
Psychology

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Contact Boundaries in Love Relationships

The purpose of this article is to show the role of contact boundary in relationships; especially in love relationships.

The term “contact” is a fundamental concept in Gestalt Therapy. Contact has been described as the central point of human life, as well as the life of all organisms, and it can be understood as the “meetings of various kinds with others”.

In the context of gestalt therapy, contact means meeting with awareness with the other. Such contact is possible only where there is awareness of difference, of what is not-me. Therefore, contact can be described as the awareness of an “other” at a boundary in the field.

The practice of gestalt therapy shows how couples realize, or avoid, the intention to reach and be reached by the other. Couple relationships are seen by Gestalt therapy as a continuous co-creation of the contact boundary, as an experience that lies “between” the partners.

Thus, the awareness and protection of the contact boundaries is very important in love relationships.

Keywords: gestalt therapy, contact, contact boundaries, contact-mechanisms, spontaneity

The issue of contact boundaries is very important in our culture. We often meet people who are not aware of own contact boundaries, both in new relationships and in short-term contacts.

One of the factors influencing the violation of contact boundaries in our country lies in parenting style. It is well seen in symbiotic-confluent relationships between parents and children. Good example is when client calls stating that his/her child has a psychological problem and wants to bring the child to therapist; on question how old the child is, answer is 40.

Problem of violating contact boundaries in Georgian reality is apparent also in speech. Parents often use phrases like: “we are already grown up,” “we’re ill,” “we started to walk” etc.

Naturally, all this leads to unhealthy relationships that lead us to contact defense mechanisms like confluence, retroflexion, introjections, and deflection.

As my practice has shown, the problem in love relationships basically is related to a lack of awareness and a lack of sensing contact boundaries. It later reflects as confluence and isolation in relationships. From an emotional perspective, typically we see fear of relationship, sense of danger, aggression, feeling of suppression, anxiety, etc.

I assert that in love relationships the most important thing is to know the person you face. It is not simple to get to know another person; first, you need to know yourself. This means you need to notice and be aware of your feelings, thoughts, what choices you make being in contact and what needs are these choices connected with. Unfortunately, it does not often happen like that. As a result, every person interacts with others from own experience, opinions, needs having an illusion that another one should feel the same. This determines the violation of contact boundaries in relationships. The violation of contact boundaries is especially painful in love relationships. It creates crisis both in personal and couple relationships. Human psychics have a tendency to need external help, as it’s very difficult to deal with the crisis on its own. Psychotherapy, and namely gestalt therapy is an instrument for these.

So, the aim of the article is to reveal the role of contact boundaries in relationships; especially in love relationships; to show how important it is to know, protect and respect inner personal boundaries as contact boundaries in relationships.

Two Ways of the Being in the World: “I-It” and “I-Thou”

Gestalt Therapy has the perception of the “Figure” and the “Ground”. The “Figure” like the element of the unity-ground, and the “Ground” like the emerged sense from the figure.

One of the first profoundly simple definitions of Gestalt therapy was given by Perls himself. He states that the two philosophical pillars on which this therapy rest are Phenomenology and Behaviorism.

Bob Resnick defines Gestalt therapy as being based on three (not two) philosophical pillars - Field Theory, Phenomenology and Dialogue (O’Neill & O’Neill, 1995, 2007).

Maurice Nicoll, a British psychiatrist of the early 20th century, was a student of Gurdjieff (Nicoll, M., 1952). He described when people meet there are two “realities” – the visible and the invisible.

There is a world not visible to others which may be experienced only by the person. No one is aware of others’ thoughts, dreams and imaginations unless we are told by the person themselves. This is our secret, private, invisible world. When we then look at each other it seems to us we have easy access to this invisible reality in ourselves. Therefore, most of what we see and hear is not the whole person. We don’t have access to others invisible world unless they tell us about it. This invisible world includes feelings and thoughts, love and wisdom. Hence, most of what is important in life and is all around us - is this invisible inner world (MeulmeesterFrans, Module 3).

