

What's a Gestalt?

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ABSTRACT

"What's a Gestalt?" "What does 'Gestalt' mean?" Why is it called "Gestalt therapy?" When pressed to answer one of these questions, we often find ourselves tongue-tied, unable to give a simple explanation. There is good reason for that, as *there is none*. I have explored the history of this concept, tracing its etymology, its development in Gestalt philosophy and Gestalt psychology, and finally its application to clinical practice in Gestalt therapy. I could not give a simple definition and had to describe it in terms of *nine different Gestalt qualities*. These characteristics, when illustrated by concrete examples, can suddenly bring us to a realization of what this word really means.

"What's a Gestalt?" "What does 'Gestalt' mean?" Why is it called "Gestalt therapy?" I have even been asked, "*Who* was Gestalt?" My purpose here is to develop an understanding of this intriguing word. I look into its literal meaning and follow its path over time from Gestalt theory in philosophy to



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Gestalt psychology and, finally, to Gestalt therapy. I have found nine “Gestalt qualities” – the essential characteristics that define the nature of a Gestalt – and concrete, everyday examples are given to illustrate each quality. It is hoped that these concrete illustrations will provide that “aha moment” (which, incidentally, is a Gestalt) – that exciting moment of discovery of what those abstract definitions mean.

It is assumed that most people who read this article will have a basic understanding of Gestalt therapy concepts and practices. When a Gestalt therapy term is mentioned, such as the “Gestalt experience cycle” or “unfinished business,” there will not be an elaborate discussion of its use in Gestalt therapy. Rather, it will be for the purpose of illustrating how the idea of a Gestalt has been transposed from philosophy and psychology into the clinical realm of Gestalt therapy. Knowing more fully the linguistic and philosophical implications of the terms and practices we use can help clinicians, particularly beginning ones, understand more deeply what they are doing and why.

Dictionary Definitions

- **Gestalt** (pl. **Gestalten**) (noun): form, shape; configuration, structure; arrangement, organization; figure.
- **gestalten** (verb): to organize, arrange, structure, shape, carry out, fashion, mold, give artistic or literary form; to become, develop or turn into something (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 2002; Harper Collins German Dictionary, 2004*).

Gestalt Theory in Philosophy

“Gestalt qualities,” also called “form” or “whole” qualities, were first systematically formulated in 1890 by the Austrian philosopher Christian von Ehrenfels. He delineated two types of form qualities, temporal and non-temporal. Temporal qualities are processes over time, such as a melody. Non-temporal qualities are spatial shapes, such as a square or triangle (in B. Smith, 1988, pp. 82-117).

Gestalt Psychology

Gestalt psychologists expanded on Ehrenfels’s qualities, applying them to human psychology. Their work greatly increased our understanding of perception, cognition, thinking, learning, memory, emotional expression, patterns of behavior and movement, aesthetics, motivation, field theory, and the human organism (Köhler, 1959, p. 728).

Gestalt psychology began as an academic experimental psychology in early

twentieth century Berlin. Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler, and Kurt Köffka were the founders of the Berlin School, and their work focused on visual perception. In laboratory experiments various visual images were presented to subjects, who reported back on how they organized these stimuli into subjective perceptions. For example, a figure made up of four lines of equal length and four right angles, organized in a particular way \square , was perceived as having the geometric quality of "squareness," an *extra* quality beyond the sensory input of lines and angles (Ehrenfels, 1890 / 1988; Corsini, 2002, p. 414). That "squareness" was also recognized in physical objects – the squares of a checkerboard or a piece of chocolate – even though they differ in material, size, and color. "Squareness," however, is not inherent in any of the parts, i.e., the separate lines and angles. Only when the parts are brought together in a certain configuration does "squareness" emerge. It is a new element, a whole quality, a "*Gestalt*" (Boring, 1929/1957, p. 443). The relations and interactions, between the parts, form and *are formed* by the organization and structure of the whole, i.e., the *Gestalt*. Other important psychologists in this tradition were Wolfgang Metzger on the laws of seeing (1936/2006); Kurt Goldstein on the organism (1934/2000); and Kurt Lewin on field theory, and on tension as a source of energy and motivation (1926; 1951/1964).

Gestalt psychologists' methodology was phenomenological, focused on *how* individuals *subjectively* experienced and organized their perceptions. What they learned is that our eyes are *not* like a camera or a window. We do not see the world objectively. Rather, what we see is *interpreted* and *given meaning* by the observer, based on memories, expectations, beliefs, values, fears, assumptions, emotional states, and more. We know this from eyewitnesses' differing descriptions of an accident, or siblings' unlike experiences of the same parents. Modern neuropsychology has confirmed that neural interactions compare and contrast old and new information, and synthesize the new with the old to construct a new internal reality (Siegel, 1999, pp. 165-169).

Gestalt Therapy

In addition to Gestalt philosophical theory and Gestalt psychology, Gestalt therapy has roots in psychoanalysis, Smuts's holism (1926/1999), existentialism, phenomenology, Lewin's field theory, Goldstein's theory of the organism, Zen Buddhism, and Reich's armor theory and body therapy (1945/1961). The fundamental concepts and methodologies in Gestalt therapy grew out of a blending of these perspectives, which have many overlapping characteristics.

Having drawn from all these sources, what made Fritz Perls choose to name his approach *Gestalt* therapy? Perls, Ralph Hefferline, and Paul Goodman

(PHG) (1951/1990; 1951/1994) give us an answer in *Gestalt Therapy*, defining the essence of their method as “Gestalt Analysis”:

The therapy, then, consists in analyzing the internal structure of the actual experience, . . . not so much *what* is being experienced, remembered, done, said, etc., as *how* what is being remembered is remembered, or how what is said is said, with what facial expression, what tone of voice, what syntax, what posture, what affect, what omission, what regard or disregard of the other person, etc. By working on the unity or disunity of this structure of the experience in the here and now, it is possible to remake the dynamic relations of the figure and ground until the contact is heightened, the awareness brightened and the behavior energized. Most important of all, *the achievement of a strong gestalt is itself the cure, for the figure of contact is not a sign of, but is itself the creative integration of experience.* (p. 232; p. 8; emphasis in original)

In this essay, I limit the discussion to the Gestalt therapy ideas and practices that embody “gestalt qualities,” showing how these qualities were adapted and developed for use in the *clinical* context of Gestalt therapy. Recent critiques that challenge earlier assumptions and practices – particularly in phenomenology, development, and relational approaches to therapy – will also be included.

