

Gestalt Psychotherapy & Coaching for Relationships

PHILIP BROWNELL

GESTALT PSYCHOTHERAPY AND COACHING FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Gestalt Psychotherapy and Coaching for Relationships provides psychotherapists and coaches with a thorough understanding of two-person dynamics and offers practical interventions for working with couples and with two-person teams within larger organizations. Part I of this text relates contemporary gestalt therapy theory and gestalt-based coaching to developments in phenomenology, hermeneutics, cognitive science, extended cognition, embodiment, and kinesthesiology. Through a variety of narratives, Part II builds upon these themes and examines issues that typically emerge during couples work, including infidelity, provocative language, asymmetric relationships, sex, the use of emotion, limits and boundaries, and spirituality. Also included are general strategies for assimilating coaching into psychotherapy and vice versa, as well as recommendations for further study.

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GESTALT PSYCHOTHERAPY AND COACHING FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Philip Brownell

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DEDICATION

To Linda Garrison Brownell

Now
We
Go
Into the next major phase in this world
into which we've been thrown.
For so long, dear, I did not know you were.
And now I believe you will always
Be
With
Me.



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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations ix
Preface x
Acknowledgments xii

Introduction 1

PART I
Grounding Work Involving Two Clients **7**

1 An Orientation to Contemporary Gestalt Therapy Theory 9

2 An Orientation to Gestalt-Based Coaching 40

3 Contacting, the Satisfaction of Interest, and Positive Psychology 64

4 Related Subjects and Issues 80

PART II
Attending to Specific Aspects of the Situation **95**

5 It's Never About Just One Person 97

6 It's Often About the Feedback Loop of Mutual Interpretation 109

7 Turning Around Destructive, Reactive, and Counterproductive Communication 123

8 Accounting for the Influence of Past Experience 134

9 Overcoming the Trauma of Infidelity 144

10 When Asymmetric Relationships Work – and When They Don't 154

11 Using Emotional Processing to Strengthen Relationship 164

12 Volition and Motivation 176

13 Sexuality and Sexual Dynamics 183

14 Limits and Boundary Dynamics 191

15 Spirituality 199

16 Dyads Within Teams, Families, and Organizations 212

PART III
General Strategies for the Therapist and/or Coach 221

17 Referring to Research Literature 223

18 Assimilating Coaching into Psychotherapy 227

19 Assimilating Psychology into Coaching 230

Conclusion 232

Index 233

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

3.1	Cycle of experience	71
4.1	Situated mind	84
4.2	Embodied mind	85
4.3	Embedded mind	86
4.4	Enacted mind	86
4.5	Extended mind	87
10.1	Symmetry	161

Table

12.1	Needs hierarchy	181

PREFACE

Today, as I write, there is a major emphasis on relationship in psychotherapy, and that is certainly true of gestalt therapy as well. It is true of gestalt-based coaching also.

But I am not trying to jump on a bandwagon with this book. Rather, I've done a lot of work with couples and people existing in dyads of various kinds. I wanted to write about that, and that is the reason for this book.

Am I an expert on relationship? I don't know. I've lived through several of them. I've seen many of them in various stages of life or on life support. I've watched several die, both in my private life and in the lives of my clients. I think at best we all have something to say about relationship once we've lived past the age of 30. Before 30 people are trying not to be children. After 30, they know they are not children, and they are trying not to be stupid. I am still working at that.

One thing I have noticed is that some people seem to persist even after you no longer see them every day. Some are family members who live at great distance from me, and I have contact with them using technology, but I don't see them face to face every day as I used to. Other people I have not talked with for years no matter what kind of technology would have made it possible. They never cease to exist, and they abide with me *in relationship*. That is, I remember them as we used to be, as they used to be for and to me. Some are dead, but they still live, not just as a memory. It seems that they are untethered from the limits of corporality and they are with me. They are "to me"

kinds of people. They are related "to me" by experience, by involvement, through embodied intimacy or harrowing adventure. Not everyone who has passed through my life is like that. Many people *have* ceased to be for me, because they were never "to me." We passed one another with glancing blows, bumping off one another like billiard balls against the cushions of the pool table. They just went shooting off in various directions, and they became lost to me. I don't even know who they are anymore.

So here is this book about people who turn out to be "to" us, toward us. We will never be without them.

Philip Brownell
From the rim of the Snake River Canyon
Above Shoshone Falls
Twin Falls, Idaho
February, 2017

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First I would like to thank the people at Routledge/Taylor & Francis. They have been patient, very patient!

As always, I think of my colleagues in the world of contemporary gestalt therapy with whom I have discussed theory and practice for years. There is no way to list everyone and every conversation that has contributed to this book on this subject. However, in particular I appreciate Dan Bloom. In spite of great difference, difference that has divided most others, we have found a way to build a relationship that has endured. He is one of my best friends – as long as we do not discuss politics!

Others who have contributed are Peter Philippson, Sylvia Crocker, Seán Gaffney, Jan Roubal, Gianni Francesetti, Jean-Marie Robine, Lynne Jacobs, Carol Swanson, Jon Frew, and all the folks who wrote themselves into the dialogues at Gstalt-L, the Association for the Advancement of Gestalt Therapy's email discussion list, and the discussion group at the New York Institute for Gestalt Therapy. Like I said, they are just too numerous to list, but all of them have been important and formative.

I would like to acknowledge my family – the one I grew up in and the one who came into being through my relationships with three women. I would not have chosen it to be the way it was, but *what an education*!

I want to remember the people who have given ground to all this gestalt "stuff." Before I became a gestalt therapist, I had become a Christian and an ordained minister. The things I learned about relationships in the church have been built upon

in subsequent years. So I want to identify Pastor Lee Toms with whom I had a mentorship relationship in terms of church ministry. I served on his multiple staff in a large church in central California. We used to say on that staff that the ministry was about people, not program; it is. Ministry is all about relationships with people. I also want to remember Pat Roberts, who has been a spiritual guide and support over more than forty years. She is telling me to start writing fiction (I hear you; I hear you).

Last, I recognize that my partner in life during these last many years, during all the writing to date of various books and chapters in books, is Linda Garrison Brownell, who has endured and has supported me, and given of the time she wanted to have with me but that went to books instead. There are reasons that it's been the way it has, and she knows them well. I could not have done anything without her. She is my partner in every sense of that word. She is not just "wife." She is not "my better half," because we are both completely whole. She is my partner, the one who knows more than anyone what it has cost to write this book. She has lived through it.



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INTRODUCTION

My wife and I met online. We asked one another every conceivable question and entertained between us a multitude of scenarios. We were, after all, not talking about just dating. We were each looking for a partner in life. That was about ten years ago. The process worked for us. We have differences, but it feels right. It fits. So when I get frustrated with her, or she gets irritated with me, we don't contemplate calling it all off. We are committed. We are committed not as if we're in a teeth-grinding obligation from which we cannot escape. We are committed knowing that we are better off with one another than without. We are committed out of affection. We are committed out of wisdom, because we've each lived a while, and we know the alternatives. We are committed because we believe we've been given to one another.

Sometimes the whole thing is also simply puzzling. In fact, puzzling is not a strong enough word. Mystery will not do. Sometimes the things we face together are enigmatic and baffling. We can find ourselves asking, "Now why was *that* necessary?!"

Accordingly, one day I sent her off to start a professional coaching program in Pittsburgh while I was still living in Bermuda. I did not realize what was going to happen. There ensued about two and a half years of a distance relationship. I had heard of others living that way. In fact, in Bermuda it is not uncommon to have one member of a relationship go off to study and be gone for a while. So my wife and I saw one another

periodically when I flew into Pittsburgh, or the two of us would visit our kids in one of the scattered places they all live, or we would attend a professional conference together. Eventually, I took a position as a psychologist for an integrated healthcare organization in southern Idaho, and now we are back together.

That all leads up to this last Sunday. I was in church with her. The music was contemporary but highly worshipful. It brought me to my feet, and it brought me to tears. Then the pastor started to speak, and he said that God is good all of the time, constantly good no matter what kinds of hardships and difficulties come upon us and trouble us. He pointed to a couple of good gifts from God. He reminded everyone of the cool breeze in the evening of the previous day and the taste of fried chicken. And that is when it hit me. The goodness of God for me is that He created human beings for relationship – that we *have* relationships, that we connect with others intimately, and that we inhabit this world *with other people*. Such relationship is in the very nature of God as I understand Him – as a three-in-one[1] kind of being. When he said he would create human beings in his own image, he had relationship in mind. The *imago dei* is a relational construct. The church is a relational institution. The body of Christ is one body with many members, each of whom needs all the others.

I have been working as a people-helper for most of my life, and in all of the various roles I've had I've had to work relationally. When I was a teenager, I did babysitting. When I joined the Navy and became a hospital corpsman and then neuropsychiatric technician, I had to communicate with patients and staff. I had to take orders from nurses and doctors, both of whom were officers and outranked me, and I had to translate those orders into service to the patients who had a variety of illnesses and injuries – both the physical kind you can see and the emotional kind that you cannot see. I worked as line staff in children's and adolescents' residential treatment centers. I went to seminary after my undergraduate work, and in both cases I had to relate to professors and fellow students. I served churches as an

ordained pastor, and I had to relate to governing boards and serve congregational members. I worked with people in the communities where these churches were located. I went back to school in a doctoral program and then I worked as a mental health therapist in a dual diagnosis hospital, working with low-functioning, acute, and addicted patients. I engaged in post-doctoral level training in gestalt therapy, and I had to relate to my trainers and fellow trainees. I worked as a program coordinator and clinical supervisor in a county-funded resource center for children and families, and I had to relate to government officials, juvenile justice workers, local educators, and mentors for an Asian outreach program. I had to supervise Master's-level therapists on the one hand and satisfy the director of the whole organization on the other. I worked in community mental health for children and families, and then I went to Bermuda and spent eleven years working in an outpatient capacity offering assessment and psychotherapy. I had to relate to those with little education and means and those of privilege, some with very advanced business and law degrees, some with roles in national government and still others working in the court system. I had to relate to people who lived at the extremes; some were poor and working three jobs just to scrape by while others were rich with inherited wealth. I also became a professional coach, and so I've worked with people wanting executive coaching who were very goal-oriented, looking for ways to increase productivity, and I've worked with people who wanted life coaching and the solutions-focused strategies that could help them become more positive and fulfilled.

All of that relied on building workable relationships. That is so for the issues or problems that people presented, and it is true for the nature of the relationship between me and those people – my clients. I know relationship "stuff" theoretically from books and professional discussions and I know it from my own life. As the saying goes, for most things I've encountered in working with people and relationships, I've "been there and done that."

In writing about relationship in contemporary gestalt therapy I once said:

> *When I am in contact with the world, a meeting takes place, and if I am routinely in such contact with the same things, places, or persons, then I will establish some kind of relationship with those things, places, and persons, because relationship can be understood as contact over time (Yontef & Bar-Joseph Levine, 2008). Consequently, there are different kinds of relationship and various degrees of depth and complexity that describe them, with the nature of those various relationships linked to the field conditions, the contexts, in which such meetings take place.*
>
> (Brownell, 2016b, p. 222)

But relationship is not a concern only for gestalt therapists. It is also a concern for gestalt-oriented coaches. I limit the scope of my concern here to the gestalt community, to gestalt therapists, gestalt-oriented coaches, and organizational consultants, but of course it is a concern for the larger fields in which people work with other people.

This is a book about working in a gestalt therapeutic or coaching fashion with relationships. Of course it entails working with the people who are in those relationships, but it requires viewing the people not as isolated individuals who happen to be with other such individuals in some mutually beneficial fashion. As the book will assert, there is a non-independence about these people that makes them dyads or couples. It sounds so cold, as if I am talking about robots, but I am not. I am talking about human beings who exist in communities, families, groups, and in close contact with others through dyadic contacting. I am talking about couples of all kinds.

This book divides into three parts.

The first part explains and describes various theoretical constructs and processes that are relevant to couples work. The first chapter is a description of contemporary gestalt therapy theory, which is a basic orientation to gestalt process that is evident in

both therapy and coaching. The second chapter is a more specific orientation to gestalt-based coaching. The third chapter looks more closely at three subjects important to gestalt therapy and coaching: contacting, the satisfaction of interest, and positive psychology. The fourth chapter addresses several important collateral issues such as embodiment, extended cognition, and hermeneutic phenomenology, and it contextualizes these subjects in couples work.

The second part is a series of snippets from the flow of people's lives that are described and then contemplated from a gestalt perspective. They include the non-independence that exists between the two people in a dyad, the process of mutual interpretation, turning around destructive, reactive, and counterproductive communication, overcoming the trauma of infidelity, and using emotional processing to strengthen relationship, among others.

The third part is more like an epilogue. I briefly consider research and the assimilation of coaching into therapy and psychology into coaching.

This is not the be all and end all on this subject. It is not exhaustive; it is suggestive. It comes from my experience, from the years of training and interacting with colleagues in the gestalt world. Perhaps what presents itself in these pages will suggest something useful to the reader and stimulate even more investigation. That would be nice.

Note

1 I intend to remain present and transparent in this book as the whole person I am, and that includes my nature as a Christian. My purpose is not to write a book of theology or to proselytize. I invite the reader to exercise patience if religion or spirituality, and specifically Christianity, is not a shared belief system. There is more to the book.

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PART I
GROUNDING WORK INVOLVING TWO CLIENTS



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1

AN ORIENTATION TO CONTEMPORARY GESTALT THERAPY THEORY

Although gestalt therapy theory addresses many aspects relevant to interpersonal relationships, not a great deal has been written specifically concerning a gestalt approach to dyadic, or couples work. Wheeler and Backman (1994) edited a volume on the subject that covered many helpful issues, but it is dated. This is also the problem with volumes by Harman (1996) and Brown (1998). O'Neill (2015) self-published a brief volume on couples work, and Yontef (2012) and Lynch, Lynch and Zinker (2005) have contributed chapters on the subject in more recent volumes. Lobb (2013) addressed several relational factors that are either indirectly or directly related to couple's work in her description of gestalt therapy in a post-modern world. Her work, like the others, is a reminder that the process from a gestalt perspective in couples therapy and/or coaching is not something divorced from the main body of gestalt theory. Thus, I will take this first chapter to provide a brief description of that theory. The reader is recommended to consult other volumes[1] and chapters describing aspects of this theory and practice that space does not allow here and to actually engage in gestalt training at a recognized gestalt therapy training program.

Gestalt Therapy Is a Theoretical Integration

Gestalt therapy is considered to be among the humanistic group of psychotherapies (Cain, 2016). Fritz Perls became the popular face of gestalt therapy, and his association with early leaders of the human potential movement, including his

influence while in residence at the Esalen Institute, coincided with the emergence of humanistic psychology. The two became identified with one another. Seeing the names of Rogers, Maslow, and Perls listed together was not uncommon.

In actuality, however, there were more people involved with the development of gestalt therapy, and early gestalt therapy was a mix of theoretical influences from various fields of study not uniformly associated with humanistic psychotherapy. Frederick Perls collaborated with his wife Laura (Lore) for some of the early writing concerning their revision of psychoanalysis (Amendt-Lyon, 2016). Frederick collaborated with Paul Goodman for the theoretical part of the seminal book on gestalt therapy (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951). Frederick and Laura relied on Isadore From to help proselytize gestalt therapy by working with training groups outside of New York, where the first gestalt therapy institute (New York Institute for Gestalt Therapy) existed, and the new approach spread through face-to-face training groups in North America, Europe, and Australia.

From German science early gestalt therapy assimilated organismic theory through Kurt Goldstein and social field theory through Kurt Lewin. Both of them were thinking in holistic and situated ways concerning human life. This was the ground forming the early anthropology of gestalt therapy – the human being as organism-environment entity. And that was the attractor drawing otherwise disparate theories and influences together in gestalt's early integration (Brownell, 2016a).

From continental philosophy gestalt therapy took existentialism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics and it was directly or indirectly influenced by the thinking of Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher, Brentano, and Husserl. Some point also to the influence of Heidegger. Some point also to the influence of Sartre, even though the founders of gestalt therapy made an early decision disdaining the nihilism in his version of existential thinking. Other ground-level influences were the American pragmatists, largely for their impact on Paul Goodman.

This is a very rudimentary account of the sources and basic ideas inherent in the origins of gestalt therapy, and as mentioned the reader can acquire a more enriched understanding of the history of the development of gestalt therapy through wider reading. Such a history is not the purpose of this book. It is enough to understand that contemporary gestalt therapy came from the integration of several theories and approaches in both science and philosophy and that it has continued to evolve through the expansion of the understanding of its foundational principles and their applications.

The Basic Theoretical Structure of Contemporary Gestalt Therapy

The basic theoretical structure of contemporary gestalt therapy relies on the concepts emerging from the process of contacting: subjective experience, relating to another, contextual influence, and experiential learning[2] – phenomenological method, dialogical relationship, field theory, and experiment respectively. The experience of being alive in this world, of being a person in relationship with other persons, comes from the integration of these four areas of concern, and the gestalt therapist or coach must appreciate that all of them are constantly in play for every individual, but certainly for everyone involved with another. Thus, they are constantly involved in the therapeutic or coaching relationship, and they are always present when the therapist or coach is working with two people as a dyad. The individual becomes a "two" during individual work (therapist/coach and client), and the two becomes a "three" during couples work (therapist/coach and two individuals in-dyad).

Contacting, Awareness, and Interpretation of Subjective Experience

These three concepts (contacting, awareness, and the interpretation of experience) belong together, because they are so closely related. Contacting cannot happen without awareness and awareness increases through contacting, both of which

trigger the meaning-making process of the interpretation of experience.

Contacting Is the Process of Meeting

I sit on the deck in front of our house and gaze across the sagebrush, north toward the Snake River Canyon. The thunderheads are forming in the afternoon heat. The air is dry, but I can smell the rain in the wind that begins picking up. I feel the touch of the earth and the presence of the One who created it. At one moment I feel the ground and the heavens come together in one vast vista, and I am humbled by that panorama. I get up and walk toward my office to write.

This is contact, a meeting of a person with what is experienced as other. In this example I perceived with my senses the physical geography, the land upon which I sat and the smell of the earth in my nostrils. As I sat with that, the sense of God's presence emerged, not separate from the perceptions, but not just the perceptions. It was an interoceptive impression and a "touch" of another kind (Brownell, 2016c), and it moved me to action, to write.

People are always situated, embedded within and part of some kind of context. This can be viewed as an environmental, physical context with land mass and geographic designation, room space with square footage and color of paint, and literal atmosphere with air quality. It can also be considered as social context, and so include families, friends, social institutions, neighborhoods, cultural values, and communities. It can also be considered transcendentally as spiritual experience. So the contacting in question concerns how people meet others in the unfolding situations in which they find themselves, what happens when they do, and the ways in which they negotiate and manage such meetings.

"*Contacting is the concrete and phenomenal embrace of the world out of which an infinity of possibilities – beauty, meanings, actualities, insights, and intersubjectivity bloom forth as forms or gestalten of experience.*" The gestalt therapist seeks to bring what is hidden or

unaware in such phenomenality into awareness, and he or she "*achieves this by focused attention on contacting*" (Bloom, 2016, pp. 1, 8). As such, gestalt therapy is a clinical phenomenology emphasizing disclosure.

As a clinical process, it is a systematic investigating of the cynosure in given phenomena. The cynosure is the brilliance at the center of attention. The word came from a reference to the constellation Ursa Minor and the Polaris star it contains, which was an aid to navigation. So the cynosure was the north star in that constellation that formed a figure of interest and stood out; it was given as a phenomenon of interest. Gestalt therapy is a process of attending to the cynosure in a person's experience and using that to navigate to related regions of that person's lifeworld.

Contacting occurs in a cycle or continuum of contacting consisting of (1) fore-contact, (2) contacting, (3) final contact, and (4) post-contact (Strümpfel & Goldman, 2002, p. 191). In fore-contact initial impulses emerge. In contacting they attain intentionality (the awareness of the "aboutness" of the experience). In final contact the cynosure is made most bright. In post-contact the intentional implications and connections in one's life are disclosed.[3]

Awareness Emerges from Contacting

Awareness is one of those concepts that seems self-evident. It is ubiquitous in the fields of clinical science (Dimidjian & Segal, 2015). Mindfulness is a popular adjunct to cognitive behavioral therapy, and it relates directly to awareness. Sahdra, Ciarrochi, and Parker (2016) described mindfulness as encompassing five abilities:

- *observing*, defined as attending to internal experiences, thoughts, feelings, or sensations;
- *describing*, defined as being able to articulate them to some extent;
- *acting with awareness*, defined as responding to the present situation with a degree of awareness;

- *non-judging*, defined as refraining from judging one's internal experiences as right or wrong;
- *non-reacting*, defined as withholding habitual reactions to internal experiences.

So mindfulness includes observation or attention and the awareness that enables and supports description and action. It is awareness of current experience with acceptance, that is, without critique (Gilbert & Christopher, 2010). Lucid dreaming has been described as awareness that one is dreaming while one *is* dreaming (Thomas, Pollak, & Kahan, 2015). Emotional awareness and somatic, interoceptive awareness are essential to autonomic, homeostatic processing (Kanbara & Fukunaga, 2016) – in other words, to whole-person health. These examples illustrate that awareness is a common consideration in psychology and clinical work. In a search at the APA's PsycInfo database, there were over 96,000 entries where awareness played some kind of important role.[4]

It is axiomatic that gestalt therapy is concerned with awareness. It is the purpose in a phenomenological exploration of the client's experience. Increasing awareness is also the goal of experiments in gestalt therapy. The awareness in question is not simply introspection, a reflexive self-awareness. Whatever awareness might be, it is pointed outward to whatever is other and known through contacting as much as it is pointed inward to answer the question, "What is it like to be me right now?" What it is like to be me comes with a situated pre-condition, because none of us is ever alive in this world isolated and free from a given situation.

What, then, is awareness? Awareness is consciousness-of. It is the knowledge that something exists. It is the experience in which something appears, some process seems to be going on or happening in the moment. Mann (2010) defines it as "*being in contact with one's existence and with what is at this moment in time*" (p. 29). Thus, the term "awareness" is a construct, an abstraction that names the results of contacting, but concrete

contacting results in a combustion of sensation, an experience rather than an abstraction.

The first president of what is now Princeton wrote a treatise on religious affections (Edwards, 1834/1979). To be affected, he asserted, implies that one is influenced, touched, met, by something or someone who affects. Jonathan Edwards observed that many people hear religious messages or scripture read to them, but they are not affected. In my own life there was a phase in which the Bible affected me in a negative way, and then I changed and the Bible affected me in a positive way (that is, I went from being repulsed to attracted, from being against to being for, from rejecting to accepting, from lack of interest to intense interest). I am now fascinated, looking back, by such a shift in myself, and I am struck when I see things like this (not just about the Bible) in others.

It is an indication to me that we can be affected, influenced, by things and or persons outside of ourselves. This might seem like a no-brainer, but if one holds to a representationalist, radically constructivist perspective, it is the subject who seeks out what is inherently interesting, needed, or attractive and then it is the subject who perceives/re-presents or shapes the world, morphing perception to fit a worldview or pattern or schema that makes sense to that person. It is all self-contained, a strongly one-person kind of meaning-making that is ultra-subjective (and to me a stagnant pond).

But what if transcendent others (the alterity of Levinas (1999) and the Thou in Buber's (1958/1923) I-Thou relationship), even things, objects, call to us (Chrétien, 2004)? In the translator's introduction to Gunter Figal's *Objectivity: The Hermeneutical and Philosophy* (2010), Theodore George describes Figal's assertion – namely, that objects confront people as substantive matters of concern, and as such they demand attention and elicit interpretation. As such, objects affect, and we know that affectation in our affections. Might such affectation/affection be awareness? Might the affectation be a calling such as Jean-Louis Chrétien describes? The call and the response

constitute the "back-and-forth" that goes on between organism and environment, which is experienced at the contact boundary within the organism-environment field. As Chrétien asserts, one does not know the call of the other outside of the response of the self. It is manifest in contacting.

Some see a difference between sentience and sapience (Siewert, 2011) in which sentience is awareness of senses, feelings, the phenomenological observation of what it is like to be (oneself) at any given moment, and sapience is the set of concepts, constructs, and thinking occurring at that time. They are both aspects of consciousness, and they are both aware processes. In terms of gestalt therapy, we might say that sentience relates to id function and sapience relates to ego function, but that would be an oversimplification, because feelings, senses, thoughts, and cognitions of various sorts are linked and adhere to one another in the ongoing process of living.

As I sat writing this, outside a thunderstorm developed. I was listening to music as I wrote, with headphones on, but at one point the rolling thunder crossed the threshold of my awareness, and I became cognizant of the storm. That is when I stepped outside to watch it. As I did, I moved out of the small writing office I have in the barn, which can become quite warm and stuffy, and I felt the rush of fresh, cold air as it whipped up the bushes in the yard. My experience included the temperature on my skin and the smell of rain on the earth. My awareness of the storm grew with added sensory experience. But I knew my experience was of a thunderstorm, and I remembered how thunderstorms form and crash in North Carolina where I also once lived. The concept of "thunderstorm" has a variety of associations for me. I did not merely sense it happening; I also placed what was happening in the context of my life. One could say I became intentionally aware as I attended more closely to the developing storm.

Interpretation of Experience

Michael Vincent Miller (2016) makes a case for the difference between awareness and attention, claiming that attention forms

from awareness when intentionality (the aboutness of experience) fully emerges out of contacting. Frederick Perls (1975) pointed to the relationship between awareness and attention, saying, "*If we are aware of something pleasant, it is easy to pay attention to it*" (p. 96). That is, it is easy to integrate awareness and attention. Intentional objects form by paying attention to emerging awareness.

In a phenomenological study of performance in accomplished athletes Toner, Montero, and Moran (2016) found that these athletes maintained pre-reflective bodily awareness of proprioceptive and kinesthetic movement, even though they did not pay attention to their bodies. In fact, being in a flow, they were attending more to other elements of the situation.

Such interplay between awareness and attention in the current context of a situation does not take place in a vacuum because we are worlded beings. Intentional objects inhabit the foreground of life, set against the background of our living. As Atwood and Stolorow (2016) put it, "*all understanding involves interpretation. Interpretation, in turn, can only be from a perspective embedded in the historical matrix of the interpreter's own traditions*" (p. 309). That is, the formation of an intentional object is an active process that is directed through attention, by attending, by paying attention to the emerging relationship between an object of interest and the background that comes with it.

One "*never glimpses an isolated phenomenon. Rather the phenomenon always presents itself against the background of an I, of a person*" (Frie, 2010, p. 83). People's actions are rooted in the lifeworld. We cannot understand any given figure, that is we cannot grasp the meaning and significance of an issue, a fact, or an intentional object apart from its context.

While the field of hermeneutics (originally the study of the dynamics and rules concerning the interpretation of texts, and most notably religious scriptures) has a long history, and while many people could be cited in speaking about it, this is not a book simply about hermeneutics. So I will limit things to a brief description of the contribution and relevance to gestalt therapy

of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, three people instrumental in moving the field of hermeneutics into the study of the interpretation of experience. In this regard Husserl provided a descriptive method and an examination of consciousness while Heidegger's understanding of interpretation is that it always arises from the perspective of one's own lifeworld or situation (Porter & Robinson, 2011). Gadamer took the initial shift from theology to meaning in life that was in the work of Schleiermacher and Dilthey (Brownell, 2010), plus Heidegger's assertion that interpretation relies on information that is already there (i.e. in order to interpret the work of an artist one must first understand things like brushes and paint) (Malpas, 2015), and he established a new field he called philosophical hermeneutics. How does this transition relate to gestalt therapy? Gestalt therapy is about a person's experience, and gestalt work with people in relationships ultimately arrives at how two people interpret the experience of being with one another. There is more to say about this, but that will come in Chapter 4.

Meeting and Relating with Another Person

One of my best friends, Dan Bloom, once told me about an exchange with his mother on the occasion of her meeting the man he would eventually marry. "As soon as my mother met him and saw the effect he had on me, she knew that whether I was gay, straight or a Martian, this was right for me." How does that happen? How can a person know such a thing about another? When she first met my wife, my mother looked at me squarely and said, "You are lucky." Well, it wasn't luck, but I tend to think she understood how blessed I might be to have my wife as a partner. These two women, Dan's mother and mine, were quick to tell, upon meeting the partners of their sons, that their sons were with the right people. I think there is often something almost magical in the meeting with another person that conveys information that cannot be quantified but can be known in a way that sets the heart to rest or pacing.

Meeting an Other

Contact has been described as meetings of various kinds with what is perceived to be other. More will be said about contacting in Chapter 3. But if we move beyond the construct of contacting, what kinds of dynamics take place in a meeting with another person?

We read one another visually. We hear one another. What we see and hear evokes other senses, such as touch. We say things like "I see what you say," or "The look on your face touches me." The motor neurons originating in our sensory motor pathways fire in the brain in response to another's movement and we "feel with" them, as if imitation and metaphor merge through the cross-wiring in our brains between left and right hemispheres. Words and concepts cross paths with intuition and emotion. Of course, this is a crude description of what takes place. But it is enough to point to the complex mix of obvious and subtle processes going on when we experience another person.

The face of another, furthermore, seems most influential to contacting. Researchers have found that when team members facially resemble one another, there is an increased sense of team effectiveness that resists information otherwise contradicting such a positive impression (Wang, He, & Liu, 2016). Zebrowitz and Montepare (2015) remarked that first impressions from facial expressions were automatic and yielded the sense in the observer that the observed could be aggressive, competent, healthy, or trustworthy. The speed and automaticity associated with such impressions work against conscious control, and they influence facial trait associations by reinforcing those first impressions. In other words, if a person is perceived at first to appear angry and controlling, then even subsequent neutral facial expressions will be appraised as anger.

Building a Relationship

People can easily fall prey to using "Cartesian" as a shibboleth. In a post-Cartesian world, it is a quick and dirty way to brand

and reject without critical consideration. Descartes proposed a split between the material and the immaterial in which brain (material) was separate from mind (immaterial). It was separate because, he postulated, they were of different substances. So there was, ontologically, a substance dualism. Gestalt therapy holds to an emergent self in which the immaterial self emerges from the material actions of organisms in some kind of environmental context. That is not a substance dualism, but it is a property dualism. Are all dualisms "Cartesian," as in the ethos of a post-Cartesian philosophy? I would not say so.

Subsequently, we come to the consideration of physical space versus relational space. Are we "in" relationship because we inhabit the same physical space? I would not say so, but it is possible. So is this a polarity (physical and relational space)? Do we reject Cartesian space in favor of non-Cartesian space? If we hold to an emergent self as a property dualism and thus non-Cartesian, and we understand that relationality emerges from the embodied habitation of Cartesian space, then we see that they are different, yet interrelated and interdependent. Relationships develop in time and space, over time and through situations (where situation refers to the way, the "how," in which people occupy physical space and support the emergence of relational space).

Why this piece of philosophy? Because I believe physical properties, such as embodiment, are crucial to relationship, but relationship itself can be thought of as more ethereal, something more than the mere intercourse of physical bodies. For instance, two people must be in physical proximity (even if by the extension of using technology in the sphere of virtuality); they must be able to see, hear, smell, taste – to *feel* one another.

Does contact at one point in time establish relationship? Two people can be related in the sense of establishing some kind of connection at a single point in time, but does that mean they have a relationship? In a court of law, one might be asked, "What is your relationship to so and so?" And the other might say, "We hooked up once," meaning they had sex one time at a

specific point in physical space. That would be the way in which their life paths crossed at one point in time, but it would not mean they had a "relationship." They would have had sexual relations, but not a relationship (at least not in the sense I am depicting in this book).

Yontef has described relationship as contact over time (Yontef & Bar-Joseph Levine, 2008). I think there is more to it than that, but that is certainly a succinct way of describing it. A relationship takes time. As such, then, there are various kinds of relationships possible as people meet over time in various ways. If I go to the same grocery store each week and go through the same checker's line, then after a while we exchange pleasantries and perhaps even superficial conversation. It is low level in terms of intimacy, but it's a relationship – a grocery store relationship. But there is more to it than that.

Martin Buber (1958/1923) suggested two modalities of relationship: I-Thou and I-It. The first is what develops when people experience intimate contact (which does not have to be sexual), and they begin to know and be known by one another. The second is what develops out of contact that is goal-oriented and for the purpose of achieving something, conducting some kind of business. Thus, when two persons exchange pleasantries in a checkout line in a grocery store, they do so in the context of doing a job. They want to achieve something, and that is their main purpose. They can be nice about it, but really, speaking for myself, if I go to the grocery store, I'm not going there in order to talk with Nancy unless my goal is really to see Nancy. My goal is to get my groceries and pay the least amount necessary, get it done as rapidly as possible, and be done with it. So if Nancy goes on and on about her Aunt Sarah and the incident at the local school board, I just want to get out of there. I want to run. But let's say my interest is in Nancy. Then I might likely forget what I needed at the grocery store, stand around watching Nancy, and then talking with her, and have to come back later to finish purchasing my groceries. That is because I would have been more interested in meeting Nancy

in a more intimate way, in getting to know her better and having her get to know me.

I-Thou discourse is filled with the words "you" and "me." I-It discourse is filled with words pointing to what needs to be accomplished, obtained, used, eaten, and so forth. When sex is more about I-It than I-Thou, it becomes an athletic event, a peak experience to be had. It's about the pleasure, and it's more about the individual with the objective than it is about the two people and their intercourse.

The currency of relationship is dialogue. It consists of presence, inclusion, and commitment to the process of dialogue. Therapeutic presence (Greenberg & Geller, 2012) is being fully *there*. It is characterized by receptivity, an inward attending, and an outward extending toward contact. It is the acceptance of one's situation and the inhabiting of one's ground. It is being face *to* face, opening one's self to the other. Inclusion consists of making space for the presence of the other, however that other might choose to be present, without losing oneself *to* the other. Commitment simply speaks to the fact of the priority placed on such dialogue and the patience and endurance it takes to support dialogue even during difficult contact.

Dealing with Biopsychosocial Factors of Influence

This term, "biopsychosocial," is another way of saying "field" or "situation," which are the more gestalt-familiar terms. While suggesting diverse associations, these terms all point to complex, adapting, or dynamic systems. Furthermore, they cannot be reduced to merely physical or environmental conditions. They are, as Wolfgang Köhler asserted, a continuous medium in which events in one region affect events in other regions in ways that "*depend directly on the properties of both in their relation to each other*" (Köhler, 1940, p. 55).

Understanding Multiple and Interrelated Factors

The field is all things having effect. It is a sphere of influence (Crocker, 1999). It is Lewin's life space (Lewin, 1951). It is a

situation, the current set of circumstances in which one finds him or herself. Although the present moment is the time factor for how the field is organized, that present moment includes salient memory of the past and expectation of the future.

The field is a mix of people, places, processes, interests, forces, needs, desires, senses, developments, and extra-therapeutic events. It is the ontical field (all those actual factors in the social and physical world bearing upon the experience of any given person), and it is the experience of being in such an ontical field (what many refer to as the phenomenal field, comprising the perspective and experience of a person who is in and of such an ontical field).

Complex adapting systems (CAS), another way to think about fields, have several characteristics (Rouse, 2008). They are non-linear. They are dynamic and do not have fixed equilibrium points. They are composed of independent agents who, in the case of gestalt field theory, act according to physical, psychological, and social relations rather than only being acted upon by the forces inherent in relatively simple systems, including the rules suggested by structural theory in sociology (Porpora, 2012). In the morphogenetic CAS elaborated by Margaret Archer and her associates, for instance, the integrity of human beings is maintained, as is the distinction among structures as social relations[5] and the agency of people within such structures, moderated by culture. These agents, operating as they do, provide for the emergence of social structure that then exercises downward influence on the agents themselves (Archer, 1982).[6]

Any CAS tends to be messy, because agents have often conflicting figures of interest, as reflected in their various relations, which also may conflict. Agents, furthermore, are intelligent. They experiment and gain knowledge and experience; so they adapt to changing circumstances. The emergent behaviors can be relatively successful or tragically futile. Finally, there is no single point of control, no CEO who exercises ultimate authority and power and thus can circumvent any given agent.

In couples work the two people involved comprise a field, and when the therapist begins to work with them, the dyad becomes a triad, a CAS – a small one when compared to things like a country's health system, but a CAS nonetheless. Thus, as the therapy unfolds the people (agents) have relations, and the structure of the therapeutic process emerges as they work. That is a loose sociological perspective on a clinical process. It suggests that there are many ways to view what is going on in couples work. This book largely examines two of them: gestalt therapy and gestalt coaching.

Working Purposefully with Situational Elements of the Field

When one thinks about working purposefully, strategy appears as a consideration. A strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve an overall aim. In psychotherapy that aim usually involves change of some kind, and in coaching that aim usually involves achievement of some kind. The theory of change associated with gestalt therapy is called paradoxical (Beisser, 1970). It is called that because change is supposedly achieved by not aiming at it. It is achieved by actualizing oneself in the present – by being present to oneself and increasing one's awareness of the situated nature of one's current existence.

Self-actualization is a term coined by Kurt Goldstein for the motivation to become, to thrive, to be all one can be, and as such it is a potential. In the hands of Frederick Perls there is also a distinction between being oneself and attempting to measure up to one's ideal of oneself. Operating in accord with the introjects one accumulates, the "shoulds" and the "oughts," is to be controlled by the ideal, and that is not what is meant in the paradoxical theory of change. "*There is only one thing that should control: the situation. If you understand the situation in which you are in, and let the situation which you are in control your actions, then you learn to cope with life*" (Perls, 1969, p. 20). While this is incomplete, in the sense of it being more a simple systems approach in which factors act upon, or *control*, one's life, it is enough to point the contemporary gestalt therapist to a field

perspective with regard to change. The person is *of* such a field while also being *in* such a field. The person acts, interacts with assertiveness and the aggression that pursues figures of interest just as he or she is acted upon by other agents and other factors resident in the field under consideration.

Thus, gestalt's theory of change is not forward looking, projecting a goal or idea and then attempting by various ways to reach it. It is focused on being authentic and honest with oneself in the current moment, by increasing one's awareness of oneself as situated in that current moment.

The link to the field was stated by Perls and is obvious. So the field or the situation can become a lever in the hands of the therapist. While it is true that the client changes by actualizing the current moment as he or she is aware of being situated, the situation itself can change by the purposeful actions of the therapist. So the therapist has a choice to merely work to increase the awareness of the field or to introduce new elements into it.

If I introduce some new element, am I still operating according to a paradoxical strategy or have I left that to become targeted and behavioral? The answer resides in an understanding of the role of experiment in gestalt therapy, which is the next section for consideration.

Moving to Action in the Service of Awareness

People are known by what they do. People also know themselves by what they do. Sometimes what we do precedes what we know.

Existential Enactment Based on Faith

Existentialism was in the ground of the original formulation of gestalt therapy. The gestalt therapist trusts in the process in which he or she is engaged, "*knowing, beyond awareness, that if one takes a step there will be ground underfoot; one gives oneself unhesitatingly to the act, one has faith that the background will produce the means*" (Perls et al., 1951/1972, p. 343). This faith is one means of support for those risking the unpredictable excitement

involved in contacting. One never knows how things are going to turn out.

We bought a house after we moved from Bermuda to Twin Falls. We inherited eighteen cats that had been left behind by the previous owner; so we caught them all in traps and put them in a converted chicken coup. Every day my wife and I went into that "cat house" to feed them, and to try to get them, especially the kittens, used to human beings. In grabbing hold of some of them I was bitten and scratched repeatedly, and so it became true that I never knew what was going to happen when I reached softly and slowly toward a cat to touch it. Would it bite me? Would it flinch and withdraw (and make me react with my own flinching)? Would it let me touch it? Could I eventually pick it up or pet it? Would it like to be scratched and would it then start to purr? I never knew what I was going to get, but I trusted that what I was doing was the right thing and I continued with the process.

Sometimes working with people is somewhat like that (not that people will literally bite and scratch – at least most of them will not). It is existential because the whole process of gestalt psychotherapy is unpredictable and proceeds supported by faith.

Behavioral Experiments to Generate Information

Beyond this, and what people usually think of when they think of gestalt therapy, are the dramatic effects possible through gestalt-oriented behavioral experiments. Behavioral experiments are employed in cognitive behavioral therapy in order to (1) disprove a faulty hypothesis (something a client believes is true, but the therapist believes is not necessarily true), and (2) to discover new information (Bennett-Levy, Butler, Fennell, Hackmann, Mueller, and Westbrook, 2004). In gestalt therapy we are not trying to disprove a faulty hypothesis; we are trying to throw the process into action, where the lively figure becomes bright through the creation of new experience. Turning the spotlight of attention on experience creates awareness

of what we are doing and how we are doing it. That provides options for how a client might want to operate in the future, but it also increases response-ability in the present.

The experiment in gestalt therapy is a deliberate move to action, to enactment, in the service of increased awareness, and it is largely regarded as one of the essential earmarks of gestalt process (Roubal, 2009). The most familiar form of experiment is something negotiated between therapist and client in the context of a dialogical relationship; as such it is co-created and bilateral. However, unilateral experiments are also employed, and this is where the therapist simply decides to do something. This may be a decision to self-disclose. It might be a move from a largely dialogical process to a largely strategically field approach (i.e. suggesting that a client go for a walk, read a book, obtain the services of a collateral and complementary provider such as a reading tutor, go to the dentist, etc.). As such, these kinds of experiments are unilateral, because they are not negotiated. The therapist simply moves to action of some kind.

The Experience of Self Is a Relational Consideration

One person all alone does not have an experience of self. This kind of situation is a thought game, because there is no one in the world who ever came into the world all by him or herself and who then existed all alone. Even the most isolated hermit builds relationships with things in the environment. We are thrown, as Heidegger put it, into a world full of people and things already going on and already filled with meanings. It is in contacting that self emerges.