This movement in awareness between this inner “essential” world of self and the external world of “observed” phenomenon is crucial to understanding the dialogical philosophy and counselling of Martin Buber (Buber, 1958).

There is a dialogic existentialist approach based on Martin Buber’s work, a Jewish mystic, who saw there are two ways of being in the world: “I-It” (“seeing people as objects”) and “I-thou” (discovering the connectedness, seeing each other as an “other”).

This movement from an “I-It” observation and control of the objects of our external world (found in so many counselling approaches) to one where we are “bound up in relation to the other” – a relationship of I-Thou – is a significant and creative leap in psychotherapy (Meulmeester Frans, Module 3).

In Philip Lichtenberg's opinion concept of contact is very strange. Concerning contact and retrieving it is the very thing that gestalt therapy took from Freud. Freud calls it the experience of meeting the needs. He uses the example of the nutrition of a newborn child and notes that contact happens on the first days of life (Anthology, 2016).

In the process of a relationship we create something new and for some time the individual "I" and the individual "you" are created/restructured/processed during this process (i.e., in every moment self-determination, self-establishment and self-creation happens).

We are autonomous and different at the beginning, in the very process of relationship, if "I" identity and "you" identity are fully present, we meet and get a chance to become parts of something bigger. We become we. Here is the dialectics: from one side – self establishment, and from the other side – merging "I" with something bigger. The work *Civilization and its Discontents* calls this egoism and altruism.

In gestalt therapy, in Lichtenberg's opinion, we cannot develop "I-Thou" contact, we develop uniqueness of each part of a relationship, rather than observe them merging, healthy merging in full contact phase. This is the drama: to be special and be lost in something big (Anthology, 2016).

In every event there is "I" and "You". Laura Perls noted that there is "I" in contact, and there is "You". Here we come at the point, that I-ness and You-ness transforms into We-ness. Lichtenberg speaks that you may be in a kind of relationship, when the other person tried to speak about him/herself and not about you. She or he had friends for a long time that overemphasized their own importance: they knew very little about Lichtenberg, were not interested about him, unlike him admiring and supporting them. They represented special "I". "For them, I was obscure "I", meetings were sentimental and I tried to leave contact unsatisfied" (Anthology, 2016).

It's interesting that people growing up in family violence are more cautious when they don't know when the drunken father would beat someone up, or whether he arrives or not. They have to spend a lot of time watching his mood and guessing taking others into consideration. Besides, they lose sense of self in this process. They get used to others and at the same time, lose connection with own life rhythm. Other becomes dominant - "you", and your "I" -identity shrinks/ is lost.

In most of the cases the relationship diverts to one direction or another: either I is sharply expressed, or the other. It restricts the productivity of our relationships. In

every case, they strive for equality. Eventually any relationship is a relationship of equals.

It's known that in any contact there is "I" and "other". In every act in a relationship we mobilize our inner world, connect its different parts, our desires and needs, and behave by regulations of existing relationships. But a connection has two directions (towards oneself and towards the other).

As it's noted above, for an alert/cautious child, a connection with one of sides of contact is lost. When someone speaks to me, without me, talks endlessly about oneself, without considering me, this person speaks with deep feelings, but is not with me.

In any relationship that we are part of, we influence and impact others. Besides, we are influenced by other.

Thus, in whole contacting we have two corners - "I" (I want, I feel who I am) and "I" how I react on "you" (when you do this, something happens in me).

Lichtenberg notes that when contacting, both our selfness develops and other person's selfness develops. Thus, during contact, there are not two but four components.

It means that "I take responsibility to ask you what you want, who you are, what you feel in contact with me, also to ask what is your reaction when I speak or do something."

Thus, during contacting in the process of I-individuality and you-individuality, four corners are outlined:

- I am
- I react on you
- I want you to tell me who you are and what you want
- I want to tell me how you react on me

Different combinations take place in relationship. Quite often, two persons talk with each other and there are two monologues going on: I talk about myself and you talk about yourself. It continues this way: I..., I..., I..., I want, I feel, I think and no one gets the idea to say: "wait, I think what you said is just terrible. Don't you think?" it may also be put this way: "What you said about yourself makes me concerned."