Gestalt Qualities

A Gestalt quality is a curious phenomenon. It is an attribute of a perception or a thing that has a *quality* that is *different from* (not more than) the sum of its components, the components being the stimuli received from the outside world. It is a quality of the entity as a whole, resulting from its configuration, i.e., the *relationship, interaction, and interdependence* between its parts, rather than the *sum* or *random combination* of its parts. Ehrenfels saw these qualities as levels of experience automatically organized or constructed by the experiencing person, above and beyond the information received through the senses. Metzger (1936/2006) agreed, writing that along with the sensory process of seeing there is an autonomous physiological process, which takes place in the cerebral cortex of the brain, *not* in the eyes (p. 191). Wertheimer’s studies of “apparent motion” illustrate this notion. His stimuli are a rapid succession of slightly different *still pictures*, which our mind puts together as *images in motion*, as in pre-digital motion pictures and flip books (Köhler, 1969/1972, pp. 35-40; Corsini, 2002, p. 952).

Ehrenfels's two types of form qualities, and the Gestalt psychologists' more complex aspects of Gestalts, are described below. In Gestalt psychology theory, character traits, emotional states, styles of movement, and patterns of behavior and thinking are also form qualities (Metzger, 1936/2006, p. xxii). The essential attributes and varieties of Gestalts, together with specific concrete examples, are listed and elaborated upon below.

1. Transposability: In **Gestalt psychology**, transposability means that the form qualities are not tied to a specific entity, but are properties that will retain their essence when transferred from one entity to another. As E. Smith (1976) states, "the form can be found with different contents" (p. 21). Boring (1957) writes: "[I]f the qualities of the [parts] can change without changing the form, then there must be an independent form quality" (p. 443).

A *melody*, which consists of notes in a particular relationship to one other, is the best example of the transposability of a form quality. Whether it is played in a different key, major or minor, by a trumpet or a violin, or sung with different words, like the "Alphabet Song" and "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," the original melody is still recognizable (Köhler, 1947/1980, pp. 117-118).

Gestalt therapy uses the idea of a transposable temporal gestalt in its focus on *process*, a person's typical *patterns* of thinking, feeling and behavior. What is most relevant is *how* he or she goes about dealing with a problem or fulfilling a need. These patterns can be useful routines that get us through the day. On the other hand, they can be problematic when they become rigid (fixed *gestalten*) and limit our awareness of reality or our ability to make choices or adapt to changing circumstances. For example, in dealing with conflict, do people have the flexibility to choose whether to withdraw, fight, agree with the other, or discuss their differences, depending on the circumstances? Or do they stick with just one process, e.g., withdrawal?

The *gestalt experience cycle* is itself a useful "transposable" gestalt as a diagnostic tool. The processes in the cycle are relevant to all aspects of a client's functioning: *awareness* of inner sensations, feelings, thoughts, needs, as well as of outer demands from a personal situation or the physical environment; the capacity to *form a figure* of the need or demand; the ability to *scan the environment* for what would meet a need or demand; *energizing* and *mobilizing* for action; *making* contact with others or something in the environment; *regulating personal boundaries* by assimilating or rejecting things or ideas from the environment; *allowing one's need to be fulfilled*; and *withdrawing or letting go*, so that one can return to a state of *satisfaction* and *rest*. With this tool, a therapist can discover which patterns of behavior help or hinder a client, and where in the process of the cycle they become stuck.

2. The whole is different from the sum of its parts: In **Gestalt psychology**,

Koffka stresses that the whole is *something else than* the sum of its parts. It is *not just more than* the sum of its parts. What is meaningful is the whole-part relationship, the arrangement of the parts, not the analysis or summing up of the parts (1935/1963, p. 176; Pratt in Köhler, 1969/1972, pp. 9-10). There must be a particular relationship among the parts. "A brick wall is not the sum of its bricks and mortar, because its being a brick wall is dependent upon the bricks [and mortar] being in a certain . . . configuration; . . . if the bricks and mortar are in two separate heaps side by side, we still have the sum, but no brick wall" (Simons, in B. Smith, 1988, p. 167).

Examples of whole qualities:

- **Impressionist paintings**, such as Georges Seurat's *La Grande Jatte*, looked at up close, are a collection of colored dots or short brushstrokes. Only when the observer stands back, taking in the whole canvas at once, does the whole of the image become apparent.
- When the parts of **H₂O molecules** (two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom) are looked at separately, they do not reveal the entity they would form (water) when put together in a specific configuration. In addition, one would not necessarily know from looking at whole water molecules that differing arrangements of the same parts could change the whole to steam, snow, or ice.
- When reading a **detective story**, examination of the individual clues and suspects as such is not enough to solve the crime. Only when the parts come together in a meaningful way, do we know "who done it."

Whole qualities are described as *emergent* in **Gestalt psychology**. "They inhere in no single part but emerge when the parts constitute the whole" (Boring, 1929/1957, p. 588). In **Gestalt therapy**, wholeness in terms of *personality integration* was an early value and goal (F. Perls, 1948). That happens when clients allow themselves to be aware of and have good contact with all aspects of themselves – past experiences, thoughts and emotions, body language, patterns of behavior, memories, expectations, and more, without restraints or blind spots. The therapeutic process of "Gestalt analysis" described above helps the client look at the "unity or disunity" of the structure of experience and functioning "until the contact is heightened, the awareness brightened and the behavior energized" (PHG 1951/1990, p. 232; 1951/1994, p. 8). This process can move a client towards personal integration and wholeness.

3. Form of organization: The meaning of "organization" can best be understood by looking at this word from several perspectives: *structure; figure/ground; dynamics or forces; levels of organization*.

a. Structure: In **Gestalt psychology** the "structure" of a Gestalt refers to the configuration between the parts and the whole, a network of *relationships, interdependency, and dynamic interaction* like the cells within a living

organism. A part cannot be changed without affecting the whole (Goldstein, 1934/2000, pp. 173 ff.). For example, the experience of an emotion is always expressed with multiple physiological processes throughout the body. When one feels shame one blushes, avoids eye contact, covers the face, has the shoulders droop, cannot think or speak clearly, and may run away and hide.