The Concept of Self in Gestalt Therapy

The self in gestalt therapy is not a structure somewhere inside. The "true self," the "false self" – these things have only collateral meaning since they belong to different models in psychotherapy.

Id, Ego, and Personality Functioning

In gestalt therapy the self is a process of experiencing, and it is always a situated process (Staemmler, 2016). That said, you will notice that "self" is a noun, so it is confusing. Grammatically, a process is referred to using a participle, and a participle is a verbal adjective (selfing). This confusion between a thing and a process has been in gestalt therapy literature from the writing of Perls et al. (1951/1978).

The self is the primordial sense of being situated, the choosing and sorting that helps us make our way in any given situation, and the story we keep telling ourselves about who we are as the accumulation of such experiences (Brownell, 2016c, p. 352). Because of the situated nature of emergent self-experience, the self is always a relational consideration that is relative to other people, places, and things in the world. In gestalt therapy the process nature of self-formation is referred to as a function(-ing).

ID FUNCTIONING IN GESTALT THERAPY

Id functioning is the pre-reflective, pre-verbal, native sensory experience. It is the feel of a humid atmosphere when it hugs the body and seems close. It's the cool wind over the skin on a hot day. It's the vast expanse of the ocean impacting one as the horizon at sunset. It's the noise that resides just below the threshold of recognition. It is the vague sense that something is going on. Something is sensed before the aboutness of that experience is fully realized. It is pre-intentional (that is, as if pre-natal, conceived but not yet born).

In relationships id functioning takes place when one person greets another for dinner after both have been separated by the workday and the first person senses coldness, a distance that seems vague and maybe imagined. It's what stimulates the question, "Is everything okay?" Further, it's not the concern that something is wrong, because that would be too well formed a figure. It's the chill leading to that more well-formed figure.

EGO FUNCTIONING IN GESTALT THERAPY

When raw experience that is relatively undifferentiated gives rise to the awareness of intentional objects, a person realizes what the experience is that he or she is having. When that happens, one moves from id functioning to ego functioning. The experience becomes contextualized and thematized in such a way that a person contemplates and makes use of it. Figures of interest emerge. Decisions are made. Action is embarked upon, and this does not have to be a cold, goal-directed kind of activity. For instance, one kind of purpose a person might act upon at this point is the desire to know and be known by another.

Continuing with the example given above, when the person met with a cold shoulder says to him or herself, "He (or she) is upset," the self is forming along the lines of ego functioning. The aboutness of the experience becomes more clear, and it does not matter how that figure forms (which will be the subject of a hermeneutical and phenomenological process in meaning-making treated in more detail later). At that point a rapid series of options may ensue: "I could just shut up and let her/him deal with it"; "I could … I FEEL like it … give him/her a piece of my mind!"; "I could try to understand – maybe ask some clarifying questions." And then a decision on a course of action from among these or other options might be made, followed by the enactment of that decision.

PERSONALITY FUNCTIONING IN GESTALT THERAPY

Over time the way in which a person understands him or herself develops as the history of that person's experiences emerges. This includes the meanings made from those experiences.

When I conduct a mental status exam, one of the components is to ascertain the client's orientation. So I ask questions like "Where are you?", "What day of the week is it?" and "What is going on here?" I also ask, "Who are you?" Invariably, the person stops, glances to the side and thinks a bit. "Who am I?" The answer to that question for purposes of the mental status

exam is simply the person's name, but what the typical response points to is personality function. "I am the kind of person who … [fill in the blank]." If, for example, the person were to say that he or she is a gentle person, how could that be known subjectively? It would be because he or she would have had experiences in which they would have been told they were gentle, or they would have had gentle responses to people, and situations. They could only know such a thing through the accumulation of experience.

The Contact Boundary

Some people do not like the idea of a boundary, because it implies separation. Countries have boundaries[7] with fences that keep one nationality on one side and another on the other. The boundary, the fence, resides in the middle, and it is not a place of meeting. It is often a terrifying divider and spoiler of relationships. Regardless, contact boundary is the technical term in gestalt therapy, but it is not self-evident what that is or how it works, or even if it is a "thing" in the real world at all.

So what is the contact boundary? Let me talk about it in metaphor, a kind of poetry claiming it is like this and it is like that. It is like a dawning. It is like a hunch. It is a scent sensed faintly from afar, becoming pungent with attention and present through awareness. It is not a thing but a process of a certain kind. Activity at the contact boundary provides the experiences of connection and separation (Gary Yontef, personal communication, May 31, 2016). It is a meeting with an Other, which is embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended (Rowlands, 2010):

- embodied: partly constituted by bodily structures and processes;
- embedded: functioning only in tandem with an environment that lies outside the brain of a given subject;
- enacted: consisting of not only neural processes but also the ways the organism acts on the world and the world pushes back on the organism;

- extended: not located exclusively inside the organism's head but expanding into the organism's environment.

This contact boundary is not an object that exists which people approach from opposite sides. If I think of the physical horizon, it's the place where land ends and sky begins, and that is an edge. The contact boundary is the edge of an experience that emerges through a meeting. It exists in non-Cartesian space (i.e. relational space).

When I took an art class in college, I liked the professor because he helped me to pay attention and observe more closely. He showed me that an edge does not have a line to indicate that something is bounded. It's just the place where something stops and something else, even a diffuse background, begins.

So the horizon to me is simply an edge. Likewise, in relationships the contact boundary is the edge where my experience ends and another's begins. There is no static line, no fence, no border, no structure that shows where one thing ends and another begins, because where one experience ends and another picks up is a constantly flickering string, vibrating in the cosmic wind. It is the edge between self and other; it is the place where "same" and "different" compete.

As such it is like a brane, or membrane, in a particular form of string theory in physics, called M-theory. String theory brings together Einstein's theory of general relativity and quantum mechanics. Strings are the smallest objects in the universe, and string theory says they operate within ten or eleven dimensions. We cannot "see" more than three (not counting time as the fourth) of these dimensions, because the others are coiled so tightly they are compacted into the first three. That compaction is accomplished by means of layers in which the dimensions are connected by "dualities," and these dualities are best pictured by imagining plates stacked on top of one another in a specific order. The top of one plate corresponds to the bottom of another plate, and the top of that plate corresponds to the

bottom of another plate, and so forth and so on. Viewed from the top, it looks like one plate, but viewed from the side one sees all the dimensions. The place of connection for any given duality is called a brane, or membrane. A duality is called a duality, not because the plates are polar opposites but because the respective surfaces are similitudes. They meet according to some shared and common characteristic. And the place where they meet is a membrane. The physical cosmos is structured by the meetings of these dimensions, these coiled and vibrating strings, and in a similar way the experience of two people meeting is structured by the "place" of meeting, connected by some kind of similitude or commonality in the fluctuating energy between them. We usually call this an attraction or an interest.

In gestalt therapy it is ironic that similitude establishes contact, which in turn releases the awareness of difference. Understand: this similitude does not necessarily mean having things in common, such as common geography, interests, aesthetic preferences, etc. It can mean similitude in the sense of a match between the two along some plane. Both people are looking for a life partner. One person enjoys humor and the other one is funny. One is loquacious and the other is retiring but admires social fluidity.

There are also various kinds of membranes in the world, depending on the nature of the physical structures in question and their purposes and their contexts in various bodies. Consider the cellular membrane. It is a two-sided structure in that one side faces "out" and the other faces "in" (*out* being extrinsic to the cell and *in* being intrinsic to the cell). Inside the membrane many and diverse processes take place. Outside the membrane environmental processes occur. The membrane governs the thriving of the cell by allowing some elements to escape and others to be assimilated, or brought inside. Both pass through, but in opposite directions, and they do so according to the particulars governing the processes in question. Keeping the comparison simple, the idea is that a membrane is not a passive, inert structure simply dividing one side from the other but a living component of physiology connecting and contextualizing the individual cell

with respect to other cells and structures. It is the organ of connection, the means of structuring the larger organism, and essential to the nurturing and growth of the overall organism.

The contact boundary shares features of both a brane in physics and a membrane in biology. It is neither, but it is similar. The contact boundary in gestalt therapy is the place of meeting with what is other. Unlike the cellular membrane, which is physiological, this contact membrane is relational and immaterial; it forms *at* the meeting. If you were to touch an ice cube, the sense of "cold" would emerge instantly from the meeting of your finger and the ice. The contact boundary is not a thing that exists all on its own. It is a function of the meeting between the organism-environment being (a person, a human being) and whatever is other to that being (which could be a rock, a table, food, a pet cat, or another human being). Like the cellular membrane, however, the contact boundary is an active process organizing the meeting and nurturing, or informing that contacting. Like the brane in M-theory, it is the mechanism compacting the multiple dimensions of experience allowing a concomitant expansion of awareness when the gestalt therapist turns the situation on its side through a phenomenological investigation.

The Cohesiveness of Gestalt Therapy Theory Is a Relational Dynamic

Probably the name that comes to mind whenever someone refers to a theory of relativity is Albert Einstein. He proposed a general theory of relativity with regard to spacetime. Accordingly, in spacetime duration itself is relative to the gravitational pull of mass at a location in the universe and the relationship between observed and observer such that time is warped to accommodate these relationships. A physicist would have a fit at my loose description, but perhaps it can stand as a loose analogy. Elements in the whole situation are connected and interdependent, affecting the shape and velocity of time (hence "spacetime"). Further, the way the observer "looks" at the observed is part of the equation. This is how it is with the

various elements in the theory of gestalt therapy. How the therapist "looks" at the process between therapist and client affects the shape of therapy over time; and conversely, of course, how the client looks back also affects the therapy over time. All the main tenets of gestalt therapy theory are constantly connected and interdependent. How the therapist looks, though, creates a kind of relational and experiential "spacetime" that influences the choice points for the therapist, and this looking is a feature of therapist presence (Greenberg & Geller, 2012). The salience and crispness of figures of interest, for therapist and client relative to one another, the potency of extra-therapeutic field factors, the quality of the intimacy in contacting are all outcomes in the process of looking, of being present.

Imagine a gestalt therapy training group in which twelve trainees and two trainers are in the room, and someone volunteers to work as therapist and another volunteers to work as client. The volunteers arrange their chairs facing each other, and the rest of the people are in a semi-circle a few feet away so that they can observe and hear the work as it develops. In fact, the work does develop, and it takes a turn here, and it takes a turn there. Then it stalls, and there is an awkward silence before the one working as therapist goes to one of the trainers and says, "I'm stuck." The trainer replies, "What do you want?" And the trainee working as therapist says, "I don't know; I'm stuck. I guess I want an answer. What's the right thing to do at this point?" Then, like a joke played on all of them, they begin to laugh, because they realize there *is* no one single right thing to do at that point. Starting from the perspective of the trainee working as client and moving all the way around the arc of trainees watching, each could say they would have done different things here and there in the process. Why? Is it because there is no real theory to gestalt therapy? No. It's because how any given therapist proceeds at any given point is all relative and related to the perspective of the people involved. Like the mass around which the process of light travels, all the tenets of gestalt therapy are in play, but the choice, the timing in their use, depends on the way in which the therapist

perceives what is taking place between him or herself and the client. The choice points depend on one's perspective, one's figures of interest, one's ground, and the press of the current situation, which for each therapist differs somewhat according to the extra-therapeutic factors converging on the needs of the individuals in question and calling their experience in one direction or another.

The point is that there is a relationship here between theory and practice. The application of the unified theory of gestalt therapy depends on the process of contacting. The therapeutic emphasis of one tenet over another at any given time by the therapist is a figure/ground relationship commensurate with a therapist's perspective.

Summary

Contemporary gestalt therapy is a development, a maturing of the original theoretical integration accomplished by the founders of gestalt therapy in the middle of the last century. As it has evolved, it has owned more fully, and then begun to develop, its roots in existential and phenomenological philosophy and neuropsychology. It has refined its understanding of the science behind its field theory. It has begun to develop an evidence base, a research tradition of its own. It shares features with other contemporary clinical perspectives.

As therapists employ the four main theoretical struts of its core theory, the subtle features of gestalt therapy theory emerge, and several of these have been mentioned (theory of change, theory of self, the contact boundary, etc.). The four essential clinical processes in core theory are:

- exploring and understanding subjective experience through a hermeneutic and phenomenological methodology;
- developing a therapeutic relationship through meeting the other in dialogue;
- exploring causative change factors and/or employing field theoretical strategies;

- increasing awareness and knowledge through existential experimentalism.

Finally, the reader would do well to investigate the fine points of gestalt therapy through further study.

Notes

1 For instance Brownell, (2010); Mann, (2010); Francesetti, Gecele, & Roubal, 2013; Wheeler & Axelsson, (2014); as well as Brownell (2016a, 2016b).
2 There are many other points of theory to which gestalt therapists can refer; however, these four are directly related to gestalt praxis in such a way that these other matters – regarding self in gestalt, for instance – emerge from the implementation of these four tenets.
3 Consult Chapter 3 for more on contacting.
4 Search conducted February 27, 2017.
5 Relations in this context are the way people are connected according to such things as power, competition, exploitation, and dependency.
6 There are innumerable models of social relations, and this is not a book on sociology. However, these models are helpful in considering the complexity inherent to field theory in gestalt therapy; so the reader may wish to pursue some of them.
7 As related by Jan Roubal, chair of the European Association for Gestalt Therapy (EAGT) research committee, in personal communication, May, 2016.

Suggestions for Further Reading

In addition to perusing the reference section to follow, I would suggest the following as good overall texts for the study of gestalt therapy theory and practice. Of course one step better would be reading them while taking training at an established gestalt therapy training institute. These exist all over the world and can be found by doing a web search. Some provide distance education as well as face-to-face, postgraduate-level training.

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2

AN ORIENTATION TO GESTALT-BASED COACHING

In 2016 the International Coach Federation (ICF) published its study examining the global field of coaching. It showed that approximately 53,000 people were practicing professional coaches earning an average yearly salary of about $51,000.[1]

When I started my ICF-accredited coach training program through Duquesne University, the trainers made a great distinction between coaching and therapy, between coaching and counseling, between coaching and consulting, and between coaching and mentoring. These activities all involve meetings between people. All are concerned in some way with change. As I listened to the descriptions of how coaches work, I began to see similarities between coaching and solutions-focused therapy, and the methodology also resembled what I knew of gestalt therapy. I could see how coaching was not consulting, which involves offering advice and suggesting solutions. I could see how coaching was not mentoring, which involves training, bringing up another in the shape of oneself (at least to the extent of one's own knowledge base). However, no matter how much the distinction between coaching and therapy was asserted, I kept seeing overlaps. To me, having years of clinical experience, if one does the kinds of things coaches are supposed to do (explore the values, strengths, and motivations of clients), one will find oneself increasingly involved in the total life of each one of them, and then there will be no way to completely factor out the "stuff" that usually comes up in therapy – at least in the kind of coaching that I believe makes the most

sense, that of building genuine relationships with clients. One cannot stiffly push the yearnings and disappointments away, saying, "Don't tell me that, because I'm not your therapist."

Having sorted out the distinction between coaching and therapy as best I can to this point, what I believe is that coaching and therapy, especially gestalt-based coaching and gestalt psychotherapy, can go hand in hand and complement one another. This is especially so when it comes to life coaching. Many (but not all) gestalt-based coaches are involved with executive coaching, and that may be because one of the guiding lights in the field of gestalt coaching and organizational development was Edwin Nevis (see Recommended Reading at the end of this chapter).

The two professions, coaching and psychotherapy, ought to be resources for practitioners in each. Gestalt psychotherapy could be described as wisdom building, while gestalt coaching could be seen as skill building. Therapy concerns a relatively big picture and coaching concerns a relatively smaller picture. The gestalt psychotherapist builds awareness in the client of how they conduct life and what it means to them that they do what they do in the way that they do it. The gestalt-based coach builds awareness too, and could build *on* the awareness achieved in therapy, but in coaching the awareness is designed to encourage action and intensify competence and capability with regard to some goal. The gestalt therapist helps the client realize what needs to be done, and the gestalt coach helps the client do it – to achieve tangible and practical results. The gestalt therapist helps people realize how things work best (the client's personalized realization). The gestalt coach helps people put those realizations to work (the client's personalized applications).[2] The gestalt therapist may focus on results and applications as well, but the process will often be less directive.

So I will admit that I see a great overlap between gestalt-based coaching and gestalt therapy. I am not going to deal in this book with gestalt-based organizational consulting, even though it involves coaching and even though I may refer to it in passing. I

suggest that the reader refer to the Recommended Reading at the end of the chapter for literature on gestalt organizational development.

Gestalt-Based Coaching Is Coaching

Gestalt-based coaching is simply coaching. That is, it is coaching before it is gestalt. It is gestalt applied to coaching. Just because it is gestalt in nature doesn't mean it is a radical departure from the usual purposes and aspirations in the coaching profession.

The ICF defines coaching as "*partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential*" (ICF, 2016a). Professional coaching crosses disciplines, and its purpose is to increase the quality and quantity of performance, improve well-being, and facilitate change (Grant, 2005). The core competences of the ICF start with the ground of an ethical stance and concrete contracting with the client. They go on to the establishment and maintenance of an effective working relationship and the skills of dynamic communication. They conclude with an emphasis on learning and the accomplishment of results.

In order to do this the coach leads the client. That is, the coach takes responsibility to make sure the time spent in coaching is productive. It must achieve something. This can be understood by considering what the coach does, and that is a matter of identifying what the client desires, what the specific outcome might be, what the implications are of achieving that goal, and how the client might know that he or she has experienced success. All that is foundational to creating a strategy and moving to action, and so the coach also invites the client to assess progress in the present, assists the client to design actions he or she might take in the future, encourages the client to consider what resources and supports he or she might need for that action, and asks how he or she might make the client accountable for implementing the strategy in question.

Defining the Topic[3]

The topic is what the coachee or client wants to talk about. It is more as well. The client may not know what coaching is and so may be talking about past failures or frustrations, even patterns of dysfunction with which a therapist might be familiar, but they are not the domain of coaching. Coaching is not about undoing psychological disorder or dysfunction; it's about making positive moves that create satisfaction and establish success. But the question then remains: success in reference to what?

Coachees may not be able to focus on what they really want to talk about, and probably did not come just to talk about something in the first place. However vaguely understood, there is something they want to achieve, some kind of change they want to effect. They might think the coach is going to give them answers or fixes to a problem, but that is not coaching either.

I often ask the client, "What did you want to accomplish by coming to see me today?" Then a refining process usually ensues until we get to a tangible figure. That usually emerges out of an exploration of the intentionality of the client's experience.

By intentionality I do not mean purpose (purpose is important of course, but it comes in later). As mentioned in the last chapter, I am referring to the aboutness of the experience. If a person is thinking, he or she is thinking something. If feeling, feeling an emotion. If sensing, perceiving a sensation. These rudimentary experiences are usually linked to other issues, patterns, experiences, people, and situations, and it is out of these extended intentional sets that the client's purpose in coming to a coach might emerge. For instance, out of a pattern of unfulfilled relationships, the client might say, "I want to connect more deeply with people." Out of the repeated dissolution of teams at work, the middle manager might want to increase his or her relational skills in order to better support team cohesiveness.

Identifying the Outcome

This, quite simply, is a matter of desire and of hope. It is what the client would like the outcome of talking about that figure of interest to be. "I want to talk about connecting more deeply with other people." "Okay. And what do you hope might come about as a result of doing that?"

This is not identifying how the client will know if he or she has accomplished something (that will come later). This is simply what the client hopes might be accomplished. "Well, I'd like to become more relational in my approach to management."

Exploring the Meaning

To explore any given figure for a person's life often requires making explicit the meanings of terms and concepts. "What do you mean by 'relational?' What does 'connecting' mean to you? How would you know if you were 'connecting?' "

Exploring the meaning also points to implied or explicit significance. Significance is a quality of being that is worth someone's attention. As such it points beyond the fact of being worthy of attention to the implications of something in a person's life. One might ask of a figure of interest, "So what? What difference would this make?" Indeed, this is what the coach might inquire. "So, if you were able to become more relational what might that mean to you? What do you imagine it would be like? What difference would it make in your work?"

It also points to the strength of that significance. "How important is this to you?"

Here the coach can use a scaling technique to obtain a loose assessment of the level of significance. "On a scale of one to ten, with one being not at all and ten being over the top, just how important *is* this to you?"

If the coachee responds with anything less than a five, the coach might express surprise and ask what there is about the figure that makes the client want to pursue it. Again, what

difference does it make in that person's life? It might also suggest that the coach and coachee could be talking past one another and that there is something in the mix that has not yet been sufficiently uncovered. In that case the coach might want to circle back into the intentionality of the client, to understand more clearly what is related to the things the coach *has* identified in order to reveal what the coachee has not yet begun to see.

Measuring Success

One of the classic questions children ask when going on a road trip is, "Are we there yet?" It's the same question one might ask during a coaching process. How does one know when he or she has arrived? Given that a person wanted to talk about such and such, and given that in particular he or she wanted to accomplish X (and given that X was important), how indeed would a person know if he or she had obtained what they wanted? What would be the sign or indication that success had been achieved? How could a person know that he or she had "gotten there yet"?

This needs to be explicit. It is one way of monitoring progress. It's an intuitive form of evidence, something that gives way to anecdotes, personal stories of what happened when one is engaged in coaching. Beyond that, these narratives could be gathered and analyzed in research projects, but that is not what is in view here: this is the way the coachee, him or herself, in a very personal way, will know that something has been achieved, and it is usually set near the beginning of a coaching session. A person can express tangible and concrete achievements to identify success, but they will not satisfy if there is insufficient resonance with the intuitive sense, the awareness of the client.

Examining Progress Toward Success

Near the end of a coaching session, the coach inquires how successful the coachee was in achieving the desired outcome. Sometimes I ask, "Did you get today what you came for?" If the

person responds that he or she did, I follow up and come back to that subjective experience and ask, "How do you know?" Here we come back to what the person identified at the beginning of the session, but it may turn out that the client knows by some other means. There is no guarantee that everything in the session will go strictly according to plan, and so the coachee may realize by some other means that he or she obtained something valuable. They might say, "Well, I didn't get *that* but I got something else that I value and think was perhaps more important." When that occurs, I might inquire what the coachee wants to do about the identified marker of success from the beginning of the session. And this is to maintain continuity.

Committing to Further Action

One of the features of the gestalt approach is that it is not simply talking about a subject. This is especially important in coaching, which also involves a move to action. The coach inquires of the client, "What action will you take this week in the service of your goals?" "What are you going to do about this?"

While making explicit what the client intends to do, it is important to make sure that it is also possible to accomplish. The client *could* do it. "How possible is that?" "What steps do you need to take before you can do that?" "Who does that depend on? If you need help, whose help do you need, and what do you need them to do?"

Karol Wojtyla (1979) wrote that people are revealed, made known, both to themselves and to others, in what they do, in their action. So, the move to action is an experiment. As mentioned in the first chapter, behavioral experiments are at least partially for the purpose of generating new information, and that information comes from experience. So, when the client moves to action, the coach can expect the process to shift a bit in order to assimilate new facts, changing attitudes, difficult emotions, larger horizons, or a changing landscape.

Assimilating Learning

What is learning? One way of thinking about it is that learning is the acquisition of knowledge and skills, sufficiently committed to memory to be available for use as needed in the various situations one might encounter in life (Brown, Roediger III, & McDaniel, 2014). I prefer to see learning as an aspect of growth. And there are all kinds of contexts for growth – professional growth, psychological growth, physical growth, academic or intellectual growth, and relational growth. In this book you might imagine that we would be focused on relational growth, but actually one cannot put these things into separate silos, as if they were isolated and could be kept from contaminating one another. Relational growth involves all the things people know, value, and can do.

The kind of learning or growth that I believe to be most important is experiential learning. We can learn facts by reading and studying with experts. We can learn by watching others (a kind of vicarious experience), so that if we see someone else get bitten by the cat in the cage, then we don't stick our fingers in there. However, if we are the person who was bitten by the cat in the cage, our experience of that caged cat leaves a deeper impression (literally).

When my wife and I lived in Bermuda there were cats that came around. People said they were all feral. Well, one gray cat came around and I fed her, and then I let her in the house and she became our most affectionate pet. Then another gray cat came around, and I thought this one would be the same. I got close and picked it up, and then it exploded in a fury of panic and began biting and scratching me. I was so surprised I froze while it kept biting and scratching. By the time I let go of the cat, my arms and hands were a bloody mess and everybody cautioned me against infection. So my wife got Epsom salt, and I made the wounds bleed as much as possible, in line with everything I had found about treating puncture wounds. Then I doused my arms and hands with alcohol and hydrogen peroxide. I soaked them in the Epsom salts, and as the days went by I

watched for any sign of infection. Luckily I got none. Through that experience, though, I learned the difference between truly feral cats and just stray cats, and I also learned how to take care of cat scratches and bites. All that came in handy when years later we moved to Idaho, bought a little ranch and inherited eighteen cats and kittens. We had to catch them in order to get them neutered (or else face an overwhelming cat population), and in the process I had the opportunity to put my learning about cats and cat bites to use.

Establishing Accountability

This is not as much about how the coach will hold the coachee accountable as it is how the coach will get the coachee to hold him or herself accountable. In other words, the coach is not a policeman or the school principal with authority to find fault and punish for lack of follow through, and is not a stalker who will follow the client around making sure he or she is doing what they agreed to do. Rather, the coach keeps the coachee aware of what the client him or herself has agreed to and adjusts the process and agenda as needed. According to the ICF core competencies the coach keeps the focus between sessions by directing attention to the plan and desired outcomes, those agreed-upon figures of interest and strategies the coach and the client identified together, the actions that the client agreed to take (ICF, 2016b). The coach does this in session and then leaves it to the coachee. The coach also keeps track of topics for further sessions.

Stepping Back

What I've just laid out is one approach to coaching sessions, and there are numerous analyses of what the coach does in coaching, thus, what coaching is about. If we step back from specific coaching sessions, what do I think are the key elements of coaching?

The coach is dealing with some kind of desire, need, want, interest, aspiration, hope, or yearning in the client. The client

is not satisfied with the status quo; the client wants progress, not just change.

The coach is dealing with motivation, the motivation of the client to make progress and to work for it. In order to understand that, one of the chief elements the coach explores with the client is what it would mean to him or her to achieve that progress, attain that desire, satisfy that need, achieve that aspiration, etc. Such a consideration is not merely how that accomplishment might fit in the life of the client, but how it would relate to the client's values, his or her family, vocation, calling in life, and so forth.

What difference would it make to accomplish the stated objective? What significance would that have? That is the stuff of vision. And so part of motivation is the ability to visualize the future with the objective being part of it. This is not a trick, a spiritual sleight of hand, a name-it-and-claim-it gimmick. Forming a clear figure of what one wants to accomplish, of the desired objective, and also seeing how that would affect one's self and loved ones is to imagine, to visualize a significant potential, and that is done in the present. "What would that mean to you today, right now?"

Gestalt-Based Coaching Is Applied Gestalt Therapy Theory

All this talk about facilitating change, this goal-focused aspirational language, might seem counterfactual to gestalt's paradoxical theory of change and its value of dialogical process, the preference for showing up as one is, and hopes for an I-Thou relationship. Actually, gestalt therapy does not abhor change; it's just that the methods used to support change seem at odds with more targeted and directive approaches. Further, it would be ludicrous to believe that gestalt therapists have no goals or that gestalt-based coaches are not gestalt-based because they do have them.

So what makes gestalt-based coaching gestalt? The purpose here is not to compare and contrast gestalt coaching to other approaches to coaching. Rather, it is to point out what elements of gestalt therapy lend themselves naturally to the process of

coaching and can be utilized in a coaching process. What is there about gestalt therapy theory that a coach might want to utilize? (Thus, why might an established coach want to get trained in the gestalt approach and organize the work of coaching accordingly?)

People writing from a gestalt approach have identified creative adjustment or self-regulation, the Law of Prägnanz, heightened awareness, the issue of unfinished business or incomplete figures of interest, the paradoxical theory of change, the coaching relationship, experiment, the cycle of experience, contact, phenomenology, dialogue, and field dynamics as relevant gestalt principles involved in the coaching process (Allan & Whybrow, Simon, 2012; 2008; Bluckert, 2015). Rather than summarize what they have said, I am going to provide my own take. The reader can consult these other references, and I will be making applications in subsequent chapters that further inform and illustrate what I am providing below.

View of the Client/View of the Process

Gestalt therapy and coaching have similar but not identical views of the person and the process in which they are involved. Both view the person as a whole, a complex being in process, constantly forming. Coaches view the client as a healthy and complete individual who can respond creatively to demands from the environment (ani , 2013). Gestalt therapists view the client as having the capacity for health, but do not assume he or she can form figures of interest and pursue them to satisfaction. The view of health in gestalt therapy is of a person who is spontaneous (creatively indifferent and available to novel stimuli), often doing the best he or she can with a difficult situation, able to form figures of interest, and capable of pursuing those figures to completion or satisfaction. This is very close to what a coach would say, and there may be just a finely sliced hair's difference between them.

I have what I think of as a realistic perspective on this. I am an ordained clergyman,[4] and I served first as a minister of

children on a multiple-staffed, large church in California, and then as a pastor of a small, rural church on the Oregon coast before I went back to school and enrolled in a doctoral program of clinical psychology. I have sat in various churches over the years and listened to the ideal preached as if it were the actual. I've been encouraged to believe in things I could not see, to trust that one day they would be quite evident and not so shielded behind dark, stained glass. I believe, for instance, that God is certainly in the process of making people over into the image of Christ, but I don't think any of us has arrived.

We are all works in progress, and it is the same with regard to the gestalt view of persons, whether that be in the context of therapy or that of coaching. The fact is that whenever someone comes for either therapy or coaching, they are a unique person who does not exactly fit the ideal, the model of health, the perfect candidate for coaching.

So the view of persons in coaching might best be seen to be an attitude held by the coach and not a procrustean bed by which the coach shed all those who do not match the ideal. If the coach were to do that, no one would be left, not even the coach. If the coach approaches the client with the attitude that he or she is someone who is a healthy and complete individual capable of responding creatively, then often that is the kind of person who responds (or at least closely enough for them to be able to work together). I know what the ideal is – someone who is not looking for a therapist to clarify why they keep doing the dysfunctional things they do. The ideal coaching client is someone who is already an achiever and wants to be guided into greater achievement. Unfortunately, in executive coaching, for instance, a high percentage of people qualifying as high achievers (who want to achieve even more) also qualify as having personality disorders; so the coach cannot deal with one without dealing with the other. And the notion of an ideal client crumbles.

A Phenomenological Approach

There is always more going on in a given moment than one person can focus upon. A percept, a visual figure of interest, is always exceeded by what is around it. Look at a painting inside of a frame hanging on a wall. What you see is the painting, but there is the frame and there is also the wall. To attempt to take it all in would result in a scattered and diffuse experience. So we routinely filter and we customarily focus, choosing one figure to have our attention and to pursue, and choosing to set aside the wall (we often cannot set aside the frame, which seems to become part of the painting and affects our experience of it). In this process of bracketing we let go of competing figures.

Some people do not choose, however. They do not progress from id function, noticing first this sensation or concern and then another and then another and so forth. The classic exercise of awareness in gestalt therapy of noticing and saying out loud, "Now I am aware of…" "Now I am aware that…" and so forth and so on, never moving on from these rudimentary sensations to their significance, to the aboutness of their experience, never fully forming intentional objects, is an example of how people can be captured by id function. The coach can help by fostering the client's move from awareness during id function to awareness during ego function.

We Facilitate the Client's Awareness Through Observation

It is possible to refine the way one observes. I have become involved with the global movement for research in gestalt therapy, and because I've been influenced by issues related to research I have acquired a more nuanced understanding of it. Research is systematic observation. So, to use a kind of metaphor, the coach needs to become exquisite in his or her observation of the client. He or she must develop a clear method for how observation is conducted. That will include receiving not merely what is given in the phenomena of perception, but also what arises in the response of the coach to the call of the

coachee (some of this kind of language will hopefully become clearer as the reader continues). One must sit with the silence, see what is said, and listen to the movement of embodied process – a process that is a construction between self and other, back and forth, coach and coachee, on and on.

The coach receives the words a client says. The coach also receives the way in which they are expressed. Notice. Detect. Behold and mark. Let the eyes roam over all of the client and, when they do, take in what they see. Do not merely see it. Feel it. Let it affect; let it take root.

Sometimes in working with people who are in need of help to deal with various anxieties or compulsions, I will suggest they visit a store that sells fragrances or scented oils. I will ask them to smell these things and to look for something whose smell makes them not merely think, "Oh, that smells sweet." I tell them to look for something that sets loose an experience in their body so that they feel it and spontaneously notice an "aaaaaah!" somewhere in their chest.

This is the kind of observing in which the coach needs to engage with regard to the client. Observation that is most helpful does not simply remain limited to one's thoughts, to a cognitive model-making. Observation that is most helpful also includes embodied resonance – what one feels in the presence of the client.

We Refine Our Observation Through Bracketing

When the kind of observation that I have described above is carried out, the observer cannot help but do two things: start to put together a model of understanding and be affected or touched by the observations.

People instinctively attempt to understand. We are given to meaning-making. We interpret our experience, and this begins almost immediately with any given situation in which we find ourselves. "What is going on here?" "How does this relate to me?" "How do I make sense of this?" The need to do that when one is a therapist or coach is even more intense because one is

being paid to exert some kind of expertise or wisdom with regard to the needs of the client. However, in respect to a systematic method of observing, this instinctive need to understand gets in the way, and if not thwarted, often leads to premature conceptualizations which actually miss the client (as the client is a whole person much more complex than any rudimentary model forming on the fly in the mind of the coach or therapist). So the coach must bracket model-making. Just set it aside. You can always come back to it if you need to.

The second thing that needs to be dealt with is the effect of observing the client on the coach. Often what one perceives and takes note of in the client brings up unresolved issues and old experiences in the coach. These tend to limit the coach's ability to "go there" with the client, because if they have been unresolved in the coach, he or she will tend to avoid them. So, the coach just observes them quietly to him or herself, but then sets them aside as well. And if they seem significant enough, and they keep emerging in work with one client after another, then the coach needs to seek the help of a therapist to understand them better and disperse them.

We Provoke the Client's Awareness Through Description

Describe what you observe in the client. This takes two forms. You can express what you perceive, and you can disclose what you experience. "I notice you grimace when you mention your boss." "You look at your feet?" "I hear a sigh."

Description can often take on the character of explanation in which the describer is providing a subtle commentary or "take" on that which is being described. That is not what I advocate here. There is a place for self-disclosure but this kind of description refrains from such commentary. This kind of description is a likeness and depiction. It's not so much a painter giving an impression as a photographer capturing a moment in time.

We Crystallize the Client's Awareness Through Curiosity

"When you keep saying 'I don't know,' I become very curious about your 'no knowing.'"

One of the greatest friends of any coach (or therapist for that matter) is curiosity. Curiosity communicates interest. A coach can measure the quality of contact and presence he or she is manifesting by the level and complexity of curiosity he or she experiences about the client, about the process of meeting the client, about the effects of the client on others, and so forth. Furthermore, the more the coach can model curiosity and make ordinary the satisfaction of curiosity so that the client begins to express it as well, the more coaching presence (or therapeutic presence) is accomplished. There is no end to where curiosity can take the process when it is expressed cleanly and directly, normalized in the flow of contacting. The coach needs to give him or herself permission to look long and deeply into the client, to observe, and then to be curious about whatever comes up in the process of observing. Why? It will take the process into deeper levels of significance. It will foster deeper contacting, and it will contribute to a dialogical relationship.

A Relational, Dialogical Approach

In explaining how executive coaching becomes a relationship with a trusted leadership advisor, which is maintained for multiple years, Wasylyshyn (2015) asserted that it was a matter of presence. Presence leads to relationship, which makes sense when one considers Yontef's assertion that relationship is contact over time. So establishing coaching relationships involves the skills of contacting and dialogical process.

Gestalt Coaching Is Achieved Through Contacting

We meet people. Contact has been described as meetings of various kinds. It is touch. It is hearing. It is seeing. It is being embedded and aware of one's environments through sensory

input. More will be said about contacting in the next chapter. It is one of those critical constructs that is also often misunderstood.

This Approach Requires Coaching Presence

"When you keep saying 'I don't know,' I feel avoided." Coaching presence is not only an ICF core competency, it is acknowledged and celebrated by most coach training programs as being essential to the process of coaching. It is the letting go of a focus on technique and a being with the client. In this respect coaching presence, practicing presence, is the same in coaching as it is in gestalt therapy. Greenberg and Geller (2012) described the process as follows: "*Therapists' responses are directly informed by their receptivity and contact with the in-the-moment experience of the client and the relationship, and how this experience resonates in the body of the therapist*" (p. 93) Just insert the word "coach" for "therapist" in that statement and you have it.

What is it like, as a coach, to be with? To BE with? To be WITH? Not all people are the same; so, the experience will vary with different clients. Contacting is maintained only to the level of support a person can give, and so it is important for the coach to understand that being with various kinds of people requires first that he or she support him or herself in the experience of being with. That support-seeking is accomplished by turning the focus first to one's own experience and then finding a way to stay with the particular client who is contributing to that experience.

"*The person is an embodied being having the capacities of life (it is animated), intellect (it has* nous*, or mind), and relationship*" (Brownell, 2015, p. 21). These capacities, when unleashed through contacting, result in experience. Such experience is an embodied phenomenon. So following the process requires one paying attention to the lived body in the movement of the rhythm and exchange between coach and client. More will be said about embodied process in the next chapter.

Just as it is crucial to attend to one's own experience of being with as the coach, it is crucial to attend to the experience of the

client. There are two people who meet in contacting during the coaching process. One is the coach, but the obvious other is the client. I have already mentioned a phenomenological process using observation. This is where that process intersects with the relational process in gestalt coaching.

Gestalt Coaching Builds Relationship Through Dialogue

The essentials of dialogue have been described previously in Chapter 1 on gestalt therapy. They remain true for coaching as well. However, there is in coaching a more directed movement toward the accomplishment of some goal, the marking of some progress, and for that a coach might make a strategic use of I-It dynamics. This would be a more guided dialogue.

"I am wondering what brings you to me today." "What did you hope to accomplish in our meeting?" "How will you know you got what you came for?" "What do you imagine it would be like to actually achieve that?"

"When you tell me that you are tired of the way your relationships have been, I see what looks like pain in your eyes. And when you say you want to connect more deeply with someone you can trust, I feel a burning in my chest. What's it like to hear these words of mine?"

"What's this yearning for relationship like? To what might you compare it?"

"How serious are you? In other words, how much would you pay to achieve what you want? What might you give up in order to have it? Name an amount; describe the sacrifice."

In coaching, the dialogue is going somewhere, and the coach takes responsibility for reaching that destination. This is not to say that in therapy the dialogue is aimless and simply wandering, but it is more of a free exploration of current experience as it relates to the etiology of dysfunction and/or the hopes for the future, aimed at enlarging the client's awareness of patterns of thinking, feeling, and doing, and how they have been playing out in the course of living. In coaching that kind of information is relevant as ground to the figure of directed action

aimed at getting to some new place. Consequently, the I-It of dialogue often targets behavioral experiment (see below) as a destination of discourse.

A Strategic Field Approach

In using the heading of a "strategic" field approach we are getting closer still to the enactment of experiment, but field dynamics have to be understood first, because all these things, a phenomenological approach, a dialogical relationship, and an existential and experimental enactment, the move to action, take place in a field and involve organism-environment considerations.

The Field Is a Social Consideration

Certainly the field can be considered environmental, as in the case of a force field exerting influence upon an individual. As such, we can think of a physical force field, but most often what is under consideration is a social environment – people living, working, interacting in groups. When people do this, they function as agents and act according to roles, and as they act in those roles they give life to an emergent social structure that exerts influence upon the very people within it.

Often in the process of working with someone, it is these social factors outside of the coaching engagement that make a critical difference:

1. A middle manager in a firm struggles to make progress in his team, reporting to a militaristic and rigid supervisor who rules in a detached fashion as if cracking a whip and demanding higher performance. The whole range of issues and goals changes when that supervisor is replaced by a more relational human being who understands that respect runs along a two-way street.
2. A high-level executive is working on achieving the next victory in his "climb to the top" only to succumb to a change in policy that sidelines older employees in favor of younger ones.

3 A progressive, well-educated woman who enjoys the theater and art museums in Manhattan follows her partner and his new job to a small, conservative mountain state where people go hunting for recreation and their idea of a good night of theater is watching a movie on streaming television.

In each case the needs and goals change as the situation shifts from one social environment to another. But the relevance of a social context can be useful if the coach and coachee approach it as an opportunity, as a tool by which to bring change. Change something about the social process, the way agents interact and/or their roles, and it will bring change in the structure itself.

The Field Is a Cultural Consideration

The social and interpersonal field can be considered as a process, but it can also be considered as a given, as the customs, set institutions, the norms, attitudes, and expectations for any given social group. And people are born into such a cultural field. It is already going on and filled with meaning when they are born into it. Parenting is affected by such cultural influences, and children grow up and are acculturated according to such factors. The cultural expectations and influences on a young black male living in Bermuda are quite different from those on a young Hispanic male living in the southwest of the United States. The first one likely grows up in a female-led, single-parent family in which the mother is working at two or three jobs to deal with extreme expenses and the boy often assumes an entitled position in which not much is expected of him. In the second, the boy grows up in a two-parent family in which both parents may work but they are also highly invested in family and expect their children to contribute to the welfare of everyone involved and to show respect in the process. Working with these two cultural situations is quite different.

