

Client-therapist relationship in gestalt psychotherapy essay sample

[Life](#), [Relationships](#)



Abstract

There are many theories that have been advanced by psychologist as they try to explain the human mind, ways of thinking and the factors that shape personality among other issues. It all began with Freud then Piaget. Other theories built on the works of these psychologists either in refute or to reinforce the ideas of the postulated theories. This paper focuses on Gestalt person centered therapy in regards to what it posits, its core concepts and how it works in leading to self awareness and personal development.

Person –Centered Experimental Psychotherapies

Gestalt psychotherapy according to Rogers (1980) is a dynamic therapy that just like the various psycholoanalytic therapies builds on the premise that the unconscious mind has great influence on the behavior and conscious functioning of a person this psychotherapy. This psychotherapy builds from the observations made by Freud, whereby clients with mental disorders or hysteria exhibited recovery or improvement as soon as the seemingly unimportant and forgotten events were brought to the conscious mind and addressed. Although Gestalt psychotherapy borrows some ideas from the Freudian psychotherapy, it differentiates itself in the sense that it focuses attention on the recent/ here and now events as opposed to the childhood events according to Fall, Holder and Marquis (2003).

Gestalt means whole configuration and thus gestalt psychotherapy concerns itself with helping clients attain a sense of wholeness in the emotional, mental, spiritual and physical aspect of being that is an interactive whole and

works towards attaining a healthy balance of sorts. Thus, it is safe to say that the major concern of gestalt therapy is to develop the clients self awareness and self support systems which comes in handy to sustaining the creative, harmonious and spontaneous relationship with others. (Joyce and Sills, 2001 Toman and Woldt, 2005). This may all sound complicated and almost obstruct but the most important thing to note is that gestalt psychotherapy is experimental oriented and focuses on what is out rightly obvious in the here and now. (Fall, Holder and Marquis, 2003)

Fall, Holder and Marquis argue that Gestalt school of psychology posits that the brain functioning has a correlation to psychological events. The inability of a person to reconcile the different constructs of his/her personality to a health whole root from some psychological disturbance. Therefore, a gestalt psychologist would lend himself more of his efforts on encouraging the client reflect on inner self and particularly their emotions, release their and address them for what they are rather than suppressing them.

Away from that brief history and introduction, what are the ultimate concerns in gestalt psychotherapy? Gestalt psychotherapy is concerned with healing through dialogue and not merely the small-talk kind, but an honest, open, non judgmental and comprehensive kind of talk where there are no inhibitions to the client or rules. This implies that the relationship between the therapist and the client is a dialogic kind of relationship. The major task of the therapist according to Woldt and Toman (2005) is to assist the patient to become aware of the unconscious way that he/she pushes others away from him them, or unawares cuts away human contact with themselves

As noted earlier, Gestalt therapy believes that human contact is what brings about healing and thus the therapist client relationship is of utmost importance. This means that the role of the therapist is basically to explore with the client the current state of affairs in his/her life and not to attempt to point out undesired behavior and modifying them. The healing comes out better when autonomy and growth through self awareness is fostered. (Woldt and Toman, 2005) Of course this takes place through dialogue. The relationship here is that the therapist and client relate in a cordial and friendly manner and the therapist propels the conversation in an energized tone. This sets the pace for the client to talk about themselves, how they feel about anything and everything surrounding their life. More to that, this intricate relationship and dialogue with the therapist assist the client to hear themselves and how they experience themselves, how the therapist experiences them, how they experience the therapist as an individual and friend and so on.

Needless to say this kind of therapy can be very tricky to use especially in the case of two opposite sex. It may yield a counter transference and the therapeutic distance. This may impede on the effectiveness of the therapy. It is therefore important that the therapist be very self aware of himself and objective through out the whole process of therapy. He should be in close monitoring of the evolution of the relationship with the client and on the look out for potential obstruction or abuse of power during the sessions of therapy (Rogers, 1980). This is not only a requirement in gestalt psychotherapy but basically in all psychotherapies. It is required by law that

the therapist should always keep a therapeutic distance from the client because a breach in observing that distance is tantamount to abuse. This is because in therapy the client is usually vulnerable to the therapist and may feel pressured to please the authority (therapist) although in the real situation, this would be atrocious.

In gestalt therapy the most essential aspect is awareness and not dictating what behavior a client should or should not take. The therapist is merely a figure who takes the client through the many choices of behavior that he /she would like to adopt and help them in pointing out the orgasmic reactions as well as the consequences behind their choice and in accordance to their believes and values (Joyce and Sills, 2001). This means that if not in the jurisdiction to the therapist to choose for the client what is morally right or wrong since the foundational basic of gestalt therapy is that the client is response-able and are capable of charting their own course and behavior. Basically, in this therapy it is not about the ' should' and ' should not's' so to speak since this impedes on spontaneity and the integration of wholesome self awareness. (Woldt and Toman, 2005).

Gestalt therapy follows a humanistic approach to psychotherapy. That is, dealing with problems that make up human life say love, fear, pride, self actualization, belonging, individuality, creativity among others. Dealing with these human issues pitches a better understanding of human beings (Joyce and Sills, 2001). It is also person-centered meaning that it lends itself more to personal relationships in the client therapist interaction and the main goal is to push the client to a state of realization of oneself. The Gestalt therapy is

more realistic and rational as compared to other therapies that focus on past events that may not have any relevance to the client's current situation.