If we refer to Goodman's point of view, that there are big and little involvements in contact; a big involvement may be defined as: when all four components are apparent, it is not necessary that in words, but obviously it may be said, that we know each other (Anthology, 2016).

In my opinion, in love relationships problems appear while in contact there is only "I" oriented relationship or only "you" oriented one. The first case leads us to isolation, and the other – to confluence. Relevantly, dialogue of a couple does not go beyond "I am..." level.

When we speak of love relationships, we cannot ignore influences that may be coming from outside (i.e., from the field), where there is a field, and at the same time which is created by each of them towards each other.

Contact and Contact Boundaries

Contact is what happens when people move around in the world. In a very rudimentary way, contact is what happens when a person bumps into a wall. There is a sudden meeting between soft, sensitive face and hard, resistant wall. They touch. Contact in the gestalt vernacular involves a bit more. There is a meeting, but this meeting constitutes the awareness of the relationship between self and other and makes explicit the way in which self and other touch. It also gets one's attention, because contact is exciting. "Primarily, contact is the awareness of, and behavior toward, the assailable novelty; and the rejection of the inassimilable novelty" (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951/1972, p. 230). Erving Polster and Miriam Polster (1973) described contact as the lifeblood of growth and the means by which a person changes himself or herself and the experience of the world. Contact takes place at a boundary, conceived metaphorically as an organ or membrane connecting oneself to one's environment. A contact boundary is the point at which a person experiences "me" as opposed to "not me" (Brownell, 2009).

The term "contact" is fundamental concept in Gestalt Therapy. Contact has been described as the central fact of human life, as well as the life of all organisms, and it can be understood as the "meetings of various kinds with others" (Crocker, 1999, p. 18). Contact also means being in touch with what is emerging in the moment (Yontef & Jacobs, 2007). Contact is the means for changing oneself and one's experience of the world (Polster & Polster, 1973). In the context of gestalt therapy, contact means "aware

meeting with the other. Such contact is possible only where there is awareness of difference, of what is not-me” (Crocker, 2008, p. 132; Philip Brownell, 2010, pp.103).

Therefore, contact can be described as awareness of the “other” at a boundary in the field. The organism makes contact with the rest of the world at its boundary and here an exchange takes place which maintains homeostasis or contributes to growth.

A relationship can be impersonal or personal. Impersonal relationships can be a causal relationship between two variables or simply a correlation between them. Personal relationships can be sexual relationships between two people or simply a friendship between them. A relationship is a connection between two or more variables, objects, or subjects. When this connection is between two people, it can be thought of as contact over time. (Philip Brownell, 2010, p.111)

According to Erv and Miriam Polster, contact is not just togetherness or joining. It can only happen between separate beings always requiring independence and always risking capture in the union. At the moment of the creation of the union, one’s fullest sense of his person is swept along into a new creation: I am no longer only me, but I and you make us (Erv and Miriam Polster, 1974, p. 99).

According to Frans Meulmeester contact is the process of interaction between an organism and its environment. It is the continuous process of mutual influence, which takes place at the boundary of organism and environment, which means that contact is not just something belonging to the organism, but something that belongs to both, organism and environment.

When we say that contact takes place at the boundary of an organism and its environment, this word ‘boundary’ has two aspects:

1. The process of contact takes place at the boundary, organism-environment
2. The process of contact is limited (bound) by the possibilities and limitations of the manner of contact.