The Field Is a Contextual Matter

One of the central rules of interpretation is to understand any given action, feature, or behavior, or in the interpretation of texts to understand any given word or phrase, in its context. Just as the context shows how a word is being used, in human interactions the context frequently makes clear what a person means. A battered wife sitting silent in the presence of her abusing husband is different from a silent employee referred to coaching by his HR department.

"What kind of situation drove you to come talk with me?" "How come you chose a coach rather than a therapist?"

The Field Lends Itself to a Strategic Action

The field is a complex, adapting system. It can also be called a dynamical system. In dynamical systems higher cognition "*is assumed to emerge on the basis of elementary sensorimotor loops*" (Tschacher, 2014, p. 4) that result because a person is embedded environmentally and his or her brain is engaged with the world. In the dynamical approach cognition emerges predominantly with reference to its embeddings, as embodied cognition (Tschacher & Bergomi, 2011) or situated cognition (Greeno & Moore, 1993). Embodied cognition is a useful term about which more will be said in Chapter 4. However, gestalt coaches would know this as the meaning that emerges at the contact boundary of the organism-environment entity – the holistic person. It is a reference to the contact boundary at work.

So the first strategy in purposefully using the field in coaching is contacting. Contacting produces experience, alters one's cognitions, and leads to change.

Subsequent strategies could be numerous but would all come under the rubric of altering elements of a person's situation. If that person is embedded in such a situation, and the situation changes, then his or her meanings and embodied cognitions will have to change as well. Here, however, the coach is not simply asking the coachee to imagine changing something; the

coach is asking the coachee to change something. This is a move to action and so rightly fits under the next subheading, that of the experiential. The coach moves to action, and it becomes an experiment.

An Experiential-Experimental Approach

There is a time in all coaching work when the coach promotes action. This move to action in some coaching approaches would be like pulling a spoon through a bowl of custard. You know exactly what will happen, and you know the purpose for which you are doing it. In gestalt coaching, however, the move to action is not at the command of a coach who knows exactly what will happen. It comes with the unknown, and it comes with risk, just as in gestalt therapy. The coachee tries something in order to see what might happen, and in the process of trying out something novel, the coachee meets the unexpected at the contact boundary, navigates contacting, generates experience, and learns from that experience. However, no one truly knows how it's going to turn out when it is proposed. And that is what makes it existential. There is risk, and there is faith in taking that risk, trusting that the field will produce the means necessary for any given challenge.

Summary

Gestalt coaching is first coaching. Coaching is not therapy, nor is it mentoring or consulting. Coaching is a relational process in which one person helps another to achieve pragmatic goals related to various meaningful values and aspirations. That said, gestalt coaching is also gestalt and proceeds according to an application of gestalt therapy theory. So it includes a phenomenological method, a dialogical relationship featuring coaching presence, a strategic use of the field, and existential behavioral experiments. Gestalt coaching is more directive, and it often makes purposeful use of the I-It dynamic in dialogical process. It is goal-oriented. Gestalt coach and coachee are attempting to achieve some goals. They will be able to measure success by the

completion of such goals – something gestalt practitioners might call the satisfaction of figures of interest.

Notes

1 Downloaded August 2, 2016 from the ICF website (http://coachfederation.org/prdetail.cfm?ItemNumber=4301&_ga=1.157935994.1543022710.1470145303).
2 This is not to say that gestalt therapists do not help clients apply what they realize from therapy. Of course that happens, but then, frankly, this becomes one of the overlaps between therapy and coaching.
3 In this section I am indebted to Sr. Susan English and Janice Sabatine, instructors in Duquesne University's Accredited Coach Training Program (ACTP).
4 The reader will notice that I speak candidly and openly at times from the perspective of my spiritual identity; it's an essential aspect of who I am, and since I often attempt to be transparent, it would be bad faith on my part to obscure or set aside this piece of who I am.

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3

CONTACTING, THE SATISFACTION OF INTEREST, AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

This chapter takes a closer look at the central construct of contacting. It does so with a wide lens and then narrows that lens to a more specific focus on contacting. Both these approaches are related to two different, but connected, contact cycles. There has been debate in gestalt circles about which cycle or continuum of contacting best represents what is happening in the process of contacting, but if one sees them as contemplating contacting with different focuses there is little direct conflict. I will address the first, more general way of seeing contacting below, and later in the chapter, under the heading "Satisfaction of Interest," I will address the second. The chapter closes with a consideration of how the gestalt approach in therapy and coaching relates to positive psychology.

Contacting

The cycle of contacting put forth in Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951) has been described under the heading of "*contact and withdrawal*" by Margherita Lobb and Philip Lichtenberg (2005). It consists of fore-contact, contact, final contact, and post-contact. They describe a process of figure-background formation, but in most subsequent discussions of contacting, especially by most recent contemporary gestalt therapists, it seems that what people are looking at is the way human beings relate to what is "other" for them. That is a relational perspective. Therefore, I will address what takes place in the cycle of contacting in terms of a different kind of sequence or process.

That involves touching, meeting, intentional contacting, and knowing. Later, these elements will also be present for the second kind of focus, but in that more focused fashion. Furthermore, when I say sequence I am not thinking of a strictly linear sequence, an ordinal display of one thing rigidly following another. Rather, these things are going on and the person in the process of contacting is likely involved with all of them either in sequence or simultaneously.

Touching

It is autumn on the rim of the Snake River Canyon as I write. The air has turned crisp, and the dew remains on the lawn. The smell of smoke is in the air; we have fired up the pellet stove. The lawn is lush and green beneath the yellow and brown leaves that continue to fall to the ground like odd feathers that glide on the soft breeze. They twirl. They twist. They float, and sometimes they just fall straight down. When they come to rest, they stop suspended on the grass, but they touch the ground, one surface flush with the other. Is this what we mean by contact?

Certainly, there must be some kind of rudimentary proximity of a given subject to what is other, whether that be the environment or other persons. But what constitutes "touching"? The dictionary usually defines touch with the word contact. That is not so helpful here, because I'm in the process of defining contact itself. What is touching?

If you hold up your hand with palm out and keep it about half an inch from another person's extended palm, you will likely sense something. It could be faint warmth. It might be a tingling sensation. There might be a disturbance of some kind. That is touch, but it is not one surface literally flush up against the other.

Touch has been appropriately implicated in a variety of clinical settings for various uses (de Carvalho, 2009; Vandergrift, 2013; Cotton, Luberto, Bogenschutz, Pelley, & Dusek, 2014; Sylvia, Shesler, Peckham, Grandin, & Kahn, 2014) and shown to be helpful. The purpose is not to advocate for touch, but to

illustrate that simple touch is one factor in contact. It is healing touch.

Phenomenologically, touch has been identified as an unusual and singular sensation. If we diagram the process, there is a reaching out to or toward something or someone so as to place part of one's body, one's skin, onto what is not one's body. Thus a person can feel that other. But instantly there is the sense of what it is like to be touched. The other seems to touch back, reaching out as it were to place itself on the person; the experience is reciprocal. That is what is meant by the saying, "Touch touching touch."

As I have grown older I have noticed that I am more easily affected by the emotions of others, the disquiet of a tender moment, the heroic suffering of a courageous person, or the sudden intuition of the human condition, mixed as it is with sublime yearnings and mundane hungers. They get to me; they touch me. And so there is a kind of touching that is not the physical contiguity of one surface on another. Some kinds of touch move a person inside just as if someone had crawled into the heart and put his or her shoulder to tip someone over emotionally.

So contact takes place through touch, but contact is not exhausted in touch. Nor does touch completely define contact.

Meeting

Contacting has been described as meetings of various kinds. This, then, is a more personal and relational way of understanding contact. It involves presence – being present and appropriating the presence of an other.

One year my wife and I accepted a chance to teach in Nanjing, China. In the mornings we would rise and go out from our room at the university and walk down the street to a kind of coffee shop. The road where the shop was located was the main thoroughfare for people going to the children's hospital, and while we drank our coffee, throngs of parents, mostly mothers, walked past, carrying or holding the hands of their children,

taking them to the hospital for treatment. Sometimes they begged in the streets for money to help pay for the treatment their children needed. I will never forget one mother who sat with her legs crossed, right in the street, and across her lap lay a severely disabled child of about three or four. The child was half naked, and the mother held her hands out hoping for people to contribute to their need. There were hundreds of people in the street all moving, walking quickly to get somewhere, and they were walking around her. The throngs of people moving about felt like a blur, but that woman was clear. She got to me. I let her in. The others were kept at a distance. I did not meet them. I did, however, meet that woman and her disabled child. Understand, I did not approach her to introduce myself; that is not the kind of meeting I mean here. It wasn't a cocktail party. And she did not meet me. Her eyes moved quickly from one place to another, flashing right past me in the process. But she reached me, she got to me, and I met her. I can still see her to this day.

So contact is not necessarily interpersonal communication either. Communication connotes a mutual, two-way interaction in which both persons share some information and come to some kind of mutual understanding or experience of one another. But contacting is meetings of *various* kinds, and in this instance I experienced contact with the Chinese woman although I doubt she was very much aware of me at all. Contacting can and often does include communication and a two-way awareness, one person with another. But it does not have to. In this way a person can experience contact with inanimate objects such as a seascape, magnificent trees, or the physical horizon during a beautiful sunset. The point of such meetings, such contact, is that they affect a person. People do not remain dull and numb to contact; they are moved. They are "touched." And that often leads to some kind of change.

Intentional Contacting

In the cycle of contacting there are these phases: fore-contact, contact, final contact, and post-contact. Intentional contacting

refers to the phenomenon of intentionality in this process of contacting. And so here I am referring, recall, to the more general and relational sense of contacting.

As mentioned, intentionality is a phenomenological construct referring to the aboutness of a person's experience. Intentionality relates its subject to the object in question as thinker to object thought (Brower, 2005). As such, intentionality has its own voice, and that voice is the middle voice.

Any subject may take an active, passive, or middle voice in doing whatever they do. In the active voice the subject produces the action, in the passive voice the subject receives the action, but in the middle voice the subject participates in some way in the results of the action. It is conducted with self-interest. The middle voice relates the action more intimately to the subject (Brownell, 2010), and that is why intentionality can be seen as taking place in the middle voice.

"What is this thing going on with me, and what is it about?" "If I am flushed with excitement, what does that mean?" With intentional contacting, thus, one is squarely *in* the experience, both the what (content) and the how (process) of it, and at the same time one is aware that the experience is linked to other aspects of one's life. It has implications and relates to the ground as well as the figure.

Knowing

This intentional contacting leads to the accumulation of knowledge, the wisdom of experience. This is not the accumulation of abstractions. This is what people can know because they have been through something. It comes from having a definite figure of interest that is then pursued and from which, from the process and experience of pursuing, learning develops. We can learn from watching others (social learning), but we learn most effectively and with the most effectiveness through first-hand experience.

I know, for instance, that God loves me (bear with me). I chose that example on purpose, because it is so easy for people

to ascribe some doctrine, some affirmation, to the notion of God's love, and for "God" to be an abstraction. They can believe *that* God loves them, but they may not have a tested, experiential ground in knowing God's love. It's more like a hope or trust in an assertion that lacks the confidence of personal history. I will not tell the stories and provide lengthy descriptions of what I've been through with God, resulting in my knowledge that He loves me. It would take too long and become more of a distraction than it would be worth. But I know. In the face of hardship and confused inquiry, He has done things that gave me the assurance of His presence, His faithful commitment to me, His caring, and His affection. His person and character have been noema, and the process of confirmation noesis.[1]

Both content and process are important aspects of intentional contacting, and they set up the appropriation of real knowledge. The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968) proposed what he called a chiasm, the X-shaped feedback loop we have with a real world that cannot be fully known, absolutely known as it is, but which can be encountered and can be known in part through contacting, through a shaking of hands between a person and his or her real world. This is what provides knowledge of one's situated condition. Such a process makes sense for an organism-environment entity, which is the anthropology Perls et al. (1951) proposed. We are connected to the world from birth. We are born into a world already in flux, into a family with its own traditions, and into a culture with its own values. We learn what these things are and how they work, what their importance is for us, through being in touch with the people and things that comprise our various lifeworlds.

Here is an example of how this works on a more mundane level. I grew up in the central valley of California where it is hot in the summer. The green grass and wild flowers of spring turn brown when the heat increases. The earth bakes. After that, when there is sudden rain, the smell of that rain hitting the dry ground intoxicates. It is called petrichor. The word is made from the Greek *petra* (rock) and *ichor*, the fluid flowing in the

veins of the gods in Greek mythology. During dry weather plants exude oils that are absorbed by clay-based soils. When the rain falls, the oil is released into the air along with geosmin, a metabolic by-product of some actinobacteria, which is emitted by wet soil, producing the scent. That is the technical explanation for something I know experientially from living on the land. That smell never emanated in Bermuda, where the soil is never dry enough; Bermuda is a very humid place. So when, after eleven years of living in Bermuda, I moved to Twin Falls, Idaho, a high desert area, the petrichor made me feel as if I were "home." My sense of belonging, of coming to rest in a place that was mine, emerged experientially because I was in contact with my environment, and that experience, that knowledge from experience, was a residue in my field.

Satisfaction of Interest

Now I want to take a more specific look at contacting, which is concerned with the formation and satisfaction of figures of interest. The process thereby involved is also one of contacting.

The Cycle of Experience

Figure 3.1 shows one depiction of the cycle of experience. There are numerous others, and they have been adapted for use in therapy as well as in organizational development and coaching. This is a very simple version, but it is enough to get across the basic idea.

One can see that the first phase is called sensation. This correlates with id function in which sensations are diffuse and vague. They are there, and a person encountering it does experience something. Thus in the first phase of contacting (this also correlates with fore-contact from the previous cycle); a person is aware of emerging experience. However, that person is not yet quite sure what is going on or what this experience is about.

In the second phase, called awareness, the emerging figure of interest becomes distinct. This, then, is the clarity of the

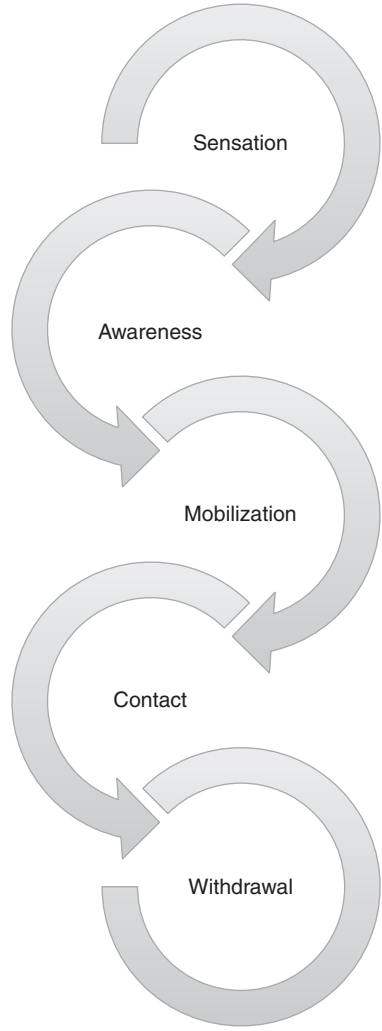


Figure 3.1 **Cycle of experience.**

intentional object, the figure of interest, and the aboutness of the experience. It's not that sensation lacks awareness. It's that it lacks the awareness of the intentional object. Thus, the awareness in the second phase of the cycle of experience is of the emergent figure of interest – the intentional object. And this corresponds with the emergence of ego function. When vague

and disconnected sensation gives way to clarity, then one's intentionality also begins to present implications for a person's values, goals, desires, and interests. And in ego function, the person, or in Perls et al. (1951) the self, starts sorting and organizing priorities and putting together plans for pursuing the satisfaction of interest or need.

That leads to the mobilization phase in the cycle when people marshal their resources, compare figures of interest (after all, any human being alive in the real world has to deal with numerous challenges and interests, many coming simultaneously), and make decisions about which figure to pursue and which figures to temporarily set aside. This also is ego function.

Then the decision is made. Then one moves into action to put one's plan into effect and satisfy the figure. If one is hungry, and has decided to order a pizza, it is ordered and when it arrives the pizza is eaten. This is contact. There may well be numerous kinds of peripheral interactions with people to complete one's plan, and they would involve contacting as well, but the subsidiary interactions involving contributing figures of interest would come with their own intentionalities.

That gives way to withdrawal or assimilation. And this is when ego function, satisfied as it is, gives way to reverie and personality function. This is where a person reflects on the given experience and finds a place for it in the story he or she tells about who they are as a person. In fact, they may recall past pizza evenings, the people they ate with then, and so on.

Figure and Background

In subjective experience when the diffuse, pre-reflective nature of sensation, which is related to id function, gives way to distinct and aware interest, focused upon some point, shape, person, thought, or substance, which is related to ego function, then a figure/ground relationship has emerged.

Gestalt psychology has long been understood to focus on figure/ground relationships. They are one of the basics of gestalt principles of perception and essential to understand in

the world of graphic design. In artistic composition, darker shapes appear to be closer and more figural than lighter shapes. Those that are higher in the visual field attract more attention than those that are lower. Figures in focus are set against relatively blurred backgrounds or landscapes upon which such figures rest. The relationship between figure and ground provides depth of field; the character of figure as focus and background as blur provides direction of interest.

This relationship extends to life as well as graphic design. Take, for example, and by analogy, dramatic presentation. In acting when someone moves to the back of the stage, they force other actors to turn their backs on the audience in order to address them, and that leaves the focus on the actor at the back of the stage who still faces the audience. The move is called "upstaging" because the back of the stage was usually higher than the front. In upstaging, the actor at the back of the stage becomes figure to the others, who become background even though they may be closer to the audience. The effect is to steal the scene, and it can be done just as easily through movement, or action not directed toward the zone of activity – any distraction that diverts attention.

The point is that there are many things in a relationship that might steal the scene from someone who is attempting to communicate, be known, or otherwise contribute to the process.

The Forming of Intentional Objects

In the sequence of figure formation growing awareness during id function allows ego function to emerge, and ego function allows the formation of intentional objects. I have already related intentionality to the cycle of experience and to contacting, but it must be said that intentionality is a huge subject and one relevant to gestalt process in both therapy and coaching. When I meet with people, whether as a therapist or as a coach, I routinely ask them what they want to achieve by coming to see me. I am inviting them, enticing them, to form figures of interest, to make for clear intentional objects. Being grounded and

knowing what one feels and what one wants leads to clear communication and facilitates healthy relationships.

Intentionality, though, exceeds a clear picture of what one wants. It's not simply about goals. If we feel, we feel something. If we think, we think something. If we need, desire, or yearn, then we do so in regard to something. These somethings are intentional objects. We can even consider or contemplate abstract constructions such as justice, equity, or freedom and these are called categorial intentional objects. Furthermore, with regard to gestalt process they are figures of interest and they form along a continuum of contacting or a cycle of experience. (I am not interested in fighting with people about which of those heuristics is orthodox.)

The Satisfaction of Figures of Interest

When I moved to Bermuda, I told myself with some excitement that I might experience a hurricane. It seemed like an adventure waiting to happen. Well, I did. I experienced several of them. I learned how hurricanes form and I became adept at tracking them as they form in low pressure systems off the African coast and then drift across the Atlantic, picking up the steering currents and ending up here or there. However, for most of my stay I never had a hurricane come directly overhead so that I could experience being in its eye. One year we had two in one week, Fay and then Gonzalo, and as I tracked the second one it looked very much as if it was going to drift straight over us. But then the hurricane warning services started telling people not to go outside in the middle of the eye. They said it was dangerous because even though the eye is calm, the backside of the hurricane follows it, and people can get caught outside if they are not careful.

I was fascinated by the eye of the hurricane. I had been watching eyes form at the center of massive cloud formations for years, and the thought of the stark contrast between intense wind and sudden calm was too seductive. I could see in my mind's eye the satellite photos of hurricanes from high overhead. I had read about conditions in the eye of the hurricane, and I wondered

what it was actually like. Was I going to do as I was told and remain inside the apartment when the eye passed overhead? How would I even know when the eye had arrived?

Gonzalo was a category two hurricane that came ashore just over the hills and from the south. It tested the palm tree next to our apartment. It created thick white caps on the Great Sound, and I could watch them from the side window that looked across Harbor Road toward Hamilton. All the patio furniture had been cleared away and put into the pump house. The hurricane lasted for twelve hours with peak winds of 144 miles per hour. It tore the roofs off many structures. In Bermuda about 36,000 accounts require electricity and about 31,000 of them lost power. My house was among them. Gonzalo destroyed boats, damaged the causeway leading to the airport, and knocked down trees and utility poles, clogging the roads with debris. I could hear the wind roaring, and since the hurricane came during the day, I could see the spray of rain blowing sideways. Water began to leak around the window, and I stuffed towels around it and on the floor to soak it up. The cats were hiding wedged behind furniture and boxes or on the bed next to pillows.

Then the roar diminished, and the rain eased up. It occurred more slowly than I had imagined. It was like rolling down a slope, not like falling off a ledge. When I opened the door, the air met me in a gentle breeze, very humid, which then died completely. The sky was not bright blue; it was hazy. But the tree frogs began chirping loudly and their sound was crisp and clear. They sang in a loud chorus.

I was outside in the eye of a category two hurricane. I was indulging my curiosity, misbehaving by ignoring the warnings to stay inside. Who was there to catch me and send me back to my room? I was having my adventure, and I was not alone. Down the hill I could see neighbors, and they were all outside as well. People were giddy. Their voices were excited and happy. The adventure was contagious. Some were even laughing.

After a few minutes, I began to wonder how it would be and how I would know when the eye had completed its path overhead.

Then I could feel the breeze pick up again. I stepped back into the shelter of the balcony, standing near the front door to my apartment. The wind increased and suddenly the rain came back and the wind increased even more. It began roaring and thrashing the palm tree again, but I continued standing under the balcony. Most of the wind came over the hill and along the side of the apartment, which was dug into the hillside. I stuck my hand out from the windbreak of the apartment wall, out from under the overhang of the balcony, and I could feel the force of it slapping my body. I went back inside and then the full force of the backside of hurricane Gonzalo came upon the apartment. It was more violent than the first half, and I was glad to be back inside, even though I was then wet and sticky from the salty air.

I had satisfied my figure of interest. The term aggression is used in gestalt therapy for the assertiveness required to push forward in spite of whatever might discourage a person from pursuing their interests, filling the empty spot of their hunger, or satisfying their curiosities. It often takes some fortitude, because it often also requires effort. It requires being grounded in the awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, values, desires, and yearnings, and being able to step off such things as if to say, "Based on these things, this is what I want," then having the fortitude to permit oneself to pursue it, to reach out, and to grasp it.

After I came back into the apartment and began watching the backside of Gonzalo do its thing, I felt very good about myself. If I had not done what I did, if I had retroflected, pulled back in fear of stifling vigilance, and not gone out into the hurricane, I would have regretted it for the rest of my life. There was one window of opportunity. In all eleven years of being on the island, and in all the hurricanes, the eye came over only once, with Gonzalo. Take it or leave it. I took it. But what if I had not?

So the satisfaction of figures is not merely about getting what one wants, scratching an itch. It's also about the existential risk of taking a chance when the pivot point of opportunity arises. It takes faith to step out into the breeze and risk the hurricane's

backside. People face those kinds of moments in the little and small as well as the large and significant. Sometimes it's just hoping one can get through breakfast with the children without a lot of yelling and screaming.

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology includes the study of positive emotions such as happiness or contentment. It also involves virtuous personal characteristics, absorption in activities, and the pursuit of fulfillment and meaning in life (Siegel, 2014). Some people conceive of it as the study of human strengths (Bolt & Dunn, 2016). Martin Seligman (2011) revised his understanding of positive psychology, calling it wellness, and claimed it included positive emotions, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment. Well-being "*is essentially a theory of uncoerced choice, and its five elements comprise what free people will choose for their own sake*" (Seligman, 2011, p. 16). So positive psychology, or wellness, is built upon the assertion that people are free to choose, and in gestalt therapy we know the process of choosing under the construct of self-regulation.

Always existing as situated beings, people do the best they can with often difficult situations, and they choose what seems best to them. Sometimes their choices set up creative adjustments, and sometimes they become more interested in well-being than in the illumination of symptoms. Positive psychology, or wellness, is not fixing something that is broken. It is starting wherever a person happens to find him or herself and improving the situation.

Positive psychology complements the approach of coaching. It has been linked to coaching because this is supposedly not about cleaning out dysfunction but about helping people attain a better quality of life and about increasing productivity. It is supposedly more strengths-based than psychotherapy, although some forms of therapy are strengths-based as well.

Positive psychology is consistent with the basic model of health in gestalt therapy. Health in gestalt therapy is the fluid

and successful satisfaction of figures of interest – the assimilation of novelty and the rejection of whatever is noxious or dull. What doesn't fit with gestalt therapy is the skewed nature of positive psychology. In gestalt we follow the experience and interest of the client wherever they take us, and we are not forced to cram those things into a strengths-based container or cut off the edges of whatever hangs beyond the pursuit of happiness.

Summary

In this chapter I have explored contacting, a central and important construct in gestalt therapy and its applications in coaching. It is a rich construct that includes meetings of various kinds with whatever is other (hence the environment, other people, and the rich content of categorial objects, allowing the contemplation of abstractions such as justice, mercy, freedom, and empathy). That assertion is somewhat controversial; how can one's own thoughts be "other"? Only as much as the realization that the abstraction contemplated is regarded to exist in human discourse, in the constellation of ideas, and is therefore available for consideration as much as an apple sitting on the kitchen counter.

I have also indicated that intentionality, a very rich subject in phenomenology, is intrinsic to the formation of figures of interest (intentional objects). I tracked the formation and satisfaction of figures from id function through ego function and into personality function. In terms of questions, that process would go from "What are you aware of?" through "What is that about?" or "What is that related to?" to "How important is that?" and "What does that mean to you?"

Finally, I compared and contrasted positive psychology or well-being to gestalt therapy.

Note

1 Noema is the content of intentionality and noesis is the process of intending. The reader is referred here to some of my other works that

address these things: (1) Brownell, P. (2016) Touch of another kind: Contact with God and spiritual self. In J.-M. Robine (Ed.) *Self: A polyphony of contemporary gestalt therapists*. Bordeaux: L'Exprimerie; (2) Brownell, P. (2010) Intentional spirituality. In J.H. Ellens (Ed.) *The healing power of spirituality: How religion helps humans thrive, volume 1: The healing power of personal spirituality* (pp. 19–40): Santa Barbara: Praeger/ABC-CLIO. These and other works are also available at my page on academia.edu (https://pgtti.academia.edu/PhilipBrownell).

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4

RELATED SUBJECTS AND ISSUES

This chapter addresses several important collateral issues such as embodiment, extended cognition, and hermeneutic phenomenology.

Embodiment

To say that people are embodied might seem like stating the obvious. Obviously we have bodies, but is it really like that? We *have* bodies or we *are* bodies? If we are bodies, then are we just bodies or is there some immaterial aspect to who we are that is somehow also intrinsic to being a body – both material and immaterial?

Conversely, do we have selves or are we selves? What is the relationship between self and body? What have flesh and blood to do with psyche or soul?

If we say that we have bodies, then we paint ourselves into the corner of also saying that the part of us that thinks and feels and can say "I," "me," and "mine" is encased inside that body, and that "self" owns the body, using the body to communicate. In such an instance the body becomes merely a vehicle in which to ride through life. It becomes the medium through which we experience living in this world.

Just to make this even more complicated, for centuries many religious people have claimed that we have to account not only for bodies and minds, but also souls or spirits. So is the human being constituted, or as some might say created, as a tripartite being? Where do we stop breaking a human being down into parts? How many parts and what do they do?

I don't believe that parts are the answer. I don't believe capacities such as physicality and contemplation, or the spiritual capacity for relationship with the transcendent, are split off from one another, as if existing in separate silos inside the person. In fact, I believe each human being is a whole creature with a holistic existence.

Pardon while I illustrate from another aspect of my life. While studying the Old and the New Testaments, I discovered that the Jewish concept of person and the Greek concept of person differed in scripture. The Old Testament term often used to refer to someone is *nephesh*, and it indicates a whole being, a living being. So whatever capacities that being might have, they were considered to be bundled together, and the resultant being was then considered to be a complete, intact unit – a whole person. In the New Testament the various capacities were divided and given different words. So the human being could be an *anthropos*, who could be an *andros*, or male. That male human being could think with a mind (*nous*) and have a physical body (*sarx*), and so also be conceived of as a soul (*psyche*). These were conceived as referring not to separate substances but rather to capacities of, or perspectives on, the one substance, the unified person. This illustration does not prove that we are all whole beings with diverse capacities, but it does illustrate that people can conceive of such a possibility (and have done so in history). It is one viable perspective on human existence.

When I adopt that perspective and I say that we are embodied, what I am referring to is what I regard as the fact that our embodiment contributes properties to our experience and unified existence. Some philosophers would say that our substance monism includes a property dualism, but in that unity who is to say what the true nature of that substance might be? Is it just the physical? Are we simply matter that alternates with energy – particle and wave? Whatever we are is a mix between a physical body and a conscious self; furthermore, the conscious self includes the property called spirit, by which I mean the capacity

to relate to the transcendent, or as some would say, the sacred (Pargament, 2007; Brownell, 2015a, 2016.) Others would add various other capacities of the property of consciousness. All in all, our consciousness cannot escape being affected by our physical engagement in a material world, but, conversely, our embodiment does not stand alone, and we are constantly affecting our physical bodies and our world through deliberate and conscious decisions.

Alan Fogel (2013) wrote, "*I can define myself conceptually but I come to inhabit myself via the concrete feeling and acting of embodied self-awareness*" (p. 31). By that he was contrasting a conceptual self with an embodied self. The conceptual self, he claimed, is based in linguistic and symbolic expression, is rational and explanatory, and is abstract, transcending the present moment. In contrast, the embodied self is based in sensing, feeling, and acting, is spontaneous, open to change, and experienced in the present moment.

Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951/1972) proposed a unified self with three functions. "Function" is the word they chose to signify a capacity to act in certain ways. Thus, id function of self is awareness of sensation, ego function of self is awareness of the intentionality of one's experience and the ability to choose, and personality function of self is the awareness of what kind of a self one is. Building on Fogel's organization, personality function is conceptual self, id function is embodied self, and ego function is self-conscious self. Id function provides exteroceptive, interoceptive, and proprioceptive information that situates a person in the environment. Ego function allows a person to make sense of the world in which one finds him or herself, and personality function suggests self-appraisals such as the self-conscious emotions of pride, embarrassment, guilt, and shame (Brownell, 2015b).

Extended Cognition

Cognitive science is the subject that deals with how our brains work to produce consciousness and organize our bodies.

Consequently, it's easy to assume the whole subject is just about the brain – our heads.

People sometimes say, "Get out of your head!" I know what they mean. To be in one's head is to be abstracting and theorizing, to be detached and analytical, instead of spontaneously existing in the flow of events and responding to them with one's whole person. In contrast to egotism, people often want to grasp a person's passions, to sense what is really important to them, and to experience them spontaneously in the current moment.

So, when I use this term "extended cognition" it might seem that I'm advocating *more* analyzing and theorizing, that I'm saying the theoretical attitude is one's home base. Actually, though, that would not be true.[1]

Imagine a science fiction story in which the protagonist is the next step in human evolution. Instead of creating machines that might link up with humans, this being has the ability to penetrate the surface of his environment and to assimilate its potential in order to have an influence and make it work to his advantage. His mind melds with the minds of others. His will is sensed and carried out through his power over machines. What he thinks is what others begin to think. What he feels affects the world around him, and what he values begins to move others by the mere fact of his presence. Alterity breaks down at the insistence of his immanence. There is no force field around him; rather, the force emanates from him and extends out as part of him.

That being exists. He is you. He is me.

In the Greek language of the New Testament that I studied in seminary it became important to appreciate prepositions. A person could have been "with" by virtue of being alongside, toward (as in face to face), or upon.

The preposition *eis* in its root meaning meant "within" or "in." In composition it meant "into," as to go into or place into. Thus Paul in the book of Acts went *into* the city of Tarsus, and in another place when he preached in a city the people dragged

him *into* the market place. Extended cognition as it relates to relationships has to do with the mutual "extension" of going into. One person is *eis* another, into another. The graphic picture of this is sexual intimacy in which the male penetrates, goes into the female, but here I am not talking about sex. I am talking about everyday presence – one person with another.

So let me describe extended cognition with a bit more specificity (as I have already mentioned some of these concepts previously), and I am recommending that when you think "cognition" you do not settle for the effect of the brain, the mind, but think more comprehensively of the self or the person. Thus, it is not simply a matter of the physical body going into, but of the penetration of one's lived body, one's whole experience of living being extended. Thus, the implications of extended cognition for a phenomenological view of the intersubjective process go beyond computational algorithms from the universe of artificial intelligence (where some cognitive science resides).

There may be several other ways to conceive of how mind forms in connection with being situated, how mental process emerges, and how self forms from the engagement of a person in his or her environment, but Figure 4.1 shows four ways to think about the subject (see Rowlands, 2010).

Turning these constructs over, comparing and contrasting them, brings into relief the ways in which we are not simply brains encased in skulls. It also illustrates how people are of the field and not simply in a field.

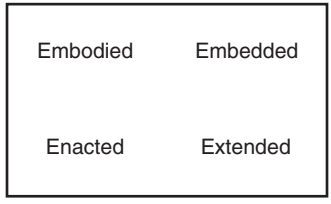


Figure 4.1 **Situated mind.**

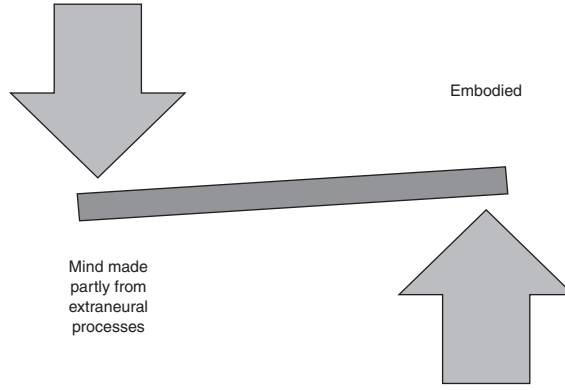


Figure 4.2 **Embodied mind.**

Figure 4.2 illustrates the idea that the peripheral nervous system and the way it innervates the body make mental processes more than just what the brain achieves. Furthermore, it's also the idea that the organs of the body, outside of the brain, support and contribute to such mental processes. We see with stereo-optic vision and have perspective because we have two eyes. The brain cannot compute sound without being connected to the ears, cannot smell without the nose, and so on. Consequently, perception and the impact of perceptive experience relate to this idea. And it concerns the idea that the cognitive processes are situated. They are contextualized within the wider bodily structures comprising the entire human body.

The concept of mental processing shows in Figure 4.3 proposes that a person uses elements in the environment to offload some of the burden on the brain. The environment is supportive of mind in such a relationship. Some who favor this way of looking at things speak of the mind being constructed to act in tandem with the environment, realizing that unless the environment is as it is and the mental processes are as they are the mind would not exist. It could also be stated that the environment is designed to facilitate mental processes. Thus, there is an inherent teleological strand to this thinking, the whole thing implying purpose. The universe is constructed in such a way

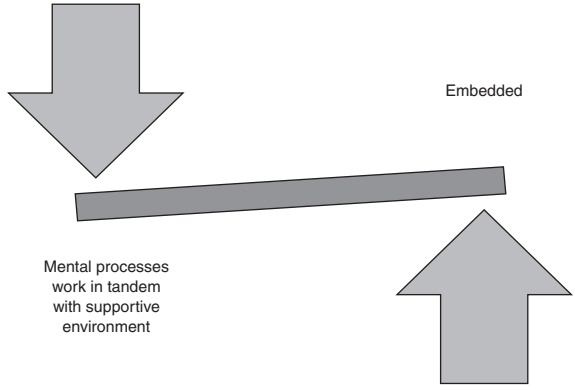


Figure 4.3 **Embedded mind.**

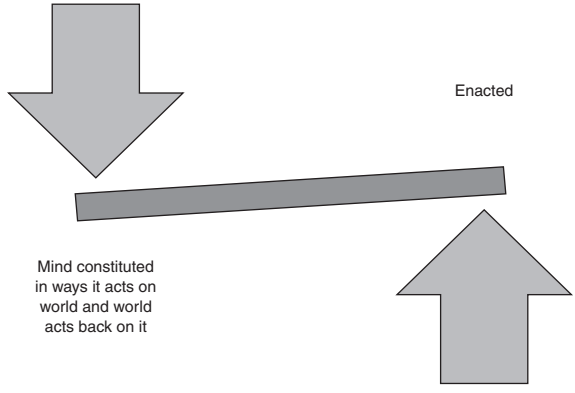


Figure 4.4 **Enacted mind.**

that it is discoverable. In that sense it is anthropic, conducive to human beings. In considering mind as embedded, one can say that the universe is not only discoverable but also facilitative.

We bought a small ranch when we moved to Idaho. That's what I call it; perhaps it's just a big yard. Anyway, I had to move hose and sprinklers this summer to keep the lawn from turning brown, and every time I had to adjust the range and arc of the water flying through the air on each sprinkler. In each case I had to lean down, grab the sprinkler and move the spring on the device limiting the arc of the water, let go, and then get out of the way. I usually came away with water soaking parts of my

clothing, because as soon as I had worked on the sprinkler, the sprinkler started working on me. That is the picture here of an enacted mind. Inherent in this idea is a mind distinct from a world with some sense of separation so that one can act *upon* the other. Mental processes are not just neural processes but are manifest from action, from sensorimotor relationships and the information gained through them. Enacted mind is a result of movement, of experience that feeds intuitive process. Mental processes are constituted in part by how a person acts on the world and how the world acts on that person.

If I see a box sitting on the driveway, I perceive not simply a two-dimensional object but a cube. I know that if I move around to the other side of that thing I will see another side that is contiguous, connected, a whole. I know that even before I move around to the other side because I intuit it. I grasp it; I get it. In the same way, I don't just see a sphere; I see an orange. Even if part of it is obscured by a basket or an apple, I still see part of it and fill in the parts I don't see with my understanding of the world, and it's a function of movement and of understanding dimensional space. Thus there is knowledge in the world that is available only through interaction with it and *in* it (see Figure 4.5).

Clark and Chalmers (1998) offered several illustrations of the assertion that our minds extend into the environment. They

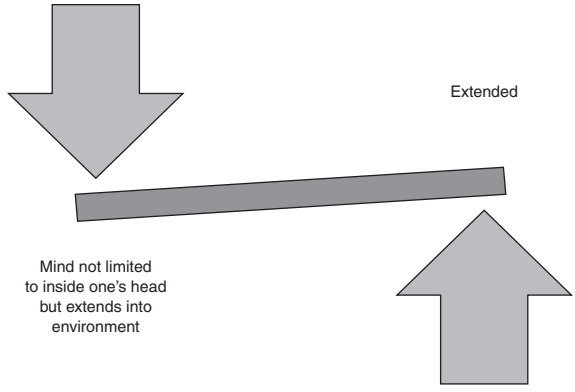


Figure 4.5 **Extended mind.**

cited the game of scrabble and suggested that by moving and rearranging the tiles a player thinks through various word possibilities. It is not the case that the brain thinks first of the new word and then the player moves the tiles around (although that can happen as well); rather, by moving the tiles he or she imagines new possibilities for words and brings them to mind. Thus, there is utility to this process that is more than mere use of the environment. It is more than the preceding models. It is enactment, and it is the use of a supportive environment, but it is the mind creatively forming alterations as a function of the tiles.

I often refer to the example of writing as an illustration of extended mind. When I first started writing, at the age of ten, I had to use a pencil and paper. I can remember challenging a friend of mine who was also bored to death by our elementary grade teacher to write a story in class and then we would compare them after school; so I spent class time writing intensely and I think the teacher must have thought what a good student I was. When I went to seminary I had no turn-around time to write long hand and then type out my papers, so I had to compose on the typewriter, and I would often stay up all night working on a paper, with ample use of correction tape. That is when I learned to compose on the keyboard. When the computer came into my house and the internet came into my life, I began conversing in discussion groups with colleagues and people I met from various parts of the world. It was so exciting that I didn't realize I was creating long pieces of thought, "theses" as one friend called them. After some time at this I realized the process had changed my ability to think. I noticed that if I talked over the phone, I stumbled, could not find the right words, often forgot to mention things, and had to write an addendum to the discussion later on. When I put my fingers to the keyboard, my thoughts flowed. I am now a better keyboard thinker than an in-person thinker. My mind extends into my world through my fingers on the keyboard. Furthermore, my presence in the world through my keyboard is a different experience for other people than when they meet me in person.

Through the keyboard I am much more direct, concise, deliberate, and often much more goal-oriented. In person I am reserved, not making as much effort to be precise, because I often cannot find the right words and it is frustrating to be standing in front of someone trying to do so.

This brings me to another of Clark and Chalmers' (1988) examples of extended mind. That is language itself. Language shapes the plastic and developing brain (and mind) of the child. The child learns to extend him or herself into the environment, indeed into the other people in his or her world, through language. The language inherent in the world in which the child is born influences ways the child understands that world as well as the opportunities to use the resources of the world.

With all this talk of extended mind one might wonder just how I conceive of embodiment. I do believe we are embodied, but what does that actually mean? Mind is emergent, and once it emerges it is not the same as brain. By the time any of us interact with anyone else we are already in that emerged state. So at that point our property dualism is functional (and thus we have a self). What is the self but the immaterial me? How do you measure that with a naturalistic method? As stated above, cognitive science posits four ways in which to think of the actions of mind as situated: embodied (mental process involves more bodily structures than the brain, thus mind is situated in the body), embedded (mind is situated in an environment conducive to its thriving and its utility, the environment supports mental processing, thus mind is situated in environment), enacted (mind acts on environment and environment acts on mind, thus mind is situated in relationship to or toward environment), and extended (mind is situated in the world, and mental processes actually extend out into the environment making mental processing an aspect of the environment and the organism). The last one is consistent with the early anthropology of gestalt therapy as organism-environment entity.