The core concepts of Gestalt therapeutic relationship.

Whenever a client goes for therapy of what ever kind, the mentality held by the client is the therapist holds all the answers and should tell them what to do in that situation or problem they are facing. However, the awakening truth that no therapy should directly tell a client what to do as this solves the problem temporarily and creates another on top. That is, dependency and helplessness.

In Gestalt therapy, the therapist affirms orgasmic trust between him and the client as well as nurtures or encourages the client to be confident and have a faith in their own thoughts. The hallmark of Gestalt therapy lies in the ability of a client to articulate feelings and own his freedom and limitations so as to live a fulfilling life and contribute to the lives of the others.

Genuineness is essential in the Gestalt psychotherapy session. This means that the therapist should not flaunt a façade or a professional front. It is all about being you in this therapy and indeed, this increases the odds of the client experiencing constructive growth and behavioral change. The therapist client relationship is transparent letting each other in on the flowing emotions in the here and now moment and even when a client may feel uncomfortable to let out some feelings or attitudes, this should not happen on the port of the therapist.

Another core concept in Gestalt relationship between client and therapist is that of unconditional positive regards to the client. Notably, human beings tend to relate better with some individuals than others. It may therefore be hard to show acceptance and positive regards to some clients especially when the feelings they express go against the therapist morals and values. Nonetheless, Gestalt therapy points out that therapeutic healing is more likely to occur when the client has positive regards for the client, irrespective of the current feelings or emotions being expressed say anger, hate, fear, pride, disgust, confusion and so on. That is, " the therapist should prize the clients in a total rather than a conditional way". (Rogers, 1980, p 115 -116).

Empathy is perhaps the most important and facilitative aspects of the gestalt psychotherapy (Rogers, 1980). This means the ability of the therapist the feeling not they may be feeling. That is, his ability to sense the feeling and meanings to feelings expressed by the client and communicate them back in an understanding way. So much into the client's world is the therapist that they can be able to classify underlying meanings that the clients may be oblivious of. In this client therapist relationship it is all about listening and active listening and understating for that matter. The session is characterized by non judgmental, sensitive communication. In cases where these feelings are not understood then seeking clarification using a paraphrase of the client word expresses understanding and leads to self awareness, for example, I hear your say that you are unable to understand why you are always furious with your husband, why do you think that is the case?

The client role in the Gestalt session is an active and focused kind of role. The client should be willing and ready to open up and express himself and “are create atmosphere and attitude toward working in therapy that lead to greater awareness of the reality of oneself and how one interact with others and how one functions in the here and now (Greenwald, p. 269 cited in Fall, Holders, Marquis, 2003, p. 232).

The Gestalt psychotherapist believes that treatment or leaving of the patients lies in the very relationship that they have with the client. (Joyce and Sills, 2001 Toman and Woldt, 2005) Gestalt therapist points out that some clients avoid the human contact with others or rather fore contact with others because it makes them feel anxious. For example a client who spills out the most important subject of his visit or the intimate reason for seeking therapy within the first few minutes of the session is said to be avoiding fare contact because they there anxious. Notably everyone at some point experiences this feeling of anxiety although at different levels. This interrupts spontaneous and creative interactions with others. This should first be eradicated in the Gestalt therapy as the client and therapist progress towards self awareness.

The quality of therapeutic relationship between the client and the therapist in Gestalt psychotherapy is related on the level of feedback and immediate in the dialogue between the two. The therapist is seen as a tool of change, and combined the confrontational, supportive and empathetically attributes. The therapist uses the I-Thou relationship experienced directly by the client to foster contact and catalyses the here and now feelings in the client toward

self awareness. The therapist challenges the client when they avoid contact with the therapist by bringing the disturbance to the client's attention.

(Marquis, Holder and Fall, 2003, p. 232). The therapist responsibility is to ask the question how and not why because the latter sounds judgmental to the client's issues.

The therapy session in Gestalt begins with an exploration of both the client and the therapist experiences as a whole then cumulatively narrows down to the clients own experiences (Rogers, 1980). This is basically for the purpose of establishing contact and building rapport so that both parties feel comfortable to open up more without inhibitions or hiding behind façades.

Unlike the psychoanalysis approaches which also acknowledge the importance of therapeutic relationship with the client, Gestalt psychotherapy uses a phenomenological approach to helps the client to freely explore the important events in their life as well as experiment with the specific events to that they are more aware of the things that happens in their lives and their response to these events (Joyce and Sills, 2001). This in turn ensures that these has a client 'let-what-is-stand-out-in-the-open' approach to life which essentially acts as a mirror to reflecting personal convictions and truth hence leading the client to self awareness in life. This aspect goes on up until it becomes part of the daily life of the clients, and beyond the therapy walls, and at such a point, it can be said that the clients has experienced healing (Rogers, 1980).

Conclusion

The client therapist relationship in gestalt psychotherapy is in exhaustive and goes deep in to fostering an environment where the client freely expresses thoughts that he may not be aware of and addressing them more and more in order to be more aware of one. But generally, it is all about revealing the feelings, thoughts of the client and how they affect actions in daily relationship. By and large the relationship should be close enough yet still be sufficient to prevent any abuse by the therapist or the client.

References

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