There is always some kind of contact and for that reason it is better to differentiate between two aspects of the word ‘contact’:

- Contact as a continuous process of interaction between organism and environment
- Contact as a consciously initiated or consciously experienced moment of connection with the environment. (Frans Meulmeester, 2006)

The second form of contact can be seen as a moment within the continuous process of contact that is already going on. Therefore we can differentiate four moments in the total contact-process (Perls, 1980):

- Fore-contact: something occurs, a new figure comes up. The body is the ground. There is a physical sensation, but not yet a conscious experience. We notice something.
- Contacting: the figure becomes more clear. There is awareness and the excitement prepares us for action.
- Final contact: we make the connection with the figure. It is a moment of confluence with the figure, through which something new can arise.
- Post-contact: the connection dissolves and we withdraw, while the figure is incorporated into the ground. We integrate the experience. There is space again for a new figure to come up. The moment of post contact fluently goes into a new moment of fore contact.

In this sequence of the contact-process we find the second aspect of the word ‘contact’ in the moment of ‘final contact’. It is important that we notice that the contact-process includes both poles of the polarity, ‘approaching – withdrawal’.

Now I would like to discuss the ideas of the prominent representatives of gestalt therapy about issues related with contact boundaries. I would like to start with *three boundaries* discussed by Peter Philippon, that create their own sense of self in relationship. *The first boundary* starts where Perls, Hefferline and Goodman indicate: this is the boundary between the organism and environment; it is also called it/not-it. Boundary emerges when field is created and differentiates two processes: happening outside my skin, that is essentially different that processes within my skin. Boundary maintains permanence of this difference. Therefore, everything happening at the both side of boundaries is determined by the activity of the boundary itself and how boundary functions depend on processes at both sides. Philippon notes that boundary is not something third, like a wall between properties; boundary is a form of relationship containing both sides (Anthology, 2016).

Perls, Hefferline and Goodman write in their book that a boundary contains two aspects for a live organism. First, it must keep the physical unity of an organism. (Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, 1951)

Second, the feedback mechanism is in action; due to this feature, the organism grows, gets resources for existence from the environment and exchange happens. This inter-

action happens between me and environment. The borderline process happens at the boundary of interaction between organism and environment, which is the experience and feelings, and the instrument of this experience is skin, axon terminals, proprioceptors, sensory and motor organs. Through them we get experience. Philippson notes, that it may be difficult to understand, but it does not represent our experience – “I” does not exist yet, self is not there yet. He cites Descartes: “I think therefore I exist.” Here lays a puzzle, a trick. If we say, that “I think”, then “I” already exists. It becomes a closed circle. Therefore, at this stage, we don’t speak of self, but of situation where we get experience.

Philippson calls *the second boundary* as self/other border or ego border. It is completely different than the first one. This border differentiates between “me” and “not-me”; its essence is that the first border gives ground to feelings: “here are my emotions, here am I, here is the other”. Daniel Stern and other authors write about how we feel the self and the other, by being close and distant, by possibility to control the environment. In his opinion, there are many ways to perceive I-ness.

Interaction at the boundary is contact, but not experience. It is true that the first boundary is also called contact boundary, but it functions in the mode as getting experience. Only at this boundary we get to the processes of identification and rejection and we say: “it is me, it is not-me”, at this point we can say, that this is our own experience.

Contact instruments include choice, responsibility, awareness, aggression, and spontaneity – all these elements are elements of boundary.

The possibility of feedback is much broader, as «the other» - is much large territory. Eventually «I» reveals itself with respect of those aspects of «the other» that match my needs and interests. Therefore, «I» choose what to form certain elements of the territory of the other. Of course, the other will do something similar, s/he has own needs. In many cases the other is a person, but it may not be a person. This is why there are broad interactions between self and others, and we create us at every moment of such interaction. This is the second boundary and the advantage is the possibility of flexibility it gives to self.

Philippson calls *the third boundary* personality boundary, «for me/not for me». He means using the ego-function in retroreflection when identifying and rejecting. I self-identify with certain aspects of possible behavior and am alienated from some aspects.

Personality characteristics are memory, table environment (supportive environment), volition and autonomy.

It must be noted, that all these three boundaries are interconnected. A physical boundary is of course a primary one; it is the basis, and it is feeling of the field. But as soon as the ego-boundary is formed, it forms physical boundary. After this I have a choice, to be in physical boundaries that I chose myself, be able to be here or to be in the pool. Thus, ego-boundary is related with physical boundary by reflexive feedback. I generalize and realize when I go from ego-boundary to personality boundary. But when I do that, it influences my choice and my physical boundary. This way, these three boundaries are interconnected.