We are embodied in the sense that somehow, in addition to being an immaterial subject with subjective experience of all that we know, feel, imagine, value, believe, or want, we are linked, as if of one existence, with a material body. We interpret our real contact, but we have direct, real contact of the world that we inhabit (in the extended cognition sense). The consciousness that allows us to say "I" and "me" is inherent in the person, but the lived body of that subject extends into the actual world, which of course affects the lifeworld. There is a blurring of the boundary, and here I mean the contact boundary. It's as if in contacting there is a dissolving of the membrane separating me from the other, and I know the other as a "for me" other. Thus, contacting and the intentionality inherent to such contacting are in the middle voice (Brownell, 2010) of intense self-interest.

Hermeneutic and Existential Phenomenology

When I went to seminary we had to take several classes on hermeneutics. Actually we had one intense class on that subject and then several classes on the application of the subject to the translation and interpretation of sacred texts. Hermeneutics in that context was the rules that govern the interpretation of those texts. The task was to take a section of Greek or Hebrew written hundreds if not thousands of years ago in a different part of the world, to a people group living in a pre-industrial, pre-digital world, and to try to figure out what the writer had in mind when he or she wrote to them. What is the meaning of the text for them, which is related to their horizon and thus their lifeworld or what gestalt therapists might call their field at that time? Before it could be applied to people living now (which is to compare the previous horizon to the current horizon), it had to be understood in its own context (Luft, 2008). To understand what this is like, gestalt therapists might say that we have to grasp the child's world, what something meant to the child as a child, before we can apply it to the person who grew up and is now an adult living and trying to make sense of

their current world while certain memories keep popping up. What it means now is affected by what it meant then.

PATIENT: I was locked into a dark closet for hours by my mother when I was 6 years old.
THERAPIST: You remember that?
PATIENT: I can't forget it.
THERAPIST: What was it like in that closet?
PATIENT: Dark (laughter). (Silence and a pause) And scary. I could not see if there were any spiders in there with me, and I hate spiders. … I wondered what I had done to deserve that.
THERAPIST: You thought it was your fault?
PATIENT: It must have been. Otherwise …
THERAPIST: Otherwise?
PATIENT: Otherwise it didn't make sense. It felt terrible. Crazy. Alone in the dark and crazy. I must have done something wrong.
THERAPIST: What did the 6-year-old you tell himself when he got out of the closet?
PATIENT: Oh! Try real hard to be good. Try to find out all the rules and follow them.
THERAPIST: That is what you felt and told yourself back then.
PATIENT: Right.
THERAPIST: What do you think of that now?
PATIENT: (lauging) Pardon? (more laughter)

Phenomenology has been described as an eidetic[2] science of the first person perspective. As such, people who follow a phenomenological approach study things in the manner of their appearing, or the manner of their givenness (Marion, 2002; Luft, 2008). This is not to signal a study of phantoms or mere appearances as opposed to actual things in the world. It just means that phenomenology is concerned with how any given person (the first person perspective) takes what is given, what comes, what appears. Phenomenological philosophers have differed in regard to how they conceive of such a study.

Although there are many ways to understand the differences in phenomenology. I will offer three varieties: transcendental phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, and existential phenomenology (Kafle, 2011). In transcendental phenomenology experience is transcended in order to get to the essence of things in themselves. It is a transcending of the natural attitude, which is the normal and unquestioned sense of being in the world. The constituting ego sets it aside in order to question it; it's a turning back on the natural attitude. In hermeneutic phenomenology it is impossible to escape the natural attitude, and so it is an exploration of it. It is the study of subjective experience through the interpretations people make of being in the world. Existential phenomenologists observe subjective experience from within the scope of lived experience as opposed to seeing it from a vantage point outside of it. One must be engaged in the world in order to have an experience of the world.

Husserl is the father of phenomenology in general. The field of hermeneutic phenomenology is credited to Heidegger and Gadamer, but Husserl, especially in his later writings, also addressed the subject. These people took the practice of interpretation of texts and developed it into a way of understanding life. So, as mentioned, hermeneutic phenomenology concerns the principles involved in making meaning from experience, and it has been utilized by researchers who are interested in more qualitative approaches to research as well as therapists interested in working more directly with the experience of their clients.

The ideas of continental philosophers were put forth in their works, which they called "projects." However, gestalt therapists and coaches are not involved in philosophical process, attempting to complete philosophical projects, when they meet with clients. Rather, both client and therapist meet in the midst of life. So, again the natural attitude. We are all in it. The only reason to turn back on it is to detach oneself from it in order to consider the essence of the things in it – to muse and to reflect in order to perhaps create theories about it. Yet that is a philosophical

project and not a clinical process. When we are with a client, we are simply exploring the client's experience of being in the natural attitude, what it means to them and so on. The therapist or coach and the client, involved in dialogical encounter, never escape the natural attitude, and the therapist or coach approaches the client in the personalistic attitude, which is a subset of the natural attitude. We relate. We create a relationship. In the process of dialogical inquiry and phenomenological exploration, utilizing the paradoxical theory of change, therapist and client discover realms of the previously unknown. This is not, as some have imagined, the mundane review of ignorance (consigned to the natural attitude and things always taken for granted). Rather, it leads to the sudden surprise of insight. It is a phenomenology *of* the natural attitude.

Summary

So what is the point of this chapter, of talking about embodiment, extended cognition, and hermeneutic phenomenology? Largely it is this: when two people are in relationship there is more going on between them than they can grasp, but it helps to have a sense that this is happening, because it's very easy to reduce the relationship to a few trouble spots and completely miss the established patterns that exist between them. These patterns, furthermore, involve non-verbal, pre-reflective information. (I will get more into this in subsequent chapters.)

Starting with the body, then moving to the mind, and then understanding that our sense of the situation is also an interpreted experience, can give a person pause to consider before reacting impulsively and regretting reactive behavior. These things give the gestalt therapist or coach steering cables with which to set the direction of the therapeutic process.

Notes

1 There is, of course, an appropriate moment for theory, for stepping out of the flow of events to observe oneself and others, to contemplate what is going on and to relate that to one's values, beliefs, and purposes.

2 The term eidetic basically refers to the recall of visual images. For instance, an eidetic memory is a "photographic" memory. One form of phenomenology is an eidetic process in which the consciousness of individual and concrete objects is left for the realm of pure essences – the intuition of the *eidos*, or shape of a thing, what it is in its essential structure, apart from all that is contingent or secondary about it.

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PART II
ATTENDING TO SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE SITUATION



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5

IT'S NEVER ABOUT JUST ONE PERSON

This chapter explores the way non-independence unfolds in clinical work and coaching. Although many times one person is seen as being "the problem" or having a disorder, or being dysfunctional, or as having a goal they want to achieve, actually interactions involving two people are never about just one of them, and goals cannot be achieved in isolation. That is especially so if the client is in business attempting to work with a supervisor or lead a team of others. This chapter explores the ways people influence one another in an ongoing current of interaction.

Carl

[The "clients" mentioned in this and other chapters are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

I meet him in the waiting room, a stocky man, muscular, with full hair. As we walk back to my office, he carries himself evenly on both feet with easy strides. He is dressed in jeans and a shirt with the long sleeves rolled half way up his arms. When we reach my office he takes the easy chair instead of the couch, and he leans forward with his elbows on his knees, his arms out

front, his hands moving, touching his fingers together, tapping fingertip to fingertip in a rhythmic pattern. His hands are calloused.

Before I can welcome him to my office and introduce myself, he says, "I'm here because I'm angry. Fed up."

"Can you say more about that?"

With his fingers still tapping, he looks more directly my way, and his voice becomes louder, more emphatic. "I'm thinking I just want out. I'm not sure if I want out. If I leave, then what of my child? I don't want to leave because of my daughter. If I leave, maybe I'll take her with me."

"I imagine what I am hearing is frustration with your wife, your partner?"

"Yes."

"What frustrates you?"

"She does. Her ex calls on the phone constantly and she talks to him. I tell her to hang up, cuz he's just a nasty prick, but she stays on the phone. Then his mother makes demands for visitation with their kid…" He stops talking, his hands become fists, and he growls deep into his gut.

"What are those hands saying?"

"They're saying it's that crazy bitch who needs to be here. Not me."

"Well, that brings to mind why you came. What did you want to accomplish by coming to talk with me today?"

"I just want it to end. I've had enough. I'm about ready to leave, but if I do that it won't be good for my daughter. She's the only reason I'm still there."

"So what do you want?"

"Like I said! I want Betty to quit giving in to her ex and his mother. She's too easy. And I want her to do what I say and end it with them. There's nothing they can do, but she still waits on them."

"I hear you talking about Betty. Would Betty be willing to come in and then the three of us could figure this out?"

"She's the one who needs to be here."

"So, you ask her to come to the next meeting."

Carl did that. He invited his girlfriend to come to the next meeting. She had been married previously and had a child by her ex-husband, who was addicted to opiates and enmeshed with his mother. The two of them constantly harassed Betty, accused her of being an unfit mother, and threatened to take the child away from her while also saying how much her ex still loved her and wanted her back.

I meet Carl and Betty in the waiting room. He strides determinedly ahead of her and starts down the hall. He's been there before. She follows shyly with her eyes darting to me and quickly away. When we get to my office he takes the lounge chair again and then she sits across from him on the couch.

I look at Betty. She is sitting with slouched shoulders, hands folded in her lap, eyes not staying in any one place, with a worried expression on her face. I say to her, "I asked Carl to see if you would be willing to come today, because I was thinking that the issues he mentioned last time involved the two of you."

She says nothing. She looks trapped.

Carl says, "Well, they concern her." His attitude is condemning. It is cold. His focus is on her, and he starts listing grievances, things he believes she does wrong, including household cleanliness. He says again, "If she would just do what I say, everything would be fine."

Betty begins to cry, but she does so silently. A tear rolls down her cheek. It screams at me. I look at Carl and, nodding in Betty's direction, I say, "What do you see?"

He doesn't see.

I say again, "Look at her. What do you see?"

He says in a brisk manner, "She's crying."

"What does that mean?"

"I don't know what it means. She does this all the time. Whenever I start to tell her what to do, or when I try to fix the problem, it pisses me off cuz she starts crying. Well. It's not going to work!"

I turn to Betty and ask, "Is this the way it goes at home?" And she nods in agreement.

I say, "Well, how would it be if I met with Betty by herself for a bit? I've met with Carl, so I'll meet with Betty, and then we'll see about getting back in the same room again."

"Perfect," says Carl.

When I meet with Betty the next week, she is timid, still tentative. Her spontaneity lags. She sits in the same place on the couch that she had the previous week. She looks at me and then looks away.

I say, "What do you want in this relationship?" And she looks as if she's in agony. "Does he find fault with you a lot?"

"Constantly. I can never please him. So, I just try to stay out of the way."

"He says you don't follow up on his suggestions."

"He doesn't know. He thinks it's so simple. If I do what he says then it just causes more trouble with my ex."

"So, when you hear him give those suggestions, what do you do?"

She smiles, but it's more like a grimace. Her hands are working with the edge of her sweater. I feel desperate watching her. I say, "It feels like a no-win. Feels trapped."

She says, "It's just like my ex. I got away from one only to get involved with another. They are both the same." She starts crying. She looks up from deep in the couch with her brow saddened, and she says, "What can I do?"

I say, "Is this a place you get to with Carl as well? Where you ask what to do?"

As time goes by, week after week, Betty warms in her relationship with me, but Carl never returns. He sends a message to me saying that Betty was always the one who needed the help. He doesn't need any.

Discussion

Carl and Betty illustrate several issues often encountered in working with couples or dyads: non-independence, externalizing, and internalizing.

Non-Independence

Non-independence is just what it sounds like. Bartle-Haring, McWey, and Durtschi (2014) claimed it is a central feature of couples and families, and really of systems in general. Kenny, Kashy, and Cook (2006) defined it just as experimental psychologists might. They claimed we encounter non-independence when the scores on some measure for two people who are connected in some way are more similar or more dissimilar than the scores for two people on that measure who are not connected in some way. Conducting research on relationships and using any given couple, the researchers would have to analyze the data differently than if the two people in question were traditionally regarded as independent, just two subjects.

It is possible to have non-independence between two people who have never met when the two people in question have a third experience in common. For instance, all the people taking the drivers' test at a given office of the Department of Motor Vehicles on the first Monday in October are non-independent from one another. They have the same office of the DMV, the same day of the month of October, and the same DMV drivers' test that links them.

Günter Figal (2011) made a distinction between an "understanding" of another's view or perspective and a carrying over of that from one person *to* another.[1] The understanding is more like one's first take, and it is based on the commonality the two people share by virtue of being situated in the same world that is full of meaning before they stepped onto its local stage. He used the illustration of a gesture that one person takes as a greeting but is simply the first person turning their hand to look at a wristwatch. The error can be attributed to the similarity of these two movements and because the gesture belongs to a common repertoire of possible expressions. Where there is such a common social lexicon "what is one's own and what is other are not fundamentally separated." They are non-independent.

The social structures of a given local stage constrain people in a more general sense of being non-independent. However, when people are connected by the fact that they both live in the same house and sleep in the same bed, then we have intimate partner effects to contend with as well. Intimate partners develop subtle routines and extension behaviors that are carried out in patterns with rhythms. They get things done through one another (extended cognition), and these things are done non-verbally because they have learned one another's ways. The situation is not simply a matter of feedback loops or of a carrying over (see next chapter); it is more basic than that. The two people are *fundamentally* non-independent. Thus, the jealousy of a wife about her husband can point to her insecurities, but it can also point to the husband's way of provoking those feelings (Kenny & Cook, 1999).

When I was in training, going through my doctoral program, we used to describe couples work and say that we worked with the relationship. I don't think that really gets at the nature of non-independence. We can say that a relationship is contact over time, but that is just a really surface description. Yes, it is contact over time, but what is happening during that contact over time? The two people are developing non-independence. How are they doing that? They are developing a confluent style of some kind. In this sense I do not mean confluence as warm, fuzzy, intoxicating intimacy, nor of the interruption of contacting. I just mean that there is a dissolving of the boundary in spots. This is not just the "boundary" in terms of limits, like a fence between my yard and your yard. This is the contact boundary. Contacting has been described as the awareness of difference, and in non-independence there is no awareness of difference but there is no awareness of sameness either. Non-independence is not a general consideration. It results in rituals and routines in which each extends into the environment through the other, effecting change and taking care of business with selective focal points and objectives, in specific regions of the lifeworld of each of them. So, to me, the most important

elements to observe, to watch for, are the examples of non-independence, wherever one might find them.

When I met Betty and Carl in the waiting room, Carl took the lead going down the hall to my office. He did not pause to let her go first. She did not assume that he would. They had a routine. If I were to see Carl and Betty in the parking lot of a market and watch them going into the store, Carl would be walking ahead of her, impatient that she was taking too long, and she would look just as she did walking down the hall to my office. It is part of their non-independence with regard to one another.

Sometimes a therapist or a coach only gets one member of a couple in the office because the other one refuses to do couples work. In such cases I often offer to work with that one person who is willing, with the knowledge that the greatest asset in such work *is* their non-independence. I tell the one in my office that we can work to change something about the way he or she operates in the relationship, realizing that the other person will have to adjust. They are non-independent, and when the routines, the subtle ways of doing things, change, it sends ripples out into the dyad. These things can be very subtle indeed.

For instance, I might have said to Betty, "Would you like to do an experiment?" And if she were open to it, I might have said, "When you sit with Carl, try sitting more upright, holding your head up and looking steady into his face." She may have flinched at the idea, but if she were open to it, I might have suggested that we practice doing that in my office, between her and me. First I would have sat across from her in a slouched posture, fidgeting with my hands, looking into my lap, and every once in a while my eyes darting up to look her in the face. I would have asked her what it felt like to sit across from me when I was like that, and then I would have sat up and looked her straight in the eyes, and I would have asked her what it felt like to sit across from *that* presentation. After we processed her experience of sitting across from me in both

presentations, I would have asked her to sit up and look me straight in the eyes. And we would have processed that. The embodied sense in each posture would have been explored. "What did your body feel like?" "What emotions came up to sit like this or that?" "What was your sense of being you in space?"[2]

The non-independence between couples will manifest in enduring themes, styles of relating to one another. In Carl and Betty the themes of externalizing and internalizing were evident. These two broad categories are basic to developmental psychopathology, but they ripple on through people's lives and their relationships long after childhood. In children externalizing behaviors are evident in hyperactivity, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, and general aggressiveness, while internalizing disorders are evident in anxiety, depression, and somatic concerns.

Externalizing

Externalizing is what people do when they cannot accept responsibility for the way they affect other people. It is someone else's fault. The circumstances were not right. The other people were unfair, unethical, inept, and so forth. In childhood externalizing is most associated with behavior disorders such as oppositional defiant and conduct disorder. More broadly, the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) identifies externalizing with impulsive, disruptive conduct, substance abuse, and anti-social issues. In adults one sees externalizing in personality dysfunction (because personality disorders are disorders of the ways in which people relate to one another). In gestalt therapy, externalizing is most associated with personality function, the story one tells oneself about who he or she is. In Carl's case the story he was telling himself about who he is presented him as right, someone who knows how to get things done and someone who is paid large sums of money to *get* them done. He is used to sizing up tangible situations, reducing them to simple factors, and then manipulating those factors to his

advantage. Carl's field has reinforced this story over and over. There is no reason for him to change it. The problem in his relationships could not be his fault, and he is frustrated by a woman who sees things with more complexity, wants to avoid conflict, and resists him passively.

Internalizing

Internalizing is the opposite, of course, of externalizing. They form a polarity. An internalizing person is convinced that circumstances and others are not the reason things go badly; it is because this person him or herself lacks the intelligence, ability, or willingness to see and do whatever it would take to ameliorate the situation, solve the problem, or fix the broken widget. More broadly, internalizing leads to disorders such as anxiety, depressed mood, physiological and cognitive problems (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Like externalizing, internalizing is a fixed pattern of responding. It is not simply a set of behaviors or symptoms as much as it is a "*way of being*" (Gecele, 2013, p. 601). This way of being is something that emerges as a function of presence in and being *of* a social field. It can be likened to a relational coping strategy that becomes rigid and is applied pan-situationally. It is not simply a fixed gestalt, which would be a prism through which to see out; it is a presupposition about what might be found and a predisposition toward response. It is expectation. It is an action potential primed for synapse. Internalizing is a fixed way of responding to the social field that is viewed as dangerous, unpredictable, hurtful, overwhelming, harsh, unkind, inflexible, and perhaps even cruel. But what's more is that the individual believes the self is deserving of such treatment, has caused such treatment, or is too fragile to deal with such aggression. The fixed response is withdrawal, avoidance, aggression pointed inwards, and so forth.

In Betty internalization was evident in her posture, deferment, and passivity. Even if she could complain about Carl's way of being, she still would abide it. Some observer might ask,

"Why do you put up with that?" Betty, however, would not imagine another way of being.

Psychotherapy

Couples, people in dyadic relationships, are not aware of their non-independence. Gestalt therapy is one of the original mindful approaches in that it has emphasized awareness from its beginning and focused attention on current experience. The task of the therapist is to help the client listen, observe, and sense what is happening. So when it's a matter of the process between two people (not counting the therapist for a moment), then it's a matter of getting each person to pay attention to what goes on between them.

On the way out of the waiting room, the therapist could have said, "I notice you're way ahead of us, Carl." He or she could asked during session, "Betty, I notice that when you follow Carl to my office your gaze is down, toward the floor, and your shoulders are slightly slumped. What does it feel like to walk down the hall behind Carl?" The therapist could have addressed Carl to ask, "What were you aware of walking down the hall ahead of us?"

Working with Betty and Carl, the therapist could ask Betty to walk in front of Carl as a behavioral experiment, and then they could all deconstruct that experiment phenomenologically, turned toward one another, "comparing notes" to describe to one another how the experiment affected them. The therapist could ask Betty to look up and see Carl when he speaks, to describe what she sees when he speaks, to describe the tonal quality of his voice, to say what it is like using metaphors, or to describe what her body feels like when he speaks. He or she could ask Carl what it is like for him to hear Betty say such things – not just what he thinks when she says those things, but to pay attention to his body and to describe what bodily sensations he experiences while she speaks.

Coaching

Coaching is more goal-oriented. As I have said, it would naturally follow a process of therapy in which the clients began to catch themselves in their non-independence or, being more conscious of it, to use it to improve the way they contact one another.

Client coaching goals might then be something like the following:

- I'd like to slow down in my responses to my wife.
- I would like to become more sensitive to her.
- I would like to become more present to my husband.
- I would like to be more assertive with people in general, but certainly with my husband.

The Non-Independence of the Therapist or Coach

In both psychotherapy and coaching the presence of the therapist or the coach is also, of course, a factor with regard to non-independence. The therapist or coach is not a separate person who observes and then "intervenes," who does something to the clients to make them in turn do something else, feel something in particular, or think something distinct. The therapist may offer experiments, and they may be unilateral (where the therapist simply moves without negotiation and presents the clients with some form of action to which they must adjust), but the therapist is part of the experiment; so, in the manner in which he or she presents the experiment, offers an observation, or self-discloses some piece of information, the therapist's way of doing such things is part of the client's experience and response.

Therapists and coaches do not work with two-person systems. They work within at *least* three-person fields. That is due to the presence of non-independence.

Notes

1 The carrying over is Figal's term for interpretation, which will be treated in more detail in the next chapter.

2 The proprioceptive and interoceptive aesthetics involved in the moment.

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6

IT'S OFTEN ABOUT THE FEEDBACK LOOP OF MUTUAL INTERPRETATION

This chapter deals with the issue of interpreted experience in clinical and coaching settings. That includes the way in which two people interact, embodying the verbal and non-verbal discourse they each exhibit, and reading, or translating, the discourse they each receive. It is a whole-person and person-to-person, kinesthetic process. The chapter describes how the background for the verbal-conceptual content contextualizes figures of interest offered as foreground. Strategies for both psychotherapeutic process and coaching are provided.

Greg and Bob

[The "clients" mentioned in this and other chapters are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

Greg and Bob did not get along. That was not evident immediately. Their animosity and irritation with one another grew slowly.

They worked together in the production department of a wholesale business cards company, which employed twelve people. Some did the layout of the cards on computers. Some printed the cards out on sheets called "twelve ups," each one

containing twelve cards that had to be cut down to produce twelve sets of business cards for twelve different clients. Some employees inspected the cards, threw out the crooked ones, boxed up the good ones, and drove them around to a number of retail print shops that had contracted with the wholesaler for the product. Each morning was spent in production, and each afternoon was spent by route drivers bringing the products to their destinations, while back at the shop the layout people were working up the next set of cards to be printed, and the printing presses were putting out more twelve ups to be cut down the next morning. It was a fast-paced environment with a high degree of redundant, repetitive tasks. One manager supervised the production line, and he kept to himself in an office where no one could see him.

Greg had been hired first. He was 43 years old. He was the single parent of three children, and every day after his driving shift was done, he had to hurry home to pick up his children and make dinner. He was a conservative Christian who had attended a Bible school instead of going to college and preparing for a career in business. He was reserved and attended to his work. However, a production environment runs more smoothly when there is at least a little humor, and so Greg was not beyond a practical joke, but when the production flow was running fast, there was little room for that. Perhaps a man with more ambition would have planned better for the future and not found himself working for barely more than the minimum wage, but he had been idealistic as a young man, and he thought he'd have been successfully working in some kind of church ministry by the time he reached 40. His wife had left him and the children in an effort to salvage what life she could see was still available, having given several years of her life to being with such a passive man.

So Greg showed up each day and put his time in at the slitter, cutting down the twelve ups, learning how to take all four rows of loose, cut cards, often 2,000 of them at the same time pressed hard against his forearm, off the end of it. Then he would inspect them for crooked cuts, box up the good ones, and get

his route ready for delivery. That had been going on for about a year before Bob was hired.

Bob was half Greg's age and a high school dropout. He was irreverent. He had a foul mouth and a quick wit with which he targeted other employees, often making them the butt of some joke. Once he tied a sign around the license plate of one of the drivers that read, "Gays Are People Too," and he meant it in a sarcastic and cynical way, to link the driver to gay people whether he or she wanted it or not.

One day all the slitters and route drivers were gathered around the central table where they tapped the cards down and pulled out any that were sticking up because they had not been cut at exactly ninety degrees. Greg was on one side, and Bob was on the other. Bob was off on one of his rants, and he was cutting down one of the other drivers. Greg was silent, packing the cards into boxes and putting them on the proper shelves for the various routes. But he watched Bob, glancing in his direction every so often.

As Greg moved around from his side of the table and took one of the boxes of cards to the storage racks, Bob watched him. He watched him the whole way around the table and over to the rack. As Greg turned and walked back to the table, he glanced quickly toward Bob and their eyes met.

"What you lookin' at, Grandpa?" said Bob.

Greg let it pass. He grabbed the next stack of cut cards and began tapping them down, picking out the crooked ones and setting them aside.

Then Bob started in on him. It was the first time Bob had targeted Greg directly. "Don't leave any crooked ones, Gramps. Need some glasses to see 'em better?" Greg let it pass. "Maybe if you pray about it, you can find the crooked ones easier."

Greg felt the impact of that one. It seemed to him to be more than a workplace bully spouting off. Whenever anyone brought up, all on their own, some aspect of spiritual life to him, he regarded it as a God-appointed conversation. So Greg answered this time, and he said, "What do you know about prayer?"

"I know it's stupid shit for stupid shits."

"You don't know."

Bob continued mocking him, but the conversation ended because the manager came out into the production area. He told everyone to take their cards and leave to drive their routes. Greg went out to his car to find a sign over his rear license plate that read, "Gays Are People Too."

After that several days ensued during which Greg and Bob walked around one another. They walked past one another without uttering a word, but they watched one another each time they approached.

Then, toward the middle of one day, everyone was standing around the table where they sorted the cards. Greg was on one side and Bob was on the other. They were both quiet and the other slitters/drivers were just as busy sorting and packaging cards to get them ready for the route. No one was talking, but everyone felt the silence as tension.

Bob glanced over the table toward Greg, and he had a subtle grin on his face. He took a crooked card and let it fly in Greg's direction. "Oh, whoops," he said, glancing in Greg's direction.

Greg ignored him. Bob did it again and Greg still ignored him, but the other drivers started smiling. Then Bob started talking to himself loud enough for everyone to hear. "Some people have smarts and some don't."

Greg glanced in his direction.

Bob continued, "Yeah, I'm gunna go to Bible college…" He said it so as to emphasize the words "Bible" and "college" but with a derogatory tone. "I'm gunna go to Bible college so I can become a business card slitter."

Greg stopped sorting cards and lifted his gaze to look at Bob directly. Then Bob smiled at him. Greg said, "You don't know anything about me."

Bob mocked him, "You don't know anything about me." Then he tossed another card across the table in Greg's direction.

The tension around the table became heavy, and the other people stopped smiling. No one said anything. The sound of

cards being tapped down dominated the room. The tapping became loud in the silence, more like pounding. Then Bob started giggling.

Suddenly, Greg threw down his package of cards. He looked straight at Bob and he said, "Alright! Right now. Outside. I have had it with you!"

Bob did not go outside, but at that point the manager called me asking for someone who could mediate a work-related dispute between two employees. He said he could have fired them both, but he could not afford to do so without having people to take their place. In this case, the manager was my primary client and the two employees my secondary clients. The process involved was not psychotherapy; it was coaching in the service of organizational dynamics. So there was contracting to be done with the manager, and then there was contracting to be done with the secondary clients, Greg and Bob. All of it related to the nature of the relationships at both levels – employees with manager and employees with one another. So I met with the manager first.

Manager

"Thank you for meeting with me. I understand there was conflict between two of your employees?"

"Yes," said the manager. He was a young man in his early twenties who had had two years of community college, and he was looking to stay with the company, which had a national footprint. "Like I told you, I wished I could have fired them both, but I couldn't afford it."

"What do you want me to accomplish?"

"I want you to fix it. I don't want these guys fighting with each other."

"What does 'fix it' look like to you? How would you know if I had fixed it?"

"These guys don't have to like each other, but I don't want any more crap. No more practical jokes, no more sarcasm. No more poking each other with a stick."

"How about this? Would it work for you if I get them each to sign an agreement with one another to which you can hold them accountable?"

"An agreement?"

"Like a contract. If they break the contract, you can hand out the consequences. You can give them more work around the shop, you can suspend them without pay, or you can let them go."

The manager contemplated that. "Do you think it would work?"

"You would have to work it. My part would be to get them to agree to the contract. You would have to hold them accountable if they broke it."

"Okay. And you would be available to talk with if I needed that?"

"Yes."

Greg

(I met with Greg twice by himself and three times with Bob.)

"Hello Greg. I have been asked by your manager to help you and Bob resolve your differences and to be able to work together without conflict." I said that in a pointed and direct way, but also in a matter-of-fact tone of voice.

I noticed Greg shift in his chair, and he scanned the walls of my office. He looked troubled.

I said, "What came up for you when I said that?" I tried to express myself with a gentle smile and a soft tone in my voice. I took an open physical posture, and I was relaxed.

He said, "I feel like a fool. I knew better than to let him get to me. I've got too much to lose. I've got kids to support."

"Hm. So, what would you like to get out of this process? It seems like you might have some personal goals that exceed even what your manager wants. What do you want to accomplish?"

"I want to keep him from getting to me. I just want to do the job and go home without any trouble."

"You were the one to call Bob out. How does that fit with the way you see yourself?"

"I lost it. That's not me. Even in high school I never challenged anyone to a fight. I don't know why it happened."

"If you don't know much about how it happened, what is there to keep it from happening again?"

"Just me. I won't let it. He's … nothing he can say is worth losing my job."

"Right now, at this moment nothing Bob might say could lead you to 'lose it' again and then get fired?"

"Right."

"You say that with a kind of firm tone to your voice."

"Yes."

Bob

(I met with Bob once by himself and then three times with Greg.)

"Hello Bob. I've been asked by your manager to help you and Greg resolve your differences and be able to work together with no conflict."

Bob said, "I know."

"I'd like to know what you believe that conflict was about."

"I don't know. The guy just went off on me."

"You mean it came from nowhere. You have no idea what it was related to?"

"That's it."

"What were you doing just before he called you out?"

"Boxing cards."

"What were you saying to him?"

"Nothing. Like I said."

"Hm. Okay. What would you like to get from this process I've been asked to do with you?"

"Just to get it over. I don't need anything."

"Okay. I think we can get it over rapidly. For that I need you to meet with me and Greg a few times and then we all need to come to an agreement about how everything will be handled in the future. That okay with you?"

"Do I have to?"

"That's how we can get this all behind everyone."

"Okay."

Greg and Bob

We met three times. Largely Greg was attentive and cooperative and Bob was dismissive and externalizing. They were pointed with one another, stating clearly that they did not like one another. Bob thought Greg was condescending. Greg thought Bob was crude and cruel. Greg admitted that he had acted in contradiction to his values, and that he didn't want to find himself so frustrated that he might act like that again. Bob dismissed the whole thing and consistently thought the mediating process was a waste of his time.

On the third meeting I summarized the process and presented them both with a "bottom line" capturing the manager's expectations.

"Bob and Greg, thank you for coming and for participating in this process." They each acknowledged what I said, and I continued, "When we started I told you that your manager had asked me to mediate between the two of you. I've listened to the both of you. Here is a page with statements to which you must agree in order to return to work. I expect you will sign your copy, agreeing to these expectations. In the future, your manager will hold you accountable to this agreement. Please read these before signing so that you know what you are agreeing to."

Bob rolled his eyes, and Greg picked up the sheet and started reading. It read as follows:

I ____ agree to the following and am accountable for adhering to these expectations:

- I will show up to work on time and take care of my own responsibilities.
- I will speak respectfully to others in the work place.

- I will not use sarcasm or any other kind of expression to make fun of anyone or to bully them.
- I will not threaten anyone with physical harm.
- I will take care of my own property and leave others' property alone.
- If a conflict arises in the workplace, and I cannot avoid it, I will ask the Manager for advice.

Signature ____ Date ____

Bob looked at it. After a bit he said, "What is sarcasm?"

I said, "Sarcasm is the use of irony to mock someone."

He said, "What is irony?"

Greg said, "Sarcasm is when you noticed a bunch of crooked cards in your stack and you said, 'Nice job!' "

Bob started to smile.

Greg went on. "Or when you said, 'Gays are people too.' "

Bob laughed out loud, and then looked at me and said, "Not the easiest thing to sign."

That is when I told them both that if they refused to agree to and sign the statement or if they did not live up to it, they would be terminated. Greg signed it immediately and Bob followed. They were done.

I sent the signed agreements to the manager and told him that enforcement of the contract would be up to him. He stated that he understood. Within three months Greg was assigned to a different part of the organization and Bob left the company altogether.

Discussion

To understand the mutual interpreting that goes on in the "back and forth" between two people one must take into consideration a few things: the level of complexity with which a person sees the world, the ground upon which that person stands, and, related to that ground, the strength of the sense of self by which one supports the process of contacting. These

things pertain to characteristics of the clients, not just to the level of sophistication of the therapist.

The Complex Perspective

Complexity in this instance refers to a multiplicity of possibilities. Whatever is under consideration could be this, that, or a third. When asked a nebulous question ("What is going on here?"), the person with the complex perspective might take a while to respond, and that would be because he or she could see several things "going on." Such complexity seems to be a matter of innate ability. I have conducted cognitive intellectual testing on pre-adolescent children and found some to exhibit high degrees of complexity. Those children usually have difficulty in the concrete and simple social structures that typify elementary school, and they often stand out as having social skills deficits. It's not because they don't know enough about social expectations; it's because they cannot figure out which expectation is actually expected. The field for them is complex.

In the situation that developed between Greg and Bob it took Greg some time to figure out what Bob was doing. Was he simply being humorous? Was this his attempt at humor? Even before it became pointed at him, Greg wondered if Bob was trying to get along with others by making people laugh or if he was simply being cruel by singling out this one or that one and making that person the object of some joke. Bob, on the other hand, was much less complex.

Such complexity extends to the ways in which a person observes. A careful observation yields more perceptions and all the aware perceptions affect one's interpretation of meaning. So it is not simply what a person says that has impact, but also the way in which he or she says it. Sometimes it is not what is said but the way in which something is not said. Sometimes it is the non-verbal discourse that says it all. This was the case, for instance, when Bob sent a card sailing over the table in Greg's direction. It was so when Greg slammed his cards down and silence held the moment prisoner around a tense table. It was

true when Bob started giggling. All that was done in a predominantly non-verbal way of "talking" to others and its reciprocal interpretation. At some point, either because the diffuse sense of the moment's complexity coalesces and is reduced to one imagination or another or because the otherwise complex field is never perceived as such by a person who sees with concrete simplicity, people create a story they tell themselves about what is going on – a theory.

The Ground Upon Which One Stands

The ground upon which one stands refers to sedimented experience in the history of a given person – what kind of family one is born into, what kind of social structure and culture, what kinds of experiences one has had, and so forth.

Since we make sense by forming figures against backgrounds, this sedimented experience is the background for contextualizing any given current experience. Because Bob had had bad experiences with authority figures when he was going through school, Greg's expressions and opinions, and his age and larger fund of experience, seemed to him to be a kind of lording it over others. Greg, it seemed to him, was assuming the role of wise, older, and more educated man, and that reminded Bob of all the adults who had ever told him what to do and how to do it, and then passed judgment on him. At first it did not annoy him because he hardly noticed it, but over time the pressure increased, and he began targeting Greg, resisting what he perceived to be his authoritarianism.

Greg, on the other hand, was also affected by past experience. Bob reminded him of every mouthy bully he had encountered in junior high and high school. However, at this point in his life he was not fearful, just annoyed. That annoyance eventually turned into anger.

In terms of communication the figure/ground relationship provides a relational and interpretative structuring. Wood (2013) proposed two levels of meaning in the communication between people: what he called the content and the relationship

levels of communication. The content is the literal message. The relationship level depicts each person's identity and relationship to the other. It is primary to how people feel about each other, providing a relational context for the content level of the communication. This is a figure/ground dynamic, which is well known to gestalt practitioners. It also supports and reinforces the non-independence between such persons. The relationship level indicates how to interpret the content meaning and how communicators see themselves in relation to each other. These considerations are also related to the history of the current field and residue of experience each person in the relationship has had with others, but more specifically with their current relational partner. Standing on such relational ground, when people communicate there is always an implicit and relational consideration: what is that between you and me? It is the hermeneutic space that connects them.

I like the idea of a hermeneutic space that is alive and that connects rather than separates. This, for me, allows for the individuality of each person while also admitting that they are in contact and have influence with one another. Some would see "space" and leap to the conclusion that it is empty space that separates. However, it is no more empty space than the lived body is only physical in nature. If the lived body can be the sense of being an embodied being in a world, then hermeneutic space can be the interpretative dimension shared by two non-independent persons in relationship. Gestalt therapists know this hermeneutic space as the contact boundary.

When I met with Greg, the hermeneutic space that connects was also present. I had noticed that Greg shifted in his chair and that he scanned the walls of my office. I interpreted that. He looked troubled. I said, "What came up for you when I said that?" I tried to express myself with a gentle smile and a soft tone in my voice. I took an open physical posture, and I was relaxed.

He had said, "I feel like a fool. I knew better than to let him get to me. I've got too much to lose. I've got kids to support."

I could have gone directly to the figure of Greg feeling like a fool, and if I had been engaged as a therapist in a therapy session, I might have done that. Each clinician or coach has choice points in the flow of his or her work. I chose to let Greg's shame go at that point and to move more directly into the more time-limited and goal-oriented nature of coaching, even gestalt-based coaching. I asked him what he wanted to achieve from the sessions (recall that my primary client was the manager and not Greg or Bob).

The Strong Sense of Self

The terminology "strong sense of self" does not refer to positive self-image. It is not self-esteem. It is related to having a contactful style of life and of being aware of oneself in the moment. It is also related to having a clear identity, which in gestalt is personality function.

Recall that in gestalt therapy the self is comprised of id function, ego function, and personality function. Id function is the pre-verbal sense of being in the world. Ego function is the awareness of what that means and its related intentionality. Personality function is the conviction of what kind of a person one is, based on a history of experience. In contacting one has a clear sense of content (what I am sensing) and a sure understanding of the meaning or significance of what is happening to oneself and others. Both are then related to one's sense of identity and values. That is when what is happening becomes contextualized, and the sense of what it means "between you and me" emerges. It is interpreted. There is contact between actually existing persons in concrete environmental and social contexts, there is awareness, and there is the hermeneutic space in which the handshake with the world, Merleau-Ponty's chiasm, gives rise to the fullness of the moment.

Coaching Strategy

The coaching process could be described at length, but I don't want to do that. Rather, I will share what I regard as an important

tactic. It is the unilateral experiment. It can be employed in both psychotherapy and coaching. I chose to use it in this case because it seemed to be the most efficient way to empower my primary client, the manager, with the necessary means to accomplish what he wanted.

I created the behavioral contract, a common thing to do, and had both Greg and Bob sign it. Whether or not they took it seriously, they both verbally agreed to it, and they both signed it. Going forward, the manager could refer to the contract if things broke down between them again, and use the contract to leverage future behavior or terminate the person who did not live up to what he had previously agreed to.

The experiment was also simultaneously a field tactic; my approach then was experimental and field-theoretical. What ensued were meetings with the manager exploring his values and the assertiveness he needed to follow through in using the contract as a tool in the workplace.

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7

TURNING AROUND DESTRUCTIVE, REACTIVE, AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE COMMUNICATION

This chapter describes general patterns in which people communicate with one another, typical ways in which they are self-defeating when relationships are threatened, gender differences with regard to communication styles, and how to strengthen relationships through better communication.

Mark and Sasha

[The "clients" mentioned in this and other chapters are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

Mark was a 37-year-old business man. He was successful for the first time in his life, and he loved the work he was doing. He liked the challenge and the excitement. He liked the people with whom he worked, and he didn't mind working long hours. In fact, he usually worked twelve-hour days or longer, seven days a week during the busy peak months of the calendar year. At lunch or after work he frequently stopped at his club to have drinks with work colleagues. By the time he got home to his wife, Sasha, who also worked but had to get home as soon as possible to take care of their child, she was too tired to pay attention to him, or she was just frankly already asleep. They slowly and consistently grew apart.

One day Mark discovered that his wife was having an affair with someone at her job. He was incensed on several levels. He knew he had had opportunities to have sex with women outside of his marriage, but he had resisted, and now he felt that he had been cheated of the opportunity for nothing. He suddenly took the attitude that all his long hours slaving away had been taken advantage of; never mind that he liked being away working and that his work felt to him more like a great sporting match than the drudgery of a hated job. And Mark also felt scared. It was that fear that brought him to my office seeking couples therapy.

When he arrived, he appeared tense. His shirt was not properly tucked in, and his tie was loose around his neck. His hair was not combed well; it was disarranged in several places. His eyes darted around my office, and he spoke rapidly. He was desperate, saying that his wife was the most important thing in the world to him and he needed my help to make sure she didn't leave. His eyes glistened with the tears he was holding back, his throat tightened, and his voice thickened with emotion.

I asked him if he thought his wife would come in so that we could all three meet, and he said he thought so. He would ask her. We set an appointment for the next meeting and I told him that while I could not guarantee how the process would turn out, because couples take it to the destination of their choice, I felt confident that I could help the two of them become more aware of what that might look like. He indicated that he understood, but his affect said he had hope. He heard what he wanted to hear, and he felt that he had an ally in dealing with his unfaithful wife.