Goldstein's ideas are evident in **Gestalt therapy's** attention to *body language, body processes, body awareness, and body memories*. This attention is reflected in its treatment modalities, which include psychodramatic *experiments* and hands-on *bodywork* both to increase body awareness and overcome interruptions to full embodiment. Experiments often use bodily polarities. A woman who mumbles most of the time may be asked to shout her words across the room and then examine how she feels in each of those modes of using her voice. Hands-on bodywork is helpful in finding where a person's muscular tensions are held and what they mean. Touching or massaging those points of tension can bring out memories and emotions that have been held in the body but blocked from conscious awareness. Freeing up the body from its structural restraints and muscular tensions usually leads to greater freedom and integration for the client as a whole.

b. Figure/Ground: In **Gestalt psychology** studies of visual perception, a figure is a Gestalt when it is organized as a separate coherent entity with definite boundaries, a shape that stands out against an unformed background like a tree against a clear sky.

In **Gestalt therapy**, the *figure* is what stands out, what is most important in a client's awareness at any one point in time. The saying, "start where the client is" emphasizes the importance of working with the client's figure, rather than imposing one's own agenda. The *ground* is the context from which the figure emerges, encompassing anything from the client's body, thoughts, mood, or language to social, cultural, religious, or historical surroundings. Figure and ground are not seen as separate entities but as embedded elements of the person's *organism/environmental field* (PHG, 1951/1990, p. 228; 1951/1994, p. 4; Wollants, 2008/2012; Stawman, 2009, pp. 25-33).

The first step in the gestalt experience cycle – moving from sensation to awareness – is where the figure of a need emerges. As the need is met, the figure recedes. When one senses thirst, a drink of water emerges as figure. After drinking the water, the thirst is quenched, and that figure fades away. F. Perls (1957/1978) wrote: "We couldn't live if we would register all the millions of shapes and forms, which we encounter day by day without bringing some order to them. And we bring order to them by [the] inherent ability of any organism, the human as well as the animal organism, to form a [figure, a] gestalt" (p. 67).

Treatment in **Gestalt therapy** often focuses on *interruptions* to figure

formation. This interruption can have a number of causes (e.g., desensitization to body processes, or the inability to move from a sensation to cognitive awareness, the first step in the Gestalt experience cycle). Other causes may be attention deficit disorder, depression, grief, or brain damage, as described by Oliver Sacks (1998) in his story, "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat" (pp. 18-22).

c. Dynamics and forces: The dynamic processes that organize a Gestalt are twofold. One is the inherent *dynamic self-distribution* of parts in accordance with the laws of nature. In physics and chemistry, this occurs in the formation of a bubble or a snowflake. In botany, it is the transformation of an acorn into an oak tree. In biology, it is the development of an egg and sperm into a living baby.

The **Gestalt psychology** understanding of dynamic self-distribution is that the dynamics of the whole determine where and with what function each part of the whole must be, without our conscious control. This happens when stem cells become blood or liver cells, depending upon where they are in the configuration of a living body. The growth of cancer cells might be thought of as a failure of the whole to control where and with what function cells grow. Metzger (1936/2006) found this notion in visual perception as well: "The organization of the visual field occurs within us essentially without our involvement, and without our explicit awareness of any of its laws" (p. 181).

In **Gestalt therapy**, *self-actualization* ideally is a process of dynamic self-distribution. Each person is born with an inherent drive and potential to develop her personal nature and talents. Given the proper environment and opportunities, individuals tend to realize that potential, attaining self-fulfillment and an authentic existence, where they are whole and integrated and fully themselves (Corsini, 2002, pp. 455, 875). This is in contrast to being limited or shaped against one's nature or will, by what family or society thinks one should be. However, as the next section will show, there are always external interruptions and obstructions that interfere with the self-actualization process.

Forces from without are the second dynamic in the organization of a Gestalt, e.g., inorganic objects in nature are shaped by the conditions in the field. Pebbles become smooth and round when washed repeatedly by the tide. The molecule H₂O forms ice, snow, water, or steam, depending upon the surrounding temperature. A river flows downwards due to gravity and winds its course according to the topography of the land. The survival and form of a living organism depend upon the availability and type of food in its surroundings. In times of famine, one can read starvation in a child's bloated stomach and stick-like arms. In the USA, where children are surrounded by junk food, that unhealthy excess reveals itself in the epidemic of childhood

obesity.

Gestalt therapy realizes that *self-actualization* and *organismic self-regulation* can be supported or interrupted by *forces from without*. When a child's family recognizes her nature and interests, and provides opportunities for growth and development in those areas, the forces are beneficial. If her parents are rigid and controlling, constantly denying her value or nature and trying to shape her only according to their own standards, then they are harmful to her self-actualization and self-regulation.

Creative adjustment is an important process for dealing with the forces in one's surroundings. Whether they be family, social, or religious mores, financial misfortune, loss of a loved one, illness, injury, or war, there are always forces that interrupt or limit self-actualization and self-regulation. All require creative adjustments both within oneself and in one's situation, so that one can continue to function as well as possible under the circumstances.

d. Levels of organization: In **Gestalt philosophy** and **psychology**, the simplest organization of a visual spatial Gestalt is a two-dimensional form, such as a circle. If there is a richness of elements, as in an intricate mosaic or an elegant cathedral, a high level of organization is present. When the simple melody of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" is played with harmonic chords and ornamentation in Mozart's Piano Variations, "Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman," it becomes a more complex Gestalt. Movement Gestalts, a combination of spatial and temporal qualities, can vary from the simple level of the style of walking of an individual to the intricacy of the harmonious movements of a ballet ensemble.

In the clinical context of **Gestalt therapy**, levels of organization may be seen by looking at levels of *creative adjustment*, the changes we make in the organization of our lives when we are affected by disturbances in our situation. The highest level is described in Section 4 below in the quotations on *Prägnanz*. In the situations of daily life, however, these adjustments are not always ideal, but may be necessary for survival. A child with an abusive father may adjust by keeping quiet, being obedient, and making herself as inconspicuous as possible, to avoid further abuse. This is necessary for survival, but a bad adjustment for personal development. The mother in question may enable a higher level of adjustment for her child by leaving her husband, going to a shelter with her child, and getting help to start an independent life free of abuse.