If we go back to Perls, Hefferline and Goodmann's work and functions of self, we will see that physical boundaries are relevant to Id. There "Id represents something passive, scattered and irrational, content is imaginary and body comes to the foreground".

Here is the simple schema of figure-ground. It is more relationship with the ground, than with the figure. "Id" has relationship more with the field than with I.

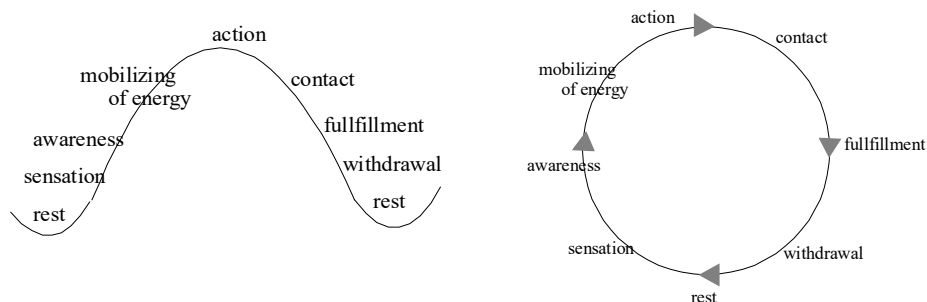
Thus, the organism/environment boundary is feelings, there is a little bit of self or is not at all. It is a newborn self, that feels something, senses body at the first stage. Apparently, ego boundaries are connected with ego-functions, personality boundaries with personality functions (Anthology, 2016).

According to Michael Vincent Miller, a basic issue in gestalt therapy is about experience that appears for two reasons. First, experience is acquired at the contact boundary between the personality and environment. Second, experience is not only acquired, but also is created at every given moment. Accordingly, experience is an example of creative activity (Anthology, 2016).

The contact-process

Beside the four phases of making contact, Gestalt literature mentions several other models for the process of contact. The names and descriptions vary a little bit, but the most essential elements that come forward in all these models is the cyclical and the creative experience. Therefore we encounter names like 'cycle of experience', 'cycle of creative process', 'contact-cycle' or 'Gestalt cycle of experience'. In this book I

would like to refer to the model, which Zinker and Nevis describe as the ‘cycle of experience’. Both of them use two ways of representing the cycle: the circle on the left and the curve on the right.



While the cycle clearly represents the cyclical process, it is the curve that represents the changes in energy during the process. In the process we see a sequence of rest, mobilizing of energy, action and again rest. So the energy changes depending on the phase of the process.

Let's look at the phases now starting with the rest phase.

Rest - The point of rest can be seen as a moment in the contact-process, where we have just integrated a previous experience and are open again for new impulses. It is also called the point of creative indifference (Friedländer in Lambrechts, p. 37).

Sensation - Out of this rest or emptiness, a new impulse can arise; first, as only a bodily sensation or stimulus, of which we are hardly aware. Our need for food or drink announces itself as a bodily sensation. It takes some time however before we really notice this sensation.

Awareness - Therefore, the next phase in the process is noticing and realizing, the moment of awareness. We become aware of the sensation; we notice it and realize its meaning. A figure starts to differentiate against the ground.

Mobilizing of Energy - The more we increase our awareness, the clearer the figure becomes, and so energy will be mobilized to make a connection with this figure.

Awareness calls upon us to go into action, to make the connection and mobilize the energy that is needed.

Action - A logical next step is to go into action. Literally, we activate our muscles (e.g., to open our mouth to say something). This action leads to making a connection with the figure, which has become more and more defined against the ground during the process.

Contact - We make contact with the present figure. Contact is in the sense of ‘final contact’, a moment within the total contact-process towards which the process aims. It is the moment of connection, which can lead to a new experience and fulfillment.

