

behave and of how unaware they have hitherto been. As therapy continues, client and therapist may pay more attention to general personality issues and the general patterns and conditions which contribute to clients' insufficient awareness. The idea is that increasingly clients carry their higher levels of awareness into their everyday lives and maintain and build upon them after therapy ends.

THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

There are at least two ways of looking at the therapist–client relationship in gestalt therapy: that of Perls in his demonstrations and workshops and that of other important practitioners, for instance Laura Perls, Gary Yontef and James Simkin. The relationship and style of Perls' Esalen workshops is often called 'Perlsism' or 'Perlsian Gestalt' to differentiate it from the relationship and style of therapy practised by those other leading gestalt therapists.

Perls was a charismatic and dominating personality who, once he became well known, may have attracted clients who felt they might benefit from his confronting approach. Though ostensibly he advocated a democratic dialogue between therapist and client, the reality was that much of the time he was controlling the therapeutic process. Perls' son Stephen was to observe that his father did not know how to relate to another person on an equal basis (Perls, 1993). Fritz Perls' relationships with clients contained the paradox of advocating personal responsibility at the same time as assuming the major responsibility for the therapeutic process himself.

At his best Perls was so concerned with helping clients that he would not allow them to sabotage their growth by being phoney, an important word in his vocabulary. A contemporary phrase for Perls' relationships with clients is 'tough love'. Other leading practitioners have conducted gestalt therapy within the context of more equal or horizontal therapist–client relationships.

All gestalt therapists regard the therapeutic relationship as a 'working' rather than a 'talking' relationship. Yontef and Simkin observe: 'When one moves from talking about a problem or being with someone in a general way to studying what one is doing, especially being aware of how one is aware, one is working' (1989, p. 341). In this working relationship, both therapists and clients are self-responsible: therapists for the quality of their presence and self-awareness, their knowledge and skills in relating to the client, and for maintaining an open and non-defensive stance; and clients for their commitment to working to become more in charge of their lives through developing greater self-awareness. Furthermore, therapists are responsible for not colluding in clients' manipulations to get them to do what clients fear they cannot do for themselves. Instead, therapists should relate to clients in a warm, respectful, direct and honest manner.

THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS

interventions are decided upon in an ongoing dialogue between therapist and client. Such interventions are considered as experiments. A major purpose of encouraging clients to experiment with different ways of thinking and acting is to collect information to achieve genuine understanding rather than mere changes in behaviour. Repeatedly clients are encouraged to 'Try this and see what you experience' (Yontef and Jacobs, 2000). Creativity from therapists and clients in setting up and carrying out appropriate experiments is highly valued.

Awareness technique

Gestalt therapy is an experiential rather than a verbal or interpretive approach. Assessment data about how clients interrupt their contact with life are collected as therapists and clients work together. Gestalt therapy demands that clients experience themselves as fully as possible in the here and now, both to understand their present manipulations and contact boundary disturbances, and also to re-experience the unfinished business of past problems and traumas.

Perls (1973) regarded the simple phrase 'Now I am aware' as the foundation of the gestalt approach. The 'now' because it keeps therapists and clients in the present and reinforces the fact that experience can only take place in the present. The 'aware' because it gives both therapists and clients the best picture of clients' present resources. Awareness always takes place in the present and opens up possibilities for action.

Clients are asked to become aware of their body language, their breathing, their voice quality and their emotions as much as of any pressing thoughts. Below are some examples of Perls directing the attention of Gloria, the client, to her non-verbal behaviour taken from the *Three Approaches to Psychotherapy* film series (Dolliver, 1991, p. 299; Perls, 1965).

'What are you doing with your feet now?'

'Are you aware of your smile?'

'You didn't squirm for the last minute.'

'Are you aware that your eyes are moist?'

'Are you aware of your facial expression?'

One way of following up a client's awareness report is for the therapist to say 'Stay with it' or 'Feel it out.' Such instructions can encourage clients to more fully experience and work through feelings to completion. For example, staying with moist eyes may lead to further experiencing and then identifying the reasons for feeling sad and to crying.

Exaggeration, which may focus on either movement and gesture or on verbal statements, is another way of heightening clients' awareness of how they communicate. In each instance, clients are asked progressively and repeatedly to exaggerate the behaviour. Examples of exaggeration requests from Perls' interview with Gloria are as follows