The next time I saw Mark, Sasha was with him. He appeared composed, tightly and neatly dressed in a suit, hair combed, and he entered my office with an air of control. Still, his black shoes were noticeably scuffed.

Sasha followed him into the office. She was slender and petite, and she wore a tight-fitting business dress. She was 35 years old and she too was fulfilled in her career. They had a

nanny for their child, but part of Sasha's fulfillment was that she had found a balance between work and home life. She simply lamented that Mark had not, and she was lonely for him. She had begun to feel distant from him. Whenever she said that she wanted him to come home and not be at the office so long, he would become irritated at her, and then she would recoil and pull away. She did not like the confrontation and the conflict, because she experienced his irritation as cruelty. A man in her office had paid her the attention she missed from Mark, and it ended up with them sleeping together while on a business trip.

When she entered the office, I said, "Hello, Sasha. We have not met before. As Mark may have told you, I suggested that you come in as well when he came to me with concerns for your marriage."

She nodded. She offered a glancing look in my direction, but she did not hold my gaze.

"So, could you tell me what you want from meeting together? If this is successful, what would that look like to you?"

She considered the question. She considered it for some time. That pause settled over the room like shadows that overtake a room at dusk.

Mark could not stand it. He broke the stillness, saying, "Well I can tell you what I want…"

I put up my hand like a stop sign, said, "Wait," and he stopped talking.

Sasha offered a timid smile and she said, "It's easier to say what I don't want."

I said, "Yes, that is often the case, but if I ask you to think what you do want, what do you come up with?"

She thought about it more and eventually said, "I would like to be forgiven and for us to move on."

Now Mark could stand it no longer. He blurted, "You want to move on? How can we just move on?" His tone was harsh and his energy level rose several points.

Sasha cringed. She moved back more firmly against the couch and brought both arms together across her chest with

hands folded, clutching one another, in her lap. She diverted her gaze to her hands, but she said nothing.

I said, "Mark. Stop for a moment. Look at Sasha and tell me what you see."

He did not do that. Ignoring me, his eyes bore into her, and he continued, "What do you expect me to do when you act like a common slut? How do you expect me to move on? How can I trust you not to just go spreading your legs for him again?" His voice was louder, and his intensity had risen to the point of aggression. He was almost growling.

I waved my hand to get his attention, and I said, "Stop! Look at her." He looked stunned. I said, "What do you see?"

Sasha had begun to tremble. She wrung her hands tightly, but she was silent, with tears spilling over and running down her cheeks.

Mark said, "I don't know why *she* is upset. She's the one who did something wrong."

I asked him to stop talking altogether, and I turned toward Sasha. "Sasha, are you hearing me?" She nodded, and I continued, "Would you look at me?" She lifted her eyes. I said, "When Mark does that, how do you feel?"

She said, "I feel his hatred."

I responded, "That is what you imagine he feels like. When he calls you a slut, how do you feel?"

"I feel sad, so sad, and all alone."

"And when you feel sad and alone, what do you want to do?"

"Get away."

"How do you usually do that?"

Mark blurted again, "Yeah right. She goes to someone else. She goes to him!"

At that point it became apparent to me that Mark could not restrain himself from giving vent to provocative and destructive accusations. So I asked him to step out, and I indicated I would be talking with Sasha by herself for the rest of the session. I would see him in two weeks, but the following week I wanted to meet with Sasha by herself. After he was outside, I asked Sasha

how often Mark spoke to her in the fashion I had observed, and she indicated it was a common thing since he learned of the affair. She was interested in meeting with me by herself and so we made an agreement to meet the following week.

When Sasha came to the appointment she appeared calm, more at peace. She held her head up and kept my gaze. Her smile seemed brighter. Her gait was easy. When she sat down, I said, "You seem different. What happened?"

She said, "I have decided to leave him."

"Oh." I waited for more.

She continued, "Mark thinks I am going back to the other man, but the truth is I felt cheap and dirty right after … even during the sex, and we both agreed not to see one another ever again. I don't want anyone right now. Not Mark. The way he's been. It gave me a different picture of him. And not anyone else."

"And did you tell Mark this?"

"Yes. But he doesn't believe me. I don't think he even heard me. He has moved out and is staying at a friend's house."

"So, will you be joining Mark next week?"

"No. I don't see the point. Something changed inside. Mark is not attractive to me right now, the way he's been, and I don't think I can get that back after all this. He says he can't live without me, but it doesn't seem he likes me. Maybe all he wants is someone to kick around and blame for the way he feels."

The next time I saw Mark he looked as he did the first time I saw him. His eyes were bloodshot. He told me he had a headache and that he had not been sleeping well. Even though I knew the answer, I asked Mark where Sasha was, and he said, "She's not coming. She's leaving me." And with that he put his face in his hands.

"When you do that, I imagine you feel pretty bad."

"I just made everything worse. I went home after we met last time and I kept at her. She'd walk away, and I'd follow her into the next room, and I just kept riding her, driving her into the ground, making her cry like it was in here."

I did not say anything. He had said it all. I let him sit with his own realization. But after a while I asked him, "What does it mean to you that she is leaving?"

"It means … I just can't imagine. It's an empty spot. A big horrible hole that I'm falling into and I just keep falling and falling."

"Empty?"

"Nobody and no thing. All black. All terrible. All alone."

"Anything else?"

"She says she will not take our child from me. That sounds so awful!"

"I can see that you feel terrible. It's all over your face and the way you hold your body…" He began weeping. "…and I hear about the empty spot. I also hear that you blame yourself, but what I'm wondering is how much you understand what it was that drove her away."

"It's that I could not get out of myself enough to make a space for her pain. And I just attacked her and made her feel worse. I didn't forgive her."

"And move on?"

He lifted his head and looked straight at me. The muscles around his eyes were taut. "What the *hell*! How could I just move on?"

"As if nothing had ever happened. As if she had never hurt you."

"Right." After a moment he said, "She never apologized. Not good enough. Not to know what she smashed between us. Not to show she was sorry. Not so I could know she would never do that again."

Discussion

Gender-Specific Communication Styles

A word needs to be said about gender-specific communication styles. In attempting this, I realize I am stepping on a landmine. People are very sensitive to gender stereotyping, but at the same time differences between genders *have* been recognized. I am

going to point out one inference from one researcher's work, and the reader can take it or leave it.

Several years ago Deborah Tannen conducted research on the ways male children and female children communicated. She put the boys in one room and watched them, and she put the girls in another and watched them. The boys for the most part sat side by side and worked on some project. The girls sat across from each other, looked one another in the face, and spoke about what was important to each one. Tannen wrote a book about her work titled *You Just Don't Understand* (1990), and I believe she hit on something I have seen over and over in my practice. The women want to be understood. They feel understood when someone makes personal contact and shares the experience they are going through by talking and listening to feelings, thoughts, values, and desires. Men connect by taking care of business, working on a shared project, and problem solving. They can watch a football game, crack jokes at one another, slap each other on the back, throw beer at one another and have a wonderful time, because they are sharing an experience. Women want to share an experience as well, but they will feel more gratified if they can share what the experience means to one another, how they feel about going through it, what they want, and what the significance of it all is for their relationship with each other.

As I said, these are generalizations. Take them or leave them, but if you start to see these kinds of differences popping up, it might be a good idea to wade around in them phenomenologically and to extoll the differences between men and women so that people have more patience with one another and more interest in what the other's perspective has to offer.

Flailing

The kind of behavior that was seen in Mark is what I have called flailing. A flail is a threshing device that is swung around, and relatedly a flail could also be used as a weapon for flogging. To flail is literally to wave or swing about wildly. That physical

action expresses what is going on inside a person who is suffering intense pain, if not terror and confusion. On the interpersonal level it means to flounder or struggle uselessly. But it also often takes the form of flogging the person perceived to be the reason for one's pain. That is what Mark was doing when he lashed out at Sasha and called her a slut. He was flogging her, but in flogging he was not actually whipping with a stick; he was using excessive and repetitive speech to beat her.

This is a common action that counselors will observe. It goes beyond externalizing, although it is certainly that. It is, ironically, a move to get the other person back, to stop the damage and pain, and make the impending disaster (of a loss of relationship) go away. As such it has simply amazed me. Why does a person think that attacking and blaming the other will make that other want to be with the attacker? Some may say it is a power move, an attempt to coerce the other into obedience. I think it must be more than that, and I think it is doomed.

Flailing drives the other away. The only cases I've seen where it does not are when the other is in touch with the fact that they actually do love the flailing person, they have extraordinary personal character, and/or they have pity and patience enough to endure it for a time in order to try to remedy the overall situation. Other times someone will remain with a flailing person because there is nowhere else to go, no other person they believe will have them, or they are just used to it and believe they do not deserve anything better. In those cases, the mental health of the other is in question.

Teaching the Clients to Observe and Describe

Gestalt therapists are taught to use a modified phenomenological method that comes with a tactical sequence: observe, bracket, describe. That is not all there is to the phenomenology in gestalt therapy, but it is one aspect of it.

I teach this to my clients. I show them. I demonstrate it, largely because I utilize it, but I also call attention to what I'm doing. I tell them to practice a mindful observation of the other

and as theories about what they observe emerge, to set them temporarily aside, come back to the observation and then describe it.

"I notice you are holding her hand and stroking her finger with your finger." I said that to a client couple once and the man doing the holding and stroking exclaimed, "OH!" He was startled, and when I inquired into his experience of being startled, he said that he had not been aware of what he was doing. Interestingly, the woman in that case said the same thing!

Often people do not pay attention to what they are doing and/or what they are experiencing. This kind of observing, bracketing, and describing of phenomena apparent to the therapist helps form contact between therapist and client as the client often feels seen and the response by the client feeds back to the therapist as excitement. The same thing can take place between couples. They do not need to learn phenomenology, the philosophy of intentionality, or read about embodied intersubjectivity in order to benefit from using a more careful and systematic way of noticing and connecting with one another.

The trick in teaching the client is to emphasize observing instead of interpreting. When people interpret one another, they may easily be off or simply wrong. At those times the other does not feel seen and understood; they feel missed and managed. So it is safest to make sure the clients know to remain close to the observed and perceived behavior of the other.

In teaching one couple this process, I asked one man what he observed in his wife when he talked to her (as he had just done). He said, "She's angry."

I said, "Well, that is your imagination about what she feels, but what did you observe?"

He fumbled around a bit and then said, "She frowned. And her forehead wrinkled up."

Suddenly, his wife spoke up and spontaneously offered, "Well you would too if I made you as frustrated as you make me!" When she said that, toward the end her voice cracked. She began to cry.

I said, to the husband, "Now what do you see?"

"I hurt her feelings."

I turned to his wife and asked her if he had hurt her feelings, and she said, "NO! He just doesn't get it. I feel frustrated and hopeless."

"You mean I didn't hurt your feelings?"

"No. I'm just so tired of us missing each other."

"Well me too." And with that he reached out and touched her hand. She looked at him, raised an eyebrow, and they both giggled.

I turned again to the man and said, "Now what do you observe?" and he said, "She giggled."

Perspective Taking on the Returning Serve

So this back and forth process is like tennis with the ball of communication and developing relationship being served and returned in ongoing volleys of effort. When flailing is taking place, it can be interrupted by getting the person who is flailing to observe the effect he or she is having on the other. Remember that flailing is not altogether random and pointless. There is a hope and a purpose. So if the hope is that the other will apologize, turn away from the wound they have caused, and promise to remain, then driving them away is counterproductive to one's purpose. Observing, bracketing one's own feelings or experience, as well as one's imaginations and theories about the other, and describing what one perceives of the other can sometimes break the serve. Only what I really mean is that it can break one's own serve and interrupt the flailing one is doing by taking the perspective of the other who is also hurting in the midst of the overall situation. Seeing how repulsive one is becoming in the eyes of the other is a stunning realization, especially when one realizes it is because of one's own behavior.

Paradoxical Change

Of course, there is no guarantee of how the process will proceed nor the direction it will take. This is the paradoxical theory

of change in gestalt therapy, and it is true of all gestalt process. There simply is no way to know what, exactly, will happen, and in that sense the process is existential as well, but one can trust that the process of becoming increasingly aware of what one is doing and how one is doing it will lead to an adjustment.

If Mark could take stock in the moment of what he is doing and how he is doing it, the bullet points might look like this:

- I am intense, pressing, and aggressive.
- I am not leaving room for her; it's all about my perspective.
- I am accusatory, belittling, and cruel.
- I am demanding that she see things my way.
- I shout.
- I look at her with stern, intense eyes.
- When she turns away, I become more insistent.
- When she looks like she might leave, I become needy, cry, and beg.
- I don't like myself acting this way.

So the more the therapist brings to awareness what is going on in the relationship, because there are two people interacting and not just one, the more chance they each have of seeing not only the other but also themselves.

Such change, though, is messy. It cannot be controlled and directed in an efficient manner. So it defies the usual treatment plan and goal attainment within a limited set of sessions. In fact, it defies strict goal attainment unless one sets a goal that appreciates the dynamic of paradoxical change.

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8

ACCOUNTING FOR THE INFLUENCE OF PAST EXPERIENCE

This chapter deals with field factors in each person's life that influence the ongoing and current relationship. Specifically, it addresses past traumatic incidents, previous intimate partners, and a couple's families of origin.

Monica and Brad

[The "clients" mentioned in this and other chapters are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

Monica was the daughter of an established Bermudian family – established in the sense that they could point to generations who had been born, had grown up, and had raised families of their own on the island – but the family was not wealthy. They were of Portuguese descent, so culturally Monica was predisposed to avoid mental health care. Counseling or therapy was frowned upon by Portuguese people. It was stigmatizing. However, Monica was deeply troubled, and she needed to find help.

At first she went to her priest. The priest asked how he could help her and she began crying. She cried so deeply, sobbing in heaves, with tears running down her face and mucus drooling from her nose, that the priest became quite alarmed. He

offered her a tissue. He told her God loved her. He recited Romans 8:28 ("*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to* His *purpose*"[1]). He tried to calm her down, to make her stop, to separate her from her emotions. All that did was to make her feel that the priest did not want to bother with her and that she was doing something wrong by coming to him with her troubles. She went back to stuffing the things that bothered her, but she could not keep them out of her awareness, and that was because events were taking place weekly that for her reenacted past experience and stimulated those issues.

Every time her husband offered suggestions on how she ought to do things, every time he told her what she should have done to correct a problem, Monica felt criticized. She interpreted her husband's serious tone of voice as harshness. Then she would feel fragile and very young and she would begin to cry. Then her husband would become frustrated and in his anger he would make things even worse. He would raise the issue of divorce, claiming that if she was not happy with him, if she did not believe his advice was good, then perhaps they should just end the marriage. But the threat of losing her husband whom she loved would make her feel even worse, so her crying would increase.

Monica had been raised in an alcoholic home. Her father would come home after a day at work and then drinking with his friends, and everyone knew what to expect. He would walk through the door and slam it behind him. He would yell for his wife and demand to know where his food was. He expected her to prepare his dinner and have it ready for him, but she never knew when he would get home. So she could never satisfy that demand. Consequently, Monica's father started off his evening with everyone in an angry and combative mood.

Monica would not please him as a little girl. She approached him like a timid animal, watchful, trying to avoid his displeasure. Typically, she would fail him. For instance, one day he was working in the garage of their home. She had been skipping

around, not paying attention to him, and suddenly he yelled at her, "Stop that and bring me the paint from the kitchen." She came back with a can of thinner instead. He took it from her and then yelled down at her, "What is wrong with you?! I said paint, not thinner!"

She froze where she stood and started crying.

When he saw her crying, he became more annoyed and he yelled, "Stop that! Stop that right now or I will give you something to cry about."

She could not stop it, and he slapped her. Then he punched her on her shoulder and on her back and she had the breath knocked out of her. She gasped for air, panic-stricken because she could not breathe, and when he saw her, he pushed her to ground and yelled, "Get the hell out of here. Dumb and useless."

Monica crawled out of the garage and into the house. She went to her bedroom and the words "dumb and useless" played back in her head. She sat on her bed and whimpered. She yearned for someone who could be her friend, someone who could see and understand, but there wasn't anyone. Her mother was too busy. She didn't dare tell anyone else outside the family. It just was not done. So she cried softly by herself in her own room, keeping it away from anyone else to prevent more outrage and pain. The emotional and physical abuse continued for most of her childhood and adolescence.

Monica married a man she described in therapy as being similar to her father but without the drinking problem. Also, he was not physically abusive. He did, however, become frustrated with her crying, and she could sense that in him. Brad and Monica moved into the house that she had grown up in. It was the family homestead, passed down from one generation to the next as was the custom among many families in Bermuda. But what that meant was that Monica was living in the same house in which she had experienced so many difficult events with her mother and father. They were living in an apartment on the property but not in the larger house itself. Still, not only was this the same house, but her parents were nearby, right there.

Even though her father had quit drinking, the memories of what he had been like were all over that place, and he occasionally dropped by to see what she was doing with the place and to give her his opinion.

One can't enter the place where abuse occurred and not remember what it was like. Sometimes a person who has been sexually assaulted or abused, for instance, will have body memories. That is when something in the immediate present reminds the person so much of what happened in the past that his or her body begins to physically re-experience it. That is when, quite literally, the past is in the present.

When Monica came to me she cried. She cried at each session with me whenever she began to speak of relationship matters, things that were important to her. Her crying was tears welling up in her eyes and spilling down her cheeks, with me giving her tissues, and her dabbing away the tears. Other than the tears, she seemed at those times to be quite composed. The tears became normal, par for the course, and I did not want to call any more attention to them than I had to.

One day I asked her if she would like to have her husband join us, and she said she would. She invited him to the next session and so one day I met them in the waiting room and we walked over to my office together.

I welcomed him, learned his name, and called him by name, saying, "Hello, Brad. I'm glad you could come. As you know, I've been meeting with Monica, and I suspected it would be helpful for you to be here as well."

He nodded. He said, "I came to help her."

I said, "It seems to me that when the two of you have problems, and Monica gets upset, it's about more than just the two of you."

With that he leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. Tears began running down Monica's face. Brad looked at her, and he brought her the box of tissues that had been sitting next to him on the coffee table. Then she began to cry more profoundly.

I said, "What do you think, Monica? Who else in your life has made you cry besides Brad?" That is when she started to cry with more anguish, moaning, the tears gushing, and the mucus formed and then hung from her nostrils. She began to tremble, and I became alarmed. I had not seen that level of distress in her before. Her hands were in her lap. She closed her eyes, and the trembling turned to shivering.

Brad sat next to her and looked calm. He watched as if he were seeing the evening news. He later told me he had seen her like that before. However, to me, Monica seemed in the midst of a traumatic memory. That was the story I told myself about her, and I felt I had to intercede.

"Monica, open your eyes. Look at me."

She opened her eyes and looked in my direction, but I could not tell if she was seeing me.

"Look at me." Her breath came in short gasps, gulping for air between sobs.

I said, "Now breathe deep. Long deep breathing in and blow it slowly out. Slowly in, and slowly out. That's it. Keep doing that. Feel your feet on the ground. Feel the air in your lungs. Slow in and deep and slow out."

She calmed down, her crying slowed and stopped, and her breathing became regular.

Brad said, "These are all things that I tell her too."

Discussion

Some therapists would consider what Monica was experiencing when Brad's gestures and comments resulted in her tears to be transference. The unfinished business, the residue of previous experience between Monica and her father, was tapped by the interaction between Monica and her husband. So the experience was a current experience of a dominant feature in a previous relationship. For gestalt-oriented practitioners, this is field dynamics.

The field in gestalt therapy has been discussed for decades now, ever since Gordon Wheeler (1991), called people to consider

Lewin's influence (1951), and that discussion has been continuously updated, as seen in Staemmler's (2006) call for more care in the use of the term. In the case of Monica, she was not simply retraumatized by her husband's critiques. She was caught in a recursive loop in which she revisited the relationship of the past and experienced it in the present. The field is a current, here-and-now construct. In this case Monica's experience of the ontical field was not simply a memory of the past. It was the past lived in the present. So the work became that of parting the waters – creating a new path in which she would be able to see her husband on one side and her father on the other. It was also a matter of helping her to see the similarities and differences between them. They are not the same man. She did not marry her father. Brad reminded her of her father, but he was not her father.

What made Monica's situation worse was the way Brad's "joking" about getting a divorce compounded her anxiety and made it imperative that she not upset him or let him down and that she correct herself so as to measure up to what she perceived to be rigorous expectations.

Another way of thinking of these things is that the sedimented experience in the field conditions forms the ground upon which one steps in the present.

Here in Idaho, on the rim of the Snake River Canyon above Shoshone Falls, it has been a difficult winter. We've had extended weeks of freezing temperatures, several snow storms, and the accumulation of ice. Sometimes the temperature has fallen to as much as –17F. As the layers of snow and ice developed, it was common to find uneven ice beneath a soft-looking bed of powder. One day, arriving home from shopping, my wife stepped onto the snow, hit a ledge of ice beneath it, turned her foot, and broke her ankle. That is the picture of how the sediment of experience can turn one's footing in the current situation. What was true of the physical body in my wife's case is true of the lived body in all of us.

The lived body is a holistic view of the embodied self. It is not simply the physical body. It is the "I" in the world. It is the

subjective sense of the lifeworld. It is the situated person, locked into a perspective through finitude. One can only be in one place at a time, because one is always limited to the capacities of the body, the location of the physical body, the perspective of the body, and so forth. The "I" lives through the body, makes contact in the environment through the body, relates to other people through the body, and makes sense of the world through the body. This process entwines one's phenomenality around one's material existence. The phenomenal emerges from the material; the world of the self is a self-in-the-world kind of life. That is why lived body and lifeworld are so related. That is why, also, the sedimented experience of a whole human being is a matter of the lived body; the ground we have walked upon comes up to meet us again and again. The ground of the lifeworld is the personality function of the lived body.

When Monica's father yelled at her as a young child, he also beat her. Sometimes he would throw things at her when she did not give him the answer he wanted, hand him the tool he needed, return rapidly enough from an errand, etc. She carried that in her lived body, not just in her mind or her memory. When it happened back when she was a child, what he said was put against the ways that he said it, put against the relational level of the communication, and that level conveyed the interpersonal displeasure of the more powerful father with the actions of the less powerful daughter. The residue, the sediment laid down at that time, did not merely register failure; the way it was conveyed and the relational aspect of what he was communicating left a footprint on her. The relational message was, "You do not please me." It was internalized as "I do not please him." Who she was as a person depended on who she was in the world, and for Monica, the world became a scary and unpredictable place with reference to her most important relationships. Thus, Monica, in her self-regulation, became a timid and tentative person, vulnerable to her husband's criticisms or perceived irritation.

When Monica came into my office for the first time, she brought with her all of that. She deferred to me. She waited on

me to speak. She offered little and responded largely with agreement. I found myself explaining, offering models, such as the model of the Adult Children of Alcoholics. I explained the dynamics of intergenerational family dysfunction, and she sat dutifully listening. Whenever I would rotate out of talking and ask her for her thoughts and feelings, for her recollections, for her current experience of what I was saying and what it was like for her to be with me (not simply her agreement), she would cry. The tears ran during every session.

So the therapeutic situation is a complex one. It could be seen in part as the following:

$$\frac{(\underline{Exp_{RES}}\backslash\text{Relational Others: } \underline{Exp_{CURR}}\backslash\text{Relational Others})\ \text{Therapeutic Presence}}{\text{Gestalt Therapy Praxis}}$$

where the residue of the experience of relational others maps to the current experience of relational others all to the power of therapeutic presence under the influence of gestalt therapy theory and practice. And this is the situation in which the therapist may choose to work this way or that within the scope of options offered by gestalt praxis. Furthermore, therapeutic presence in this context is not merely the presence of the therapist. It includes the growing ability of the client to be present, to meet the therapist in contact and to be mindful of the other. The experience of the therapist and the experience of the client with relational others are located in the same room.

When I met with Monica at first I had no idea of the significance of her tears. Gradually, however, I felt that there was a balance I had to find in response to them. I have been with many clients, and so the experience of being with others in the past informed me that crying in front of me was something most people did not feel comfortable with at first. Some never liked to cry in my presence. Since Monica had been shoved away, belittled and beaten for her tears, it was important to me that I not appear uncomfortable with them. To be uncomfortable is to tell people not to cry or to attempt to fix them so that they don't need to cry, or to somehow, in some way, get them

to stop crying. Instead of doing that, I attempted to make the meeting between myself and Monica a space in which it was acceptable to cry, if crying is what she needed to do. However, I also brought myself into the mix, and with my presence I was curious as to what the crying was related to, what Monica felt like (her embodied experience) when she was crying, what thoughts and remembrances she had as the tears ran down her cheeks, and so forth. Over time she needed to cry less, and she seemed much more at ease with me. And that is why when her husband came into the room and she was so torn up, there was a dramatic difference.

At one point I proposed an experiment. I suggested to Monica that she think about Brad and about her father. I suggested she make two columns on a sheet of paper. One column she would title "Brad" and the other column she would title "Dad." She would start each entry in each column with either an "S" or a "D" and then describe either a similarity or a difference. I asked if that was something she could do and she indicated it was. I asked her to bring the table back to the next session. So at the next session I asked where it was, and she said that she had not done the experiment. So, I inquired how that had happened; how did she not do it? She said that she simply forgot. So, I asked her to do it for the next session. At the next session she had not done it either and she said that things had been very busy at work and she had not been feeling well. Okay. I asked her to complete the table for the next session, and she asked me for the instructions, because she could not remember what I had suggested. At that point I asked her what was going on. I confessed that to me it seemed she did not want to do the experiment, at which point she tried to take care of my feelings, to please me, and I called her back on that. "You don't need to please me."

She said that she had tried to write down the similarities and differences between her husband and her father, but that she stopped because she suddenly became too scared. I asked her what frightened her, and she admitted that she was afraid that

she would see all similarities and no differences. I asked her if that is what she actually believed, and she affirmed that she did not. She believed the two men were importantly different. So I amended the experiment and asked her to make the two columns but to put the difference column first and to work on it first, leaving the similarity column to the last. Did she think she could do that? She thought she could and, sure enough, she did.

I asked her what she found, and she smiled. She said that she discovered several important ways in which they were different, and then she admitted she also faced a couple of ways in which they were similar.

My work with Monica continued for some time, during which she identified several collateral issues that seemed related to her previous experiences with her father. In all of them we worked a kind of theme: "That was then, and this is now. Some of that is also now." The more aware she became of these various things the less they affected her life and the more she found an ability to self-regulate in facing them.

Note

1 New American Standard Bible.

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9

OVERCOMING THE TRAUMA OF INFIDELITY

This chapter addresses the traumatic breach of trust in intimate dyadic relationships caused by infidelity. Betrayal in other contexts is also addressed. The role of forgiveness is explored.

Mark and Sasha (part two)

[The "clients" mentioned in this and other chapters are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

Mark found a place of his own, an apartment, and he had visitation with his child there. Some time went by before I saw him again.

One day Sasha made an appointment. She had not filed for divorce and neither had Mark. Although Mark suspected she had left him so that she could continue her affair, that was far from her interest. She felt disgusted with herself and even more repulsed by the man at work she had slept with. She watched him do the same thing he had done with her with other women, and it made her feel dirty. They had to work in the same office, but they avoided one another. She came to see me because she had begun to wonder if there were any way to reunite with Mark. It had been months since they separated. She and Mark

had worked out a viable co-parenting system, and she appreciated that he was responsible and had stopped checking up on her. It seemed to her that his resentment had cooled. She watched him with their child and she admired him as a father.

I was not sure what she wanted me to do. I said, "Sasha, I don't know if you want me to give you advice or if you want to do therapy."

She said, "Can you give me a magic pill? Can you make me feel good about myself again?"

"That is an individual therapy kind of question."

"Well," she said, "I don't want our child to grow up in this split existence, going to one house and then the other. I want us, Mark and me, to live together again."

"As roommates?"

She smiled. "No. I want him close again. Can you do that? Can you make that happen?"

I said, "What you are asking for is a magic wand instead of a magic pill. You want me to say abracadabra over this situation and then suddenly 'they lived happily ever after.' I can't do that."

"I know. But if Mark is willing, would you be willing? To see if we can mend?"

I said that I would be willing to facilitate a process but I could not say where it would end up. It's always the same answer. She contacted Mark, and they both came to the next appointment.

Infidelity is a breach of trust, but saying it that way is too simple. It is an assault on a person's worth and self-image to have intimate trust betrayed. After his wife had an affair and decided to leave the family, a man came to live in the Pacific Northwest, in the woods of the coastal range. He had cut and stacked seven cords of wood, but one day he found himself out near that wood and something came over him. The grief and anger got the best of him and he began to grab logs and throw them. Tears ran down his face, and as he threw the wood around the yard he yelled out loud, "I'm not a bad person! I'm not a bad person!" Before he was through, all seven cords of

wood lay scattered on the ground, and he felt peacefully exhausted.

Mark came to the first appointment cautious. He had been through a difficult period of grief and self-loathing. He did not want to revisit all that. He was also suspicious. He imagined that Sasha might be attempting to get more child support or that she was going to ask him for a divorce. She had not told him why she wanted him to meet her at my office.

They sat on opposite couches. Each looked at me. They were quiet. waiting, looking to me to find a way to start whatever it was that might develop.

I told them both what Sasha already knew – that she had wanted to meet with Mark to discuss something and that she wanted to do that in the relative safety of my presence, in my office.

Mark turned toward her and asked, "What do you want?" He was blunt.

Sasha moved past his coldness. She had more important things on her mind than dealing with coldness at that point. She said, "I've been thinking. Well, neither of us has filed for divorce …"

Mark interrupted, "Do you want a divorce?"

Sasha gave him a troubled look and said, "No. Mark. Please give me a chance here."

"Okay. Sorry."

"I am trying to find out if it's possible for us to reconcile."

That took Mark by surprise. He could not answer. He sat looking at her, taking her in, watching her. He had never wanted to separate in the first place, but now that they had, he was finding those times when he was alone and did not have his child to take care of to be relaxing – no one to please but himself.

"What? I mean why?"

She shifted her weight on the couch and turned more toward him. "I want our child to live with both of us. I don't like being alone, being without you."

"Well, you should have thought about that a long time ago."

Sasha sighed and looked toward me for help.

I said, "Mark, Sasha wants to know if you would be interested in attempting to work things out between the two of you so that you can live together again. Is that something you would be interested in?"

He pondered it. He finally said he would be interested in talking more because there were still some things he wanted to talk about. He was not sure if they could get back together. His demeanor had changed and in her presence it remained changed. He was not as needy and insistent. He no longer pressed her and pushed her. He no longer blurted out provocative statements. He was not flailing.

Sasha on the other hand was never quite comfortable at the first session with her place on the couch. She moved this way and that to find a good spot, an easy posture, a place to rest her feet, somewhere to put her hands, and she never found what she was looking for. As time went by Mark calmly told her that he had no promises to make, no agreements to offer. He was waiting to see what she had to say, but she was not comfortable saying much. She said what she wanted, but she had no idea how to get there, and he was no help.

I finally asked both of them if they would engage and commit to the process of finding out if they each wanted to reconcile or if they wanted to move to finalizing their separation in divorce. While that sounded ominous to them, they said they were willing.

When next we met it became apparent that despite Mark's calmness, he was still carrying the offense Sasha had committed against him by having an affair with another man. He could not get over the fact that she had slept with someone else. The scales had tipped too far, it seemed, in the fact that another man had physically gone into her, that another man's penis had been inside of her, and that she had not only allowed it but sought it out. The offense was palpable in his simmering anger once we started talking about things. He did not call her

offensive names, but his objection had them fastened under the picture of her with that other man that he had created in his imagination.

She asked for his forgiveness. I explained the concept of forgiveness, and they each understood. Mark grasped it clearly, but he also was honest in admitting that he could not forgive her. For him there were two levels to her offense. The first, the most obvious level, was that she had betrayed his trust by sleeping with another man and lying to him about it while it was going on. How could he trust her again? Related to that was the issue of believing what she said; so, if she were to say that she loved him, how could he believe that she did? The second level was that he felt she had shamed him, made him into a fool in the eyes of his imaginary social audience; so how could he just lie down and let her get away with that? How could he live with himself if he knew he was her fool and her doormat? Both offenses were major affronts to his manhood.

In my experience, often a person will express "no go" sentiments. They will say there is no way something could be only to turn around and accept it: "No, I cannot live with you," and then you find out that the two are living together; "No, I won't hit her again," and then he hits her again. Some women are quite big; one of my clients was routinely beating up her husband; so, he moved out. The client's temper routinely got the better of her, and she consistently turned her temper loose on that man. They did not last. So hearing Mark say he could not forgive Sasha, but then seeing him come back week after week, made me question the strength of his negativity. Did he want to make it work and be with her again? Yes. He loved her. Did he mean that he could not forgive her? Unfortunately, yes. He could not. They eventually agreed that it just was not going to work and they left my office sad but apparently clear about the way forward.

As a kind of postscript, about a year and a half after our last session, I observed the two of them walking down the street of our community, hand in hand. Studies indicate that the largest

percentage of change can be attributed to extra-therapeutic factors. I like to tell myself that whatever happened that allowed their hands to be joined again, it came about upon the ground of their work with me, but who knows? What I do know is that no hand holding, no reconciliation, was going to be possible outside of repentance and forgiveness.

Discussion

I want to discuss the issues of repentance and forgiveness. That sounds as if I am about to launch into a sermon, but I am not. There is considerable research on the subject of forgiveness, showing that it is essential to healthy relationships. It is certainly necessary to mending the wounds of infidelity.

Rebuilding Trust

I will never forget one person who came to me while I was practicing in Bermuda. She said that she was having trouble with her husband because he had been unfaithful. When he got in session with her it became apparent to me that the man often went on business trips and that he had women in virtually every city he visited. He had an entire second family in one city. He boasted that he could get any woman he wanted as well. So his wife's question was, "How can we build trust between us? How can I trust him?" Since the man asked this as well, how he could get his wife to trust him, this is what I told them both.

When trust is shattered because of broken big ticket items liked fidelity, then one has to rebuild a track record of following through on what one says. I told the man, "If you say you will take out the garbage, then take out the garbage. If you say you will be home by 5 p.m., then be home by 5 p.m. Develop a track record of saying what you mean and meaning what you say."

Forgiveness

Forgiveness sounds like a religious term, and certainly forgiveness is intrinsic to Christianity. However, psychologists have

been researching the subject for some time. On January 30, 2017 the PsycInfo database of the American Psychological Association indicated 4,463 entries pertained in some way to forgiveness.

"*Forgiveness is a multidimensional construct that involves giving up motivations for revenge, feelings of resentment, and hostility*" toward an offending person or group (Toussaint, Kalayjian, Herman, Hein, Maseko, & Diakonva-Curtis, 2017). It is both a passing state of mind and a more consistent feature of a person's character. Worthington, Lavelock, VanOyen Witvliet, Rye, Tsang, and Toussaint (2015) defined forgiveness as letting go of negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors held toward an offender or in relation to a hurtful experience. (Incidentally, trait forgiveness is consistently linked to overall health.) Instead of grasping and holding onto the offense, the pain, the injustice, or inequity involved in what one has suffered, the person who forgives lets go. They do not forget; in many cases one cannot ever forget. They do not condone; people who have suffered an offense, a humiliation, or who have known physical and/or emotional pain because of what someone else has done, especially if they believe the other was wrong in doing what they did, cannot approve of the offense. They may not reconcile; forgiveness is not an invitation to move from the dog house to the main house. Instead, the one who forgives merely loosens the grip on revenge, opens the fingers, and lets the whole thing fall away. In doing so, they release themselves from the burden of seeking vindication and compensation.

While there are many interesting things a person can read about forgiveness in the research literature, two observations are relevant to Mark and Sasha. One is the belief on the part of the offended regarding the degree to which the transgressor intended to offend them, and that is related to belief in the level of guilt the transgressor experiences when the transgressor seeks forgiveness (Adams & Inesi, 2016). Imagine two offenses. On the one hand, a person shares a secret told in confidence on a careless day during an office gab fest, and the

secret gets known by others. On the other hand, the one who shared the secret to begin with resents the broken confidence and purposefully spreads a malicious lie about the careless coworker. One can believe the first person feels guilty, but one has a harder time believing the second one does, because that person consciously approved of the spiteful action they were taking and felt justified in getting revenge. It is easier to forgive the first one than to forgive the second one.

The other observation is that an adequate apology from the transgressor often facilitates forgiveness from the offended person. Such an apology reduces the offended person's tendency to respond aggressively and alters that person's attitude and neural responses toward the transgressor (Beyens, Yu, Han, Zhang, & Zhou, 2015).

Repentance

If an adequate apology goes a long way in helping the offended person forgive, then what makes for an adequate apology? It's not as if all apologies are the same. Each one is evaluated against the background of previous experience with the person in question and the nature of the offense. For instance, an addict who repeatedly relapses and who apologizes and promises to never slip up again is unbelievable. That is because of the nature of the offense, the dynamics of addiction, and the number of times those in relationship with the addict have seen him or her go through the same sequence of offense-apology-promise-more relapse. Another reason an apology might be inadequate is if it is made too soon, if it comes with a glib air that communicates a lack of understanding of the cost to the offended. Four features make for an adequate apology:

- a sufficient ground;
- an intellectual appreciation of the cost to the offended;
- a sincere emotional regret for what that cost has been;
- a determination of the will never to offend that person in that way again.

There are many aspects to the ground of a given apology that would be relevant. The one about time has been mentioned already. There simply must be sufficient passage of time. To slap one in the face and immediately say, "I'm sorry," does not work. There has not been enough consideration of what one has done. Second, and more important, is that there has to be trust. The apology will seem more genuine and believable if the relationship was already infused with trust before the transgression took place.

An adequate apology is one in which the offender comprehends the offense. The offender must grasp the nature of it, the scope of it, and the cost or consequences of it for the one against whom he or she has offended. In order for that to be believable the offender has to somehow get the information, and if he or she cannot get it directly from the one who was offended, then the information must come from someone else. Furthermore, this cognitive understanding must be communicated effectively to the offended person.

An adequate apology is also one in which the offender experiences emotional pain in the form of regret. So there is intellectual perspective taking and there is emotional perspective taking – the walking in the shoes of the offended includes both. And when it does, then the offender experiences remorse. The offender feels badly about the pain he or she has caused the other.

Finally, an adequate apology includes the sincere determination never to offend again in that same way. It is not a vague promise to be good or do better next time. It is the pulling together of one's understanding and contrition with regard to the specifics of the situation and how they have affected the offended person in order to form a purpose of the will. The offender becomes determined never to touch that "hot stove" again.

In the case of Mark and Sasha, she experienced almost instantaneous guilt when she slept with her co-worker. She was disgusted with herself, and she knew that the landscape of her relationship with Mark would change, and it was going to be her fault. While they had been having difficulty because Mark

had become so preoccupied with his job and absent from her daily life, she could not excuse her behavior through those reasons. No amount of loneliness could justify what she did. The repeated gestalt dialogues in session, in Mark's presence, demonstrated these things. Sasha virtually begged Mark to forgive her.

But he did not. For him there was no adequate excuse, and that was the fulcrum upon which he balanced his understanding of forgiveness. He felt it would have been an affront of major proportions to forgive, because forgiveness to him was akin to acceptance or approval. It was winking at bad behavior. To do that would have been to suffer another humiliation. Narcissistic people have difficulty forgiving, because there are virtually no small or inconsequential offenses, and each one is a malignant commentary on their identity. Mark's narcissism was just enough to prevent him from forgiving Sasha. He listened to her quite adequate apology. He sensed her remorse, even her agony, and he wanted to find a way back to her. He did try to find one. But eventually we all had to accept that he could not. Not yet. Not then.

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10

WHEN ASYMMETRIC RELATIONSHIPS WORK – AND WHEN THEY DON'T

This chapter deals with relationships in which there seems to be something out of balance – a wife who bears most of the responsibility, a business partner who takes most of the financial risk, etc. Sometimes it works for the people in question, and sometimes it doesn't. The chapter also addresses co-dependency and the influence of addiction or self-medication.

Terra and Betsy

[The "clients" mentioned in this chapter are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this same way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

Terra was 43 when she first saw Betsy. Terra had sensed, if not known, from an early age that she was a lesbian. She did not know that term at first, but she learned. She liked the company of women. She was attracted to the way they looked physically, and she enjoyed being intimate with them. Although for the majority of her adult life she could not marry, she regarded herself as monogamous. Of course, in her youth, and especially when she was learning what lesbian life was like, she had had multiple partners. At 43, however, her attitude was, "been there and done that." By the time she met Betsy, she knew she was

attracted to younger women, she was not in a relationship, and she wanted to be. She knew who she was, and she was sure of what she wanted.

Betsy was 23 when she first saw Terra. They met on the first day of orientation for their graduate program. They sat across from one another at a circular table with another of their cohort and a faculty member. Betsy was taking it all in. She had come up through community college and then finished her undergraduate work at the state university. She was entering a clinical master's program in social work. She was wondering who she might become on several levels. What kind of therapist might she be? How would grad school change her? Would there be a relationship in her near future?

As these two shared classes together, saw one another daily, and interacted, Terra became increasingly interested in Betsy. She liked the way she filled out her jeans. She listened closely whenever Betsy spoke up in class.

One day one of their classmates invited everyone over to Betsy's apartment to celebrate her birthday and Terra made a point of attending. When they got there, and almost everyone else was milling around the table, Terra walked over to the book case and started looking at what Betsy had for reading material. Betsy noticed that and thought, "She is interested in me." From that point on they started a mutual circling around one another.