Fulfillment - It becomes clear in this example; the moment of contact will lead to fulfillment satisfaction. Making the connection with the figure has led us to a transformation of the situation; something has changed.

Withdrawal - In this moment, integration of a new experience takes place. The new experience becomes a part of us and contributes to our growth as an individual as well our growth as a team or as an organization. We now can withdraw and let go of the figure.

After the withdrawal we enter a phase of rest again, a phase in which a new impulse, sensation or need can come up and a new cycle can begin. The continuous process of creative learning and growing goes on and every new cycle will bring us one more step further in our growth or development as an individual, couple or group. Because the process of contact is always an interactive process between an organism and its environment, we do not only grow or develop ourselves, but our environment grows or develops with us as well. (Syllabus, 2017, pp. 28-31)

Contact-Mechanisms

As it's known the contact-mechanisms contribute to the interaction and so to the contact-process. These mechanisms were actually first described by Sigmund Freud, but he used the word “defense-mechanisms” and by doing so, he emphasized their neurotic, defensive function. It was Perls and his associates who deserve credits for describing the contact-increasing function of the mechanisms.

These contact mechanisms are:

- confluence

- introjection
- projection
- retroflection
- deflection

Confluence - Literally means ‘merging’. It is the mechanism that enables us to merge fully with somebody or something. For just a moment there is no boundary, no awareness of being different. “It is the appreciation of equality” (Lambrechts, p. 470).

You can think of examples like ‘losing’ yourself completely in music or in nature or ‘losing’ yourself in somebody else during a moment of total intimacy. It is also the merging of a new experience or the merging of nourishment, which we have taken in and which now becomes a part of us (Syllabus, 2017, pp. 31-33).

In love relationships, we often see this contact mechanism, when partners lose their sense of personal boundaries. It means losing one’s own feelings, needs, emotions, thoughts, interests, goals and living another person’s life.

Introjection- Literally means ‘throwing inside’ (Lambrechts, p. 471). It can be understood as the mechanism which enables us to take in something from our environment. Taking in nourishment as well as taking in ideas are forms of introjection. Without introjection, we are not able to learn anything and in a fact, we are not able to live, because we would not take in any food. Taking in new impulses can also be seen as a type of introjection. In the cycle of the contact-process, introjection fits into the phase of sensation.

Of course we can uncritically take in the ‘wrong’ things (the wrong food, the wrong ideas etc.). But in that case we are dealing with a distortion of introjection. In its original meaning, introjection has a clear function in serving life and growth. (Syllabus, 2017, pp. 31-33)

Introjects become toxic and dysfunctional sometimes, including in love relationships. It disturbs partners in being authentic and meeting real needs “here and now”. And the needs have tendency to be met by no means. When introjects prevent meeting needs directly, a person starts to “creatively adjust” and realizes himself/herself by using other contact mechanisms

Projection – This actually is the opposite of introjection. Projection means ‘throwing

outside'. This mechanism enables us to put or bring something out of ourselves. This 'something' can be something we no longer need like the remains of our nourishment, or it can also be something new, like an idea in which we create something completely new in the world. For example, an architect projects his idea of the new house that he wants to design into the landscape in front of him. Or the expressionist painter projects his inner images or feelings onto the waiting canvas.

We can also project ideas and images onto other persons, (e.g., onto partners in love relationships, like we do when we recognize something from ourselves in the other). This is a well-known phenomenon when meeting new people: we assume all kinds of specific characteristics or qualities of the person based on someone's appearance or clothes. Because he dresses himself the same way we do, we assume that he will resemble us in other ways too, and with that assumption, we feel more comfortable making contact with this person. We call this phenomenon 'projective identification'.

Here, projection has a clear function in getting to know each other.

Since we also attribute a thought, meaning or feeling in the phase of awareness to the sensation we noticed, we are actually projecting. Therefore, this mechanism connects with the phase of awareness within the contact-cycle.

