

For the Record

Genitality: Myth or Reality?

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Wilhelm Reich's greatest concern regarding the future of orgonomy was that the concept of genitality would be ignored or distorted by future generations. Indeed, he thought it most likely that orgone energy would be accepted by physicists long before genitality was accepted by physicians (1). During his lifetime we saw the hatred toward Reich because of his discoveries of orgasmic potency and genitality. Since Reich's death, sexologists and "body therapists" borrow extensively from Reich's work without crediting him and avoid mention of orgasmic potency and genitality. Among those who do acknowledge their debt to Reich, most compromise with the issue of orgasmic potency and/or undermine the concept of genitality. Alexander Lowen, the founder of Bioenergetic Analysis, for example, writes of partial orgasmic satisfaction and does not mention the genital character in his character typology (2).

In a recent article, Courtney Baker and Louisa Lance acknowledge the role of orgasmic potency in successful therapy and maintain that the aim of therapy is to promote the individual's development toward genitality. Their concept of genitality, however, is something quite different from Reich's (3).

Twice in a four-page article, Baker and Lance assert there is no "generic" genital character- there is no group of individuals with those shared qualities and traits we would define as "genital." They illogically try to support this assertion by referring to Reich's statement that in describing the genital character, he was describing an "ideal." In fact, out of the necessity to generalize, Reich stated that all the character types he described were ideal or "pure" types. This does not mean, however, that the character types do not exist as real, functioning entities. Baker and

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Lance provide no further evidence of either a theoretical or clinical nature for their assertions but take a sarcastic shot at Elsworth F. Baker's description of genital characters seen in his extensive practice when they say: "These are formidable beings."

Health for Baker and Lance becomes, instead, a vague quality, which in some undefined way distinguishes those who have improved in therapy from the neurotic: "... [It] will be an individual expression determined by the totality of the personality." This is a meaningless and pragmatically useless definition of health. It might serve for a therapy where genitility is not sought as the goal of treatment, but it has nothing to do with orgone therapy, where the goal is- precisely- genitility.

Reich discovered the genital function (the function of the orgasm and its relation to the genital character type) in the process of investigating clinical problems of negative transference, and negative therapeutic reactions (4:3). He found that orgasmic impotence was an invariable concomitant of neurosis and that the disturbance of genital functioning determines the form of the neurosis and vice versa (4:3). Through a detailed questioning of patients, friends, and colleagues, including an analysis of his own genital functioning, Reich, over a period of about a decade, established criteria for genital (and organismic) health. He found the fundamental biophysical quality of orgasmic potency to be the capacity for complete involuntary, vegetative (i.e., autonomic) surrender at and following acme.

Reich found that the function of the orgasm was to discharge excessive quantities of bioenergy that had built up during the natural course of living- through feeding, respiration, absorption from the atmosphere, etc. If undischarged, this buildup would eventually result in energetic "stasis," flooding the organism with dammed-up energy and leading to either "stasis" ("actual") neurosis or psychoneurosis due to reactivation of the oedipal conflict.

In describing the relationship between orgasmic potency and the genital character type, Reich writes:

In comparing character formation and character structure of neurotic people with that of individuals capable of work and love, one finds a qualitative difference in the means with which the dammed-up libido is bound in the character. One finds that there are adequate and inadequate means of binding anxiety. Adequate means are genital orgasmic gratification, and sublimation; inadequate means are all kinds of pregenital gratification, and reaction formations.

This qualitative difference also expresses itself in a quantitative one: The neurotic character suffers from an ever-increasing libido stasis, for the very reason that his means of gratification are not adapted to the instinctual needs. The genital character, on the other hand, keeps alternating between libido tension and adequate libido gratification; that is, he has an orderly libido economy. The term "genital character" is justified by the fact that only genital primacy and orgasmic potency (*which is itself determined by a definite character structure*) guarantee an orderly libido economy. [Emphasis added.]

The historically determined quality of the character-forming forces and contents, then, determines the quantitative regulation of the libido economy and with that the difference between "healthy" and "sick." With regard to their qualitative differences, the genital and the neurotic character are ideal types. The real characters are mixed types and whether libido economy is possible or not depends on the degree of admixture. With regard to the quantity of possible direct libido gratification, the genital and the neurotic character are to be considered average types: *Either the libidinal gratification is such that it eliminates the stasis of libido, or it is not* [Emphasis added]; in the latter case, symptoms or neurotic character traits develop which impair social and sexual capacity. (5: 164)

Elsworth F. Baker, culling from 30 years of clinical experience, offers the following description:

The genital character is that individual who fulfills the criteria of health. That is, he is well enough integrated and free enough emotionally so that he can sufficiently express and satisfy himself in life. Because satisfaction is available to him, he does not build up tension and develop chronic armor. Ideal health is, of course, merely a concept and is not found in nature; but functional health is fluid and allows a wide range of expressions.

