration capacities in the body itself.

With social bonds based on life virtualization, teenagers immersed in social networks exchanges avoid confrontation in their own personal life. They dissociate, distancing themselves from their singular corporality, existing as avatar/character in a universe shaped by technical support that produces self-invention. These forms of immaterial presence, without a face, are places conducive to imaginative omnipotence. A mirror that constantly portrays self-erasure (Le Breton, 2018).

In the diverse experiences of adolescence, they don't always know how to describe or identify what they feel, not necessarily because they avoid communicating their feelings, but because they communicate through action. Bodily sensations are as intense as critical judgment from the social (the other) or what they have introjected about themselves (Nasio, 2011).

The sensations and drive demands are mediated by the hormonal discharges resulting from the transformations of the still-developing nervous system, reflecting a seesaw of extreme excitability at one end and inertia and passivity on the other. This emotional lability is a constant in adolescents' lives, generating stress, instability and insecurity. According to Lowen (1977), sensations and feelings only become conscious if they reach the perception system; if access to perception is blocked, they don't become actualized as sensations. Where there is no movement, perception does not occur. Movement precedes perception. All perception is therefore the perception of the body's movements, both internally and face to face with the outside world. When our individual movements cease, the perception of external reality disappears.

According to Reich, two functions dominate the vegetative life of the organism: expansion and contraction, correlated to the activities of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

Biological expansion is perceived as pleasure and contraction as displeasure. There is a functional antithesis between the vegetative center and periphery. It becomes possible to establish a deeper correlation between psychic sensation and energetic movement. The movement of energy from the center to the periphery is functionally identical to biological expansion and the perception of pleasure. Conversely, energy movement from the periphery to the center is functionally identical to biological contraction and the perception of displeasure or anxiety (Lowen, 1977).

If tension develops in situations in which the anticipation of the discharge that leads to pleasure is not possible, anxiety is experienced. Anxiety implies an energetic charge whose discharge movement is blocked or being repressed. Tension becomes pathological when it becomes a chronic state beyond the body's control. On the basis of these concepts, health can be defined as an organism's ability to maintain its pulse rate within the limits of the reality principle (Lowen, 1977).

One of the keys to the challenges that adolescents will face lies in acquiring the ability to move between their own internal reality and what comes from the outside, not fixating on either extreme.

Adolescents' insertion into time and space requires the presence of movements in which they experience different postures and muscle contractions; recognizing the body means perceiving sensations and thus being affected and symbolizing internally what they have felt. Movements that produce rhythm, vibration and muscular tension provide adolescents with an understanding of how to dose the load of intention that accompanies action, seeking full attention from the being to its deepest levels, both bodily and psychic (Bertazzo, 2021).

## **Body in the adolescent clinic**

Corporality is the first form of communication when adolescents enter the therapeutic setting, drained, frightened or compressed, in many ways they present themselves for a first contact that will lead them on a path of reconceiving themselves through the body.

The sufferings reflect the difficulty to access the feeling of identity, the loss of its rootedness/grounding. They also reflect a hardship in feeling its limits and return to the security of the bodily ego and its vulnerability in the face of new experimentations with itself and the world around it, in these encounters between virtual and real, public and private, interiority and exteriority, known and unknown.

Immersed in a sociability mediated by the virtualization of the body, they experiment and seek knowledge in order to be in their relationships. They exacerbate their expectations of contact and face many frustrations and unknown sensations on this journey through their new reality, both cognitive and bodily.

Despite the physical distance that permeates this new trajectory, they make contact, they are in the encounters not only in their projections and idealizations. They are in relationships by appearing both as characters who manifest the fragmentation of the bodily ego, weakened by bodily changes, and by their ability to connect through what we will call points of resplendence. Immersed in the virtual context, they oscillate between encounter and disconnection, exploring forms of contact without taking much responsibility for themselves or their knowledge – so present in the conflict with “not knowing” (Locatelli, 2022).

A disruptive issue in understanding this new body of adolescence are the concepts of virtuality and actuality, two different ways of being closely related to the singularity and new subjectivity thought of in adolescence. The virtual does not follow a logic of here-and-now, of temporality, but of complexity – unlike the actual, which involves time and the event in its resolution (Locatelli, 2022).

The virtual is another dimension of the real. Producing reality through interactivity, permanent possibility and transitions between dreaming and waking. Between embodying or disappearing, staying in suspension or diving, participating or observing – it allows for an infinity of new combinations that are also reflected in perceptions and sensations.

According to Levy (2011), who studies the virtualization of bodies, “the contemporary body resembles a flame” and when we think of resplendence, we introduce an understanding of the materialization of the body through the conquest of new spaces, of multiplication in networks.

