Like all of you, I am a member of many groups. They vary in many ways, such as purpose, culture, membership requirements, and stability. Some of my groups, such as nationality and gender, are relatively fixed. Others, such as social class, profession, marital status, religion, and place of residence, have less permanency. And others, such as work groups and conference committees—generally time-limited with short-term membership—are even more fluid.

Groups of all kinds have always been an important part of the Gestalt approach and culture. Since our beginning, our group identity has been actualized in small, tightly-knit clans—our institutes. These institutes have unique communal structures, initiation rituals, and theoretical understandings of concepts such as contact, boundary, and field theory. Our institutes can be described as experimental communities, differing from one another not only in terms of interpretation of theory, but also in how they organize themselves with respect to issues such as hierarchy, power, and money.

But we do more than live and work in institutes. As Gestaltists, our fascination with what happens between people has resulted in an interest in group theory and group development. A half century ago, many Gestalt practitioners followed a specific form of group work, that of the original hot seat model developed by Fritz Perls. It became known as the Greek Amphitheater with its emphasis on hierarchy, individual work, and observational learning (Melnick, 1980).

Soon, Gestaltists began experimenting...
with different ways to use groups, many of which were captured in Beyond the Hot Seat (Feder and Ronall, 1980), the groundbreaking book that helped usher in a range of creative theoretical formulations and applications of Gestalt theory.

As Frew and Feder conclude in their third survey of Gestalt group practitioners (“A Survey of Practice of Gestalt Group Therapy: A Second Encore Presentation”), not only our group theory, but also our practice has continued to evolve and develop. Far from the days of the original hot seat model, group practitioners today focus more on group process and the creation of support than on individual work within a group setting. Gestalt group practitioners have also expanded the focus of groups to go beyond connection, growth, and intimacy. Gestalt practitioners increasingly are applying our group methods to work with community and organizations. Gestalt theory is being applied to organizational foci such as team building, project management, and creative problem solving, as well as to political action and social change.

Because of the importance of groups to the Gestalt approach, we are pleased to devote much of this issue to the topics of groups. We truly have come far beyond the hot seat.

We begin with Gaie Houston’s “Some Roots of Group Work in Gestalt,” a historical remembrance of the fields of Group Dynamics and the T-group movement, an article originally presented as a paper at the Roots of Gestalt Therapy Conference in 2005. Houston, one of the first to apply Gestalt theory to groups (see Houston, 1993), begins by discussing our dual nature. We are simultaneously individuals and embedded in a group culture. Our task is to manage the tensions of both realities. She reminds us that when looking at groups and group development, one has to pay attention to both task and process. Her article gracefully weaves in the groundbreaking work of Moreno, Lewin, NTL, and Tavistock as important roots of the Gestalt group approach.

Next, we have our feature article, Seán Gaffney’s “Gestalt with Groups: A Cross Cultural Perspective,” followed by eight invited commentaries by individuals who have written on group and culture. And culture is what Gaffney emphasizes. He makes a compelling case that culture is an important yet underdeveloped aspect of groups. He begins by setting the frame and defining culture as “recognizable, internalized patterns of behavior internal to a bounded collection of people, and also patterns of behavior used in their external environment” (p. 207).

In Houston’s essay, it is easy to see how embedded Gestalt models are in our Western, individualistic culture. Gaffney underscores this (see also Fairfield, 2004) and points out that our models are culturally conceived, bounded, and limiting. Not only has our theory been Western in form, it has been spread by trainers from the U.S. going first to Western Europe, and then from Western Europe to the rest of the world. For example, Gestaltists from the West have trained practitioners from the former Soviet bloc, South America, the Mideast, and Africa in our culturally bound models.

Next are two research studies. The first is the survey by Frew and Feder, described above, followed by a qualitative study, “The Gestalt Cycle of Experience: A Creative Tool for Growth” by Gayle Russell, in which she utilizes a Gestalt frame to attempt to increase awareness in a structured personal growth group. Participants report an increase in internal and interpersonal awareness, as well as substantial growth and learn-
ing from the experience. I am always pleased to present research in *Gestalt Review*. This particular study, which presents a simple, elegant design in the area of groups, can serve as a model for future research.

Last is Hank Karp’s “Greasing the Squeaky Wheel: A Gestalt Perspective to Problem Behavioral Patterns” in which a different form of group is discussed: creating categories. Karp looks at a series of non-functional, fixed behavior patterns that are problematic for individuals. In the first part of this article, he discusses a universal tendency to place people into categories or groupings (*i.e.*, to formally or informally diagnose). He describes how these categories can become figural and keep one from seeing, hearing, and being in contact with one’s self and others. Then, borrowing from the work of Mooma (1993), he describes two dimensions of human functioning he calls “default positions”: energy and dominance, which influence the formation of five categories of fixed Gestalts. He then suggests practical ways for counselors and coaches to help clients move beyond these patterns.

We end this issue with Back Pages, featuring Tunde Horvath’s description of Gestalt therapy in Hungary. As Horvath points out, some of the earliest roots of the Gestalt approach are found in Hungary. However, these roots have lain dormant until recently, when a young, vibrant Gestalt community began to develop. Our Back Pages also includes two poems by Carol Brockmon, and Charlie Bowman’s review of John Wymore’s book, *Gestalt Therapy and Human Nature: Evolutionary Psychology Applied*.

I hope this issue proves to be stimulating in its presentations of Gestalt group therapy. I also hope it will challenge you to look more closely at the many group experiences—formal and informal—that enrich our lives.

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**REFERENCES**


