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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COUPLE THERAPY FROM A GESTALT PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This scientific article briefly presents the main theoretical concepts and topics in working with couples and their intimate relationship from the perspective of Gestalt therapy. The topics covered in the first part of the paper are: Definition of couple; Observation of the couple through the process, content and phenomenology of the process; Observation of the couple through the experiential cycle; The most common interruptions/resistances of the cycle; The couple as a system field and the couple as a metaphor; and Phenomenology of silence. In the second part of the paper, the focus is on the following topics: Creativity in long intimate relationships; Development of an intimate relationship; Creative customization; Experimental attitude and methodology in working with couples; Hard work and discipline in working with a couple. In other therapies dealing with couples, emphasis is placed on the content and structure of their lives. In this work, the question of how gestalt therapists emphasize the creative abilities of the partner as an aesthetic individual, that is, a system trapped in its quarrels, is mostly encouraged. It gives special meaning to how the couple describes their problem.

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Introduction:-

Gestalt therapy is a system and method for understanding and possibly changing ourselves as creative beings. One of its founders, Laura Perls, explained how the basic concept of Gestalt therapy is more philosophical and aesthetic than technical. Furthermore, Gestalt therapy is an existential-phenomenological approach, and as such is experiential and experimental. Gestalt formation and destruction is an aesthetic process, both in individual and multipersonal systems. When a couple successfully copes with a dilemma, the experience they have then is a feeling of wholeness, completeness, justice, goodness, beauty. Completed gestalt - represents a complete experience in which the couple becomes aware of how they perceive and assimilate, which represents aesthetic pleasure and confirms them as valuable human beings. Unfinished gestalt - represents unresolved problems that keep gnawing at the couple, making them feel sad, impersonal, ugly and frustrated.

Working on an unfinished gestalt is a typical example of diverting attention, in Gestalt therapy, a sign from the past that interferes with the present: it is not a matter of magically releasing an inner burden through the provision of some type of psychodrama, but rather integrating this element as a burden of one's life into a meaningful whole, as one of the "polarities" in the client's life.

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The birth of an energized gestalt flows smoothly and beautifully from awareness through energy to mobilization, action, contact and assimilation, which is the aesthetic standard for good form and the basis of health in human interaction. Aesthetic values in interactions emerge spontaneously, make contact, and result in a satisfying determination to complete a unique work (which has a beginning, middle, and end) within a certain time frame.

Gestalt couple therapy focuses on people's high awareness of what they are doing is good, from the moment they are shown the way they have interrupted and blocked their own processes during the interactive cycle. Blockages and interruptions are actually resistances to awareness and contact, which on the one hand form a dark spot of awareness, and on the other hand, they are a manifestation of the best possible functioning of the system at that moment when a decision was made for their common problem.

A well-functioning couple doesn't need to pay attention to their process, because as long as the process is going well, it stays in the background. However, when the process works poorly, it comes to the fore and the couple comes to therapy. Then, together with the therapist, he explores the "figure" to which they are both attached and which they both care about. And therapists go through the same process as their clients. They observe the couple, still not knowing what they care about, what interests them, or what is important to them. Something is allowed to become a "figure" in the process, and then the couple is told about it. We call this action an intervention. The intervention expands the couple's awareness, drawing something out of the background to make it a figure. If the couple can discuss awareness, get something out of it, and choose to change their behavior, the therapist is satisfied. If the couple cannot do this, then the therapist creates an experiment that provides the building blocks for new awareness within a concrete framework. The experiment exposes the couple to new behavior, experience, and insight, and then they can choose whether to add the new experience to their life repertoire. The session ends by introducing the couple to a new way of self-observation.

Definition of a couple from a Gestalt perspective

A couple, from a gestalt perspective, represents two people who have something that brings them together or brings them together and they "discover" each other. They can become friends or partners, share life, experiences, feelings, pain. They meet in the hope that they will enrich each other's lives, fill their souls and hearts. In the broadest sense they are a "couple". They meet friends, go to the cinema, have fun, travel. They cook together and invite friends over for dinner. It is said that "they are intimate" when there is an energy field that unites them in a common interest, curiosity and commitment to each other, even when they are apart. We also know people who work together. They are also a "couple". They can be business partners. They are friends, they discuss and solve problems together, they argue about the political situation, they share the weekly newspaper over coffee, they have common interests, they have common goals and they share visions related to work or the "good life".

