

Gestalt Therapy: of “Ordinary People”

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Gestalt is a German word meaning “whole or completion” (Corey, 2015. P. 201) which is the lens in how the theory views a person in their entire being in their contextual existence. The here and now in conjunction with the I/Thou relationship between the therapist and the client with emphasis on dialogue and direct experiencing is what leads to a wholeness.

The fragmented parts of ourselves that have not been resolved cause roadblocks to us fully being engaged in the present. Since the approach is relatively confrontational by “taking the plunge into the very thing that is fraught with anxiety and make contact with those parts of themselves that have been submerged and denied” (Corey, 2015. P. 216), Gestalt therapy prescribes “personality voids” (Corey, 2015. P. 218) as the avoidance of what needs to be tackled. Since it is not just surface behaviors that are being dealt with but the underlying issues, research has shown benefits for “personality disturbances, psychosomatic problems, and substance addictions...and treating a variety of psychological disorders” (Corey, 2015. P. 225). In terms of human nature, the framework is like the person-centered approach in seeing the strength within the individual themselves to change and regulate to be “who they really are in the world” (Corey, 2015. P. 201).

Conrad displayed retroreflection to deal with the unfinished business of grief over his brother's death. He believes that he should have died with him together and the one wrong thing was “I hung on” (Redford, 1980, 1:43:52). As a result, there is a blockage in living every day to the fullest, which is why he attempted suicide, and tries to mask what he feels by living how he “should be” and deflecting the pain. However, the blocked energy is no longer adaptive, and his denied feelings keep bursting and he reaches out to his friends and Dr. Burger for genuine connection. His own self is trying to integrate what is truly felt and the reality of his circumstances to achieve congruence.

As Dr. Burger, there are many techniques to choose from in the Gestalt therapy but the two that could be used with Conrad are empty-chair technique and making the rounds. Conrad's relationship with his mother is complicated, especially since she never visited him at the hospital and was in Spain or had the flu (Redford, 1980, 1:06:22) but he believes she would have gone if Buck were there. When he even mentions the name Buck (Redford, 1980, 0:42:31), his mother flinches and starts to get up and walk away from the conversation but he continues to bid for her affection by offering to help set up the table only to be immediately rejected. It was as if Buck was the only connection between his mother as shown in his flashback memory, the triangle gazing of love and laughs were only towards Buck not to each other. It would be important for Conrad to confront his mother on a deep level because when she found out about him quitting the swim team she says, "it's to hurt me" and he replies, "don't you have that backwards" (1:05:49). By making the rounds, Conrad would be able to speak with the other family members such as Buck who he feels pain for being mad at (1:40:42) or his father that is always appeasing. Even if he might not be able to get an answer, "the purpose is to confront, to risk, to disclose the self, to experiment with new behavior and to grow and change" (Corey, 2015. P. 216).

Gestalt therapy is superbly beneficial because Conrad's inner truth is unavoidably coming out and the exercises would expedite the ridding of that blocked energy. It is exactly the unfinished business of his brother's passing and the tense dynamic with his mother that was inhibiting his current functioning. As his self-awareness grows, his words and behaviors are actively becoming in sync with his true feelings to become more of a whole person.

References

Corey, Gerald. (2015). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy., Tenth Edition,* Thompson Learning.

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