4. Principle of *Prägnanz*: Literally, the German word *Prägnanz* means conciseness, simplicity, or precision. In **Gestalt psychology**, Wertheimer's Law of *Prägnanz* is the "principle that the organization of any structure in nature or in cognition, will be as 'good' as the prevailing conditions allow" (Corsini, 2002, p. 539). This high level of organization is what has been called a

"good Gestalt." This "good" encompasses the qualities of order, equilibrium, sharpness, harmony, integrity, completeness, and complexity, together with the requisite interrelationship and integration of all parts into a meaningful whole.

The fifteenth-century architect Leon Battista Alberti (1988) defines *prägnanz* in *aesthetics* in his work, *On the Art of Building*. Beauty, he says, "is that reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away or altered, but for the worse" (156). Stephen Greenblatt (2007), Cogan University Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University, comments: "The cunning of this definition is its . . . refusal of specificity. It is not this or that particular feature that makes something beautiful" (p. 46); rather, "the pleasure derives from the sense of symmetry, balance, and the elegant ratio of the constitutive elements" (p. 47).

Metzger (1936/2006) describes this phenomenon as the *law of greatest order in perception*:

When a military commander makes global sense of a confused battlefield situation based on dozens of individual reports and observations, . . . when . . . those that fit together into a self-consistent story are rendered prominent, while those that appear insignificant and have no relevance to the case are rejected, clearly it is the law of *greatest order* that is at work. (p. 182; emphasis in original)

Wertheimer (1945/1959) explains the role of *prägnanz* in *productive thinking*:

[T]o live in a fog, in an unsurveyable manifold of factors and forces that prevent a clear decision as to action, as to the main lines of the situation, is for many people an unbearable state of affairs. There is . . . the almost irresistible tendency, the strong desire to get at a simple, decisive structuralization of the field, to get clear-cut orientation, to act sensibly, not to be blind, not to act fortuitously. There is a thirst for true orientation. (p. 244)

And Goldstein (1934/2000) defines the "good gestalt" in the context of an *organism* and its activity: "the performances are executed in the promptest, most correct manner, and with the best possible self-assurance." "The movements," he says, "take place in the most adequate and definite way . . . the organism actualizes itself, according to its nature, in the best way" (pp. 286-87). The quality of "good gestalt" can be recognized when one watches a group of dancers all seemingly making exactly the same movements and finds that the eyes are constantly drawn to a particular dancer whose

movements are perfectly centered and integrated in a harmonious whole.

Gestalt therapy uses the concept of *prägnanz* as well, calling it a *good gestalt* or *good form*. In clinical work, it is the development of the ability to perceive, think, create, and act in the clearest, most productive, integrated, and harmonious way. It would be the highest of the levels of organization mentioned above and the ideal level of a *creative adjustment*.

Zinker (1994) adapts this idea to *family therapy*:

The aesthetic of the "good form" of human relations is . . . witnessing a family moving from pessimism to hope, helplessness to increased competence, confusion and chaos to clarity, going around in circles to developing a feeling of direction for the future, mutual blaming and projection to ownership of an experience and an appreciation of each other's dilemma. (p. 28)

5. Tertiary Qualities: Gestalt psychologists also found what they called *tertiary qualities*, understood as a quality beyond the first two elements in a perception – the first being the sensory stimulus from the outside world; the second being the person's internal experience of the external stimulus. Metzger (1936/2006) calls it an almost magical "extrasensory perception" (p. xix). Ehrenfels (1988) found it in seeing a resemblance between family members or recognizing a composer from a brief melody (pp. 1-6). Pratt (1969/1972) explains: "The friendliness of a face . . . is a tertiary quality. . . . A room appears drab and inhospitable. . . . A landscape may seem tranquil, a mountain majestic, a melody sad" (pp. 22, 24). How we perceive these qualities is difficult to analyze rationally. It has to do with an immediate intuitive recognition of the whole – the "gestalt" – of the experience.

In **Gestalt therapy**, tertiary qualities are part of the intuitive awareness and astute eye for *body language* F. Perls demonstrated and many experienced therapists demonstrate as well. Naranjo (in Gaines, 1979) described this unusual quality:

Fritz had another kind of awareness . . . almost psychic. . . . I think it was . . . connected with seeing in gestalts rather than in terms of detail. To perceive configurations is a subtle form of computation, which constitutes much of what is called intuition. . . . Fritz could see the total gestalt. He could see a certain rhythm in events and thus know what was coming and what was missing, and what a person was silent about. (p. 297)

6. A tendency towards closure or completion: If we sing a musical scale – "do,

re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti . . . ” – and stop, there is a compelling tension which is not released until we complete the scale by singing “do.”

In Gestalt psychology, Lewin and Zeigarnik brought this tendency into the more complex realm of human memory, motivation, and behavior. Lewin (1926/1997, pp. 283-99) found that when a need arises or a demand comes from the environment it creates a tension system, both reminding and energizing the individual to move towards satisfying that need or demand. When the need or demand is fulfilled, the tension ends. If there is no resolution, there is an unfinished situation with continuing tension.

Zeigarnik created experiments in which subjects were given tasks to complete. Some tasks were allowed to be completed, while others were interrupted. She found a tendency for unfinished tasks to be recalled better and more often than finished ones. That greater recall, the “Zeigarnik effect,” is a sign of the continuing tension in regard to the unfinished tasks (Zeigarnik, 1927/1997, p. 306; Mazur, 1996, pp. 18-23). As Köhler (1947/1980) wrote:

The following experience is quite common: I have a task which . . . I do not like, but which is urgent. In the course of the day, however, I find myself occupied with many other things. I talk with friends, I read a book. . . . But time and again something like a pressure makes itself felt in my interior, and upon examination this pressure proves to issue from that task. The pressure amounts to a persistent tendency of the task to be recalled, and thus to enter into the present field of action. (p. 178)

In **Gestalt therapy**, problems with this “tendency towards closure or completion” are called *unfinished business*. For completing unfinished business, early Gestalt therapists often used an *experiment* where the person with whom one had unfinished business was imagined as sitting in an *empty chair* and the client would talk to the “person” about her unfinished business, e.g., trying to resolve a painful and persistent longing for the attention and recognition that she had needed from her deceased mother and would never receive. The dialogic relationship, with the therapist’s caring presence, confirmation of her worth, honoring of her uniqueness and personal perspective, can provide the validation and recognition that she lacks and needs and is now the recommended way to finish unfinished business (Buber, 1947/1955, pp. 202- 5).