During adolescence, through communication networks, it launches itself into the public and returns transformed to its private world by shining in this universe of flame bodies, in a dynamic movement.

Regarding the bodywork that Lowen discusses, we need to incorporate this knowledge and understand the new materiality of the body in adolescence. We need to recover the recognition of the body and self-perception, to value movement and understand how this movement happens in a shared network of virtual affections and their illnesses (such as fragmentation/derealization). We need to intensify the interpersonal register of affection that validates individuation and respects the limits of the expression of singularity and welcomes emotional fluctuation. We need to enhance self-acceptance so necessary for the identity encounter.

### **Dialogue with teenagers' bodies**

During adolescence, our psychic life is presented through our corporality, crossed by our musculature and records of emotions and behaviors. At the same time, it is opening up the possibility of giving new meaning and recapitulation based on new powers and discoveries, bringing the well-being of recognizing and discovering your own body.

The spontaneity and the overall affective bond between adolescent and therapist favor the therapeutic bond and transference in this setting where the adolescent recognizes their corporality in the therapist and can thus experience themselves and their singularity in a space of trust, love, admiration and power.

Bertazzo (2021) suggests interventions and body activities that soften imbalances and attenuate the fluctuation of emotional discharges. He also highlights the importance of practices that include rhythm (walking, dancing) and organizing experiences such as the recognition of routines that involve the perception of day/night cycles, contours that involve the recognition of the body, its functioning and health.

The corporality that is established in the clinical dialogue with adolescents recognizes their internal disarticulation and the threat that this can bring to the experience of self. It helps leaving the place of pain and distortion that surround the sensations in crisis, helps diving into the knowledge and uniqueness of that body. It promotes the unveiling of anger and fear of humiliation in a safe environment and helps and recognizes the importance of the skin and body contours.

Experiencing oneself, expanding one's repertoire of complex emotions in the face of bodily sensations, rescues bodily security as a sense of self,

reintegrating and expanding. The therapist makes their presence vibrate in tune with their place in the relationship with the adolescent, which allows the young person to also exercise respect for themselves, showing the possibility of integration in listening and interventions (Nasio, 2011).

Further therapeutic goals are rediscovering the body in adolescence in order to confront the self-erases, recovering the bodily ego in relation to the power of bodily sensations originating on the surface of the body, valuing and jointly seeking the value of insertion into social life, breaking out of the inertia and fixation of behaviors, identifying and including their diversities, differences and singularities through their own creations and narratives.

Each young person's singularity of expression requires attentive and affective listening that allows validating their personality aspects and traits. It also stimulates the development of skills that put them on scene with the complex universe surrounding them; whether in stimulating verbalization and emotional expression, or in the space of silence and internal listening. This therapeutic attitude facilitates the expansion of their repertoire and perception of themselves, their affections and desires and their aptitudes (Bertazzo, 2021).

Witnessing adolescence means living with the young person's attempt to always be present, living the moment with intensity and in their own way, without being bothered by this flow and its different rhythms. It means promoting a body contour in a setting that helps them appropriate their identity and regain their self in this process of maturing and acquiring a new way of loving others and themselves.

The body psychotherapy with adolescents and youth requires accompanying this new way of loving, perceiving and including others starting with a new way of being. It requires exploring and enhancing their characteristics, respecting their new contour and expanding their self-expression.

I follow a few steps with the adolescents as an outline that helps me to walk with them along the path to recovering self-perception, symbolization and self-regulation. As Lowen (1985) emphasizes: "All feeling begins with the sense of self, that is, of one's own body. Through this, one perceives what is happening in the environment, as the environment exerts an influence on our bodies and senses. The more vital a person is, the sharper their senses and the sharper their perceptions."

Initially, I see the patient themselves, seeking to strengthen and to connect to them, so that their narrative and corporality can dialogue with me

in the setting, so that the possibility of a therapeutic relationship that promotes autonomy can be established and minimizes persecutory thoughts about how confidentiality will be handled with parents and how respect will be shown for their own rhythm and flow in the therapeutic process. With adolescents, it is essential to be honest about access and conversations with family members in order to create a sense of security and to help them dealing with emotions and feelings that may be associated with the roles of mothers/fathers.

I currently receive adolescents aged between 14 and 17 years old, and in the screening of their body biography they present body agitation, hypervigilance, a state of terror and intense reactivity, they express shame and fear, some are in social isolation and many are living with cyberbullying/bullying.

They don't always tell these stories, but the body's expressions and clues are present, as are the nervous system's activations, requiring the therapist and the setting to be sensitive in welcoming them with words that help them feel safe, as well as suggesting subtle movements that can be integrated to recognize the body's states – its freezes and hyperactivations.