Also, people who give each other comfort and support, who enjoy each other's company share life, have common sexual experiences, have a common picture of their future, get married and become a married couple.

When the term "couple" is used, it refers to two people with approximately the same level of experience, maturity, personal power, and shared influence - although this is not always true or even necessary. What is much more important is a permanent interest in the other's ideas, their development, as well as the persistence to be constantly connected.

These are people who maintain a level of curiosity, desire and openness to potential surprises and excitements in life. Couples who work well are constantly learning about each other and realize that this learning provides the foundation and support they need to help them endure both the most ordinary and the most extraordinary events in their lives. Couples who work well may disagree about something, they may argue heatedly, it's part of their passion. They can be temporarily separated - and later reunited. Attraction does not dissipate, but is modified through crises, illnesses, social disasters, family tragedies and triumphs.

During their life together, the initial excitement of their togetherness is modified through everyday problems, routine, birth of children, death of loved ones. But this fullness of family life usually enriches and strengthens their connection.

Observation of the couple through the process, content and phenomenology of the process

In other therapies that deal with couples, emphasis is placed on the content and structure of their lives, while in Gestalt therapy the question of how the couple describes their problem or how Gestalt therapists emphasize their creative abilities as partners, and how they as a couple are stuck in with their quarrels. They want to get them interested in this process, to increase common awareness, where they are successful and where they fail to reach each other. They want to warm them up for this moment-to-moment process as they attack or fight. Gestalt therapists support the beauty and goodness of the couple, support the process of their struggle, their pain.

It is important to emphasize that the therapist himself can be a very powerful tool for transformation. Some even claim that the therapist is the very instrument in therapy. That is why it should be possible to point out an aspect of the therapist's personality that builds his originality and strength. Therefore, it is necessary to have an insight into our capacities and our limitations, then what type of personality we belong to and what style of therapist we are building. For clients, the therapist represents an image of optimal health. The therapist should create an impression of the client's personality based on what he knows about personal experiences of different personality types.

The perspective from which one looks at what is wrong with a couple is of a procedural nature. They are observed while they are together, how well they communicate, how they interrupt communication. It is observed how they are stuck together in the sense that they have "lost" each other, they don't see, they don't listen, they don't talk, they talk too fast, they talk a lot. They may have lost the energy and excitement that keeps curiosity alive in a relationship. Perhaps they have lost what is beautiful in life: the happiness and satisfaction of having a witness to their existence.

The phenomenological approach involves trying to stay as close to the client's experience as possible, staying in the here-and-now moment, and instead of interpreting the client's behavior, helping him to explore and become aware of how he understands the world. In other words, this approach helps the client to find out "who he is and what he is like".

The phenomenological method is actually more of an attitude than a technique. It involves approaching the client with an open mind and genuine curiosity, where nothing matters but the discovery of personal experience. By doing this, the client's awareness of his own process and the choices he makes is focused and sharpened.

The phenomenological method was first proposed by Husserl (1931) as a method for investigating the nature of existence. It was adapted for therapeutic purposes and then became an exploration of the client's subjective meaning and experience of self and the world.

There are three main components. The first is stopping (braking), where the therapist's beliefs, evaluations, and judgments are temporarily set aside in order to see the phenomenon or situation "as if for the first time." The second is description, where the phenomenon is simply described in terms that are immediately apparent to the senses. The third is horizontalism, where all aspects of the phenomenon are given equal importance. Phil Joyce & Charlotte Sills add a fourth element – active curiosity – which they believe brings the other three to life. (Phil Joyce & Charlotte Sills, 2009).

Process versus content in couple work

The content is the life story of every couple. A description of their routine, what they do and don't do. What they should and what they had to do. Content is their daily life. It is a description of their past and all projects for the future. Content is the named problem to be solved. It is the story of their victories and defeats, all aspects that the couple relates to practical life matters and the couple's social activities. Content supports the couple in a social environment. The content reveals the couple as part of a cultural and social system. At the same time, the content is very attractive to the therapist as well. It can happen that the therapist "gets caught up" in this and is tempted to advise the couple or to solve problems for them. Grabbing the content and answering for them is how they then move away from thinking about their own problems and being able to find answers to them without anyone's help.

Process, on the other hand, is how a couple experiences their life. How they express themselves here and now. It is their speech, movements, feelings, how they experience their feelings in the present time. The process is dynamic. It is the therapist's free, comfortable and fresh perception of what the couple experienced here and now. The process of observation is unique, clear, precise, because it is a true description of the present moment, using the language and

expressions used by the couple, the language of what is there, the language used to describe the experience that is happening in the couple.