7. Isomorphism and Holism: Isomorphism (Greek: *equal form*) refers to a holistic view of the mind-body problem. **Gestalt psychologists**, studying perception, surmised that there was “a functional and structural correspondence” between the mental experience of what our senses present to us and the underlying

neurological and physiological processes of the brain. This hypothesis has since been confirmed by modern neuropsychology (Corsini, 2002, p. 511; Köhler, 1938/1966, pp. 154-155; Siegel, 1999, chap. 5).

This mental-physical correlation is true of emotional affect and the brain and the body as well. Emotions are embodied experiences. Joy correlates with a general decrease in the rate and intensity of neural activity in the brain and is reflected in the body as smiling or laughing, increased empathic eye contact, and a feeling of calm and relaxation. Fear is reflected in hyperactivity of the amygdala area of the brain and by a pale face, shaking, hairs standing on end, fast pulse and respiration, and a cowering posture (Nathanson 1992, pp. 79-81, 92-96). There is no dichotomy between mental experience and the brain, nor between mind and body. Although cognitively these constructs can be abstracted and discussed, in human experience the processes are totally intertwined and can only be truly known and experienced in a holistic way.

Gestalt therapy's attention to *experiential work*, *experiments*, and *embodiment* (*body processes*, *body language*, *body awareness*) carries on this holistic understanding of the correspondence between mental and emotional processes and the neurological and physiological processes of the body and brain. F. Perls's strictures against "*talking about*" and *intellectualization*, without the accompanying bodily experience, reflected his conviction that authentic and meaningful experience and change cannot be attained without the full integration of body and mind. As PHG (1951/1990; 1951/1994) wrote:

The average person, having been raised in an atmosphere of splits, has lost his Wholeness, his Integrity. To come together again he has to heal the dualism of his person, of his thinking, and of his language. He is accustomed to thinking . . . of body and mind, organism and environment, self and reality, as if they were opposing entities. The unitary outlook which can dissolve such a dualistic approach is buried but not destroyed and . . . can be regained with wholesome advantage (pp. viii, xxiv).

8. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena, of things as they appear to us in our subjective experience.¹ Phenomena, being perceptions, are distinguished from the "real" entities in the outside world. Gestalt psychologists felt that one could never fully comprehend human psychology solely from observing what was externally visible or measurable, rejecting the methods of behaviorism and the physical sciences. This was also a rejection of the distrust by classical

¹ The philosophical foundations of phenomenology will not be discussed due to restrictions of space. See the writings of Husserl (1931/1960; 1913/1998); Heidegger (1962); Gadamer (2004; 2008); Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962; 1948/2008); and Spinelli (1992; 1996; 2007).

psychoanalysis of conscious experience (Yontef, 1993, p. 238).

From their studies of visual perception, **Gestalt psychologists** learned that what people see is not simply a replica of what is before them. Rather, individuals' reported perceptions involve selection, construction, and organization of what they see, as well as interpretation and the creation of meaning. They found that one's existing mind-set³ shapes a perception or experience as much as the external stimulus affects the mind. Memories of past experience, habitual patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior, as well as personal values and beliefs are stored in the brain and influence how the stimulus is perceived and how the observer will understand, respond to, and give meaning to the experience. A specific stimulus does not lead to the same experience in different observers (Koffka in B. Smith, 1988, p. 41; Wertheimer, 1924/1997, p. 5). Shel Silverstein's (1996) children's poem illustrates how each person's reality differs in accordance with his personal perspective:

George got stung by a bee and said,
 "I wouldn't have got stung if I'd stayed in bed."
 Fred got stung and we heard him roar,
 "What am I being punished for?"
 Lew got stung and we heard him say,
 "I learned something about bees today." (p. 148)

Gestalt therapy brings phenomenology into the clinical setting by valuing and exploring the client's *phenomenological field*, an immediate subjective experience – what a client is (and is not) *aware* of, what stands out as *figure*, and how the client *understands* and ascribes *meaning* to the experience. When awareness is blocked or incomplete, client and therapist look at how past experiences and habitual patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior may be affecting the client's perceptions. If these interfere with his awareness or understanding, therapist and client work together to find a perspective that serves him better. How people interpret their perceptions is a crucial factor in their ability to understand and function in the world.

According to Spinelli (1992, ch. 2), the *phenomenological method* for investigating experience has three steps:

1. The Rule of Epoché urges the bracketing off of our personal biases, prejudices, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and judgments in order to be as open as possible to our immediate experience of the other (p. 17). Staemmler (2006/2009b), however, points out that "it will never be possible to clean your

² Stolorow (1994) uses the term "organizing principles" for how we structure and give meaning to our perceptions and experiences, particularly when this is done in "fixed and invariant recurring patterns" (33-34). Resnick sees these patterns as what forms a person's "character" (p. 4).

mind of all pre-understanding" (p. 71). He cites Rennie (2000), who states that "certain aspects of [the therapist's] horizon of understanding . . . are inaccessible to self-reflection" (p. 486). There is no such thing as "immaculate perception, as Nietzsche ironically called it," concludes Staemmler (2006, p. 18). As therapists, we need to accept that our understanding of a client always has an element of *uncertainty*, and that when we share our understanding with a client, we present it as a *hypothesis* to be checked out with the client's point of view. Staemmler (2004/2009a) calls it a *first draft* of our understanding, to be repeatedly revised, refined, and cocreated together with the client within the dialogic relationship (p. 87).

2. The Rule of Description is "Describe, don't explain" (Spinelli, 1992, p. 17). F. Perls took this to the extreme of "Never, never interpret" (1969, p. 121).³ Staemmler (2006/2009b) stresses the impossibility of that command: "[W]e are all interpreting and creating meaning all the time. . . . *You cannot not interpret*" (pp. 65, 74; emphasis in original). Simply by *choosing* one aspect of what we see to *describe*, we are already interpreting that aspect as being more significant than some other we might have described. Staemmler (2006/2009b) puts it in this way: "The question has to be: how can we as Gestalt therapists interpret in ways that are compatible with our basic tenets?" (pp. 65-66). Staemmler (2004) quotes Spinelli (1996, 199ff.) on how to interpret *descriptively*, a way that

retains its focus on the manifest material and seeks to extract the meaning of that material . . . by engaging the client in . . . a process of clarification where . . . [that] material may be 'opened up' to mutual investigation. . . . [F]ocusing on various elements . . . and considering what they express to the client about his or her currently lived experience, what they reveal or imply about his or her self-construct, relations with others, and so forth. (pp. 53-54)

3. The Rule of Horizontalization (The Equalization Rule): This rule "urges us to avoid placing any initial hierarchies of significance or importance upon the items of our descriptions, and instead to treat each initially as having equal value or significance" (Spinelli, 1992, p. 18). Staemmler explains: "If one is too quick in regarding some information as important or unimportant, this may easily block one's view on constellations one has not seen before. Under this aspect, cultivated uncertainty gives way to *new discoveries*" (1997, p. 46; emphasis in original).