I try to create physiological, sensory and affective states that transform states of fear and hopelessness through awareness of bodily sensations with small suggestions of eye movements around the room, contraction/relaxation movements of the hands and feet, discovery of abdominal breathing, perception of the ischium and its connection with the knee/ankle – an invitation to present the body, still seated, and perceive the small changes in its state there in the setting in the face of a non-invasive presence.

By creating this cozy space that stimulates a sense of security and protection, I build dialogues that allow their narratives to contain the intensities experienced outside the setting and produce a therapeutic relationship that promotes the patient's spontaneity and, on the other hand, demands a commitment and genuine interest in walking together, a dialogue that affirms and recognizes corporality, its impulses and integrations.

I use a form of adapted somagram, bringing together techniques that I've learned from Liane Zink in training and others that I have added through my clinical experimentation and which work very well for adolescents to concretize their corporality. The exercise consists of asking the patient to stand up, handing them a wooden spoon or a small bamboo, and positioning myself in front of them with the same material – explaining how to proceed with stimulating the contour of their own body with light touches

rising from one foot and discovering the entire bony part of their contour, laterality, contributing to this awakening that produces an internal sensation of this inside and outside and mentally registering these sensations. After completing the contour, I ask them to close their eyes and record this sensation, then they return to a sitting position and I hand them a piece of modeling clay so that they can represent what they feel in the shape/contour of their body, keeping their eyes closed.

I notice that this adaptation helps the patient and the therapist to read other clues in the body, constrictions, asymmetries, proportions that concretize the stasis and also help us in the body screening of what the patient feels, projects or evaluates about their body. We discuss the perceptions about its own production, stasis and their internal and external expressions. This process helps us to check the patient's contact with its corporality and, as it is not a specular place, it helps us not to reinforce the burden of discomfort or intensity in the image that stereotypes can bring during adolescence.

I also use projective techniques, with artistic cards of the shapes of the body that is perceived versus the body that is desired, followed by looking at the whole body in the mirror and drawing its outline in the mirror, then comparing it with the choice made on the cards. This dynamic/exercise has the function of revealing the internalized judgments about their body, the unrealistic standards about the body that society presents, the sensations of discovering the living/vitalized body.

I choose these techniques to bring the reality of the body closer to the therapeutic process so that patients can open up space for Lowen's exercises on grounding, vibration and discharge, which are the subsequent steps in the interventions selected for greater contact with states of tension/relaxation and the spontaneous physical and emotional reactions that arise from the exercises.

Joint mobilization exercises, rotations and stretches are welcome, followed by perception of limb expansion and visualization of their own body limits. I finish with a turnaround themselves, with arms extended according to their sense of self-space in world. I also use the exercises of contact and perception of limits in the relationship with the therapist, noticing invasions, efforts or the support needed to be firm in relationships without illness (extremely important in contact with peers/partners).

Grounding (both on the wall and with the therapist) helps to perceive each other in relationships, amplify awareness of the other's body and re-

alize the presence or absence of synchronization. It is an excellent resource when addressing the development of interdependence and trust and surrender to affective bonds.

Facing traumas and aggression (bullying), I include another exercise I learned from Liane Zink. I have them visualize a personal safety triangle, in which I ask them to sit cross-legged and with their back against the wall or a cushion. Then they imagine themselves inside a triangle with its tip a hand's breadth above their head and its base between their knees, inhaling and breathing inside this triangle of personal safety, imagining where are the people who can produce positive or negative affections (inside or outside this triangle). In the case of trauma/abuse/aggression, I help them to remove the people who have invaded the space of personal safety without consent, restoring the boundaries and limits of the integrity of the body/personal safety. In situations of great insecurity or parental invasions, it is also an exercise to get out of dependency and putting parents as supporters on the outside, promoting autonomy and individuality/privacy.

In summary, the main stages described for a body psychotherapeutic approach with adolescents using Bioenergetic exercises are:

1. *Safety and Attunement*: Establishing nervous system regulation through gentle movement and breathing awareness
2. *Body Mapping*: Developing conscious awareness of bodily sensations, tensions, and energetic patterns
3. *Boundary Development*: Learning appropriate limits and interpersonal boundaries through grounding exercises
4. *Emotional Integration*: Connecting bodily sensations with emotional experience and expression
5. *Identity Consolidation*: Integrating new self-awareness into coherent identity narrative.

Adolescents who undergo a psychotherapeutic process in Bioenergetics can demonstrate significant improvement in self-regulation capacity with better management of emotional intensity and behavioral impulses, increasing their body awareness and recognition of internal states and needs.