At one point Terra, thinking it not very likely that this young woman would want to be with another woman, and on top of that an older woman, someone almost twice her age, decided she needed to see Betsy in another way. She decided to ask Betsy to go for coffee, just the two of them, and Betsy accepted. She thought if she could get Betsy to talk, she would expose some kind of flaw, some measure of immaturity, something that would take the shine off her.

They only had about thirty minutes between classes, but they spent the entire time asking questions about one another: where they had been in life; what made them want to become a

therapist; why they chose a Master's rather than a doctoral program. And then it came to the issue of belief in God. Betsy had been raised in a conservative Christian family. What was Terra's belief?

Terra hesitated. She pointed to the clock and said, "We should talk about that when we have more time." They returned to class, and Terra found herself in worse shape than before. Instead of her heart being quieted, she only became more intensely interested in Betsy and sadly troubled. Terra believed in God, but she could not believe that God had a harsh, unloving, and punitive nature. She had not been raised in a Christian home, and her experiences with the church had been terrible. She felt condemned by Christians because of the kind of people she loved, and somehow that did not harmonize with the things she read that Jesus had said. The more they talked, however, the more Terra wanted to be with Betsy.

A few days later Terra asked Betsy if she would like to have dinner with her one night after classes. Betsy accepted, and Terra picked her up at her apartment. They went for Thai food at a place in the neighborhood.

Terra asked Betsy what she wanted for dinner and when the waiter came, she ordered that for her. They talked for a little about various things, and then Betsy became quiet. Terra asked her what she was thinking about, and Betsy said, "Is this a date?"

Terra answered, "Well. Yeah. I think so."

Then Betsy excused herself from the table, saying, "I think I'm going to throw up." She went to the restroom in the restaurant, and when she returned, she said that she wanted to go home. So they left. Betsy paid for her part of the meal, and Terra for hers. Terra drove her home, watched her go inside, and then sat in her car. Normally she would have written the whole evening off and put Betsy into a category where she didn't have to deal with her again. But this was not a normal situation. She was very taken by the young woman. So, she was sad.

"It is hard enough," she thought, "without the sexual thing." And then it occurred to her that this was probably the case with heterosexuals as well. She turned the key and got on with her life.

A few days later Betsy took Terra aside during a break. They sat in the shade of a tree on the campus of the university. Betsy told Terra she'd been thinking and that she had also been praying. "I came here thinking I might find someone and start a relationship. I never imagined it might be a same-sex kind of relationship."

Terra started to apologize and look for a way out of the conversation.

"Wait," said Betsy. "So, I am still trying to find myself. And I asked God if it would be okay for me to try this out as a way of finding myself. And He said it would be okay."

Terra was stunned. On the one hand she was happy Betsy was open to exploring a relationship with her, but on the other hand, she wished it were just a clear and enthusiastic "Yes!!" She would take what she could get.

"So," continued Betsy, "I would like for us to do some couples counseling. Think of it as getting some good experience with counseling."

Terra agreed, and they came first each on her own and then together. Terra explained that she had grown up in an alcoholic home. She knew she had co-dependent tendencies. Betsy grew up in a strictly conservative Christian family in which a neighbor, a friend of her father's, sexually abused her whenever the family visited. She could not be touched in certain ways, and she was quite conflicted in that she had been sexualized and tended to view men as sex objects but sex as something forbidden until marriage. At this point in her life she was exploring many things that had been taboo before.

I told them it seemed to me they were embarking on a cross-cultural relationship. They were from different generations, differing backgrounds on the issue of same-sex relationships, and they also had different religious commitments. I asked them

what they thought about that. They both agreed. When asked what made them risk such differences, Terra said, "I am in love with Betsy," and Betsy said, "It sounds like a good way to find out more about myself."

They came to counseling on a regular basis while spending more time together, going out to dinner, doing class work, seeing movies. Betsy made a rule for the period during which counseling was taking place and until she could sort herself out more. She did not want kissing, and she did not want to have sex with Terra.

"What *can* we do?" asked Terra. "I love you, and I want to be close."

Betsy said, "Well, we can be close. We can hold hands, cuddle, and we can put our faces close, but no lips on lips."

So that is what they attempted. Terra frequently came up behind Betsy, wrapped her arms around her and pulled her close. Betsy would giggle nervously. Sometimes Terra put her hand up to caress Betsy's face when they cuddled on the couch watching television, her face close to Betsy's, their mouths almost touching.

"It is intoxicating for me," she said when we met in my office. "She's breathing my air, and I am breathing hers. It arouses me."

"So, Betsy," I asked, "what is it like to hear Terra say that being close to you like that arouses her? Do you know what she means?"

"I know. I know what she means. It doesn't turn me on like it turns her on. I don't think it's the same for us."

Terra shifted her weight on the couch. I turned to her. "I feel sad hearing that, because I imagine you want to hear something different."

Her eyes glistened.

I met her eyes with mine and said, "I can almost hear a sigh in what I see."

Her tears spilled over and down her cheeks and she reached for some tissue.

"Terra, what would those tears say if they could talk?"

"I try so hard to make things work," she started to say, but then she shook her head and her gaze fell to the floor. She continued, "I do my part and I'd even do her part if she'd let me."

"Can you say that again?"

"I do my part and I do her part."

"How familiar does that seem to you?"

"It is very familiar. And I'm sick of it. I don't want to do her part on top of mine. I just want someone to love me all on their own."

I turned to Betsy. "What's been going on for you while Terra and I have been talking?"

She said, "It's not my fault. I told her I just wanted to find out about myself."

I said, "You feel like someone is blaming you?" She nodded.

She said, "Sometimes Terra acts like something is no big deal, because she's 'been there and done that.' Well, I have not been there and done that, and I don't want to miss it. I want to be there and do it for myself. I can't just take her word for everything. I might as well still be living at home with my parents. They're really good at telling me what I should think and what I should believe and do."

Terra responded, "I just want to save you some time and trouble. Besides, what am I supposed to do with what I know? Pretend I don't know it?"

"Pretend? You mean like I've been pretending? I have to say this. I don't know if I've been pretending or just fooling myself, but I can't do this relationship anymore. I wanted to find some things out about myself, and I have. I want to be with men. I think some women are beautiful, but I want a man to love me."

Discussion

Symmetry is balance. When two objects are symmetrical, they are evenly shaped. Symmetry is a relational construct. It requires at least two, and it describes one by virtue of the other. In human relationships we are not talking about machine parts

that can be precise in their symmetry. Rather, we are talking about people who have more or less similarity and whose features either fit aesthetically well together or whose joining makes imbalance obvious and whose relationship requires additional support.

Peace

The word "peace" in Hebrew is *shalom*. At its core it points to wholeness, completeness, and sometimes safety, where this is a sense of dependability. This is not basically the absence of conflict. It is the strength of a unified structure. It is ease in contacting, where "ease" connects fluidity as opposed to easiness. Although peace implies rest, a time of peace can also be characterized by high energy, creativity, and productivity. Ironically, this sense of peace can include intense difference and conflict but difference that increases understanding and appreciation.

I once worked with a patient who indicated that she always kept the most sacred part of herself reserved and protected by interpersonal walls. But there was one man with whom she felt instinctively, intuitively, safe. She was at peace with him. In his company she felt she was her true and spontaneous self. She felt whole, solid, and with him her figures of interest were crisp and clear, offered without reservation, known without confusion.

Symmetry can be a matter of the overall shapes or it can be a matter of the place where these shapes meet. It can also be a matter of the space between shapes, the "empty" space that unites them. Symmetry is sensed; it is a matter of wholeness, completeness, soundness; it is characterized by peace.

My wife came into my new office and put up my diplomas on the wall (see Figure 10.1). There are four of them: the Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology, the Master of Divinity, the Master of Arts in clinical psychology, and the Doctor of Psychology. They are all framed in rectangular, plain black frames. No frills. They look very similar overall, even though the doctoral degree is larger. She arranged them with two forming a vertical and



Figure 10.1 **Symmetry.**

two on the outside forming a horizontal. None of them touch, but there is space in between them all that is very similar and that unites them. Altogether, rectangles and space between, they form one whole, one gestalt. When I look at that arrangement, I feel at peace with it.

With human beings, who are all different, it is possible to have two people who are more dissimilar in overall "shape," but whose connections, the way they navigate the contact boundary, the "space between" that both separates and unites, are very strong. The symmetry of the contact boundary is an interpersonal aesthetic rather than a physical-visual structure.

With Terra and Betsy there was obvious difference in "shape," and there was a weak symmetry in the aesthetic of their contacting. Part of the aesthetic of contacting concerns the symmetry of the intentionalities for the people in question. Terra was taken by her affection for and attraction to Betsy, but Betsy was absorbed with her individual interest in personal growth. While Terra wanted to know and be known, Betsy was engaged in a personal, existential experiment. The pattern that their relative intentionalities etched in relational space left a jagged trail of hits and misses. Not only were they asymmetric in overall characteristics, but they were asymmetric in the way they typically

met one another. Their meetings were not strong enough to overcome their dissimilarities. And that is the difference between an asymmetric relationship that works and one that does not. The asymmetric relationship that works overcomes difference through the sense of peace in contacting.

Co-Dependency

An example of how these types of asymmetries work is what is known in some circles as co-dependency. As many know, this relational dynamic was discovered among people working with alcoholics. There was the person addicted to alcohol and there was typically the partner of the alcoholic who was enabling that person, running interference for them, making excuses, and otherwise cleaning up the messes and making it possible for the alcoholic to avoid the natural consequences of addiction.

Those working with such couples discovered that as soon as they helped the alcoholic to get more healthy and to engage in a program supporting sobriety, the enabling partner would cut the legs out from under him or her, sabotaging their recovery. It was puzzling until they began to comprehend the asymmetric features of their relationship. The obvious shapes in their differences boiled down to one person drinking to the point of irresponsibility and the other one either not drinking or, if they did, controlling it enough to be responsible for both of them. One missed work; the other maintained a job. One spent money recklessly, and the other, in spite of the first, paid the bills. However, the symmetry in their meeting, even though superficial, was enough to form a dependable structure. It worked for them, even though it supported an unhealthy pattern of living.[1] Co-dependency is a giving (a focus on others, caring for and ordering or helping them) in order to get (the security of the relationship). There is a symmetry in its aesthetic of contacting. Threaten the peace and security, the symmetry of such a relationship, by one person getting more healthy and wanting to change the basis of their contacting, and suddenly there is no peace.

Satisfaction of Figures and Depth of Intimacy

I-It relationships are characterized by the intentionality of task. I-Thou relationships are characterized by the intentionality of depth – depth of knowing the other, which is also understood as intimacy. These two types of relating have typically been cast as a polarity and split off from one another with regard to contacting (I-It being seen as a lack of contact and I-Thou as the presence of contact). Just as it is possible to experience contact through conflict, it is also possible to experience contacting in order to accomplish goals and take care of business. In fact, without contacting, it is impossible to complete figures of interest, and if a figure of interest is inherent in I-It processing, then contacting is necessary to success with regard to the meeting of goals and the satisfaction of interests.

In the case of Terra and Betsy, Terra wanted to know and be known. She was interested in nurturing the I-Thou capacities of her relationship with Betsy. However, Betsy was asymmetrical in this regard. Ironically, she was focused on achieving the I-It goal of personal growth at the expense of relational intimacy. Betsy was interested in existential breadth while Terra wanted interpersonal depth. They were out of sync with one another with regard to the relational style that largely characterized their relative efforts. So their contacting was awkward, with one person often feeling intrusion and the other a kind of lonely frustration.

Note

1 But then, that is the nature of addiction; at some level it works for a person, meets some needs.

11

USING EMOTIONAL PROCESSING TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIP

This chapter addresses the role of emotion in adaptation and self-regulation. It also covers the way affection, respect, and appreciation can nurture relationships, and it provides therapists and coaches with insights into emotional intelligence.

Jack and Jill

[The "clients" mentioned in this chapter are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

The names Jack and Jill bring to mind the children's rhyme and images of buckets, hills, broken crowns, and tumbling after. I think that was the experience of the two people represented by these names.

Jack and Jill met when they were in the college age group attending at the same church. They were both of European descent, both with mother and father still married and living together, both having become Christians by expressing faith in Jesus in high school. They had never encountered a real challenge.

Jack came to me, however, wanting some counseling to help him and his wife sort out their thinking given what they had

been through together. They thought they were on the same page with one another going into it, but coming out of it they were not so sure.

Jack had been a worship leader in his church, which represented a very high-profile group in their community, located in the central valley of northern California. It had multiple staff, and they were in charge of numerous ministries. The church leadership was organized in a hierarchical fashion, with the head pastor at the top.

The pastor prided himself on being a diligent student of the Bible. He took seriously the admonition in 2 Timothy 2:15 to carefully exegete the Bible and then to teach it to his people and to hold himself and others accountable to that teaching. Consequently, he had distinct ideas about how the church ministries ought to be run.

Jack was a very easy-going man. He was relational. He loved the worship ministry, because it brought together his love of music and his love of God. He often thought that he had already died and gone to heaven because he led the congregation in singing hymns, spiritual songs, and devotional choruses every week. Furthermore, Jack enjoyed people. He listened to them. He felt moved by their struggles, and he extended himself in compassion, trying to comfort as best he could when someone's need became apparent.

Jill was much more pragmatic. If Jack was lost in the sublime, Jill was taking care of the mundane. She also loved God, but she took the attitude that God had given her a brain, and He meant her to use it. And use it she did. She was a top executive managing over twenty people and coordinating multiple projects.

Jack and Jill had three young children. The oldest was 12 and the youngest was 5, with an 8-year-old in the middle. While Jack was up in front of the church on Sunday mornings, Jill was managing the three children, who were all healthy, curious, impatient, and self-centered – in other words, normal children. Jill had decided that rather than sit all the way down front with

the other staff wives, she would sit with her children further back. She did not want them, and her attempts to make them behave, to become the center of attention. She did not want to distract from the worship that her husband was conducting in the ministry he had been given.

The problem, however, was that the pastor of the church believed all staff and their children should sit down front where everyone could see them and could model themselves on them. It was a nice concept; however, the pastor was single. He had no children. He had devoted himself to the study of the Word, and although he was dating someone who would eventually become his wife, at the time he dealt with Jack he had no family to supervise on Sunday mornings. He only had his theology, his specific message, and his theories about how church ministry ought to be done. So, he instructed Jack to tell Jill to sit in the front row with their children.

Jill refused. She knew what would happen, and she did not want to become the focus of everyone's attention when they were supposed to be singing to the Lord or listening to the sermon.

The pastor told Jack again, and Jack did talk with Jill. They discussed the situation, and he agreed with her. So he came back to try to discuss the situation with the pastor, to give him their thinking on the matter, but the pastor would have none of that. He regarded Jack as insubordinate and his wife as rebellious. He told Jack that he lacked leadership, that he could not manage his own household, and therefore that he could not continue as an elder and as the worship leader at the church.

This caused a ripple in the congregation, because in fact Jack had been a good minister, his people felt loved by him, and the majority of the church appreciated the music he brought to the worship events. In order to quell dissent, the pastor called a congregational meeting where he made the general accusation that Jack had lost his ability to lead, and stated that while the staff could not get into the details of the situation (supposedly saving Jack and Jill embarrassment), Jack would be replaced.

He called on the people to accept what had happened "as from the Lord," since it had come directly from his, their pastor's hands.

Publicly humiliated and scorched by the heat of a legalistic mindset, Jack and Jill left that church. They decided to come to me, because they had begun to doubt themselves. Was Jack indeed incapable of leadership? Was Jill rebellious? Were these two out of step with the Holy Spirit because of where Jill sat with the children on Sunday morning? They came to me because they knew of my background in the ministry and that I was also a fully accredited psychologist; they needed someone who could understand church life but someone who could also counsel from a psychological perspective. They were confused on more than one level.

Jack said, "I never second-guessed the way Jill and I relate until this. She is so good at some things, I just let her do her thing and we are all better off for it. I'm good at other things and she has been thankful for that."

I asked, "What are you good at?"

He said, "I do cooking; I like to cook. And I do most of the interacting with the kids. I tell them stories and we play at night before they go to bed."

"And now?"

"Well now I wonder if I should be managing all the books, doing the finances, and such."

"What makes you think that?"

"It's kind of the model our pastor advocates. He says the man should be the authority in the house, and the authority is the one who manages the money."

"So, is that anything like pastoral wives should sit down front?"

He shrugged and Jill laughed. She said, "Right. It's *just* like that."

I said, "Jill, what is the emotion that you are feeling right now?"

"Is it okay to be angry?"

"It better be!"

"What about you, Jack? What are you feeling when Jill is feeling angry?"

"I don't know. I'm not comfortable with her anger."

"Jill, can you tell me more about your anger? Who are you angry at?"

"I am angry at the pastor, and I'm angry at the whole church for letting it all go down the way it did."

"What does that anger feel like?"

"Like surging energy; like a fire burning."

"Where in your body do you feel that?"

"In my chest and arms … also in my legs. I feel like I want to get up and *do* something."

Jack interrupted, "That is what I'm afraid of. Your anger makes me anxious."

"Okay," I said, "what would your anxiety say if it were a person? If he was sitting right there," and I pointed to the couch on the far wall.

He looked at the couch, paused, and then said, "I don't like this. Would you stop making me visible?"

"Visible?" I said.

He had a mildly stunned expression on his face. "Yea. I guess so." Then he chuckled softly. "I guess I usually do worry what Jill is going to do next that I'll have to deal with in some way."

Jill spoke up. She was not happy. "Well, it's bad enough that the pastor and the church don't understand, but now you don't support me either? And you *worry* what I'm going to do next?!"

I asked her, "What are you feeling now?"

"I'm even more angry than before."

"You have tears in your eyes." When I said that she fumbled with her words. She could not figure out whether to talk about the tears or continue in her anger. So I observed that she seemed to have two emotions, and she admitted that she did.

"I am sad. And I am angry." I asked her to say more, and she said, "I am sad because people don't understand me, they don't know me, and I'm angry because they act like what I think isn't

important. And now I am even more sad to think that Jack doesn't get me either, when I thought all along that he did. That is a big loss!" And with that the tears were flowing more, but that seemed to irritate her.

Jack started to say something, to attempt to soothe her, but I stopped him with a hand signal.

"What makes you think Jack does not get you, doesn't understand you either?" I asked her.

"He said as much."

"He did? What did he say?"

"He said he constantly has to clean up my messes, and he never knows what I'm going to do next that will make him have to clean up one of my messes." Then she quickly added, "And *that* makes me mad!"

I observed to them that anger and sadness lived side by side in Jill's experience. Then I asked Jill, "Which one comes out most often?"

She said, "Anger."

Then I asked, "Which one seems closer to who you are?"

She said, "Sadness."

With that we all sat in silence. Sometimes I simply observe, describe what I observe, or ask questions that seem to come to me intuitively out of the flow of the interaction, leaving applications and the deeper sense of how elements of the client's life are related to one another. They will know more about themselves than I ever will; so I purposefully leave space for them to connect those dots. There are other times, however, when I teach a concept, and I consider this to be a unilateral experiment. So, after the silence I started to teach them about the adaptational value of anger.

"Anger can be considered normal and healthy when it drives a boundary. It's the energy one needs to back someone off and mean it. Anger is the emotion that says, 'pay attention to this; you might be being disrespected, stepped on, or neglected.' So, Jill, how well does this fit with what you are feeling?"

She said, "It doesn't."

"Okay. Let me ask in another way: on a scale of one to ten, how well does it fit with the anger you feel toward Jack?"

"One."

On that same scale, how well does it fit with the way the pastor and the church treated you?"

"Eight."

"What other word for what you are feeling toward Jack would fit better than anger?"

"Disappointment. Loss. Sadness."

"What are those related to?"

"We've been partners. Even if nobody else understood me, I knew he did and would have my back. So when I heard him say he worried what I would do next, I felt like I was all alone."

Jack was watching her intently the whole time that conversation was going on. The look on his face was anguished. He finally said, "I'm sorry I hurt you. I love you. I feel like you do. Even if nobody else gets us, we know we do. But now I know that other people not understanding can have consequences, and maybe I kind of knew that all along."

At another session I pursued the consequences for Jack and Jill of being judged, characterized in a certain way, and questioned as to their fitness for leadership, including the anger related to that. In the course of the dialogue, they wanted to know what I thought of the action the pastor had taken. I know that what I think of such a thing is not as important as what the client thinks. I had a choice point. Would I turn it back to them, or would I offer my perspective? Much of therapy amounts to offering a corrective relational experience, and so I decided to make myself more fully present in self-disclosing, in answering the question they had posed.

I said, "I think what that pastor did was abusive. There is such a thing as spiritual abuse, and it is when someone in spiritual or religious authority lays down harsh, inflexible rules in areas that are not explicitly detailed in scripture. The rules amount to what the leader thinks and wants, what serves his program of ministry, or what more fully establishes his authority and security

as the unquestioned leader of the faith community. Just as I get angry when I see a child used, mistreated, or neglected by an adult, I get angry when I see a child of God treated badly by the people inhabiting the position God established as the servant, the shepherd."

"So you don't think Jack lacks the ability to lead, and you don't think I'm rebellious?" asked Jill.

"Do I think you are spiritually defective?" I said, smiling.

They laughed, but it was a nervous kind of laugh. And here I did turn it back on them. "What do you get from the Lord when you take that question to Him?" And then I said, "Lord, you are here. You have heard. Do you think Jack and Jill are broken spiritually? What is it you want them to see from all this?"

I wondered what they thought of my prayer for them. I reflected that if they had both been psychologists, they might have looked askance at what I did, and I realized I battled my own sense of being defective in someone's eyes.

Then Jack said, "What I got was the reassurance that He loves me and that He will see me through to the end."

"How does that fit with feeling unacceptable to others, or even the doubt that one is actually broken?"

"Well, I just have peace about it now. I know I need a savior cuz I am broken, but it's not about being broken. It's about His commitment to me and His presence – the way He covers my brokenness. The other, the feeling of not belonging, drops off because I know I belong with Him."

I looked to Jill and she was smiling. She said, "See? That pastor never knew us."

Discussion

Greenberg, Rice, and Elliott (1993) wrote a book linking the human capacity for meaning-making and adaptation to emotion. Among other cogent statements, they claimed that at the core of the human organism "*is a biologically adaptive emotion/motivation system*" (p. 73). In saying that, they agreed with Richard Lazarus' (1991) conception of emotion as being adaptational in value for

any given person in the world who functions with roles and relationships. To that I would add a few things. Maybe it is not so much adding as it is expanding.

Phenomenologically the self transcends sheer memory. In gestalt therapy we say that the self is the current process of contacting, with a memory of the past and an expectation of the future. Furthermore, we formulate, commit ourselves to, and function in accord with values, and our values are based on commitments of faith, but when we begin to trace these things back, parting the thick weeds in the residue of our experience, we lose the traces of where we have stepped in the past, and so we cannot find how value and faith came to be. We can say we just learned them growing up as we did, with the people we met along the way, but that is vague. What is important to me (my values) seems to fly in the face of prevailing definitions of the self, when self is no longer the real person inside and is something formed on the fly and contingent upon contact, situated among people and things in a world that was going on before I found myself on its stage. How can a person manifest continuity if he or she is constantly in flux, constantly forming self as a function of contact?

To me, the abiding motivational impact of values and beliefs, however they are formed, is resident in gestalt thinking at the level of personality function of self. Emotions, then, are adaptational because they arise in a situation at the level of id, before a person can sort them into rational columns, but they point one in a direction consistent with the sense of who one is and what is important. They connect id function with personality function, leaving ego function to catch up and make sense of it all. In fact, it is so fast that a person cannot say something like "Based on the person I think I am…" Rather, the emotion is a red flag that goes up to alert the person that something in the situation is important (and so they had best pay attention). So the person is working on that before he or she fully grasps what is going on and why it is important.

This process, furthermore, is a whole person dynamic. "*Emotional awareness and somatic interoceptive awareness are essential*

processes for human psychosomatic health" (Kanbara & Fukunaga, 2016). What that means is that my emotions are processed through my body and they help me self-regulate in a fashion conducive to my well-being. Greenberg (2004) put it another way, saying, "*At the most basic level of functioning emotions are an adaptive form of information-processing and action readiness that orients people to their environment and promotes their well-being.*"

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence has been popular in coaching. The coaching field loves such "tools" by which coaches can gain leverage and work toward action and change. I sometimes feel that such things reduce the anxiety of coaches who feel they must "make something happen." It's like the therapist who talks too much. Still, if Greenberg, Lazarus and others are correct, then the idea of working with the client's emotions has some credibility to it.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify one's own emotions and those of others (usually by reading emotion in the face of another). It includes the ability to use this knowledge to work through problems and to self-regulate in the face of emotional events.

When I think of that first point I remember what I've told numerous clients. It's a three-step process. First, one must focus upon what one is experiencing and tap into the emotional current running through the body. Where does one feel it in the body? What is that like? What does it feel like and what does it bring to mind when one focuses on it? So, first, there is recognition that one is feeling *something*.

Then comes finding a name for it. Many people use an emotion wheel (you can find numerous examples of these things online) to identify the feeling they are experiencing, but if a word does not suffice, then instead of "emotion wheel" put "emotion faces" into the search box. You will find numerous examples of facial expressions that communicate emotion.

Third comes expressing this emotion to the world in appropriate ways. This can be speaking and describing to someone what one has noticed and named, but it could be any other mode of expression that connects the feeling with the expression.

Self-Conscious Emotions

Self-conscious emotions (Leary, 2007; Tracy, Robins, & Tangney, 2007) are a class of emotions that are characterized by the sense of an internalized social audience making some kind of judgment on a person. Actually, then, it is a person thinking about him or herself, being self-reflective and generating emotions as a result. Two such emotions are guilt and shame. Guilt is the self-reflection, "I've done something wrong." Shame is the self-reflection, "I am something wrong." The person dealing with guilt can make restitution by paying back or making an adequate apology. The person dealing with shame cannot do that, because the basic problem is that they consider themselves defective. The only thing most people feeling shame can do is to disappear, and that is precisely the intense solution to the horrible emotion they are experiencing. They literally go away, get away from the presence of the audience in question. In the case of Jack and Jill, that was the pastor and his church. The confusion Jack and Jill experienced was around this kind of emotion. "Are we wrong? Have we been looking at this in the wrong way? Is the pastor right and we are just out of step with the Lord and unqualified? Is that how we should see ourselves as we move away and into the next thing? Is the anger we feel a sign that, sure enough, we're sinning and have the wrong attitude?"

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12

VOLITION AND MOTIVATION

This chapter deals with decision-making and purposive striving in dyads as related to their values and motivations.

Peter and Mary

[The "clients" mentioned in this chapter are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

Peter was a business man. His business was running quite well, and he had never made quite as much money as he was making when he and Mary came to see me. For all his success, though, he was not a man aware of his emotions, and he was little given to expressing them or having emotional life take up much room at all in his relationships. That was okay in the particular career that he had, because he could deal with numbers, contracts, and bottom lines, and these things didn't cry when you added them up. When he added up his own bank account numbers, they were pretty good, and then he did have an emotion – he was happy.

Mary, however, was not. She had been a social worker who had quit that kind of work in order to have, and take care of, their children. They had two. So she bathed them, clothed

them, fed them, entertained and exercised them, and then she fed them some more, cleaned them up, got them ready for bed, read to them, soothed them, and watched them fall asleep – day after day. After the children had grown quiet each night, she would wait for Peter to get home, but often he did not arrive until late. She would grow weary and fall asleep. That is how her days and nights went. They never had sex. They rarely said anything to one another in passing, and she eventually got to the point where she did not know him anymore.

One day Mary was sitting on the patio. The sun was shining, there was a nice breeze, and the children were playing tag on the lawn. She suddenly realized that unless she woke up and got back into life, her brain would turn to mush, the children would have children of their own, and she would be wondering what had happened to the last thirty years. She felt quite alone, *all* alone. In that sudden epiphany it became very clear to her what she had to do. She decided to divorce Peter, go back home, go back to school, and reclaim her life. She was beyond calling this realization a mid-life crisis. There was no crisis for her. She knew what she had to do.

When she told Peter, he knew what he had to do. "Let's go to counseling. We're in trouble."

Mary said, "Well you might be in trouble, but I'm not. I feel great!" However, she agreed to give counseling a try, because she did realize that if she moved with the children, Peter would end up thousands of miles away from them.

So we met many times, and I attempted to have them explore each other's perspectives. He shared how for the first time he felt as if his career had come together in just the right mix of interesting projects and demands coupled with a huge salary and benefits. It meant a great deal to him, and he didn't want to give it up so that he could be at home more. Besides, he believed he was doing what the man in the family ought to do – work to provide. And he *was* providing. They had a great home, and they wanted for nothing. He was saving money for the future and investing it. He could not understand what Mary had to complain about.

Mary understood. She listened, and she did not disagree. She said, "I know, Peter. I know. I just realized that you were being fulfilled and I was not. I also realized that I did not want to take that away from you. I don't want to be the reason you give up your dream job."

Nevertheless, he was troubled. Having the dream job and having the dream family made a package. And the dream family was, when it came down to it, a group of people who were there but didn't demand too much of his time and energy. They made him feel that all was right with the world, because he could come home, find them looking beautiful and satisfied, and he could feel that all parts of his life were functioning well. Coming home to an empty house would be a hint that something wasn't right.

Over time Peter made an attempt to see things as Mary did, but this was in the effort to get her to reconsider leaving. She stated that she would give that a try. Peter attempted to identify and reveal his emotions, to connect with Mary and spend time with the family. He said he valued the family over his job, but his heart was not really in that assertion. Over the course of therapy, it became apparent to both of them, not just to Mary, that they each wanted different things. When that became clear, they turned a corner and began working together to create the best possible co-parenting plan that they could. They were both at peace, even though there was a parting in the offing, a dissolving of a relationship that had been, and this brought up feelings of sadness and grief.

Discussion

The issue of purposive behavior often reduces to a discussion of whether or not there is free will. In psychology there are other terms for it. Psychologists create technical constructs to help operationalize what they are talking about, but it often seems like business speak. In fact, it is business speak – the business of psychology. So, instead of simply pondering whether people have free will, they wonder whether there is such a thing as

"agent causation" or if everything dissolves to "contextual causation." In other words, do we choose or does the environment determine one's course of action?

Working with dyads includes considering choice, motivation, and purpose. That is because couples have to navigate that territory with each other. Gestalt practitioners would say it also must include interest, and that is because a common assertion has been that interest organizes one's field, and the dyad is a non-independent, two-person field.

If you go online to look for books on the subject of purpose, you will find hundreds of them. They are written from a variety of perspectives, and they are virtually all "self-help" books. In the world of Christianity, I call the thinking that goes into such books "formula Christianity." They reduce complex processes down to simple elements, and they add them together as if applying the formula will produce the desired results. But very few things are that certain, and the same thing applies to secular self-help books.

In 1938 B.F. Skinner wrote *The Behavior of Organisms*, in which he tried to apply the study of spinal reflexes to the purposive behavior of human beings (Timberlake, 1988). In 1939 Kurt Goldstein wrote *The Organism*, maintaining that one could not understand the reflex arc outside of the brain in which it was resident, and one could not understand that brain outside of the body of which it was a part, and one could not understand that body outside of the environment in which it lived. A robot is programmed and determined, but a whole human being makes choices. Behaviorism has its limits.

Motivation can be understood as the reason why someone does something, as when asking, "What on earth possessed you to do that?!" The person asking that question wants to know the motivation, the reason forming the ground for some action. Motivation can also be understood as the desire one has to do something, and here some people believe such motivation is of basically two kinds: appetite or aversion, also understood in classic experimental psychology using rats as "*approach-avoidance*" (Lang, 1995).

Another way to see motivation is to view the source of motivation as either internal or external. However, given that people are "of the field," that they are organism-environment kinds of beings, motivation cannot be simply internal *or* external. It must be a product of the person as situated (which people always are). An example of this is the thinking of the sociologist Margaret Archer, who proposed an emergentist understanding of the relationship between human agents and social structures (Elder-Vass, 2007). Put simply, human beings functioning in roles in society make choices and carry out their responsibilities according to their values, and that activity gives rise to social structure (structure is emergent of agentic action). Social structure, then, exerts downward influence upon agentic action. It is a both-and world.

The motivation and behavior of individuals in society are functions of the values they have formed as a result of being thrown into the world and living in specific regions of society (i.e. families and communities). However, it is too simple to say that our values, choices, and actions are determined. Resilience, for one thing, indicates that while most people might take the right turn under certain circumstances, some will take the left. They will choose what Peck (1988) called the road less traveled.

Is there agent causation? Yes. Is there contextual causation? Yes.

Abraham Maslow became famous for creating a hierarchy of needs and these needs were updated to consist of eight levels (Maslow, 1970a, 1970b/1964) (see Table 12.1).

His methodology was questionable, but these descriptions and this organization of needs has resonated with people for years. Rather than box people into such a structure, I prefer to realize that at any given time a person can manifest an array of needs and motivations, that needs will be based on values and worldviews, and that beliefs about what is proper or possible will direct the intentionality of figure formation (and satisfaction). That will give rise to behavior, some kind of action.

When Mary sat watching her children and experienced a sudden shift in perspective, it led to intentional change, and I

Table 12.1 **Needs hierarchy**

Level	*Title*	*Description*
1	Biological and physiological	Basic physical and material requirements for survival
2	Safety	Protection from weather, security, order, stability
3	Love and belonging	Friendship, intimacy, belonging to someone or some group of people
4	Esteem	Valuing oneself for mastery, independence, and ability to wield power, and being valued by others
5	Cognitive	Curiosity and meaning, predictability, understanding, the acquisition of knowledge
6	Aesthetic	Appreciation for beauty, balance, composition and design
7	Self-actualization	Personal growth, realizing potential and fulfillment
8	Transcendence	Helping others achieve and grow and become self-actualized

Source: Adapted from McLeod (2016).

mean that in terms of both purpose and phenomenology. The aboutness of her experience, the links to her values, and the implications of those links triggered a shift in her purposes. With that came clarity, excitement, and energy. With that came new hope. With that an enlarged vision of her life came into view. She sensed what could be, compared it to what had been, and made a choice. She honored her relationship with Peter by sincerely engaging in the therapeutic process, but it ended up where she had imagined it would.

On Peter's part, although he was forced to examine his life and his relationship, he did give it an honest try. In the process, he came to realize that it meant more to him to keep his dream job than to keep his marriage. He found ways, working with Mary in the co-parenting agreements, to have acceptable degrees of time with his children and to be able to continue enhancing his career.

The therapeutic process that resulted in these realizations included all the things I have been identifying: dialogical

inquiry, phenomenological investigation, field theoretical strategies, experiments, use of self in therapeutic presence, and so on.

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13

SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL DYNAMICS

This chapter addresses physical aspects of intimate contact. It also deals with sexually compulsive behavior and the issue of mutuality in sexual relationships.

Terry and Freda

[The "clients" mentioned in this chapter are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

Terry was a middle-aged man who was married and had two teenage children. When he came to my office he was well dressed. In fact, he was meticulous about his dress. His shirt was pressed, and his tie was neatly tied with a symmetrical knot, and his slacks matched the rest of his outfit. He had a leather belt that matched the color of his shoes. There was just one thing that gave him away. His shoes were scuffed, old, and deformed from having been worn so long. Everything else was correct, but the shoes screamed at me.

Terry was a medical doctor. He worked at the hospital and he was busy all the time. He rarely saw his children, because he was at work when they were awake. He was also a Christian. He made a point of telling me that. At first I did not know how

that related to everything that was coming out. He was telling his story. He and his wife, Freda, had come from another country. They were trying to assimilate. She had obtained employment, and that was not easy. Between their respective schedules and the demands upon them both, they rarely saw one another. They seldom attended church together, although Freda was able to attend almost on a regular basis with the children.

The more Terry spoke the more I had the feeling that he was not getting at the reason he had come to see me. I said, "And *what* was the reason you came in to see me?"

He paused. He looked down at the floor. He said, "I have a sexual problem."

I have learned to normalize sexual issues in therapy. So I speak directly and as clearly as possible in responding to such statements as Terry had made. I said, "What is it?"

He said, "Pornography."

"Oh," I said. That is when his narrative about being a Christian began to make sense. I said, "Can you say more? How is pornography an issue for you?"

He looked a bit surprised. His speech became halting.

I said, "I notice you stumble at this point responding to me."

"Yes," he admitted. "This is very difficult for me."

I did not say anything. I waited. I watched him. He grasped one hand with the other and began wringing it like a wet dishtowel.

I said, "If your hands could speak, what would they say?"

He said, "They would scream! I hate myself!"

"Hands," I said, "why do you hate yourself?"

He said, "Because I do the things I hate and cannot stop."

"You mean the pornography?"

He said, "Yes."

I asked him to tell me more about that. I wanted to know what kind of pornography he watched, how he watched it, and what he did when he watched it. He told me that he watched

group sex, females, men having sex with women, and he accessed it all through the internet. I asked clarifying questions: I wanted to know if he ever looked at bestiality, children, males having sex with males. He denied all that. I asked him how often he watched pornography, and I asked him if he masturbated when he watched it.

"Here and there," he said.

"What does that mean? You watch it in various places?"

"No. I don't watch it constantly. It's not right, and so I try not to watch it."

"So, 'here and there' means sometimes and not others?"

"Right."

"And do you masturbate when you look at it?"

"Yes."

"How does your wife feel about you using pornography?"

"She hates it. Our relationship suffers. That's one of the reasons I'm here."

"What happens when you try to interrupt yourself and *not* watch?"

He said that he could keep away from it for a time but that ultimately he came back to it.

"You feel enslaved to it?" I asked.

"Yes. And I know that that is wrong."

"Do you think that Jesus is displeased with you? How do you reconcile your behavior with pornography with your Christian faith?"

That is when he choked up and tears formed in his eyes. "I don't reconcile them."

I asked him to tell me at what point, after how many times watching people have sex and masturbating, Jesus would reject him, and he could not answer. His theology informed him that he was "saved" through grace and not because of any religious things he might do or not do. However, he also informed me that he felt that he was causing Jesus pain, adding to his suffering by this sin. It grieved him deeply. He wanted to be able to stop.

We tried developing other areas of his life, widening the scope of his life world with the aim of reducing the centrifugal effects of what appeared to be his addiction to pornography.

"I notice that we are talking about everything but your relationship with your wife," I said one day.

He nodded and I asked if his wife would be willing to come in. He said she would, and so they both came to my office one afternoon.

Freda was neatly dressed, everything in place. She was reserved. I thanked her for coming and said it would help me to understand her husband better. She waited. She was not giving of herself in the conversation.

I said, "So, Terry described to me his use of pornography, and I am wanting to know where you are at with that."

She said that it was disgusting to her and that she felt dirty because she knew he did it.

I said, "*You* feel dirty?"

"Yes. That I would be with a man who did that. I can't let him touch me." She went on to tell me that his use of pornography was not news to her. She had known about it for years.

I turned to Terry. I said, "She's known about it for years. What has your sex life with her been like for those years?"

He looked uncomfortable. He did not answer.

I turned to Freda. I asked her the same thing, and she said, "Like I said. I can't be with a man who does that."

"So, what's it been like for you not to have sex for years?"

She said, "It has not been a problem. I don't miss it."

I turned to Terry and said, "She doesn't miss it."

He looked me straight in the eyes and said, "I know."

Freda wanted to know if I wanted to know anything else. She was all business. She really did not want to be there with me and Terry. She did not think therapy would do any good, because her husband had tried and tried, supposedly, to stop viewing naked women and people having sex. It disgusted her.

"It disgusts you?" I asked. "Where in your body do you experience that disgust?"

She looked confused. Then she told me she thought that was a strange question. She told me that if there wasn't anything else I wanted to know about her husband, then she felt like leaving.

I asked her if she enjoyed sex at any time in her relationship with him, and she told me she could not remember. It seemed to her that it had been going on so long she could not recall what it had been like before she discovered what he was doing.

I asked her how she had found out about it, and she told me she walked in on him when he was masturbating. And then she told me he had lied to her many times, claiming that he was no longer doing it. She told me that the lies hurt her more than the pornography, and for that she felt as if he were having an affair with the women on the internet.

I clarified that she did not mean that she thought he was actually contacting other women but that he was pleasuring himself by looking at them, and for that she felt cheated. Then she stood up, announced that she was done, and she left.

Some stories about psychotherapy or coaching have happy endings, because people confront themselves, become more aware of themselves, and they change something about what they are doing or how they are doing it. Terry and Freda's story was not one of them. Freda never returned to the dyadic therapy context. Terry kept coming for a time.

In addictions work there is the realization that at some level the addictive behavior serves some purpose for the addicted person. They like who they are when they are "on" their drug of choice. Their repetitive behavior serves them in some way. Because it serves them, it is not easy to give up or replace. Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Which came first, Freda's disgust with sex with Terry or Terry's use of pornography? By the time I had both of them with me that pattern had been established. Terry used pornography as a substitute for an intimate sexual relationship with Freda, and that was reinforcing Freda's rejecting him sexually. If it had not been for Terry's religious conflict, perhaps he could have simply accepted his

creative adjustment and let himself off the hook. As it was, he could not.

Discussion

I am not a sex therapist. That is not my specialty, and I defer to people whose specialty it is. I just speak from my own experience of having worked with couples for a long time. That being said, there are a few things I have noticed.

The first thing I have noticed is that people seem to fall into one of two camps on the subject of sex. When I say subject, I do not mean it in an abstract, once removed way. People fall into two groups based on how they feel about *them* having sex. Sex is personal. I'm talking about you and me. How do you feel about sex? Is it a good thing or a bad thing?