The process is always new, always happening, in constant motion, but always happening in the present moment.

What does the therapist "pay attention" to when following the process? First of all, the therapist is an observer, someone who evaluates the event, but does not drown in it. He may have his sympathies, but he is still able to evaluate what is seen from a "solid" or settled aesthetic perspective. This way of observation requires an abundant supply of one's own life experience. A life made up of travel, music, humor, politics, heartbreak, disappointment, success and failure, pride and shame, love and hate, engagement and acceptance of moments or periods of monotony and boredom - all these and much more - like falling in love with the "wrong person", betraying someone and being betrayed - all this lays the foundations for immersing oneself in the processes of a couple.

From his life lived in the full sense, from situations where the therapist gains friends but also loses them, where he has children and lets them go, he enters the arena where there are two people with their dilemmas and struggles. His eyes are open and look objectively.

Some couples are full of drama. They are usually unable to comprehend the power of their own clamor and marching around the room. But the therapist should notice the fullness of their expressions and convey it to them.

Observation of the couple through the experience cycle and the most common interruptions/resistances of the cycle

By using experiential cycles when observing a couple, difficulties can be identified at each stage of the cycle. Here are some examples:

- feeling / sensation: there is a problem when a couple is not connected with their body, when they do not allow their feelings to become part of their contact. They do not pay attention to how much physical contact and expression can bring them intimacy and excitement. They do not use the basic feelings in their bodies, they do not look at each other in order to "enhance" their knowledge.
- knowledge: they have very little or no knowledge about the importance of contact. They are not aware of the way they look at each other, use their voices, the significance of the fact that they are together at a certain moment. Communication is usually telegraphic, lacking curiosity and the ability to be fully with the other.
- energy and action: there is very little energy, monotony in the relationship. They do not touch or provoke each other. They disappear as a couple when the excitement between them disappears. Energy can also be excessive – when shouting and gesturing overshadows the depth and meaning of contact, there is too much action and mobilization of energy, which is misdirected and dissipated. They are quick to join each other in solving problems or avoid problems, but there is not enough time for a fully developed awareness of the problem.
- contact and withdrawal: there is not enough time to elaborate the experience in the moment - there is no time to withdraw, there are no moments of silence to form a new feeling or elaborate the experience, to persist in that experience. There is no experience of silence that promises connection. Contact that is not completed generates frustration and anxiety. (Zinker, 1997).

In the phenomenological diagnosis, it is about a potentially balanced system, where there is a flow of communication between the couple. It is a dynamic case where the contact has the quality of completion, where the "now and here" is fully experienced, where the system is alive, fresh. We empower each other when we recognize the value of their experience. The model used combines the wisdom of both partners. It looks at both, their abilities, instincts and shortcomings as a system.

Gestalt therapists, as sympathetic observers, observe the couple's natural behavior as they converse in their presence. First, they set clear boundaries and observe from a decent distance between themselves and them. So, there are two couples: the therapist couple and the client couple. Therapists remain curious about their process: What is well developed in their interaction? What works? What stands out as aesthetically beautiful and what is not well developed? They want to see where the relationships are in order, and where and in what way they are "stuck" and started with frustrating cycles of misunderstanding, irritation, impatience, mutual disparagement and potential loss of consideration and respect. They want to present these events in a benign way and provide full support.

In the interaction of the couple, there are resistances that interrupt the process before or during different stages of the interactive cycle, so that the couple is not able to start something new or finish the started activity with satisfaction. The resistance that develops during the sensation stage is called desensitization. In this case, when people look at each other, they concentrate poorly, superficially scan each other's language or don't bother to listen at all.

They either avoid touch or, if touched, block the "full entry" of sensations into their bodies, minds, or hearts. When they get "stuck" at this early level of interaction, couples become bored, feel intellectually dormant, or absent from each other. They lead gloomy lives and thus feel safe and fulfilled within their guarded personal boundaries. Desensitized couples protect each other from hurting each other by not feeling. They often succeed in this, but at the cost of not knowing how much they are missing out on in life. (Zinker, 1994)

The main resistance to contact in the awareness stage is projection. Projection exists when one person, without asking questions, concludes on behalf of another. The other neither provides information nor corrects projected information. For example, the person projecting might say, "You must be hungry, I'm going to get something to eat." On that occasion, there must be someone on the other side who does not give information or who allows the other to answer for him, because the other does not say "No, I'm not hungry". Neither is he or she willing to answer each other's questions clearly. Projections tend to repeat themselves and thus the mutual relationship becomes stereotyped, lacks change, becomes numb. A couple who supports a projective lifestyle tends towards passivity and indifference. There is little conversation or discussion of life.