³ F. Perls's maxim was a reaction against classical psychoanalytic interpretation, based on a preconceived theoretical framework imposed without consideration of the patient's own perspective and experience, e.g., the assumption that everyone goes through an Oedipal period.

9. Field theory, as defined in **Gestalt psychology**, is a way of understanding and analyzing causal relations, essentially that “any event is a resultant of a multitude of factors”: interaction and interdependence occur among all the factors and forces of the field; nothing can change in one part of the field without affecting everything else (Lewin, 1951/1964, viii-xiii, pp. 44-45). Small, seemingly insignificant, actions or changes can have wide or long-term effects (*butterfly effect*) (Lorenz, 1972/1996, Appendix 1).

Lewin (1951/1964) preferred the narrower term – *life space* – for the application of field theory to a particular individual’s experience and situation. He defines it as “*the person and the psychological environment as it exists for him*” (Cartwright, in Lewin 1951/1964, pp. xi-xii; emphasis added). Wollants (2005, pp. 93-94; 2008, pp. xi-xiii) offers *situation* as another word for life space as it more closely resembles daily life and refers to the fact that one is in a *particular relationship with the environment*.

Field theory permeates all aspects of **Gestalt therapy**, as the original Gestalt agenda was to “locate human distress and confusion not in the confines of a person’s individual psychopathology, but instead in the interactions between people and their situations” (Parlett, in Clarkson and Mackewn, 1993, p. 173). There are three important aspects of “field” in Gestalt therapy.

First, the phenomenological field, where the client’s perceptions and immediate subjective experience are explored (what is figural), the interpretation and meaning given to that experience, and the level of self-awareness and awareness of the *situation*.⁴

Second, the organism/environment field,⁵ the term used by PHG (1951) for the locus of a person’s contact and interactions with the physical and psychosocial environment. The organism and environment are *not* separate, isolated entities. Rather, the organism is *embedded* in a surrounding field and dependent upon its interactions with the environment. PHG (1951/1990; 1951/1994) state that it makes no sense “to speak of eating without mentioning food, or of seeing without light . . . or of speech without communicants”; and that there “is no single function of any animal that completes itself without objects and environment, whether one thinks of . . . sexuality, or perceptual functions, or feeling” (p. 228; pp. 4-5).

Thus, the process at the *contact boundary* where the *self* meets the environment is an important focus for Gestalt therapy. Yontef (1993) points out why the *boundary* “must be kept permeable to allow exchanges, yet firm enough for autonomy”:

⁴See Section 8 above for a discussion of the phenomenological field.

⁵See above references to both Lewin’s “life space” and Wollants’s “situation” as preferable terms for the small interpersonal “fields” of daily life.

When the boundary . . . becomes unclear, lost, or impermeable, this results in a disturbance of the distinction between self and other. . . . In good boundary functioning, people alternate between connecting and separating. . . . In *confluence* (fusion) . . . the distinction between self and other becomes so unclear that the boundary is lost. In *isolation* the boundary becomes so impermeable that connectedness is lost. (pp. 136-137; emphasis in original)

The *self* is not seen as a fixed entity, but as a *regulating process* at the contact boundary. Kepner (1995, ch. 3) describes the *self-functions*:

- regulation of interpersonal and bodily boundaries;
- modulation of experiences by grading, pacing, and amount of intensity;
- self-support, as in self-care, standing up for oneself, valuing one's needs enough to act upon them, and the ability and willingness to reach out for external support, as needed;
- being able to experience, express, and tolerate a range of feelings;
- reality-perception, the checking out of assumptions and beliefs, responding to situations in proportion to the actual event, differentiating past from present, integrating disowned aspects of oneself.

The understanding that "problems are problems of a field, and solutions are solutions of that field" (Yontef, 2009, p. 42), has also shaped Gestalt work with families, organizations, and the larger world. Gestalt *family therapy* sees the family as a system, where everyone is both affected by and contributing to whatever problems exist in contrast to focusing on an identified patient, such as a truant son (Zinker, 1994). Gestalt institutes train people in *organizational consulting*, using field and systems theories to teach skills necessary for leadership, management, and development in large organizations (Nevis, 2005). Melnick and Nevis's *Mending the World: Social Healing Interventions by Gestalt Practitioners Worldwide* (2013) recounts Gestalt practitioners' "social healing interventions" to foster community development and human rights and lessen the blight of poverty and war in the larger world.

Another aspect of the organism/environmental field is the *temporal field* of *past*, *present*, and *future*. Gestalt therapy is said to focus on the "here and now." F. Perls asserted that "there is no other reality than the present" (1947/1992). Of course Perls did work on past and future issues with his patients, though he insisted that the work must not be "talking about" the past or future but emotionally experienced and embodied work – *in the present* – in order for change and growth to take place (1973, pp. 63ff.). The above declaration, however, led to serious misunderstandings. Laura Perls (1992) clarifies it thus:

[The] emphasis on the Here and Now does not imply, as is often assumed, that past and future are unimportant or nonexistent for Gestalt therapy. On the contrary, the past is ever present in our total life experience, our memories, nostalgia, or resentments, and particularly in our habits and hang-ups, in all the unfinished business, the fixed gestalten. The future is present in our preparations and beginnings, in expectation and hope, or dread and despair (pp. 149-150).