Retroreflection – This literally means 'throwing back'. It enables us to direct our attention to ourselves and by doing that, to take care of ourselves. Like Lambrechts describes, retroreflection enables us to make a split in ourselves between 'somebody who is handling' and 'somebody who is handled', between 'somebody who is observing' and 'somebody who is observed'.

In this way, we are able to observe ourselves and also able to be in dialogue with ourselves. It enables us to distance ourselves from ourselves and postpone the fulfillment of our needs or be considerate of somebody else.

Retroreflection also has to do with how we handle our energy. If we are considerate of somebody else or postpone the fulfillment of our needs, we redirect or diminish the energy which has been mobilized by the awareness of our needs. So therefore, retroreflection is connected to a phase of mobilizing energy.

By retroreflecting, by being able to distance ourselves from ourselves, we are also able to laugh at ourselves. So self-mockery and self-criticizing can be seen as a positive as well - in its distortion - as a negative form of retroreflection. In its distortion, we

become too critical to ourselves; we demolish ourselves and become paralyzed (Syllabus, 2017, pp. 31-33).

Retroreflection often emerges in love relationships, when the wife or the husband uses most of his/her energy taking care of their partner and has no time, space and energy left for own interests and goals.

Deflection - means 'not throwing'. Literally it means 'distracting'. Deflection enables us to put things into perspective, to reduce things or experiences to manageable proportions. It diminishes the load or tension and in this way it also connects to the word 'soothing'. By deflecting we are able to bring somebody a shocking message in a manageable way.

We can place this mechanism in the phase of mobilizing energy as well as in the phase of action. In the phase of mobilizing energy we can see deflecting as 'having the energy evaporate' which will prevent us from coming into action. In the phase of action, deflection will enable us to adjust or reduce our action, in a way that it better fits our environment or ourselves (e.g., not overruling others)(Syllabus, 2017, pp. 31-33).

Deflection in love relationship emerges by ignoring painful problems and devaluating them, that leads to isolation and losing contact.

Self in Contact

The self in Gestalt therapy theory is the person's system of contacts. There is no "core" or "self" apart from an organism/environment field, and no human environment without the processes that we usually characterize as "internal". Whether the self is healthy, neurotic, psychotic or in the range of a self disorder, Gestalt therapy notion is a process that occurs at the boundary. (Gary M. Yontef, 1993)

Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb says in her definition- self is experience, happening here and now. Self in gestalt therapy is what acts and is acted on. Acting is defined not only by what we already know, not only by what acts on us, what influences us, but by free choice, within the contact of creative creation of self.

Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb links anthropology of self in gestalt therapy with Darwin theory and from this perspective, she reviews interrelationship between the organism

and environment. Those animals survive that adapt to the environment. Fathers of gestalt therapy go further and consider this link between the person and social environment. If an organism adapts to the environment by physiological mechanisms, an individual does it by contact, its ability to stay at the contact boundary to the end. An individual is focused on how to draw a line between a person and society, and person and his/her physiology.

Spontaneity makes human and nature, person and social environment closer, and the goal of self is contact, and during contact we are human-animal organisms.

Self is human “animal” organism’s ability to be in contact. For a therapist it means to set a goal to restore the client’s ability to be spontaneous (Anthology, 2016).

Thus, the gestalt concept of self as process involves three structures: id, ego and personality. These three structures are referred to as functions or self-functions meaning that they are processes that act in relation to the person’s situation in the present moment.

When is self in contact and when it is not?

According to Lobb, self is always in contact, while the person is alive. Different forms of contact are e.g. Contact with sofa pillow, chair, different persons, hearing birds singing, feeling warmth by our skin, air that we breathe. You are in various contacts and your organism is also constantly in contact. But the self chooses one of these contacts from the point of view of growth and development. In gestalt therapy growth is always happening on the basis of encouraged (chosen) contact. Doing contact assimilation of something new takes place.

Margherita Lobb believes that these points that may lead to psychopathology.

- stopping spontaneity (that determines anxiety, and tendency to get rid of it);
- intentions/goals change/become deteriorated;
- contacting is accompanied by fears and is realized through interjects, projections and retroreflections (egotism may be added);

Contact does not stop; contact continues, but loses spontaneity and brings restlessness.