Introjection represents another resistance that makes contact difficult in a couple's interaction. Here the idea of imposition by one member and swallowed in a piece by others is present. As in projection, introjection avoids lively discussions. The couple values operating in the usual way, using old rules rather than creating new, up-to-date ways of operating. Indifference and lack of excitement are evident in such couples. Introjection avoids increasing energy by arbitrary arrangements.

Deflection is another way a couple avoids enriching the contact stage of the interactive cycle. Here, people avoid the date by switching the contact to another topic that causes less anxiety. Deflected couples cannot shape the right research topics to satisfy them. There is no great development and firm conclusion to the subject of discussion or experience. The boundaries between people are vague, which avoids mutual anxiety.

Retroflexion is another method that a couple unconsciously uses to avoid awareness and contact. It occurs between the energy and action stages of the interactive cycle. It is necessary to release energy from the individual and invest it in joint activities or joint action. In retroflexion, people turn to themselves and do to themselves and for themselves, what they would like to do to others or get from them. Couples restrain anger, aggression and sexual expression and do not seek support, comfort or touch. Everyone feels somehow isolated, and at the same time sure of their inner struggle. This struggle is often locked up in the muscles, vocal cords or other parts of the body. The members of retroflected pairs are isolated from each other. They don't share their anger or pain, or offer each other comfort or relief, their boundaries are too rigid. Privacy is respected and members are buried in their own solitude.

Confluence is also how a couple avoids discomfort between themselves. Confluence is shared and occurs between the awareness and withdrawal stages of the interactive cycle. This is the basic way in which differences are underestimated and ignored. At the level of awareness in the cycle, people prematurely agree with something, before they honestly explore it by thinking and expressing it in their own way. A similar phenomenon occurs during the withdrawal stage when separation and differentiation are necessary for healthy functioning, but cannot be accomplished because people need to jump out of "agreement" in order to move on. Deflection and confluence result in stereotypical expressions of love that don't seem genuine because they haven't been truly tested. Partners cannot fully count on each other or feel mutual solidarity.

Therapists observe these breaks in the couples' functioning systems, the ways in which they function as individuals. They assume that when a couple is with them, many individual cycles are happening, including the therapeutic cycle. But they always look at them as a complete system and how that system works.

The couple as a system field and the couple as a metaphor

When a therapist works with a couple, he must disregard all his knowledge of individuality and individual therapy. He works with the synthesis of the existential model of two persons, a system, an ongoing and self-regulating

struggle, a kind of human cultural community, a community that is greater than the sum of two persons added to each other, a community that creates a common life, the potential nucleus of a family. The therapist has a responsibility to find a way to see them as a community of humanity—to see them with compassion, even love.

Often the therapist sees or "hallucinates" paintings, symphonies, murderous and cold-blooded duels, calm lakes or frozen mountains. These are images that can mediate between monotonous indifference and romantic interpretations. Sharing pictures takes the couple to a different place, a neutral country, a glider flight – a place where they can meet. A good intervention tends to surprise, anger, cheer, soften, challenge two people whose eyes have become cold and indifferent with age or who have lost themselves in loathing.

This phenomenon is without content - as already said, they focus on awareness, energy, theatricality, humor, drama, feeling frozen in life or the disappearance of previous pain. Every statement about how a couple makes a connection or doesn't make it, how they want each other or recoil from passion, how "young" or naive or old (very old) they become from moment to moment - how they revive or drain each other.

Being able to participate in these experiences from pure compassion or objective observation benefits the couple. They are "asleep" in their dilemmas, and the therapist wakes them up, surprises them, shows them a satirical film about how they behave.

The therapist is the one who does not lose himself in the couple, who does not merge with their perception of themselves - because the moment he loses himself in empathy, when he begins to suffer with them - at that moment he loses the power to change people. The paradox is that when the therapist joins them too much, he weakens people, does not mobilize their curiosity towards each other. It does not mobilize the powerful energy that brings them back to life. Many couples live that desperate life, submitting to rigid old habits, daily worries and monotony. They are like the "walking dead" and the therapist awakens them with the help of his observations.