In *developmental theory*, F. Perls's view of development as "the transition from environmental support to self-support" is now seen as "inconsistent with gestalt's situational view of self" (Mann, 2010, p. 114). For Wollants (2008), the traditional view of child development as a "unidirectional [*innate* process] in a succession of stages" is also inconsistent with the Gestalt perspective that "from the beginning of a person's existence, it is the person-world relations that are primary" and that "self-support is impossible without environmental support" (pp. 34, 38, 42; emphasis added). The essential need for these supportive relationships comes up with unfinished business, where "the unfinished situation arises from a recurring legitimate need that was frustrated in childhood by significant others and this need will continue to recur until it is met through a satisfactory dependence relation" (p. 42).⁶

The third aspect of "field" is the *dialogic therapeutic relationship*.⁷ The integration of Buber's dialogic I-Thou philosophy into the Gestalt therapeutic relationship created an opportunity for genuine "interhuman" dialogue, in which "the depths of personal life call to one another" (1958/1923; 1951-1962/1965, p. 78). It was then understood that there are two real human beings in a mutual subject-to-subject relationship. This intimate connection takes place in what Buber (1947/1955) calls *the between*:

⁶For examples of the Gestalt field perspective on development throughout the life cycle, see Stern (1985/2000) and Frank on infant-caregiver interactions (2001, pp. 110-112); Wheeler on childhood (1998; 2002, ch.1); McConville on adolescence (1995, chs. 1, 6; 2003); Papernow on stepfamilies (1993); Wollants on the elderly (2008/2012, p. 36); Sabar on bereavement (2000, pp. 154, 161-162). For the neuropsychological perspective, see Siegel (1999).

⁷This approach is a move away from both F. Perls's individualistic, non-supportive, and confrontive style, and the old psychoanalytic view of the patient as an "isolated mind" dealing with conflicting intrapsychic drives and forces (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992, p. 4; Stolorow, et al., 1994, p. ix). It is also a rejection of the traditional analytic therapeutic relationship based on the analyst's anonymous neutrality; unresponsiveness to and frustration of a patient's wishes for support or gratification; assumptions about the possibility of objectivity and "immaculate perception" in interpretation; denial of the influence of the therapist's own phenomenology and organizing principles on his perceptions of the patient; and the analyst's grandiose stance of omniscience about the patient's unconscious experience and motivations without regard to, or respect for, the patient's phenomenology or subjective experience (Orange, Atwood, and Stolorow, 1997/2001, ch. 3; Atwood and Stolorow, 1979/1993).

[S]omething takes place between one being and another the like of which can be found nowhere in nature. . . . It is rooted in one being turning to another as another, as this particular other being, in order to communicate with it in a sphere that is common to them but reaches out beyond the special sphere of each. I call this sphere . . . the sphere of "between." . . . It is not the wand of the individual or of the social, but of a third which draws the circle round the happening. On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where the *I* and *Thou* meet, there is the realm of the "between." (pp. 203-204; emphasis in original)

In this realm, the dialogic process can lead to the emergence of "*healing through meeting*" (Buber, 1951/1990, pp. 96-97).

This process is *not* a technique but an existential stance, which includes *presence*, *inclusion*, and *confirmation*. *Presence* is the turning of your whole person toward the other, seeing the other's uniqueness, and opening to and honoring his or her experience (Buber, 1923/1958, pp. 11, 32; 1965, ch. 3; Zinker, 1994, pp. 32-33, 158-59). *Inclusion* is "the bold swinging – demanding the most intensive stirring of one's being – into the life of the other," without judgment and without losing the separateness or centeredness of one's own experience (Buber, 1965, p. 81).⁸ *Confirmation* is the recognition of the other as a fellow human being and accepting her as she is, as well as the validity of her perspective on the world. At the same time, it affirms the person's potential to change and grow and challenges her to experiment with new ways of being. Buber (1965) states:

[T]he inmost growth of the self is not accomplished, as people like to suppose, . . . in man's relation to himself, but in the relation of the one and the other, between men, . . . in the mutuality of the . . . making present of another self and the knowledge that one is made present in his own self by the other. (p. 71)

Yontef (1993) clarifies this dimension in clinical terms, saying that good therapy requires "surrendering to that which happens between the therapist and the patient . . . a surrender to what develops and emerges out of the interaction" (p. 273). This "between" is the place from which the healing connection emerges and the cocreation of the therapy begins.

In this context, therapist *self-disclosure* in terms of either the sharing of

⁸ See Staemmler's book, *Empathy in Psychotherapy* (2009/2012), for an excellent exploration of "how therapists and clients understand each other."

a personal experience, or the sharing of the therapist's reactions, thoughts, or feelings towards the patient within the therapeutic situation, becomes possible and often beneficial.⁹ Zahm (1998), however, states: "[S]elf-disclosure is appropriate only when it enhances and furthers the therapeutic process and the relationship" (p. 28). For example, after a patient's revelation of shame, "the therapist's account of a similar experience may bolster the patient's expansion while decreasing the possibility of humiliation" (p. 45).

A *psychoanalytic relational approach* has developed in the last few decades with Kohut's self psychology and Stolorow's intersubjectivity theory. Kohut's self-object functions – "relational supports that maintain, restore and transform positive self-experience" (Stawman, 2009, p. 21) – have enhanced Gestalt's relational understanding of development (Hycner and Jacobs, 1995, ch. 8). Kohut delineated three basic developmental needs that the self-object functions meet:

1. Mirror needs: "We all need people . . . to 'light up' over our presence, . . . to prize us and reflect our pride and expansiveness" (in Hycner and Jacobs, 1995, p. 133). Children need parents who see and hear them, accept and approve of them, and recognize and reflect the meaning and importance of what they have to say (Rowe and Mac Isaac, 1989/1991, pp. 44-45).

2. Idealizing Needs: Children need to feel that their parents are all-powerful and willing and able to *protect* them from danger, over-stimulation, and frustration, as well as to *comfort*, *soothe*, and *calm* them when they are distressed (in Hycner and Jacobs 1995, p. 133). This facilitates their ability to regulate their own emotions eventually, by "internalizing anxiety-relieving mental structures" (Rowe and Mac Isaac, 1989/1991, p. 43).

3. Twinship needs: "[W]e all need people with whom we can identify as like ourselves – to reaffirm that we are a human among humans" (Hycner and Jacobs, p. 133). Rowe and Mac Isaac (1989/1991) note that the child between 4 and 6 years old feels a likeness with a parent, usually of the same sex, by dressing up like "mommy or daddy" (pp. 46-47). Imaginary friends play a similar role.

In this developmental model, as Jacobs states, "disorder arises when there is a poor fit between the needs of the developing person and the resources and capabilities of the environment" (Hycner and Jacobs, 1995, pp. 150). If these needs are *not* met this is seen as a "developmental derailment" (p. 156), which is often brought to therapy later in life as unfinished business. Gestalt therapists believe that development can best be put back on track by a healing meeting within a dialogic relationship that satisfies the original unmet needs.