Sex is a good thing, and sex is a bad thing:

- Taken personally, sex is a good thing when a person likes it, thinks about it in creative ways, thinks about it often, wants to do it, and wants to have it. Sex is such a good thing when this kind of sexual energy occurs in a relationship and a person has the ability to express it. Taken personally, sex is a bad thing when a person does not like it, thinks of it as a chore to please someone else, wants to get it over so they can do something they really want, and resents the chore altogether.
- Sex is a good thing when it is shared between two interested and consenting people, but sex is a bad thing when it comes between two people and forms an irritating fester in their relationship or when sex is not consensual and given freely.
- Sex is a good thing when the spiritual base of two people celebrates it, but sex is a bad thing when the spiritual base grounding two people regards it to be sin, dirty, fleshly, and to be highly regulated.
- Sex is a good thing when people approach it with freedom and abandon, but sex is a bad thing when people suffocate it with rules and regulations.

- Sex is a good thing when people have not been spoiled by the abusive behavior of others, but sex is often a bad thing when the prurient hunger of those with authority drives them to use the vulnerable for their own greed.
- Sex is a good thing when it is balanced with relational intimacy, but sex can be a bad thing when it's the main event and void of warmth, caring, and affection.
- Sex is a good thing when two people overcome their physical limitations with creative problem-solving, but sex is a bad thing when the need cannot be satisfied due to stifling physical barriers.

We are sexual beings. We are male and female. Sex is at the core of what we are, what kinds of beings we are, and sex is part of who each one of us happens to be as a person. So all the things said about the self in gestalt therapy apply to one's self as a sexual self. The sexual self emerges at the boundary of contact in the midst of sexual contexts of various kinds. If a person wants to have a stronger sense of him or herself as a sexual being, then sexual activity is necessary.

I used to think that men were naturally driven sexually and women were not so interested. After spending years in therapeutic work with many people, I have learned that people, both men and women, display variety. That is so in regard to sexual interest and energy as well. Here is an analogy: a depressed person cannot wait to feel like doing things in his or her best interest because that may never happen while they lack the energy to get out of the house or engage. So they have to purposefully engage, to become active doing what makes sense as being good self-care. It is the same with people who lack sexual imagination and interest. They cannot wait until they are in the mood or have the sexual energy, because that may not happen. Rather, they must become active, engage within their lifeworld, and then monitor, watching what emerges. Conversely, those with what might be regarded as too much sexual energy for a given context need to purposefully interrupt it. Is that just

prudish advice? No. I consider it an experiment in which they will create a void, an empty spot where sexual action, very likely familiar and customary action, once took place. In that space there will likely emerge something that would be beneficial to pay attention to.

In the case of Terry and Freda I observed to Terry what was obvious. Freda did not want sex with him, and Terry wanted sex using pornography to stimulate himself. Neither, it appeared, wanted to change the situation.

14

LIMITS AND BOUNDARY DYNAMICS

Burt and Danielle

[The "clients" mentioned in this chapter are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

Burt and Danielle had been married for thirty years when I met them. They had lived in many places in the world, but when I met them they were living near Monterey, California. They had raised three children. By the time I met them, their routines with one another were so familiar that they did not notice them. They fell right into them. When one turned to the left, the other tilted the head to the right. When one complained about light, the other gave thanks for the darkness. It was, as the saying goes, a dance. However, it was not a good dance, and others noticed. Others suggested they get some help, and so Danielle came first.

"I've been told we need some help."

"Who told you that?"

"My kids. My pastor. My best friend. They all said I should come see you, and part of the reason is that you are a Christian."

"I am, but how does that fit?"

"My husband doesn't think much of therapy, but he has the best chance of coming too if the therapist is a Christian."

"Oh. What about you? How do you feel about therapy?"

"Oh, well we can try it, but honestly, I don't think anything is going to change my husband."

"So, you don't think much of therapy either?"

She smiled.

I continued, "And that's what has to happen? We have to change your husband?"

I hold that couples work is always about the two people, not just one. I had spoken with tongue in cheek. She noticed, and she said, "Well, maybe I might need to change *something*."

I asked her to tell me about Burt, and she described a man full of himself, with big deals and big connections. She described a man who made friends with people in government and put together ministry deals, gave away thousands and thousands of dollars to religious endeavors, but paid little attention to his family. While he was basking in the glow of his own wonderfulness, investing time and resources, she literally had to scrounge food to put on the table. If she asked for money to run the household, he would give her about one-third of what was actually necessary to get the job done. He had no obvious compassion, and his warmth was frigid.

I said, "This is how you see him?"

"Yes. That is how he is. You will see."

When I got Burt in, and he did come, he told me with bitterness in his voice that he could have been a pastor but his wife was not obedient. She had a strong will and she would not willingly subordinate herself to him. Instead of being a pastor, then, he put all his energies into creating parachurch ministries, and he liked collaborating with government. When he was with the people in those ministries, he was like a pastor. He felt respected, and he could talk his favorite brand of theology and critique the society in which they were all embedded. At home, he had no conversation with his wife,

who, as he already knew, did not share his perspectives on theology and society.

I said to him, "I notice that when you speak of yourself, it is as some kind of relation to your wife – a comparison, a reason you could not be what you wanted to be, and so forth. Do you see what I mean?"

"No," he replied. "You are going to have to be smarter than that if you want to work with me."

I laughed and replied, "I can see that you are very perceptive. While I am extremely intelligent, every once in a while I say something absurd; so, I invite you to tell me when that happens."

He smiled. He said, "I might do that."

Quite often Burt turned his critical eyes on Danielle. He would berate her for not having his meal ready for him on time. He would tell her she was stupid for wanting to socialize with various people in the community because of what he knew about them, and he often told her she should take better care of her appearance, because she looked frumpy and when she went out in public people would know she was his wife. If she asked him for more money to pay bills with or to obtain groceries, he would criticize her and tell her she was inept as a household manager, and, oh, how he wished he had a wife who was a Proverbs 31 woman.[1]

Over time in sessions Burt fell into a predictable routine. He said nothing derogatory. He let Danielle describe the longing she had for him to share his life with her, for them to begin doing things together. I tried to draw him out by asking him what he heard her say, what it meant to him, how he felt about it, and he would provide short and perfunctory responses that meant nothing and went nowhere. Either that or he would ignore what Danielle had said and go off on a tangent about some religious controversy, trying to pull me in as an authority who could answer some esoteric theological point. This was intellectualizing as a distraction from dealing with Danielle's needs. Some people engage in that kind of thinking and

expression as a defense out of awareness, but what Burt was doing was obvious. I suspected he was doing it with full awareness and toying with both me and Danielle. So I began pulling him back by saying bluntly, "That is a distraction," and then asking him to respond to what Danielle had been talking about. Then he would give some loose association or vague response, talking on and on about it but not really responding to it.

One day I interrupted the irrelevant soliloquy and turned to Danielle. I said, "When he does this what happens for you?"

She said, "He does this all the time whenever I try to talk with him."

Burt sat with an innocent look on his face. He expressed feigned surprise.

After our sessions, when Burt got home he would say nothing at all about what came out in therapy, and he would go about his business as if it had never happened. Then the same routine would transpire and he would demean Danielle all over again. Her friends tried to get her to leave him, but she would not. They both drifted on out of therapy.

Discussion

Boundary, as in boundary setting, can be confused with boundary, as in the contact boundary. What makes it all even more confusing is that activity at the contact boundary is certainly involved whenever anyone attempts boundary setting. I want to talk about both, and I need to say before I get into this that I owe a lot to people who have gone before me in the recovery movement, and especially to Keith Miller. In his book, *The Taste of New Wine* (2009), he talks about boundary setting, and I am in debt to that discussion.[2]

Contact Boundary

My friend, Dan Bloom, has done considerable thinking about activity at the contact boundary. He often reminds people what Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951) had to say about the

contact boundary – that it is the organ of contacting (Bloom, 2016). At the same time it is the experience of contacting; experience emerges from the meeting of the organism and whatever is other to the organism, and the "place" where that meeting occurs is the contact boundary. But here we have a mind boggler – at least what I am going to say boggles my mind. Since we are always situated, it is our very nature to be an organism-environment kind of creature. It is the anthropology of early gestalt therapy (Brownell, 2016) to recognize that contacting is essential to our nature. The place where that contact takes place is called the contact boundary and it is within us, not a membrane around us, or a physical location outside of us. We are organism-environmental selves. Relating, and so relationship, is about what we are; we are relational selves. We are always of the environment, in one physical place or another, in some phenomenological space or another.

Since the boundary is both a point at which meeting occurs and the experience of that meeting, it is reasonable to assume that a variety of experiences, different kinds of meetings, occur there. Further, the person having such experience chooses, gives up choice, and otherwise self-regulates with regard to that meeting and the experience that emerges from it. That leads to the issue of boundary dynamics and boundary setting in the other sense of the word "boundary."

Boundary Dynamics and Boundary Setting

We have cats, many of them, and I've observed a few things about cats. When curious, a cat will slowly, cautiously move toward the object it wants to investigate. Getting close, it will step forward and rock back, step forward and rock back until it's gotten a good smell of and sometimes even touched its nose to the object in question. That is a boundary dynamic. It is the way the cat moves toward a novel stimulus and decides what it wants to do with it. If it is food, the cat may consume it, but also may spit it out. If the cat doesn't like it and doesn't want it, it either puts it away or gets itself away from it. That process is also simply self-regulation.

Boundary setting in the sense of the recovery movement is self-regulation. It is the management of difference that requires watchfulness. Human beings, I think, have the ability to put up with a lot from their fellow human beings, but at some point what one is doing becomes unwanted (noxious, nauseating, painful, poisonous, or too costly) to the other.

As mentioned, Keith Miller talked about boundaries as fences and walls, and I like that. With a fence two people can meet and talk while each remains on his or her side of the fence. They can have a relationship with limits, limited contact, as long as each one honors the fence, maintains the fence, practices good "fence etiquette," and so forth. But if someone demonstrates that he or she is either unwilling or incapable of observing the integrity of the fence, then the other often extends that fence into a wall. With a wall, the other is out. There is no meeting any longer, no conversation, and no contact.

What do people build fences and walls to protect? Some have identified these things as being internal or external, which is a heuristic just to distinguish kinds of issues. The "internal" boundary issues relate to what people feel, think, value, and want. The "external" boundary issues relate to one's physical body, personal space, and belongings.

There are different ways to go about fence building. You can announce that you want to have a conversation and then show the other person your fence. The fence itself is a two-sided statement, just as a fence actually has two sides that both parties can detect. It communicates that this is my side and that is your side. Both people have to know that there is another side that is "out of bounds." They have to know concretely what that side is. So one can call the meeting and just put it out, or one can build the fence one piece at a time over time. One can state things verbally, and one can communicate non-verbally. It rather depends on how well the other person is listening.

During the sessions I attempted to build some fences for the therapeutic process by telling Burt that some of the things he was doing were distractions. I could have made his behavior

more figural and put the spotlight on it. I could have told him to stop. Perhaps that would have helped, but I don't think the outcome, in terms of him sincerely engaging, would have been ultimately different.

Since self-regulation depends on being aware of one's experience, and thus one's contacting, I often asked Danielle to pay attention to something that was transpiring between her and Burt. I would typically ask her how it felt when he said or did something. She would go so far as to begin to touch how bad it made her feel, like the cat stepping forward and rocking back, but instead of continuing to step forward, she would ultimately rock back and stop there. She purposefully limited her contacting in that regard. In her dance with Burt she set no boundaries; she made no fences. Instead, he openly demeaned her, stepping all over her internal boundaries by questioning her judgment, disrespecting her feelings, and impugning her spirituality. He did the same with respect to her external boundaries by neglecting her welfare and making it difficult for her to get things done for which she would need money. He was passive aggressive and so was she. She talked about him and how bad their relationship was to her friends, who all lamented, commiserated, and told her she should kick him out. He would hear her requests for attention or resources, and then he would ignore them. She went to her friends for support. He went to his ministry buddies to feel important. They did not change anything. For some that might illustrate, according to one way of looking at it, that sometimes therapy does not work. I prefer to say that the process of looking at one's life and the way one self-regulates contacting in the satisfaction of figures always works. But the decision some people make is to retreat.

Notes

1 Proverbs 31 describes a virtuous woman with several noble characteristics: she was a woman of faith who respected her husband, a teacher of her children who also cared well for her own body, served her husband and her family, friends, and neighbors, was able to handle the finances, was creative and industrious, made her home an inviting place for others,

always made good use of her time and was, on top of all that, beautiful, with an inner beauty that surpassed her physical appearance.

2 It reminds me of meeting Keith at a conference on recovery. He was a featured speaker, and I was an attendee. We both entered the gym at the hotel at the same time, and we were both working out. After some elevated heart rates, we sat to rest and began talking. I thanked him for his book and told him it had meant a lot to me personally and to my family. He told me he appreciated that, and then he told me that from that point on it would be up to me, young people such as myself, he said, to continue writing and producing recovery-oriented material. I recall feeling encouraged by that contact.

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15

SPIRITUALITY

This chapter deals with the influence of religion and spirituality on couples.

Chet and Wynona

[The "clients" mentioned in this chapter are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

Chet was a pastor of a small, rural church when I met him, and Wynona was his wife. They had two children, both boys. They had been married for fifteen years. They met in Bible college, they had had dreams of sharing a successful ministry together, but neither of them knew what to expect. It had been a difficult journey. Chet was driven to have a growing church, but Wynona just wanted to have a growing relationship, both with her husband and with her Lord. While Chet read books about church growth, Wynona listened to Trinity Broadcasting, and she was increasingly drawn to the stories of miracles in people's lives, closeness to God, and the hope that God would indeed "move in a mighty way" in her own life. She did what she could as a pastor's wife, but she did not play piano, could not carry a tune, and so she worked in the kitchen and performed small, innocuous

works of mercy in the lives of the people in her husband's congregation. And that is how she saw it. The church was his congregation, because he made such a big deal out of being the pastor, the one God appointed to lead and watch over the people in that church.

Chet watched them closely. He told them which Bible was the right one to use, and he made sure the Bibles in the pews were all that translation. He not only told them what Bible to read, but he also told them how to read it, how to study the Bible, and he expected to see them at church with notebooks taking notes on everything he said. He taught the adult Sunday school class, led the midweek prayer group, and of course he preached a message on Sunday. He could not trust what anyone else might say. Ironically, his sermons were regarded as "gospel light" by those who knew anything, because he did not study as rigorously as he might have. Instead, he told spontaneous stories from the general narrative of his life, and he used illustrations taken from pastoral and homiletical resource journals. His preaching and teaching showed no indication that he understood the deeper things of the Christian life or had intimacy with God.

Wynona found time to be alone. Chet was out most of the time helping people. She took up gardening. She began painting. Typically, she would bring her paints, easel, and brushes out to a rural site and then spend hours there alone. As she painted, she talked with God. She poured her soul out, often cried, often felt drawn closer to God because of the beauty she saw in what He had made. She asked God why Chet could not understand what she wanted to share with him, but the only thing she got back was something like, "I see you" or "I'm here."

Chet passed judgment on many of the people Wynona saw on Trinity, and he made passive aggressive remarks to her while she watched them. He told her that under no circumstances could she ever let anyone in the church know she watched those programs. That grieved her, because she felt God speaking to her through them, but Chet didn't believe it. He could not

listen to her claim without marshalling arguments against it. Because that either led to an argument or a cold distance, over time he had learned to let it go. That is, he let it go on the outside, but not on the inside. It festered.

They came to me for coaching rather than therapy. "We don't need therapy," Chet claimed. "But I heard you did coaching and I thought maybe you could help us achieve some ministry goals. But first, do you do Christian coaching?"

"I can coach Christians."

"Are you a Christian yourself? I heard that you are."

"Yes. How is that important to you?"

"Well, I think only a Christian would be plugged into the Truth. I don't want some human, philosophical dribble. So, would you be giving us advice from the Bible?"

At that point I could have gotten into an abstract discussion about all truth being God's truth, and I could have lectured on the difference between coaching and consulting. We could have gone around and around about it, but I did not believe that would have been fruitful. So I passed up that opportunity, and I made a different choice. I said, "Could you tell me what you do want instead of what you don't want?" Then I turned quickly to Wynona before Chet could respond, and I said it to her. "What do *you* want?"

She said, "I want to be respected."

I said, "What would that look like to you? How would you know you were respected? Respected by whom?"

Chet started to speak but I held up a hand like a stop sign, and he stopped.

Wynona said, "I want Chet to respect me."

Chet started to speak again, and again I stopped him. I said to Wynona, "That is your goal for Chet. What is a goal you want for yourself?"

She said, "I want to have peace regardless of whether anyone respects me."

I turned to Chet and asked him what one of his goals might be, and he said sarcastically, "I want Wynona to respect *me*."

I noticed the sarcasm. I noticed his narrowed eyelids and the tension in his voice. I said, "What is the emotion that you are feeling right now?"

He quickly said, "I didn't come here to be psychoanalyzed!"

"Are you angry?"

"Yes. You stopped me from talking. And I *do respect* my wife!"

"Okay. So, without the sarcasm, what is one of your goals. You said you came here to get coaching for ministry goals."

He said, "I want my wife to be more involved in my ministry."

I said, "That is a goal for Wynona."

He said, "Okay, okay. I want us to develop ministry together."

I said, "Fantastic! That is a couple-type goal. You used the word 'us,' and whenever people say things like 'we' and 'us,' they are talking about their relationship. Whenever they say things like 'me,' 'mine,' and 'I' they are talking about individual issues and individual goals. What have you, Chet, heard Wynona say here so far?"

"She gave an individual goal."

"Right. You gave a relationship goal and she gave an individual goal. What does that mean to you?"

"It means we are not on the same page."

I turned to Wynona, and I asked her what she thought of Chet's goal, and she said, "He said it. It's *his* ministry, not mine."

Chet responded, "That's not gunna work. You have to be supportive of my ministry."

Wynona said, "Who says? Where does it say that?" Chet looked flustered but did not answer. She continued, "Seems to me there's at least as much support for me being a whore than there is for standing up front and being your ministry poster wife. You don't care about me."

From there we continued working on the contracting phase of the coaching relationship. Everything else flows from that with regard to coaching in general, and it is no different with regard to gestalt-based coaching. In gestalt-based coaching we might think of the goals as figures of interest. We might con-

sider the intentionality that stands behind them and leads back to the client's values. When I explored that with Chet and Wyonona what became clear was that Wynona loved God (and thus valued quiet times of devotion or worshipful times in church when she felt caught up and in His presence) and Chet loved the ministry (which meant that he valued meeting with people, helping them out with their needs, and making sure the church was running smoothly).

The difference in their perspectives was alarming for him to contemplate, because once again it seemed to him that they wanted different things, but at that point, after exploring the intentionalities and the values related to them, he realized that being on different pages had more far-reaching implications than he had first thought.

I challenged them to leave behind church, God, and ministry goals and to focus on finding, if they could, human and relational goals – something around which they could both say "we" and "us."

They struggled with that, especially Chet, but eventually they decided that as a couple they wanted to play with each other, to have fun together. So then we put together a plan to reach that goal, and they made themselves accountable to me by making short videos of the "fun" activities they created together.

Ironically, Chet loosened up and began to understand the intimacy with God that Wynona had cherished, and she felt more respected by him. It changed his perspective on ministry. Wynona never became the minister's poster wife Chet had wanted, at least not while I knew them. Chet remained largely rigid and rule-bound, but his tone in relating to other people softened.

Discussion

Spirituality and religion are often set against one another as a polarity, but I do not hold with that understanding. I have seen too many people practicing their spirituality within the structures of their religion. This doesn't mean that religion and

spirituality are synonymous. They are not the same thing, as I have explained elsewhere (Brownell, 2015). So, in terms of a dyad, it is possible for two people to endorse the same religion while having two different approaches to its practice. It is relatively easy to detect difference when one person is a Muslim and the other is a Christian. It is not so easy when both are Christian.[1] Also, as in other things, there is difference that attracts and there is difference that separates.

Legalism and Rigidity

When I was a young Christian, I attended a Presbyterian church; it was a good church, and they respected and taught from the Bible. One of my mentors at the time, however, suggested that I consider a different approach. When I considered it, I found myself faced with a decision. Did I believe it made more sense to view prophecy given to ancient Israel as now referencing the Christian church? Was I to follow covenant or dispensational theology? Which was the *right one*? I chose the dispensational route, started attending a Baptist church, and then enrolled in a Baptist seminary. At the seminary at that time they taught that the Catholic church was in error, if not heretical, and that some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit had become superfluous and so were no longer active. Although I did not realize it at the time, these positions were extreme and difficult to hold while meeting people in the world outside of the seminary cloister. Imagine my dismay when I was pastoring a small church in the Salinas Valley of California to have one of my congregation inform me that she was going to return to attending the Catholic church. Why? We yelled at one another across my desk (not my best behavior as a pastor), arguing the relative merits of such a move. It was pathetic.

There are systems of theology that are built upon systems of interpretation, that are in turn based on various commitments of faith, each with its own specific rules for making sense out of sacred texts. People can be rigorous in their study, applying these rules and then comparing the results with commentators

of various kinds. People can also just read and make up a meaning that fits the needs of the moment with no system of study and no checks and balances for their conclusions. With such a range of practices one might think that it makes sense to hold one's interpretations and conclusions loosely, but that is not my experience. People fight over these things, as evidenced by much church conflict. People kill over such things. If they do not literally kill, they often annihilate one another emotionally and interpersonally.

People do such things from a desire to be right, to live right, to teach others what is right, and then encourage them to live right as well. It is amazing to me that purposes such as these, felt to originate from good intentions, actually crush people. It is what Jesus observed when he confronted the religious leaders of his day who he said were guilty of placing burdens in the form of rules and regulations upon people without attempting to relieve the suffering that resulted. The Sabbath, he said, was made for people, not people for the Sabbath.

There is a great deal of emphasis on being right, on having correct knowledge and then organizing one's life accordingly. When someone believes that he or she is right, that they have the correct view, the true facts, etc., it is difficult to carry on a relationship, and that is because the dogmatic perspective trips people up, preventing them from hearing one another.

Rigidity is inflexibility. Rigid people do not bend. They are dedicated, and devotion is a good thing, but sometimes it takes a destructive turn. That kind of commitment also often feels like a weight too heavy for others to bear. In rigidity some have little capacity to see things as others do and accommodate or change their way of doing things. They see things one way, do them the way they see them, and have no patience for any other person's beliefs or behaviors that deviate from the chosen model.

Along with rigidity seems to come a reductionistic understanding of otherwise complex situations and processes. Consequently, these people often operate in binaries. Another name

for a binary is a polarity, and in gestalt therapy people identify with one end of a polarity and alienate the other. So they have a hard time even *seeing* the alienated other, but if they do, they tend to reject it, even passionately.

I say "it" here on purpose for a dehumanizing also occurs whereby it is not obvious how people are rejected, because "it" is the ideas and behaviors they exhibit, identify with, or advocate that are rejected (but these ideas, values, and behaviors are so closely associated with that person, that it seems like a rejection of him or her). For them the situation is black or white, and the other position is right or wrong (and there simply *are no other alternatives*). This often leads to a legalistic approach in relationships that destroys people in the effort to defeat the opposing idea, perspective, behavior, etc. It is Buber's I-It kind of relating in which the business of theology or apologetics takes precedence over the real people who simply differ. I once listened to a preacher in a church I was visiting tell the congregation that he felt called by God to confront people and show them where they were wrong.

There must be more; there must be a balance or even a preponderance of grace. Is there a place for correcting what one believes to be an error? Yes, but perhaps it is better done within the scope of a real relationship in which one affirms the people while disagreeing with their view, theology, or perspective. The difference here is between a way of relating that accepts people as given while holding one's ground and expressing oneself as he or she happens to be. Then, there is the potential in contacting for finding new understandings of spiritual commitments (which is not to say that one abandons what one has believed, but that it is possible to expand and see new facets of such commitments).

Legalism is a narrow, positivistic, and narcissistic approach to observing something, which means that a person believes that how he or she sees it is how it is. The more rigid and legalistic a person is the less they are able to appreciate the perspective of others, the less they are able to entertain the possibility that

they themselves have missed something. Weirdly, it is the claim to practical omniscience – that one knows it all. While few people would make this claim, it is implicit when someone believes they have seen the Truth, know the Truth as it is, and have the Truth, the absolute knowledge of things as they are, things as they exist in God's creation or even in the mind of God Himself. It is what some would call spiritual pride.[2]

When a person like this is in a position of authority, then rigidity and legalism become abusive. Oakley and Kinmond (2013) described spiritual abuse as occurring when an individual, church, or belief system dominates, manipulates, or castigates people through intimidation, mind control, or some other emotional or psychological constraint. The victims of spiritual abuse appear shamed into trying harder and harder to be more devoted or to mime the "correct" theology, and they cower in fear – not so much in fear of God, although that will result, but in fear of those they believe to be God's human representative(s) (Johnson & Van Vonderen, 1991/2011). In a study of wives abused by their husbands in the Jewish ultra-orthodox faith, spiritual abuse was seen as the attempt to impair the woman's spiritual worth, beliefs, or deeds, to prevent her from performing spiritual acts, and/or to cause her to transgress spiritual obligations and prohibitions (Dehan & Levi, 2009). It is an extreme form of legalism.

Such legalism or abuse involves totalizing and thematizing. These are two ways of doing the same thing. In thematizing, someone reduces a person to a topic, a category, a label, or a diagnosis. In totalizing, someone makes a person wholly into such a thing – an absolute version of that label or category. Both eliminate the complexity of another person. Saying something like "Jeb is a 'tough customer'" makes Jeb *into* something called a tough customer, and it makes him 100 percent such a thing, wiping out whatever else Jeb might be. This comes out in relationships in which religion is prominent when people use terms like "fundamentalist." At another point in history it would have been claims that someone was an Arminian or a Calvinist

(harking back to one of the most important theological debates of the seventeenth century,[3] and pointing to the difference between thinking a person can work his or her way into heaven versus thinking that one is granted salvation as a gift from God). The terms change over time, but the dynamic is familiar. Those who do not fit the mold, who are able to think critically, and who focus their thinking upon elements of a life of faith, are commonly thematized (labeled) and totalized (reduced absolutely to being the label or category). Conversely, those with a simple and concrete faith are thematized and totalized in a somewhat opposite direction.

Intimacy with God

This is a very gestalt-like concept, because what I'm talking about here is not knowing facts about God but having an experiential knowledge *of God*. Put another way, it is not about egoism (going up to one's head and intellectualizing on the subject of the person of God, what God has done, or whether or not God exists); it is about contact. It is the phenomenality of a contactful, dialogical relationship with God. It is what Dallas Willard (1999) called having a conversational relationship with God: "*Today I continue to believe that people are meant to live in an ongoing conversation with God, speaking and being spoken to*" (p. 18).

A person who knows what that is like has experienced what Rudolph Otto (1923) described as the *mysterium fascinans* (the fascination that draws one toward God) and the *mysterium tremendum* (the humbling respect that throws one on one's face before God).

To know God experientially is also to know one's creatureness. To know God experientially is to worship God, to present oneself to God with nothing hidden (because nothing can be hidden), to agree with Him, and to love Him. This kind of intimacy is an undoing. It is expressed in the prophet Isaiah's words, "*I am a man of unclean lips*" (Isaiah 6:5), on the occasion of his observing a revelation of God.

And then there is ecstasy. I once knew a pastor who would grab his tambourine and start twirling while some worship song was being sung. The man was taken and swept into the moment.

There is a flush that warms the core and an undoing that disarms the heart. Tears form, and one's voice chokes. I observed people having this kind of experience while touring the crypts of the popes beneath St. Peter's in Vatican City. We were six abreast in a line moving through the crypts, when suddenly the atmosphere changed. I could feel a kind of serious presence. As we moved ahead people began dropping out of line and stopping at one place. They were weeping. They were dropping to their knees. It was the tomb of John Paul II who was being considered for sainthood by the Catholic church. It felt as if angels were standing there with their wings unfolding.

To fall on one's knees, to look up, open one's palms, to lift one's arms – these are all expressions and responses appropriate for such a moment. For me, the experience of intimacy with God comes when I perceive the beauty of God, the wonder of His being, the completeness of His actions. It happens for me mostly through engaging my mind. Understand, I am not talking about egoism again, the reveling in abstractions. I am talking about a heightened sense of connectivity and a panorama in which I can see what God is doing. It is a feeling of being one with God out of appreciation for what God has done and what He is still doing.

I once asked God to reveal Himself to me if I read the New Testament, and He did. He met me there. I did not just get one aha experience after another, pieces of mind candy, I got the one who made my mind to respond to revelation to begin with.

I wonder what happens when you read that. This is usually the moment at which the reader, the one who hears, either understands because to some degree he or she has been there, or doesn't get it at all. Do you know what I am talking about? Are you curious? Are you interested, or do you immediately turn off? This is one important difference between people – one that Paul of Tarsus pointed to. It is the difference between

a spiritual person and a natural person; the natural person just doesn't understand the things of God because they are spiritually discerned. The difference between these two kinds of people will affect a relationship.

Intimacy with God is contacting divinity, and it is known phenomenally in a proprioception of spirit (Brownell, 2016). Just as bodily impressions inform us about our position in space and our sense of balance, proprioception of the spirit yields information about our position relative to God and the quality of balance in our relationship with God. People have more or less capacity in this area; so they need to attune to one another so that their relationship with God becomes something that enhances their relationship with one another. It requires that people adjust to one another.

Notes

1 As in other places where I have addressed religion and spirituality, I speak largely from my understanding of Christianity as a Christian. I have some understanding of other practices and spiritual commitments, but I speak here from what I know best and leave it to the reader to apply these things to other spiritual or religious situations.

2 This is not to say that we cannot know anything stable about God, that all our knowledge of God is in constant flux such that what we learned today might be proven exactly wrong tomorrow. While that could happen, the idea is to grow in one's knowledge of God, and that suggests a building process in which new is laid down over old, in which new is an expansion of old, not a direct repudiation.

3 This debate was about elements of soteriology, the study of salvation, including the questions of whether or not, or to what degree, a person chooses God or is elect and sure to believe in God. It harks back to an even older argument between Augustine and Pelagius in the fifth century and to the issues of the free will of human beings or the predestination of the elect of God, those chosen by God. Do we choose to believe in God or does God choose us and make certain that we will be saved?

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16

DYADS WITHIN TEAMS, FAMILIES, AND ORGANIZATIONS

Ralph and Aafii

[The "clients" mentioned in this chapter are camouflaged for confidentiality and/or they are composites of several clients. The dialogues themselves are fiction in that the actual words as they appear here were never uttered in quite this way. I did not record them, but I remember and know from many patients over the course of years that such words have been said repeatedly, such actions have taken place, and such people exist.]

Aafii Raad worked in the engineering division of a utilities company. He worked in a part of the company in which people had to know what they were doing or they could get hurt, or they could hurt others. He was 29 and smart. He knew what he was doing, but he had no patience with those who did not, for example his supervisor, whom he regarded as an inept, a bad leader.

Ralph was the supervisor in question. He was an older man who had been with the company for almost thirty years. He was nearing retirement.

When I had Aafii in session with me by himself I asked him what he wanted from working with me, and he was nonplussed at first. He was pessimistic that anything positive could result. I explained to him that although the company had hired me, I was not obligated to agree with them. I told him that I had obligated myself to get to the bottom of what was going on and to

either attempt to resolve it or to recommend an alternative course of action.

One day in session Aafii told me, "I don't have any respect for him. He plays favorites. He listens to his pet boys. He doesn't find out what is going on for himself. He stays in his office."

I said, "I hear that. You don't respect him. Do you think he knows something about the work?"

"Sure. In general. But he doesn't know what's going on. He doesn't know how people are clocking in and out but lying about their time. He doesn't know how one guy left part of an engine loose and that could have blown apart and killed someone. He doesn't know. He doesn't care to know. He's old. It's just time for him to retire."

I said, "I notice when you talk about him you make a face like you just tasted something bad."

"Yeah! I really don't like that guy."

"And just then you did it again," I said. "What is the connection between you not respecting him and thinking it's okay to break the rules yourself?"

He did not respond.

I said, "I don't mean to argue with you. I just notice that you are a man who finds fault with someone for not holding people accountable but you are not accountable yourself."

Aafii had been written up by Ralph for parking his bike, a scooter, inside the company gate in an area where it was not supposed to be, and for standing out there talking on his cell phone during company time.

"I guess I've given up. I was trying to advance, to get more training. To be promoted to the program for future management. He didn't put me through, and I'm one of his top men."

I said, "And now I notice that your voice has a soft and more quiet tone to it, and you kind of stare off to the distance away from me." He looked at me with a sad expression on his face. "What is the emotion you are feeling right now?"

"Discouraged."

"If they could, how would you prefer things to go instead?" I asked.

"I want to get into that training program. I want him to back off. I want fairness."

When I met Ralph, I asked him what he thought of Aafii, and he said, "He's a punk."

I said, "That sounded clear and definite." I asked for an explanation of what "punk" meant to him, and Ralph described his theory that Aafii was gang-affiliated and that he was rude and insubordinate. He told me that he had just decided to sideline Aafii and wait for him to leave, because he did not have the authority to fire him.

"Because you think he belongs to a gang?"

Ralph didn't say anything.

I said, "Aafii says you are out of touch and that you don't know what the men you are supervising are doing – about their time and the quality of their work."

"Punk. What does he know?"

"I notice a tone in your voice. What is it?"

"Yes. Disgust. What does he know?"

"I notice you ask that again, 'what does he know?' What *does* he know?" He did not say anything. I said, "I would like to have a meeting between the two of you. Would you be available for that?"

He said he would. Aafii said he would also. They both showed up and sat on opposite couches in my office. It was a tense meeting. At first no one was saying anything, but finally Aaffii told Ralph he did not deserve respect, that he didn't know what was going on in his section. Aafii cited specific instances, and Ralph looked surprised. The more Aafii spoke with knowledge of what had been going on in the section, the more Ralph became embarrassed, feeling overexposed. He finally said, "You are a gang member, and I don't want any gang members around me."

Aafii looked thunderstruck. "I am *not a gang member*!" he said.

"Well look at you. Tattoos. Punky clothes."

Aafii rolled his eyes. He shook his head, and he looked at me in frustrated silence.

I said, "I watch you both, and it seems you have accusations and judgments about one another, but you ask very few questions and do not seem to be curious about one another."

Aafii said, "What good would that do?"

Ralph claimed, "I don't have to be curious. I already know all I need to know about him."

I said, "Now I see that you look away from Aafii and me and you say that you don't need to know anything more about him while you sit in a meeting in which he claims you hardly know what is going on in your section."

Aafii jumped in, "Right! He doesn't really know me, and he doesn't know what I can do and what I have been doing."

Ralph turned toward me.

I looked at him and said, "Yes? You look like you want to say something."

He said, "I could be wrong. I don't know everything about him."

"You say you don't know everything."

He answered, "I don't know … much."

"Much?"

"I don't know about his family or what he wants to do in life. I admit he seems to have more than the average gangster."

Aafii said, "I am not a gang member."

Ralph said, "Okay. You're not a gang member."

I turned to Aafii and said, "Do you believe him?"

"No, I do not."

I said, "You sound so defiant. A few minutes ago he could not look at you. Now what do you see?"

"He is looking at me."

I said, "Say that again."

He said more loudly, "He is looking at me."

"You notice *that* he is looking at you? Do you notice *how* he is looking at you?"

Aafii looked puzzled. I said, "You look puzzled?"

He said, "I don't know that look on his face. I don't know how to answer you."

"What do you see?"

"I see he is not looking away."

"You seem to actually *notice* that he is not looking away."

"Right."

The two men laughed.

I said, "And now you both laugh?"

Discussion

Gestalt coaching is coaching, and it shares much with the dominant coaching approaches, but not all gestalt coaches operate as their counterparts in the wider field. The major load-bearing struts of gestalt therapy theory are used in gestalt coaching as well.

When it comes to working with dyads within teams, families, and organizations, one is not simply working with the two people in question. One is working primarily at the larger level of group or, as some say, "level of system." In fact, it is often the case that there are larger, systemic or field factors at play in all the various scenarios one might encounter while working with dyads within organizations.

With regard to the situation in which both Ralph and Aafii found themselves, the utilities company was a monopoly, only accountable to the national government. There was no need to care about too much as long as everything ran smoothly and nobody rocked the boat. But Aafii was a boat rocker by nature. That is what got him into a conflict with Ralph and that is what got both of them sent to me to mediate the situation. In that case my client was the utility company; my secondary clients were the two men in question. Ralph and the utilities company just wanted to make the conflict go away, but Aafii wanted justification.

As in all clinical or coaching processes it is imperative to forge a relationship with the clients and allow the details of the situation to emerge. And the "situation" is both that of the field

of the coaching or therapeutic encounter and that of the field which the clients bring in from the flow of their lives outside of the coaching or therapeutic context.

Edwin Nevis (1987) wrote of a process, of joining the "system" of the organization, by which I understand the field or sphere of influence comprising the physical constitution and social structure of the organization, and then providing a presence. That presence is the incarnated being of the coach who is available to others, aware of the way in which others are given, and self-disclosing of the experience of the coach in return. It is dialogical. It is "*therapeutic presence*" as described by Greenberg and Geller (2012), but in the context of a coaching relationship. Its vehicle is the expression of the coach in both spoken, verbal language and unspoken, non-verbal "language" (the kinetic language of the body).

Coaches might feel the need to "push the river," as an old gestalt adage had it, to make something happen. However, in pushing that river one can come to premature assessments and case conceptualizations. Rather than making something happen, it is often nice to simply let things happen, and then to notice what is happening.

There is also a tendency in much of coaching to use emotion wheels, values trees, and other tools and techniques in order to achieve efficient change (Denham-Vaughan & Gawlinski, 2016) and to ask many "powerful" questions, but the gestalt model of coaching is, to put it simply, more patient than that.

The coach's responses to the client, while practicing presence with the client, "*should also be descriptive and focused on what we perceive*" (Mann, 2010, p. 153). The role of the gestalt coach is to become an awareness-raising partner (Bluckert, 2015), and one way to do that is to use observational language because it contributes to reflexive thought on the part of the client, which has been found to be conducive to change (Banham & Schweitzer, 2016). Reflexive thought is when a person stops to consider him or herself, as if pausing to take a look at what he or she has been thinking, feeling, doing, valuing, and wanting. In

the Banham and Schweitzer study the model of asking numerous questions was found, ironically, not to lead to therapeutic change, because it did not result in reflexive thought. That is exactly the opposite of what most coaching programs teach. So, while there may be a use for numerous "powerful" questions, what is likely to be more powerful is what is taught in most first year gestalt therapy training programs: observe, bracket your own stuff and theories about the client, and then describe what you observe. That is observational language.

Siminovitch (2017) claimed that there is a difference between presence and the use of self, in that the use of self comprises what the coach does when manifesting presence, and one of those things is to observe. The language of observation, then, is one way to manifest coaching presence.

That is what I did with Ralph and Aafii. I introduced my observational language by saying "I notice that…" One can also say things like "I see that," "I hear…," "I perceive that…," "I detect…," "I observe that…."

When using observational language, however, it is important not to allow subtle interpretations to creep in. Those would be introduced by saying things like "I imagine that…," I tell myself that you…," "I have a theory about you that goes like this…," and so forth. Those are the results of observation plus the coach's or therapist's knowledge of other things. Those other things are important, but they are imported. They are not given.

In all of this it is easy to lose sight of the primary client – the manager at the utilities company who referred Ralph and Aafii to me. He represents the larger field of which the two other men are parts. And it is to him that I returned with my results. I recommended that Aafii be enrolled in the course on management to which he aspired, and that the manager offer it to him through Ralph. I told him that I believed the two of them had found room to improve their relationship, but I recommended more follow-up with me and coaching to see it through (time limited). I also recommended that the manager express his

expectations that the section would run more smoothly and that productivity levels be stated clearly and concretely. All these things were reflections of the perspective that just as the coach resembles the therapist, so the gestalt coach can often resemble the consultant. That is because of two theoretical commitments: the coach's presence as a whole, self-disclosing person, and the strategic use of the field. To make a recommendation is to interject one's opinion, one's take on the situation, into the mix, and that will have an effect. It should not be an accident. It cannot be an "intervention" in the usual sense of causing a pre-determined effect, because one never really knows how such experiments will turn out, but the action can be purposeful and carry a strategic purpose. That purpose is to assert an intentional influence.

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PART III
GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR THE THERAPIST AND/OR COACH



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17

REFERRING TO RESEARCH LITERATURE

Gestalt therapy as a field is currently experiencing the birth of a research tradition of its own. Before this, research was disdained as either being too aligned with managed care and cognitive behavioral therapy, both regarded as fostering a simplistic and reductionistic view of psychotherapy or too given to scientism. Because gestalt therapy is complex, highly nuanced, and committed to the processes of therapy as an idiographic pursuit, gestalt therapists did not trust the methods of research. Indeed, as late as 2013, Ken Evans (2013) was advocating that the gestalt ethos demands a more phenomenological, relational approach, and he criticized more experimental approaches to research as being faulty and misleading. He continued in this way of thinking during a research methods training seminar in Rome (2014) produced by the European Association for Gestalt Therapy. He was not alone. In responding to other prominent gestalt therapists who held similar views at that time, I insisted (Brownell, 2014a, 2014b) that gestalt therapists need to get serious about research. I advocated several things, some of which have begun to take place, that gestalt therapists could do if they were to get serious (teach research methods and philosophy of science at the institute level, support practice-based research projects through association/institution-level grants, publish research-oriented articles in gestalt journals, etc).