In this context of muted noise and occasional words, silence appears as a stillness that allows two people to see and feel the other's presence undisturbed, to feel the enriched olfactory energy with the help of which they can float together. At best, this is a kind of spiritual event where the couple experiences "the beginning and the end of their world", the feeling that they are one in this moment.

Silence, in contrast to noise and arguments, is a web of containment in which the therapeutic couple "holds" the systemic couple. Within this holding, this containment of stillness/excitement, can help the couple rediscover the original magnetism of the experience of holding something valuable together - holding each other in the field of shared rediscovery - such as holding the newborn child together.

In this newly discovered chest of silence - stillness, new words are born, new discoveries of feelings and knowledge about common existence here - in the world. This is another way of saying that they are experiencing a contact and a potential movement towards an unprecedented relationship - a new potential action of contact - at which point we can ask them "do you feel married?" Each time the therapist is held in this silence, he renews the sacred feeling of marriage, again and again.

When a couple fights, they fill the interaction field between them with words. Words and more words will create confusion and chaos rather than clarify the meaning they are trying to find together. For example: when she says to him "My heart is warm", this can be extended to other thoughts, she can continue with "I have never felt this warmth from my father".

In the "original" interactive circle, the pull of the left side of the cycle is filled with silence that follows feelings, perceptions, and cognitions. Little has been said about silence as a potential contribution to the formation of a clear cognitive figure in the field between two people in an argument.

When we stop yelling and interrupting each other and introduce the habit of making pauses between words and sentences - in pairs - we don't just ask them to shut up, we ask them to create small fields of silence, small "blank slates" with the aim of being able to once again form new feelings and to be able to perceive and experience the presence of the spouse as another person. This phenomenon has been overlooked in the use of the interactive cycle that is most often used to stimulate energy, action and contact between partners.

Creativity in long intimate relationships

Throughout history, the creative process has always been viewed from the perspective of the individual (Martindale, 2001). Therefore, creativity is seen as a characteristic or type of energy – open or closed – that resides within a person.

Gestalt sees this concept in a different and very important way. Instead of seeing creativity as a move, property, or product of an exclusively internal psychic process, creativity is formulated as an aspect of the relationship that exists between the self and the environment. In this way, the focus of creativity shifts from something that exists within the person, to the dynamics of the individual in relation to the environment. Creativity thus becomes something that happens outside one's skin "where the self meets others."

Although there are various names for this meeting of self and other, the basic term used is contact. By definition, contact is creative, because with the establishment of contact something new and unique happens. Therefore, all contacts are transformed, in such a way that two separate units initially separate or two aspects of the self are experienced as one for a short period of time. Contact can be made with parts of yourself or the environment, such as a tree in bloom or a beautiful sunset. This basic process of transforming the self through contact with the environment is called creative adaptation. It is considered necessary for the psychological health of both the individual and the couple.

"Prolonged intimacy results when individuals experience intimate moments over a very wide range over a corresponding period of time" (Melnick and Nevis, 1994, p.297).

Looking at creativity from the vantage point of the individual is useful, but not enough to see it in its entirety, because it exists within an intimate, long-term relationship. In order to understand this form of creative process, it is necessary to go beyond the idea of self and others. What happens between these two individuals must also be looked at - how creativity is developed and how it is supported. To do this, the concept of contact must be expanded to include interpersonal perspectives. When a person is in an intimate relationship, it is not a situation that only involves the interaction of two people. There is also a third subject - "WE" that creative couples shape themselves.

The term intimate moment (Melnick and Nevis, 1994) is used to describe a contact episode between two individuals and is a creative module towards intimacy. An intimate moment can happen when two people have the same energy level or show interest in the same thing at the same time. These moments are filled with elements of vitality and a sense of "boundlessness", accompanied by feelings of connection and togetherness. Each individual does not perceive the other as separate and distinct from himself, instead, he opens himself to the possibility that others may know him and he them.

Each of us longs to have a joyful and stimulating long-term relationship, which grows and develops over time. It is a real challenge to keep the relationship fresh, filled with unexpected elements and pleasant surprises. Creativity can play an important role in keeping a relationship vital. Needless to say, describing this activity in long terms is not at all easy, because unlike most creative processes, here we do not have a simple artistic method such as painting or working with clay, with the help of which something can be created. It's more about improvised theater, where the actors establish contact with the audience and each other, and anything can happen. However, in intimate relationships, the emotional and psychological stakes are higher, and the consequences much more risky.