If the greater part of an individual's energy is centered at the genital level, he functions as a genital character. This means that he has reached the post-ambivalent genital stage with no blocks at earlier levels that are capable of interfering with functioning. The wish for a parent's death (father or mother) and incestual desires have been given up; genital interests center on a heterosexual love object free of incestual identification- therefore, the Oedipus complex has been solved and not simply repressed. Any residual pregenital impulses find suitable expression in sexual foreplay or in cultural pursuits.... However, in the genital character, most of the energy finds expression in the genital orgasm, since it is the most complete, gratifying, and bioeconomic release. Aggression is at the service of the ego for rational goals but is not an end in itself.

Ego and superego are in harmony. The superego sanctions a sex-affirmative way of life; it is not harsh and punitive as it is to the neurotic. Since orgasmic potency reduces the instinctual demands on the ego and gives it greater autonomy to feel and act in the outside world, there is no need for a genital character to prove himself a man through socially noticeable exploits. Unconscious guilt and inferiority feelings are absent, so he does not have to bind them up in symptom formation and irrational strivings. The armor is pliable and at the service of the ego, which can call it forth or dispense with it as objective situations require.

The affect is characteristically natural. A resilient organism, the genital character can run the gamut of feeling from intense joy to deep grief, from love to hate, from pleasure to unpleasure. He reacts with deep sorrow to an object loss but does not let it overwhelm him. He is not ashamed or self-conscious in expressing feelings and can surrender to them fully. He loves and hates rationally, and can withdraw from the world completely when he so chooses or can involve himself wholeheartedly in affairs.

An ordered sexual economy is the basis for his fundamental character traits. Having reached the genital stage of development means that there is more energy available to the ego because there has been no need to use it up in repression (body armoring, symptom formation, neurotic character traits, etc.). Rather, the genital character may direct his energy toward rational aims, deep affective expression, and regular orgasmic convulsion and discharge. Orgasmic potency gives him self-confidence and determines his sexual behavior and attitude; since he is quite sure that he is a man, he needs no tricks or bragging to impress himself on others in any situation.

The genital character is basically moral in sex but not moralistic. He accepts full responsibility for his acts and knows the difference between freedom and license. Promiscuity and asceticism both seem emotional ills to him. He enters the genital embrace because he loves his partner and surrenders himself fully and earnestly without fear or restraint. He is never jocular or pornographic in the sex act. His monogamy is spontaneous; he makes love to one partner because that course fits his feelings, not because social rules or customs coerce him. If need be, he can change his sexual object- or even, under special conditions, accept polygamy (or polyandry). His self-regulation leads him to withdraw energy from a desire that cannot be satisfied by shifting his attention to other goals or other partners.

Because his primary drives are fulfilled, he has a natural decency. He is unafraid of life, and therefore does not have to compromise with his convictions if his own are opposed. He knows what others want and can accept their needs. Never dogmatic, he thinks functionally and objectively; his motives are rational, undisguised, and directed toward self-improvement and social improvement. He gives himself freely and with pleasure to work he can believe in, but he cannot work mechanically. He accepts responsibility for work, but never dictates. Willing to live and let live, he is genuinely pleased by the happiness others obtain. He affirms the natural sexuality of children and adolescents, and is easily on good terms with them. He is indifferent to perversions and repelled by pornography.

The body of the genital character is strong. His skin is warm and radiating, the eyes sparkling, the lips full and sensuous, and the limbs and torso well formed. He is relaxed and his behavior is calm. He can express emotions of any kind freely, which is a major indication of free-flowing bioenergy. He can cut ugly faces, sneer, growl, scream, and show anxiety in his eyes (many neurotics cannot do this). He can open his eyelids fully, wrinkle his forehead, bite, and hit strongly with his fists at an imaginary hated object. The gag reflex is fully developed. The eyes are deep, serious, and penetrating with full contact; the pelvis is free and well developed. The genitals and breasts are well developed, but not overdeveloped. There is no extraneous fat. (6: 10 1-104)

For the record, it is clear from both Reich and Baker, the most experienced clinicians in the field, that orgasmic potency is attainable in a variety of patients and that the genital character, as depicted, is a reality.

REFERENCES

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2. Lowen, A.: *Physical Dynamics of Character Structure*. New York: Grune & Stratton, 1958.
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4. Reich, W. : *Genitality*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980.
5. Reich, W.: *Character Analysis*. New York: Noonday Press, 1961. 6. Baker, E. F.: *Man in the Trap*. New York: Macmillan & Company, 1967.