Well, the large majority of them *were* serious at that time, and they have become even more serious since. In 2017, for

instance, Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb (personal communication) asserted that about 800 gestalt practitioners were going to gather for a conference about gestalt processes and research that was to be held in Italy. The same year a dedicated research conference in Paris was sold out, with 200 participants. The gestalt world has finally embraced research of all kinds and is creating research projects, publishing research articles, and continuing to hold research-oriented conferences (Roubal, 2016). These endeavors are laying the ground work for meta-studies and are creating a gestalt therapy fidelity scale, by which to help establish treatment fidelity in the research that is being conducted (Fogarty, Bhar, & Theiler, 2016).

That said, as I write, I know of no ongoing research focused on gestalt processes with dyads. Both in the world of gestalt-based organizational consulting and coaching, and in the world of gestalt therapy, there is fertile ground and great opportunity to investigate coaching and therapy centered on the processes of change within the gestalt approach.

Gestalt therapy works. Taken in general as an approach, it has support in all three categories of gestalt-specific research, gestalt-hybrid research, and gestalt-consilient research (Brownell, 2016).

What is needed is process-outcomes research, working with various client populations, identifying the salient features of gestalt therapy that are potent for change. One such piece of research, for example, was mentioned in a previous chapter concerning observational language focused on client subjective experience (Banham & Schweitzer, 2016). Another is the use of behavioral experiments in the cognitive treatment of anxiety (Renner, Valentiner, & Holzman, 2017), an approach Gannon (2016) argued should be used more often. These are examples of gestalt-consilient research. In an example of gestalt-hybrid research, Butollo, Karl, König, and Rosner (2016) showed that the gestalt-derived approach they called dialogical exposure therapy (DET) for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared favorably with an established cognitive

approach (patients in both conditions achieved significant and large reductions in PTSD symptoms (Impact of Event Scale – Revised; Hedges' g = 1.14 for DET and d = 1.57 for Cognitive Processing Therapy CPT) which were largely stable at the six-month follow-up).

When gestalt coaches and practitioner researchers write about their processes, they could search the research literature for examples of gestalt-consilient findings regarding such things as therapeutic presence, working relationship, dialogical process, phenomenological exploration, field-theoretical strategies, behavioral experiments, use of self, etc. They could search the gestalt-hybrid research in Emotion Focused Therapy, Schema Therapy, and others. However, I say again, what is needed is for gestalt practitioner researchers, probably working in practice-based research networks, to produce gestalt-specific research for the use of gestalt therapy principles in both psychotherapy and coaching contexts. I suspect the results would be startling.

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18

ASSIMILATING COACHING INTO PSYCHOTHERAPY

Rather than develop an extensive list of procedures that a gestalt therapist could carry out if he or she wanted to assimilate coaching into their practice of gestalt therapy, I have only a few things to say. They are my opinions.

First, just as one cannot practice gestalt therapy ethically without having gone through an established gestalt therapy training program, one cannot understand what coaching is apart from being trained in it. A lot of people claim to be coaches and to do coaching, just as a lot of people say they "do a little gestalt." It takes a little time getting down the concepts and practices and then trying to utilize them. One must first grasp what coaching is before he or she can understand where there might be overlap or similitude enough to warrant assimilation.

When I went through my ICF-accredited coach training program at Duquesne University, I immediately sensed the overlap, as I have said previously, between gestalt therapy practice and the things we were taught to do as coaches. At first that alarmed me, because I thought the coaches would end up practicing therapy without adequate grounding. So I think coaches need to take a hard look at that. If people apply the theoretical core of gestalt therapy to coaching, they will end up being therapeutic (see Chapter 19). But the concern here is for an established gestalt therapist to somehow augment the practice of gestalt therapy with coaching technology. Is it possible without diluting and distorting gestalt therapy? What

happens to the paradoxical theory of change when people aim at results, when people set goals and work toward them? With regard to that question I would say that one cannot work toward a goal at any time but the current moment; goal attainment can be approached in a paradoxical fashion.

The gestalt approach to coaching is not exactly the same as what is taught in the larger field. Gestalt coaching is dialogical, field-oriented, phenomenological, experimental, and relational. So the assimilation can be comfortable.

What I noticed was that as I went through my coaching program, my practice of gestalt therapy did become more directive. I tended to ask clarifying questions around the client's figure of interest, and that is related to the phase called contracting in coaching. So, in my practice of gestalt therapy, I started trying to clarify what the client came for and what they knew about it. Sometimes it was very vague. What I was hoping to do was to create an influence, which would have been a field-strategic move, in favor of clarity. My being that way certainly had an effect on the client, however they responded to me. When I asked them what they wanted to get out of coming to see me, it was not sufficient to me for them to simply say they wanted to "be happy."

"What does happy look like to you?" That usually resulted in a few moments of contemplative silence.

Likewise, I began to find it useful to establish near the beginning what the sign might be to the client that he or she had achieved their goal. "How would you know if you got what you came for? What would indicate that to you?"

These kinds of questions help clarify figures. I find clarifying figures to be organizing for the work, and the use of coaching technology to facilitate that has affected my practice of gestalt therapy.

So that is perhaps something that therapists who are contemplating becoming trained as coaches might want to think about. It will likely affect how you practice as a gestalt therapist.

There may be countless ways in which this or that gestalt therapist would assimilate coaching process into their practice.

It is not different from assimilating practices from other clinical models. There just has to be a clear ground and center of gravity that dictate which way the assimilation is going. It must be that the core praxis is gestalt in nature and that the assimilation is toward, or into, gestalt therapy. As such, that which is assimilated becomes thoroughly digested and part of the body of gestalt therapy.

Whatever is consilient or consistent with gestalt theory can certainly be assimilated. The use of "tools" common in coaching can be used in gestalt therapy as well. I have used an emotion wheel in gestalt practice to help clients identify what emotions are at work for them at particularly troubling or confusing times. Is it a gimmick that undermines gestalt practice? I don't think so. I use it as part of experiments to find out what might happen if and when it is used. How available is the client to think about emotions? How much can the client experience their emotions? Emotional intelligence is having a name for an emotion and then being able to recognize and express that emotion in the world. That kind of knowledge enlarges the lifeworld of the client. It helps them to establish and maintain contact with others.

Another influence coaching has had on my therapeutic practice is in addressing the actions that a client might take based on the exchanges of any given session. "How might you act on that this week?" When they come back they may or may not have acted on it, and I may or may not inquire about that. But I believe it establishes a marker that can be helpful.

Gestalt coaching can take the insights and awarenesses gained in therapy and put them to work. So the client could move from seeing a therapist to hiring a coach, or the coaching-trained therapist could simply roll over into a coaching approach to accomplish some tangible goals and action steps related to what the client had become aware of in therapy.

19

ASSIMILATING PSYCHOLOGY INTO COACHING

Usually coaches are fearful of moving too far in the direction of assimilating psychology/psychotherapeutic practices into coaching. There is a field for this, however, and it is known as "coaching psychology." People who practice in this field are called "coaching psychologists." Because of their familiarity with research literature on a multitude of subjects, coaching psychologists can find support for something they were already doing and/or they can find ideas for augmenting their coaching practice with the results of good research in psychology.

The research into observational language to which I referred previously was a good example. When I found it, I immediately recognized the overlap with gestalt practice and the support for how we work dialogically with clients. In talking with one of the researchers involved, he admitted that "*Gestalt therapists have been very much at the forefront of many approaches which are currently being rediscovered!*" (personal communication, February 26, 2017). Indeed.

Grant (2017) claimed that positive psychology and coaching psychology share the development of theory that contributes to flourishing, and that both fields test their models with a range of methodologies. Reflecting a growing consensus, he stated that the false dichotomy sometimes seen between qualitative and quantitative methods is not helpful because both fields, positive psychology and coaching psychology, need research resulting from both categories of research.

It is actually common in many of the survey books on coaching to find chapters on such things as cognitive behavioral coaching, interpersonal coaching, mindfulness-based coaching, and so forth. Palmer and Whybrow (2008) provided a survey of approaches including behavioral, gestalt, existential, person-centered, Neuro Linguistic Programing, psychodynamic, and solution-focused approaches to coaching. Each of them provided psychological and psychotherapeutic illustrations and applications of that theory to the demands of coaching. Cox, Bachkirova, and Clutterbuck (2014) produced a similar volume with chapters on approaches to coaching, with insights from narrative therapy, solutions-focused, gestalt, ontological, and transpersonal, transactional analysis, and more.

In a forthcoming reference book for the field of coaching (English, Sabatine, & Brownell) contributing authors addressing over forty subjects incorporate a multitude of insights gleaned from various fields. Psychology and psychotherapy are two of them.

One can find countless insights from the research literature in psychology, and much of it is directly related to industrial and organizational psychology, which has overlaps with executive coaching or coaching dyads in organizations. A good place to look is the PsycInfo database of the American Psychological Association. If you cannot join APA and purchase a subscription to it, perhaps you can gain access through a local university or college. The database is often found in the library.

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CONCLUSION

A conclusion is best when it concludes. This is the place where the story reads, "The End." Unfortunately, I have not said everything or even said completely the things that I have said. So more needs to be said. I hope that I have at least provoked the thinking of people who work with folks in relationships – dyads and couples.

I love working with couples. The work energizes me, because the people are right there doing their "thing," and you can see it, join it, and help shape it. The work often feels to me like magic. We are going along and then one day the two people seem to have gotten hold of some realization, some awareness that makes a difference to them. They take off with it. They make the time well spent. They take their relationship to a new level.

Doing gestalt couple's work requires a reliance on the major tenets in gestalt therapy theory, regardless of whether or not a person is doing gestalt therapy or gestalt-based coaching. It is best when the therapist or coach is relaxed and present. Thus, it is best when the spontaneity of the gestalt coach or therapist is in full display. The gestalt practitioner is a genuine person and authentically *there, with and to.*

The second part of this book is filled with partials. There is not a complete story in any of them, and I don't recall writing a happy ending. That makes this section of the book useful for the reader's imagination. Go back and fill in the blanks. Choose how you would have worked, and what you would have done with the situations that were presented.

And now? Now I conclude.

INDEX

Page numbers in *italics* denote tables, those in **bold** denote figures.

aboutness of the experience 13, 17, 28–9, 43, 52, 68, 71, 181
abuse(d) 137; emotional and physical 136; sexually 137, 157; spiritual 170, 207; substance 104
abusing husband 60, 207
abusive 170; behavior of others 189; physically 136; rigidity and legalism 207
accountable 42, 48, 114, 116, 165, 203, 213, 216
adaptational value 171; of anger 169
adjust 48, 103, 107, 210
adjustment 133; creative 50, 77, 188
aggression 25, 76, 105, 126
aggressive 19, 133; passive 197, 200; response 151
aggressiveness 104
American Psychiatric Association 104–5
anxiety/anxieties 53, 104–5, 168; of coaches 173; cognitive treatment of 224; compounded 139
approach-avoidance 179
Archer, M. 23, 180
assertiveness 25, 76, 107, 122
assimilate(d) 32, 184, 229; coaching into gestalt therapy 227–8; environmental potential 83; new facts 46; organismic theory into gestalt therapy 10
assimilating learning 47; practices 229; psychology/psychotherapeutic practices into coaching 230
assimilation 72, 227–8; of coaching into therapy 5; into gestalt therapy 229; of novelty 78; of psychology into coaching 5
asymmetric 161, 163; relationships 162
attending: church 164, 204; emerging relationship 17; internal experiences 13; inward 22; made a point of 155
avoid 54, 56, 144; conflict 105, 117; consequences of addiction 162; father's displeasure 135; mental health care 134
avoidance 105; approach-avoidance 179
awareness 11, 13, 16, 24, 26, 70, 106, 121, 135, 194, 232; bodily 17; building 41; classic exercise 52; client 45, 54–5, 57; cycle of experience **71**; of difference 32, 102; emotional 14, 172;

awareness *continued*
expansion of 33; gained in therapy 229; grounded in 76; growing 73; heightened 50; increasing 14, 27, 36; of intentional objects 29, 71; interoceptive 14, 172; of oneself 25, 82; of patterns of thinking 57; present through 30; raising partner 217; relationship 133; through curiosity 55; through description 54; through observation 52; two-way 67

Banham, J. 217–18, 224
be there 159; fully 22; not want to 186
belief(s) 93n1, 150, 180; attempt to impair 207; deviating from chosen model 205; in God 156; motivational impact 172; shared system 5n1; system 207
biopsychosocial 22
blame 127; self 128
blaming 130, 159
Bloom, D. 12–13, 18, 194–5
Bluckert, P. 50, 217
boundary 169; contact 16, 30–1, 33, 35, 60–1, 90, 102, 120, 161, 189, 194–5; dynamic 195; issues, internal or external 196–7; setting 194–6
brane 31–3; *see also* membrane
Brownell, P. 4, 10, 12, 18, 28, 36n1, 56, 68, 79n1, 82, 90, 195, 204, 210, 223–4, 231
Buber, M. 15, 21, 206

call 139, 147–8; attention 130, 137; of the coachee 52–3; the meeting 196; out 115; and response 15–16; satisfaction of figures of interest 62; spiritual pride 207
Cartesian 19–20; *see also* post-Cartesian
cat(s) 26, 195, 197; caged 47; feral or stray 48; hiding 75; pet 33
chiasm 69, 121
Chrétien, J.-l. 15–16
Christian 5n1, 183–4, 191–2, 201, 204, 210n1; conservative 110; faith 185; family 156–7; life 200
Christianity 5n1, 149, 179, 210n1
Christians 156, 164, 201
church 2, 51, 168, 200, 203–5, 207; attending 164, 184; Catholic 204, 209; communities 3; experiences with 156; growing 199; leadership 165; life 167; ministries 110, 165–6, 192; parachurch ministries 192; pastor 166, 168, 170, 174; preacher 206; rural 199
Clark, A. 87, 89
client's experience 54, 57, 93, 107, 141; emotions 229; follow wherever it takes 78; in-the-moment 56; intentionality of 43; phenomenological 14; subjective 224
co-dependency 154, 162; co-dependent tendencies 157
coaching 24, 40, 43, 46, 60, 62n2, 113, 187, 201; assimilation into therapy 5; centered on processes of change 224; Christian 201; contacting 60, 78; contexts 225; contracting phase 202, 228; cycle of experience 70, **71**; dialogue 57; dyads 231; emotional intelligence 173; encounter 217; engagement 58; executive 3, 41, 51, 55, 231; goal-oriented nature 121; goals 107; ideal client 51; intentionality 73; life 3, 41; non-independence 97;

presence 55–6, 61, 218; process 45, 50, 56–7, 121, 216, 228; profession 42; program 1, 218, 228; psychologists 230; psychology 230; relational process 61; relationship 11, 50, 55, 202, 217; session 45, 48, 87, 89; strategies 109, 121; technology 227–8; tools 173, 229; trained therapist 229; unilateral experiment 122; *see also* gestalt coaching
coaching approaches 61, 77, 216, 229, 231; dominant 216; gestalt 64
Cognitive Processing Therapy CPT 225
commitment(s) 22, 205; of faith 172, 204; of God 69, 171; religious 157; spiritual 206, 210n1; theoretical 219
commit/committed/committing 1, 46; to memory 47; offense 147; to processes of therapy 223; to values 172
communication 67, 119, 132; clear 74; counterproductive 5; dynamic 42; gender-specific 128; personal 30, 36n7, 224, 230; relational level of 119–20, 140; styles 123
complex adapting systems (CAS) 23–4
compulsions 53; sexually compulsive behavior 183
constructed mind 85
construction(s): abstract 74; between self and other 53
construct(s) 14, 16, 84; of contacting 19, 56, 64, 78; forgiveness 150; here-and-now 139; phenomenological 68; relational 3, 159; of self-regulation 77; technical 178; theoretical 4; *see also* deconstruct
contact 4, 12–13, 19, 50, 65–6, 72, 121, 172, 198n2, 208; boundary 16, 30–1, 33, 35, 60–1, 90, 102, 120, 161, 189, 194–5; cycles 64, 67, **71**; difficult 22; with environment 70; establish and maintain 229; established by similitude 32; goal-oriented 21; with God and spiritual self 79n1; improve 107; in-the-moment experience 56; intimate 21, 183; lack of 163; limited 196; at one point in time 20; with one's existence 14; over time 4, 21, 55, 102; personal 129; presence of 163; quality of 55; real 90; therapist-client 131, 141; through the body 140; and withdrawal 64
contacting 5, 16, 19, 26–7, 33, 36n3, 56–7, 72–3, 78, 90, 163, 195; aesthetic of 161–2; awareness of difference 102; central construct of 64; clear sense of content 121; continuum of 74; cycle of 13, 64; divinity 210; dyadic 4; ease in 160; emergence of intentionality 17; first phase of 70; flow of 55; generates experience 61; intentional 65, 67–9; interruption of 102; limited 197; as meetings of various kinds 66–7; other women 187; potential for finding new understandings 206; process of 11, 35, 64–5, 68, 117, 172; process of meeting 12; produces experience 60; quality of intimacy in 34; relational sense of 68; results of 14–15; sense of peace in 162; skills of 55

contracting 113; with client 42; phase 202, 228
counseling 40, 134, 157–8, 164, 177
counselors 130
counterproductive 132; communication 5
couple(s) 4, 179, 232; client 131; co-dependency 162; counseling 157; destination of their choice 124; families of origin 134; influence of religion and spirituality on 199; non-independence 101, 104, 106; one member of a 103; therapy/coaching 9, 124; type goal 202–3
couples work 4–5, 9, 11, 24, 102–3, 179, 188, 192; gestalt 232; issues encountered 100
creative adjustment 50, 77, 188
Crocker, S. 12, 22
cry/crying/cried 99–100, 127, 131, 133–8, 141–2, 176, 200; *see also* tears, weeping
current experience 138; awareness with acceptance 14; contextualizing 119; focused attention on 106; free exploration of 57; of relational others 141
cycle of contacting 13, 64, 67
cycle of experience 50, 70, **71**, 73–4; mobilization phase 72

daughter 98, 138, 140
deconstruct 106
depression 104; depressed 105, 189
describing 13, 21; phenomena 131; what one perceives 132, 174
destructive 205; accusations 126; communication 5
dialogical exposure therapy (DET) 224–5
differences 1, 139, 142–3, 158, 162; gender 123, 128–9; in phenomenology 92; resolve 114–15
disorder(s) 97; externalizing 104; internalizing 104–5; personality 51, 104; post-traumatic stress 224; psychological 43
disrespected 169, 197
duality/dualities 31–2
dyadic 9; contacting 4; relationships 106, 144; therapy context 187
dyads 4–5, 11, 24, 100, 103, 176, 179, 204, 216, 224, 231, 232
dysfunction 43, 77; etiology of 57; intergenerational family 141; personality 104
dysfunctional 51, 97

Edwards, J. 15
ego function(ing) 16, 52, 71–3, 78, 82, 121, 172
embarrassed 214; embarrassment 82, 166
embedded 12, 55; environmentally 60; meeting with an Other 30; mind **86**, 89; perspective 17; in society 192; situated mind **84**; in a situation 60
embodied 80–1, 89–90; being 56, 120; cognition 60; experience 142; habitation of Cartesian space 20; inter-subjectivity 131; meeting with an Other 30; mind **85**; process 53, 56; resonance 53; self 82, 139; sense in posture 104; situated mind **84**
embodiment 5, 20, 80–2, 89, 93
emergent self 20, 27–8; sexual 189
emotion(s) 19, 43, 104, 167, 169, 176, 202, 213; ability to identify one's own 173; adaptational 172; adaptive information-processing 173; awareness of one's own 76;

difficult 46; dual 168; expressing to the world 174; facial expressions communicate 173; focused therapy 225; help clients identify 229; identify and reveal 178; not aware of 176; of others 66; positive 77; processed through body 173; reading in another's face 173; role in adaptation 164, 171–2; self-conscious 82, 174; separated from 135; voice thickened with 124; wheel 173, 217, 229; working with client 173
emotional 173, 205; abuse 136; awareness 14, 172; constraint 207; illnesses and injuries 3; intelligence 164, 229; life 176; pain 150, 152; processing 5; regret 151; touching 66
enacted meeting with an Other 30; mind **86**, 87; re-enacted past experience 135; situated mind **84**
enactment 27, 29, 88; existential 25, 58
English, S. 62n3, 231
European Association for Gestalt therapy (EAGT) 36, 223
existential 26; approach to coaching 231; behavioral experiments 61; breadth 163; enactment 58; experiment 161; experimentalism 36; phenomenology 90, 92; philosophy 35; process 133; risk 76; thinking 10
existentialism 10, 25; existential 36
experiences 5, 15, 33, 47–8, 80, 148, 164, 169, 205; aboutness of 13, 17, 28–9, 43, 52, 68, 71, 181; accumulation of 28, 30; another person 19; awareness of the intentionality of 82; back-and-forth 16; being aware of one's 197; of being startled 131; of being with 18, 56, 141; bodily sensations 106; bracketing 132; with the church 156; clinical 40; coach's 54–5; confusion 174; of connection and separation 30; contacting 60–1, 67, 163, 195; contextualized and thematized 29; conversational relationship with God 208; corrective relational 170; creation of new 26; current moment 83; cycle of 50, 70, **71**, 73–4; disarming the heart 209; edge of a meeting 31; embodied 81–2, 142; emerging 70; emotion in your body 186; enacted mind 87; end 31; first-hand 68; follow 78; good 157; guilt 152; history of 121; hurtful 150; impact of perceptive 85; information comes from 46; internal 13–14; interpretation of 11–12, 16, 18, 53, 93, 109; of intimacy with God 209; intimate contact 21; of irritation 125; keyboard 88; knowledge from 70; of living extended 84; meeting as other 12; non-independence 101; of ontical field 23; past or previous 119, 135–8, 143, 151; peak 22; processed 103; reciprocal 66; remorse 152; residue of 120, 141, 172; resonates 56; scattered and diffuse 52; sedimented 119, 139–40; of self 27–8; self-disclosing 217; sensory 16, 28; sharing 129; shift in perspective 180; spiritual 12;

experiences *continued*
subjective 11, 35, 46, 72, 90, 92, 224; success 42; transcended 92; transgressor 150; two people meeting 32; working with couples 188; *see also* client's experiences
experimental: approach 122, 223; enactment 58; experiential 61; psychologists 101; psychology, classic 179
experiment(s) 11, 23, 50, 61, 103, 142–3, 182, 190, 219, 229; behavioral 26, 46, 58, 61, 106, 224–5; existential 161; field tactic 122; in gestalt therapy 14, 25, 27; unilateral 27, 107, 122, 169
extended 31, 65; cognition 5, 80, 82–4, 90, 93, 102; intentional sets 43; meeting with an Other 31; mind **87**, 88–9; self in compassion 165; situated mind **84**
extension behaviors 102; mutual 84; using technology 20
external: boundaries 196–7; source of motivation 180
externalizing 100, 104–5, 116, 130

failures 140; past 43
faith 25, 76, 164, 208; bad 62n4; Christian 185; commitments of 172, 204; community 171; Jewish ultra-orthodox 207; supports gestalt therapy 26; in taking risk 61; woman of 197n1
family/families 3–4, 12, 49, 69, 101, 119, 136, 180, 197n1, 198n2, 215–16; attention to 192; Christian 156–7; decide to leave 145; dream 178; intergenerational dysfunction 141; man of the 177; of origin 134; pastor without 166; second 149; single-parent/two-parent 59
father 136–40, 142, 164; admired as 145; angry and combative 135; friend of 157; of phenomenology 92; previous experiences with 43
feedback loop 102; X-shaped 69; *see also* chiasm
feelings 13, 16, 141; bracketing one's own 132; disrespecting 197; hurt 132; husband's way of provoking 102; letting go of negative 150; of sadness and grief 178; take care of 142; talking and listening to 129
fidelity 149
field 22, 25, 70, 90, 105, 122; approach 27; CAS 22–3; clinical science 13; complex 118–19; conditions 4, 139; contextual 60; cultural 59; depth of 73; dynamics 50, 58, 138; extra-therapeutic factors 34; factors 134; force 58, 83; gestalt coaching 41; hermeneutic phenomenology 92; hermeneutics 17–18; interest organizes 179; non-independent two-person 179; ontical 23, 139; organism-environment 16; people are of the 84, 180; residue of experience 120; sedimented experience 139; situational elements 24; social 105; social and interpersonal 59; social theory 10; of study 10; strategic approach 58, 61; three-person 107; use in coaching 60; visual 73
field coaching 40, 173, 231; coaching psychology 230; factors 216; insights from 231;

larger 218, 228; situation 216–17; strategic use 219, 228; theoretical strategies 225
field theory 11; gestalt 23, 36n6; science behind 35; social 10; theoretical strategies 36, 182
Figal, G. 15, 101, 107n1
figures of interest 23, 25, 29, 34–5, 44, 72, 160, 163, 228; agreed-upon 48; conflicting 23; contextualized 109; definite 68; emerging/emergent 70–1; formation of 13, 50, 70, 73, 78; goals as 202; impossible to complete without contacting 163; incomplete 50; satisfaction of 62, 70, 74, 78; satisfied 76; visual 52
final contact 13, 64, 67
flailing 129–30, 132, 147
Fogel, A. 82
fore-contact 13, 64, 67, 70
forgive(s) 125, 128, 148, 150–1, 153
forgiveness 144, 148–51, 153
Francesetti, G. 12, 36n1

Gecele, M. 36n1, 105
gender: differences in communication styles 123; stereotyping 128
gender-specific communication 128–9
gestalt coaching 4, 9, 24, 49, 64, 216; achieved through contacting 55; assimilation into therapy practice 227–8, 230; directive 61; field 41; field-oriented 228; intersects with relational process 57; model 217; move to action 61, 229; process 73; relationship through dialogue 57; seen as skill building 41
gestalt ethos 223
gestalt field theory 23, 216; complexity inherent 36n6; science behind 35; therapy 138, 223
gestalt therapists 4, 11–12, 25, 33, 36n2, 41, 49–50, 62n2, 90, 92–3, 120, 130, 223, 227–8, 230; contemporary 24, 64, 79n1
gestalt therapy 3, 5, 13–14, 17–18, 20, 26, 36, 40–1, 49, 57, 78, 138, 172, 189, 223, 232; alienation of other 206; anthropology of 10, 89, 195; assertiveness 76; cohesiveness 33; concept of self 27–8; contact boundary 33; contemporary 4, 11, 35; development of 10–11; early 10, 195; ego functioning 29; exercise of awareness 52; experiment 27; externalizing 104; fidelity scale 224; founders of 10, 35; health 77; id functioning 28, 121; influence of 141; mindful approach 106; personality functioning 29; phenomenology 130; practice of 227–8; practicing presence 56; principles 225; self-regulation 77; similitude establishes contact 32; tenets of 34–5; tools 229; view of health 50; world of 224; *see also* gestalt field theory
gestalt therapy theory 9, 33–4, 36, 49–50, 61, 141, 216; of change 24, 133; unified 35
gestalt therapy training group 34; institute 36; programs 9, 218
gestalt-based coaching 5, 41–2, 49, 121, 202, 224, 232
gestalt-consilient research 224; findings 225

God 2, 51; asking 157; appointed 111, 200, 206; belief in 156, 210n3; child of 171; closeness to 199; contact with 79n1; human representative(s) of 207; intimacy with 200, 203, 208–10; knowledge of 210n2; love of 68–9, 138, 165, 203; sense of His presence 12; truth of 201
gods in Greek mythology 70
Goldstein, K. 10, 24, 179
Grant, A. 42, 230
Greenberg, L. 22, 34, 56, 171, 173, 217
guilt 82, 150, 152, 174
guilty 151, 205

hermeneutic methodology 35; phenomenology 5, 80, 90, 92–3; space 120–1
hermeneutic space 120–1
heterosexuals 157
humanistic group of psychotherapies 9; psychology/psychotherapy 10
husband(s) 132, 137, 142, 186–7, 192; abusing 60; beaten up by wife 148; conducting worship 166; congregation 200; criticisms of wife 139–40; ex 98–100; frustrated 135; interaction with 138; relationship with 199; respected 197n1; threat of losing 135; unfaithful 149; way of provoking jealousy 102; wish to be more assertive with 107; wives abused by 207

I-It 21–2, 57–8, 61, 163, 206
I-Thou 15, 21–2, 163
id function(ing) 16, 28–9, 52, 70, 72–3, 78, 82, 121, 172
Impact of Event Scale 225
infidelity 144–5; overcoming trauma of 5; wounds of 149
influence(s) 10, 15, 52, 139, 228; of addiction or self-medication 154; biopsychosocial factors 22; of coaching 229; contextual 11; cultural 59; downward 23, 180; environmental 83; facial trait associations 19; field 58, 134, 217; of gestalt therapy 141; intentional 219; interpersonal 97, 120; language 89; looks 34; of past experience 119, 135; of religion and spirituality 199
intending 46, 150; process of 78n1
intentional change 180; contacting 65, 67–9; extended sets 43; implications disclosed 13; influence 219; objects 17, 29, 52, 71, 73–4, 78; spirituality 79n1
intentionalities 72, 161, 203
intentionality 13, 17, 43, 45, 68, 72–4, 78, 82, 90, 121, 131, 163, 180, 203; content of 78n1; *see also* aboutness of the experience
internal: boundaries 196–7; experiences 13–14; source of motivation 180
internalized 140; social audience 174
internalizing 100, 104–5
International Coach Federation (ICF) 40, 42; accredited coach training 227; core competency 48, 56; website 62n1
interpretation 15, 17, 107n1, 205; of being in the world 92; of experience 11–12, 16, 18; of meaning 118; mutual 5, 117; of non-verbal communications 119; in observational language 218; of sacred texts 90; systems of 204; of texts 17, 60, 92

interpret(ed)/interpreting 117, 121, 131, 135; content meaning 120; experience 18, 53, 93, 109; real contact 90

Kanbara, K. 14, 173
Kenny, D. 101–2
Köhler, W. 22

language 53, 83, 89; aspirational 49; observational 217–18, 224, 230; verbal or non-verbal 217
Law of Prägnanz 50
legalism 204, 206–7
legalistic 206; mindset 167
Lewin, K. 10, 22, 139
limitations overcome 189
limit(s) 4, 17, 102; behaviorism 179; coach's ability 54; relationship with 196
limited 140; contact 196–7; to one's thoughts, not 53, **87**; set of sessions 133; time 121, 218
Lobb, M.S. 9, 64, 224
Luft, S. 90–1

M-theory 31, 33
Mann, D. 14, 36n1, 217
Maslow, A. 10, 180
membrane or brane 31–3, 90, 195
mentors 3, 204; mentoring 40, 61
Merleau-Ponty, M. 69, 121
Miller, K. 194, 196
mother 18, 66–7, 91, 98, 164; too busy 136; unfit 99; working 59
motivation 24, 40, 49, 150, 171, 176, 179–80
motivational impact of values and beliefs 172
move to action 27, 46, 58, 61
mutual: benefit 4; circling around 155; extension 84; interpretation 5, 117; two-way interaction 67
mutuality 183

needs 23; addiction meeting 163n1; to become exquisite in observation of the client 52; change 59; of the client 54; coach 55; distraction from 193; to be done 41; energy 169; to engage with client 53; helping 203; hierarchy 180, *181*; of individuals 35; of the moment 205
neuropsychology 35
Nevis, E. 41, 217
noema 69, 78n1
noesis 69, 78n1
non-Cartesian space 20, 31
non-independence 4–5, 97, 100–4, 106–7, 120; *see also* externalizing, internalizing
non-independent 101–3; persons in relationship 120; two-person field 179

observation 14, 107, 118, 131, 150–1; awareness through 52; of the client 52; language of 218; mindful 130; phenomenological 16, 57; refined through bracketing 53
observe 31, 34, 54–5, 169, 218; counsellors 130; the effect on the other 132; examples of non-independence 103; help the client to 106, 130–1; oneself and others 93n1; subjective experience 92
observed 19, 33–4, 127, 131, 148, 168, 205, 209
observer 19, 33–4, 53, 105
observing 13, 53–5, 131–2, 196, 206, 208
of the field 84, 180; awareness 25; situational elements 24; strategic use 61, 219
offend: intention to 150; never again in that same way 151–2
offended 150–2

offender 150, 152
offense 147–8, 150–3
ontical field 23, 139
organization(s) 82, 117; coaching dyads in 231; director 3; healthcare 2; of needs 180; social structure of 217; working with dyads within 216
organizational consultants 4; development 41; development and coaching 70; dynamics 113; gestalt development 42; gestalt-based consulting 41; gestalt-based consulting and coaching 224; psychology 231
other 14, 31–2, 64–5, 82, 101, 103, 111–13, 133, 179, 191, 195; act upon 87; agents and factors 25; alienated 206; asymmetric relationship 162; attacking and blaming 130; beliefs 205; call of the 16; caused pain to 152; client 57; construction between self and 53; contacting 163; dealing with 51; depth of knowing 163; doing wrong 150; does not feel seen and understood 131; enabling 162; experienced as 12; extends through 102; feeling of not belonging 171; flailing 130, 132; "for me" 90; hurting 132; is out 196; man 127, 148; means, knows by 46; meeting with 19, 30, 33, 36; mindful of 141; opening self to 22; people 2, 4, 44, 78, 88–9, 104, 140, 170, 203; person 196; relates to 140; relational consideration to 28; relation to each 22; relationship to/with 11, 20, 120, 129; side 139; touching 66; unwanted to 196; upstaging 73; women 144, 187
pastor 2, 51, 167–8, 171, 174, 191–2, 199–200, 204; abusive 170; head 165; ordained 3; single 166; swept into the moment 209
pastoral 200; wives 167, 199
pastoring 204
past/previous experience 151; affected by 119; re-enacted 135–8, 143
Perls, F. 9–10, 17, 24–5, 28, 64, 69, 72, 82, 194
personality disorders 51, 104
pornography 184–7, 190
post-Cartesian 19–20
post-contact 13, 64, 67
post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) 224; symptoms 225
presence 66, 83, 88, 142, 147, 209, 218; of the client 53; coaching 55–6, 61, 218–19; of contact 163; everyday 84; get away from 174; God's 12, 69, 171, 203; husband's 60, 153; of non-independence 107; practicing 56, 217; relative safety of 146; therapist 34, 107, 141; therapeutic 22, 55, 141, 182, 217, 225; way of being 105
previous experience *see* past/previous experience
pride 82; oneself 165; spiritual 207
problem-solving 129; creative 189
processing 5; autonomic homeostatic 14; CPT 225; I-It 163; information 173; mental 85, 89
property dualism 20, 81, 89
psychologists 2, 171; coaching 230; create technical constructs 178; experimental 101; fully accredited 167; researching forgiveness 149
psychology 14, 178, 230; assimilation into coaching 5,

230; coaching psychology 230; clinical 51, 160; experimental 179; gestalt 72; humanistic 10; organizational 231; positive psychology 5, 64, 77–8, 230
psychotherapy 3, 24, 27, 77, 106, 113, 187, 231; gestalt principles 225; humanistic 10; presence of therapist/coach 107; profession of 41; reductionist view 223; unilateral experiment 122

reactive: behavior 93; communication 5
relational 44; approach 55; consideration 27–8, 120; contact membrane 33; dynamic 33, 162; factors 9; growth 47; human being 58; perspective 64; process 57, 61; sense of contacting 68; skills 43; space 20, 31, 161; spacetime 34; way of understanding contact 66
relational coping strategy 105; structuring 119
relationships 2, 4, 18, 20–1, 85, 93, 100, 103, 129, 133, 137, 152, 155, 159, 172, 176, 185–6, 195, 205; with an addict 151; asymmetric 162; awareness/attention 17; bad 197; building 19, 27, 41, 57; building workable 3; with clients 216; contact boundary 31; developing 132; dialogical 11, 27, 55, 58, 61, 208; dialogue currency 22; dissolving of 178; dyadic 93, 106, 144; effective working 42; emergentist understanding of 180; emerging 17; emotional processing to strengthen 5; extended cognition 84; externalizing and internalizing 104; field factors influencing 134; figure/ground 35, 72–3, 119; goal 202; with God 208, 210; growing 199; healthy 74, 149; honored 181; id functioning 28; I-It 163; I-thou 15, 49, 163; in-the-moment experience of 56; interpersonal 9; legalistic approach 206; levels of communication 120; with limits 196; loss of 130; mind/environment 89; most important 140; nature of 113; non-independent persons 120; nurturing 164; observed/observer 33; out of balance 154, 160; pattern of unfulfilled 43; positive 77; previous 138–9; problem in 105; religion prominent in 207; research on 101; same-sex 157; scope of 206; self/body 80; sensorimotor 87; sexual 183, 187–8; spoiler of 30; strengthen through better communication 123; therapeutic 11, 36; threatened 123; with the transcendent 81; working with 102
relationships coaching 11, 50, 55, 202, 217; dyads and couples in 232; to new level 232; room to improve 218; working 225
religion 5n1, 79n1, 199, 203–4, 207, 210n1
repentance 149, 151
research literature 150, 225, 230–1
residue of experience 70, 120, 138, 140–1, 172
respect 164, 204, 213; deserve 214; feeling 192, 203; humbling 208; for husband 197n1; show 59; speak with 116; two-way street 58; wanting to be respected 201; for wife 202

responding 184, 194; creatively 51; fixed way of 105; with one's whole person 83; to present situation 13
response 141; ability in the present 27; to another's movement 19; appropriate 209; call and 15; to the call of the coachee 52–3; client's 107, 131; coach's 217; fixed 105; gentle 30; predisposition toward 105; of the self 16; short 193; therapist's 56; toward the transgressor 151; vague 194
rigidity 204–5, 207
Roubal, J. 27, 36n1, 36n7, 224
Rowlands, M. 30, 84

satisfaction 50; of curiosity 55; of figures 76, 78, 163, 197; of figures of interest 62, 70, 74, 78; intentionality of 180; of interest 5, 64, 70, 72, 163; positive moves creating 43
sedimented experience 119, 139–40
self 16, 31, 72, 89, 105; actualization 24, *181*; affecting 49; body relationship 80; care 189; centered 165; conscious 81–2, 174; defeating 123; definitions of 172; ego function of 82; embodied 82, 139; experience of 27; formation 29, 84, 172; in gestalt therapy 27–8, 36n2, 121, 172, 189; help 179; image 121, 145; immaterial 20; loathing 146; medication 154; opening 22; and other 31, 53; personality function of 172; reflection 174; sense of 117, 121; sexual 189; spiritual 79n1; theory of 35; transcends memory 172; true 160; use of 182, 218, 225; world of the 140
self-awareness: embodied 82; reflexive 14
self-disclosure 27, 54, 107, 170, 217, 219
self-interest 68, 90
self-regulation 50, 77, 140, 143, 164, 173, 195–7
Seligman, M. 77
sensations 13, 43, 65; awareness of 82; bodily 106; combustion of 15; cycle of experience, first phase 70, **71**; disconnected 72; lacking awareness of intentional object 71; rudimentary 52; of touch 66
sensory experiences 16, 28; input 55–6; motor pathways 19
sex 20, 22, 84, 177, 188–90; during 127; enjoyment of 187; forbidden until marriage 157; life 186; objects 157; outside marriage 124; pornographic 185; same-sex relationship 157–8
sexual 157; action 190; energy 188–9; intimacy 84; issues 184; relations 21; relationship 183, 187; self 189
sexualized 157
sexually: assaulted 137, 157; compulsive behavior 183; driven 189; rejected 187
shame 82, 121, 174
shamed 148, 207
similarities 40, 139, 142–3; dissimilarities 162
situated 12, 84, 101, 195; awareness of being 24–5; beings 77; cognition 60; cognitive processes 85; condition 69; mind **84**, 89; nature of current existence 24; person 140, 180; pre-condition 14; process of experiencing self 28; self 172; thinking 10

Skinner, B.F. 179
social field 105; and interpersonal 59; theory 10
somatic: concerns 104; human psychosomatic health 173; interoceptive awareness 14, 172
space 12; between 160–1, 169; dimensional 87; empty 120, 190; making 22; non-Cartesian 31; for the Other's pain 128, 142; personal 196; phenomenological 196; physical 20–1; relational 20, 31, 161; sense of being 104, 210
spacetime 33–4
spirituality 5n1, 79n1, 197, 199, 203–4, 210n1
Staemmler, M.F. 28, 139
symmetry 159–60, **161**, 162

team(s) 58, 97; cohesiveness 43; effectiveness 19; working with dyads within 216
tears 2, 124, 126, 134, 137–8, 141–2, 145, 158–9, 168–9, 185, 209
thoughts 13, 16, 141–2; awareness of one's 76; being other 78; flowed 88; letting go of negative 150; not limited to 53; talking and listening to 129
Toussaint, L. 150
transcendent others 15; relationship with 81–2; spiritual experience 12
transcendental phenomenology 92
transgressor 150–1
triad 24; *see also* complex adapting systems
Tschacher, W. 60

unfaithful: husband 149; wife 124

value(s) 46–7, 72, 83, 90, 129, 176, 178, 180–1, 196, 206; act in contradiction to 116; adaptational 169, 171; awareness of one's 76; of clients 40, 49, 203; cultural 12, 69; exploring 122; meaningful 61; motivational impact 172; one's sense of 76, 93n1, 121; trees 217
valued by others *181*; *see also* respect

way of being 105–6
weeping 128, 209
Wheeler, G. 9, 36n1, 138
wife/wives 1, 10, 18, 26, 47, 60, 66, 98, 123, 135, 139, 160, 164, 166, 184; abused by husbands 207; bears most of the responsibility 154; build trust 149; frustrated 131–2; hating pornography 185; having an affair 124, 145; jealousy about her husband 102; left husband 110; minister's poster 203; not obedient 192; pastoral 167, 199; relationship with 186, 193; respect for 202; responses to 107; staff 166
withdrawal 64, **71**, 72, 105

Yontef, G. 4, 9, 21, 30, 55