The artistic materials available to couples are words, gestures and touches, but the most important thing is the experience of the relationship, what happens between them. This is not to say that a wider field, which includes culture, religion, time, place and world events, has no bearing on them. Nor do we mean to ignore the inner world of each individual which is filled with creative potentials and limitations. However, while we acknowledge the importance of each individual's inner experiences, as well as the larger environment in which we live, our primary focus will be on what happens between two individuals, what is defined as the field of connection.

Every creative process has a structure. In art, people are trained technically and aesthetically to recognize "good form". For example, potters are taught to hone their artistic sense at the same time as they master the skill of operating the wheel. On the other hand, couples are rarely taught the concept of good relationship form. Usually, their knowledge and skills are a mixture of unconscious and unverified things that they have unconsciously picked up from their parents and wider environment.

Development of an intimate relationship and creative adjustment

At the beginning of an intimate relationship, almost all moments are new, because there is very little shared experience and little information. Almost everything related to another person is new, and therefore interesting. In fact, intimate moments seem to happen with very little effort. Pure joy is associated with this, it is a process of easy mutual acquaintance called blind infatuation or romantic love (cf. Melnick and Nevis, 2001).

At the beginning of the relationship, the couple is mostly focused on each other. As a result, they ignore much of everyday life. However, as the relationship develops, over time there are fewer and fewer things we can discover about the other. This "disappearance of novelty" is often perceived as a great loss, which to some extent it is. However, good knowledge also has its positive sides. There is often a transition period from getting to know another person to getting to know a relationship. In addition, most of the interest and energy, which was used to get to know another person, can now be used in everyday life. In the best case, such a kind of balance is established in which appropriate attention is directed to both personal and relationship matters as well as broader needs.

There is a certain safety built into predictability. There is so much uncertainty in the world and in our lives that we are often on the verge of anxiety. If we are so lucky, a good acquaintance allows us to relax in the presence of another person, establishing a safe haven from the tensions that accompany the surprises that life constantly throws at us. This security usually supports the formation of relationship habits. Life becomes simpler if the couple knows who will pay the bill, who will cook the meal and clean the carpet. Some more important and formalized habits are called rituals. At best, these are complex habits developed to ensure continuity of confirmation of important events such as birthdays, promotions, marriages and deaths. Meaningful rituals support the structure and stability of a relationship.

Most important of all, it is in itself very pleasant to know someone and for that someone to know you. Being seen, understood and acknowledged is what constitutes the very core of what makes a human being. It's as if we were created to be in relationship with others, without any goals or ulterior motives. Many have written about this, but none as elegantly as Buber (1958).

However, there is also a negative aspect to knowing a person well. What is familiar, complex and predictable can soon become uninteresting and boring. Aspects and characteristics that seemed interesting and new to us at first can suddenly take on a negative tone and become problematic (Zinker, 1977).

"Contact is a creative adaptation of the organism and the environment" (Perls et al., 1951, p.230)

Over time, in addition to severe disappointment, there is often a gradual loss of interest in the other. To paraphrase Perls et al. (1951), the "novelties" in the pair inevitably diminish. The more familiar we are with the field of connection, the less energy we use for the other. The couple is left with a dilemma to resolve. They must learn to co-create a process that flows and never ends, a process that will revitalize the relationship and introduce positive novelties, while at the same time developing habits and patterns that will allow them to freely devote themselves to other aspects of their lives. Ultimately, they will have to find a rhythm that supports them in creatively adapting their relationship.

Although creative adaptation is often said to be an important foundation of the Gestalt approach, it is only minimally developed. The concept used by Gestalt is a reflection of disagreement with Freud's theory, which states that individuals, in order to lead a rich and fulfilling life, must suppress their needs and adapt to the environment. This kind of "adjustment" is anything but creative.

Instead, Gestaltists believe that individuals and the environment mutually influence each other and that without novelty there is no adaptation. In order for an individual to be able to adapt creatively, it is necessary to have a large number of skills. They must be able to live in the present and be aware that their needs and patterns as well as the environment are constantly changing. It is equally important that they know how to make a decision and withdraw, when and in what way something needs to be finished and how to learn from that experience¹.