Despite this insightful material on development, contact, and self-

⁹This is in contrast to the traditional analytic value of anonymous neutrality with the therapist's presentation of self as a blank screen for the projection of transference.

regulation, Gestalt theorists are uncomfortable with the term "self-object." Kohut uses the words "object" and "function" and focuses only on a single self, "not on an other" as a real person, not on a relationship with reciprocity. The existential "interhuman" quality of two human beings relating intimately with one another in a "genuine encounter" is lacking (Hycner and Jacobs, 1995, pp. 202-204).

Intersubjectivity¹⁰ moves closer to Gestalt theory with its use of the term "subject-subject relationship" and its emphasis on being "experience-near," i.e., understanding the client's subjective emotional experience by means of "empathic attunement" (Rowe and Mac Isaac, 1989/1991, p. 40). "Attunement," however, can become just a *technique* for listening, a means of understanding another's emotions, but not necessarily the stance on the *interhuman* level of Buber's presence, inclusion, confirmation, and the "between" that is at the heart of Gestalt therapy (Hycner and Jacobs, 1995, pp. 135-136).¹¹

As my writing on the dialogic relationship was coming to a close, my relationship with a client who had AIDS suddenly came back to me. As an unpaid volunteer therapist, I met with him in his own apartment on a weekly basis for about two years. When we ended the therapy, I asked what had helped him the most. He thought for a moment and then said, "You kept coming back."

Conclusion

I have traced the genealogy of the *Gestalt* through the three generations of Gestalt theory in philosophy, Gestalt psychology, and Gestalt therapy. It is hoped that my readers will now have a better sense of the answer to that perplexing question, "What's a Gestalt?"¹²

There is one more question that may be asked: "Why do we need all this theoretical material? Is it really necessary to know this esoteric theory of what a Gestalt is in order to become a good Gestalt therapist?" In *Ego, Hunger and Aggression*, F. Perls (1947/1992) spoke directly to this issue:

Many a reader will be reluctant to follow a rather theoretical

¹⁰ For more on psychoanalytic intersubjectivity, see the writings of Stolorow, Atwood, Orange, and Brandchaft.

¹¹ For further discussion of similarities and differences among Gestalt therapy, self psychology, and intersubjectivity, see Hycner and Jacobs (1995); Wheway (1997); Sapriel (1998); Jacobs and Hycner (2009).

¹² See Appendix for an experiential exercise to help people see how the Gestalt qualities play out in their own lives.

discussion as an introduction to a book dealing with the problems of practical psychology. But he needs an acquaintance with certain basic concepts pervading the whole of this book. Although the practical value of these ideas will become apparent only through following up their repeated application, he should, right from the beginning, at least know their gross structure. (p. 3)

As Muller (1997) aptly wrote: "The relationship between theory and practice is comparable to the relationship between the written note and the sound produced by a musical instrument" (p. 100).

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APPENDIX

Experiential Exercise

Find an aspect of yourself that reflects each of the Gestalt qualities.

1. Transposability

- Are there processes, patterns of behavior that you typically use in a number of different situations in your life (for better or for worse)?

2. The Whole is Different from the Sum of its Parts

- What has been your experience of "the between?"
 - Making love, nursing a baby, being in nature, playing or listening to music, a mystical experience, an intimate conversation, a therapeutic relationship?
- What "Aha!" moments have you experienced?
 - Something you were trying to understand suddenly made sense.
 - A solution to a problem suddenly emerged.
 - A long-debated decision was suddenly made.
 - The essence of a situation suddenly became clear.

3. Organization

a. Structure

- How do you see your body structure as a reflection of your personal history, emotions, thoughts and experiences?
 - Posture, gestures, voice, facial expression, breathing, muscle tension or relaxation?

b. Figure/Ground

- What usually stands out or is figure for you, when you first enter a room?

- Familiar faces, children, animals, the decor, food or alcohol, dirtiness or cleanliness?
- Do you easily form and stay with one figure? - single-tasker?
- Do you jump around dealing with several figures in close succession? - multi-tasker?
- Do you have difficulty finding or focusing on a figure of interest?
 - Affected by ADD, depression, brain-damage?

c. Dynamics and Forces

- Which internal forces supported or hindered you in realizing your potential?
 - A talent or passion for something, determination, hard work (or the lack of these)
- Which external forces supported or hindered you in realizing your potential?
 - Family, friends, teachers, money, education, opportunities (or the lack of any of these)
- When there were changes or disruptions in the organization of your life – e.g., going away to college, getting married or divorced, having a child, gaining or losing a loved one, moving, a promotion at work, unemployment, facing illness, injury, or disability – what creative adjustments have you made to re-organize your life?

4. Principle of Prägnanz

- Do you have moments when you can “perceive, think, create, decide, choose, act, and interact in the clearest, most productive, integrated, and harmonious way”?
- In what situations in your life is it possible for you to do this, (if at all!)?
- What supports or interferes with your ability to be this way?

5. Tertiary Qualities

- What experiences have you had in your personal life, or as a therapist, where you have had Perls’s kind of intuitive “extrasensory perception?”
 - “[W]here you could see what was coming, what was missing, what a person was silent about.”

6. Tendency towards Closure or Completion

- Generally, do you, or does someone in your life, tend to feel that you have to get things done right away, as soon as possible? (to complete the Gestalt)
- If so, does this create conflict with others in your life, when you or they don’t feel the same urgency, and prefer a slower process or pace?
- Do you experience the Zeigarnik effect (persistent recall of unfinished business)?
- How do you deal with unfinished business in your life?

7. Isomorphism/Holism

- At your current stage of life, how easy or difficult is it to integrate all the parts of your self and feel whole?
- As a therapist (or with family or friends), what seemingly insignificant remarks or movements have you picked up on and found that they lead to important issues?

8. Phenomenology

- What experiences have you had where you, and others with you, had completely different perceptions and interpretations of what happened in a situation that you experienced together?

9. Field Theory

- Think of the multiplicity of factors in the field that contributed to a small or large event in your life, e.g., having a banana in your cereal; meeting your spouse/partner; choosing the work that you do.
- When you read what someone says or observe something happening, do you consider the broader context or situation from which it comes, before judging whether it is right or wrong, and before interpreting what it means?

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