They can deepen interpersonal skills such as improving boundary setting and experience relationship navigation. The result of greater self-acceptance and authentic self-expression is to develop identity coherence and

its social expression. In cases of trauma and violence, the somatic approach contributes to trauma recovery with reduced symptoms related to bullying, abuse, or family dysfunction.

Bioenergetic work acknowledges and incorporates adolescent digital experience rather than opposing it. Virtual embodiment becomes part of therapeutic exploration, examining how online presence relates to offline embodied experience. Adolescents learn to navigate between virtual and actual realities while maintaining bodily grounding and authentic self-connection.

## Conclusion

Working with adolescents in groups at the Kaplan Institute<sup>1</sup> since 2003 (my private practice with youth and my Bioenergetic training in the last 10 years), I had organized a setting that could accommodate the tension of discovering oneself in one's own body, finding ways of expressing emotions and desires, realizing the existence of a self-orientation that requires fewer prescriptive interventions and reinforces internal security so that they can continue in their process of autonomy and independence. Exercising the complex task of jointly facing the paradox between challenge and dependence, characteristics that mark the interventions and the connection with the adolescent.

Bionergetics enabled me to give internal space to the rescue of vitality through exercises, so necessary today when adolescents and youth are lacking in embodied vitalizing experiences. They are displaced toward high demands on their self-image and fear of rejection/retaliation that reinforce their defenses against humiliation. This requires a therapeutic environment that produces an encounter with the ability to relax their posture and get out of stasis, rescuing life and vitality, making it possible to experience the intensity of their impulses and affects, developing their capacity for self-reflection.

I've highlighted these exercises to exemplify the importance of bodywork in adolescence and their profound need to experience affirmation and vitality. It was fundamental to have chosen Bioenergetics on this jour-

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1 Kaplan's Institute was a Brazilian NGO specializing in sexuality education and psychodrama methodology, focusing on educational games aimed at adolescents and youth.

ney, which enables me to develop a path with them integrating sensations, images and emotions; facing great learning about the human potential that is present in the uniqueness and challenges that exist in this meeting of waters.

I learned that working with adolescents, means being a riverbank, which has its own forms, flows and rhythms – and with which we can witness and be part of this journey of discovering oneself in one’s own process and self-regulation.

It is not possible to be in the clinic with adolescents without being fascinated by the encounter, the uniqueness and intimacy that is constituted in the process of welcoming the vitality, potential and creativity that are the energies mobilized by the adolescent psyche during this very important phase of our life cycle, and in which these experiences are lived through their corporality – which needs to be included in the psychotherapeutic setting. In this context, it is sensitivity to our own process of adolescence and the vulnerability felt at that moment that allows us to dialog with the inner world that is so protected in adolescents.

As Frankel (2021) observes, the adolescent psyche requires “affirmation and vitality in response to moments of separation, disintegration and stasis that accompany the passage through adolescence.” Bioenergetic therapy provides essential framework for supporting this vital developmental process through embodied therapeutic intervention.

Bioenergetic therapy offers essential therapeutic tools for contemporary adolescent challenges. By integrating classical principles with current understanding of digital age development, this approach addresses embodied dimensions of adolescent experience often neglected in traditional therapeutic interventions.

The adapted techniques presented demonstrate practical applications of bioenergetic principles within adolescent developmental context. Clinical experience supports the effectiveness of this approach for promoting self-regulation, identity integration, and authentic self-expression during this critical developmental period.

Future research should examine specific outcome measures, develop standardized protocols, and explore integration with other evidence-based approaches to maximize therapeutic effectiveness for contemporary adolescent populations.

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## About the Author

*Camila Macedo Guastafarro* was born in São Paulo, Brazil in 1983. She graduated in Psychology in São Paulo in 2006 and has worked with adolescents (2003–2023) at Kaplan's Institute – an NGO specialized in Sexuality Education and educational game strategies for sexual health and prevention. She is co-author of 2 educational games (“Vale Sonhar” and “Valores em Jogo”) and coordinated 2 health exhibitions about pregnancy and STI prevention for adolescents (“Prevenindo a Gravidez Juvenil” and “Por dentro da Camisinha”). She received her Master's Degree in Science from São Paulo's Federal University in 2013, in the Education and Health Programme, focusing on adolescent vulnerabilities. In 2015 she started a private practice and partnership with Sueli Lelis, a Senior Trainer in Biosynthesis, and organized and participated in workshops in BA with Liane Zink, which was inspiration for her training at IABSP in 2018. She earned her CBT in 2024 and presented her final paper about Adolescence and Bioenergetic Analysis, supervised by Elaine Gloeden, and continues focusing her private practice and studies on adolescents and body strategies.