¹It must be clear here that creative adaptation also includes the concept of "good form", growth and development. Otherwise, we can argue that Hitler, bin Laden, etc., "creatively adapted" to their environment.

Creative adaptation and contact, although reflective of relational processes, were originally used to describe change from an individual's perspective. As we have already said, it is much more difficult to clearly express what is happening between people. When applied to couples, creative adjustment requires an environment that is filled with energy so that people can grow. A much more accurate name would be creative co-adaptation.

This need for constant co-adjustment is necessary because, as John and Mary began to discover, many important differences simply cannot be resolved. In this sense, the situation in which "everyone wins" is just a myth. The job is to direct the energy that is created by these daily dilemmas in such a way that the relationship does not get stuck, freeze or become destructive.

It involves accepting the fact that rarely, even in the best relationships, do people always get what they want. As a result, the individual is constantly balancing their own desires, the desires of others, and what is best for their relationship. Learning how to manage these seemingly contradictory conditions is at the heart of creative adaptation. Management, in its essence, requires not only certain skills and conditions, but also a certain approach to the relationship. What is needed in this case is an attitude, an experimental attitude.

Experimental attitude and methodology in working with couples

"Here as elsewhere, the only solution to human problems is experimental invention" (Perls et al., 1951, p. 233).

An experimental attitude involves a willingness to temporarily interrupt or transform one's current life in order to "see" or understand the other in a new and different light. It leads to the question: "What would happen if..." (cf. Melnick, 1980).

An experimental attitude involves a commitment to try some new form without an evaluative component. In this way, the couple does not consider their relationship in terms of success/failure. Instead, they express a willingness to explore things from the other's perspective. Instead of being concerned with the result in terms of good/bad, the focus should be on what they learned from the experience. An experimental attitude will embrace the unknown and accept the uncertainty of change (cf. Staemmler, 2000).

In order for a couple to be able to translate experimental values and beliefs into "life", they need to have a methodology with the help of which they create new things in their relationships. This methodology helps to define and shape the forms of a unique creative process. For example, they have to find out how many changes and innovations are "enough" and thus established how much is too much and how much is too little.

Let's take a metaphor to describe the experimental attitude and method - a long-term relationship as a work of art. Suppose you bought a nice painting. Over time, as it is no longer new, it is easy to lose interest in it and succumb to boredom. For many, buying a new painting would fulfill the need for novelty. But in the case of an experimental attitude, the belief that even the most predictable possible pattern contains some novelty can produce a variety of creative possibilities. For example, we can look at a picture longer. We can look at it in a different and fresh way to catch the subtle nuances of that creativity. We can talk to others about it and ask for their opinion. We can change its place, lighting, or group it with other images. Can we bring back that feeling when we first saw her and wanted to have her? We probably can't, because the first time only happens once. What we can do, however, is create a novelty by expanding the field and shifting our connection to it.

Now to return to the pair, the experimental attitude and methodology involves the commitment and ability to look at old patterns in a new way, regardless of how functional and effective they are. Further, it involves the ability to let go and change these patterns in order to remain engaged in the process of constantly discovering new ways of experiencing oneself, others, and relationships.

"The body of research emphasizes the role of hard work in creativity, this research suggests that creative heights depend on the investment of sustained effort over a long period of time." (Amabile, 2001, p. 334)

For many, a new relationship happens without much effort. In fact, if the very beginnings required hard work, many relationships would never develop. Very few couples in love can imagine what it takes to maintain a relationship. Therefore, it is not surprising that the opinion of some people is that if you have to work so hard for a relationship, then something must be wrong. This mainstream idea that creative processes are spontaneous, simple events is

detrimental to research on creativity and creative individuals. However, even if we accept that hard work is necessary, it is not enough if there is no discipline. Discipline means committing to a structure that includes three elements: sharing a life together, the ability to live with the decisions made, and the willingness to explore novelties in the context of a relationship.

"Being together" includes the willingness to stay with the other person, regardless of the painful consequences that sometimes appear. It also includes the ability to affirm the existential value of the other (Zinker, 1977). This means acknowledging from the heart that the other person's experience is just as legitimate and "right" for them as it is for me.

"Living with the decisions made" can be the hardest part. It's easy to commit to doing better in the reconciliation process while guilt, remorse and energy are high. But applying these decisions in everyday life, when the energy level drops and various disturbances appear, is the essence of discipline. In this case, skills that involve developing positive habits are of primary importance.

And finally, if the couple is not able to "explore novelties in the context of the relationship" it is a potential disaster. This "need for novelties", which we called research, is present in human nature from birth to death. At worst, research can lead us down a path of no return where our appetites are satisfied only briefly. Wanting something is a necessary part of being human (Melnick et al., 1995). But letting your appetites run wild can have negative consequences, the least of which are our addictions – sex, various substances, money, the Internet, exercise, etc. The experimental attitude, when applied to a relationship, contains much more than a simple desire for novelty. It represents a certain form, a limited relationship experience.

In order for the couple to be able to create new things in their relationship, they must know how to get rid of old forms. This process is called creative destabilization. Sometimes this is easy – the old forms just don't work anymore. For example, neither of them enjoys going to concerts anymore. But what if the old forms still show some signs of life? What is the right time to let go of old forms so that new ones can take root? When an expression we love or a celebratory gift loses its creative power? When we cling to something too long? A creative couple must have the ability to break repetitive patterns, promote unusual experiences and thus create a flow of ideas, flexibility, originality and novelty.

Very rarely is this considered easy, and for many it is very undesirable. There are many legitimate reasons in favor of stability and persistence in what is practical and familiar. What if the new is less satisfying than the old and what if we end up discarding the valuable along with the worthless? We all have a fear of the unknown. It is this "persistence" that is a product of our fear that stifles creativity.

Instead, the creative couple must be ready and willing to take risks, break the rules, abandon old forms and be ready to fail: basically, to destabilize. How are they encouraged to do this? This includes practicing the main component of the experimental attitude, the ability to let go of consequences – and more importantly – to let go of critical judgments.

Conclusion:-

The different personality types of therapists are similar to the different surfaces of a crystal. Each side reflects one aspect of the psychotherapist's reality. Together, all parties construct the light spectrum. No one who has chosen this profession out of the generosity and sincerity of his heart should be punished for his small personal faults. On the contrary, he should be encouraged to overcome his flaws, and put the knowledge needed for this process at the service of philanthropy. Every healthy personality carries a certain cocktail of neuroses, including the therapist's personality.

Observing a couple from a gestalt perspective, awareness has great power when it is pointed out to them what they are doing well or how they are blocking their own processes during the interactive cycle. It is significant that when every couple mentions the beginning of their relationship, how they met and what attracted them to each other, their faces always light up, they smile, their eyes shine. This intervention can awaken great emotions, start something that has long ceased to be a part of them, initial passion and infatuation.

How does a therapist know when a couple is creative? First of all, their process cannot be seen as embodied in one of them, as opposed to the other. Both understand and experience their relationship as a joint venture. A couple's creative process does not result in a product. Creating intimacy in a long-term relationship involves developing a shared self-awareness in an ever-changing process. It leads to a life together full of vitality and equality. Perhaps it is a product of "us" in a real, fulfilled life.

If the process of creating a long-term relationship is so difficult and complex, why try? Perhaps the simplest answer is for the couple to learn to balance the need for change and stability and include the right ratio of experimentation in the context of discipline and structure, develop the ability to create a unique form of happiness, the happiness of doing it all together.

In view of the previously presented disruptions of the contact boundary, i.e. defense mechanisms, it is evident that any form of interference can occur at any time during the contact cycle. Accordingly, the therapist should be ready to work in decisive moments. The starting point of the therapeutic relationship is determined by the place that the client himself determines as the starting point. This may relate to the client's difficulty mobilizing when it is necessary to move towards a clear figure. In that case, this stoppage or break in contact defines the starting point.

"So, when a gestalt therapist works with a client, he is indifferent both theoretically and practically as to at what point in the process the work will begin. The therapist is equally committed to working at any point in the cycle and ultimately, committed to helping the client experience with maximum fullness and clarity." (Melnick and Nevis, 1986. 45-6).

Understanding the nature and sequence of the cycle of experience allows us to understand the therapeutic process in a dynamic way.

Culturally, in Macedonia, it is almost unacceptable to show intimacy outside one's own home. In Macedonian traditions, patriarchy and family play a big role in partner relationships, as well as certain confluency in relationships with the primary family. With the entry of new capitalism and the transitional position of Macedonia, marital and family relations faced great challenges between the primary family and independence. Therefore, young married couples still have a problem with separation. In our context, it is necessary to invest a lot of effort to work on raising the culture of counseling and psychotherapy in general.

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