When there is no spontaneity anymore, the impulse becomes restlessness that we want to get rid of. A person does not need restlessness and starts to learn other thing (e.g., avoiding contact, restlessness). Therefore, we get into contact with help of introjects,

projections, retroreflections, or I am a person thinking high of me.

Spontaneity means fully existing at the contact boundary with full awareness and full use of feelings that enables to see the other clearly (Anthology, 2016).

Issues of boundaries in love relationships

The whole is different from the sum of its parts. A couple is more than the sum of two people. It is not the traditional “two shall become one” of the Bible! This would reduce each partner to a half! The new arithmetic is: $1 + 1 = 3$. Each person plus the couple as an autonomous entity which “leads its own life”. And why not $1 + 1 = 7$? Meaning: me, you, us; you in me, me in you (the images of the other that we harbor); the ideal couple in my mind, the ideal couple in yours - a created, fantasized, mystified couple.

Being in couple implies that you are interested in the other as an other, as a novelty, besides our perception of the other, which rather frames and triggers our fear that we will not be accepted, or our fear of having to stop on our way towards the significant other. (SpagnuoloLobb, 2007)

From a phenomenological perspective, Lee is based on the assumption that it is through the experience co-created by the partners, their inter-acting with each other.

The couple leads its own life: it is not a definitive and stable state. It lives, it changes, it grows, it suffers, it is sick... and sometimes, independently from its “components” — who may be feeling very well! For example, each partner may have initiated an outside relationship steeped in joy... and the couple is suffering or dying. So the life of a couple occurs at the contact boundary. Growth and all changes of the partners are happening on these boundaries.

In turn, contact can be described as the awareness of an “other” at a boundary in the field. The organism makes contact with the rest of the world at its boundary and here an exchange takes place which maintains homeostasis or contributes to growth.

Through clear contact, the person can discriminate against that which can be taken in and assimilated and that which can be kept out and rejected.

Hence the health of the person depends on clear, full contact and if this function be-

comes disrupted or blocked the person might then take in what would be better to have been rejected (you're a bad person) and keep out what we need (I am a good person).

Whenever there is a resistance to contact due to an associated negative consequence then the person feels tension or anxiety as they move toward contact and begin to resist contact and look to how they can creatively adjust the contact to suit themselves and the environment.

This is particularly so for the people in a relationship which does not meet their needs at that moment, and so they must find ways to deal with the needs as best they can. The person uses their ability to adapt and find ways to “creatively adjust” to the difficulties in a relationship. Perls said these creative adjustments became “neurotic” when they are used chronically, outside of awareness and inappropriately; they are fixated on impossible or non-existent objects when they to involve an impoverishment of awareness and when they prevent meaningful integration of needs and experiences.

It's important to discuss healthy and unhealthy couples. What do we mean by “healthy,” and what do we mean by “couple”? A healthy life is one that is characterized by a sense of satisfaction, by growth of the individual, and by generativity, a productive connectedness in which the person is part of and enhances a larger social whole. A healthy person, then, has a sense of achieving significant personal goals, of continuing to generate new goals that are meaningfully larger, and of contributing something important to a community beyond the individual in a way that harmonizes with some larger holistic meaning (whether spiritually, politically, or otherwise conceived). At least these three elements, we would argue, are essential to the definition of health (and particularly to a Gestalt definition): take away any one of them, and we begin to think of unhealthy (meaning not whole) or dysfunction, not just a problem in life but a second-order problem of some block or distortion in the processes of life and growth themselves. By the same token, a healthy couple's relationship is one that promotes those processes of health in both partners. The keyword here is “promotes”. To promote is to support, nurture, and enhance, something more than just leaving each member free to live on his or her own while allowing for the pursuit of some goals in common (like business, child-rearing, or some other career or similar partnership goals). (Gordon Wheeler, Stephanie Backman, 1994, pp. 83)

Yet the maintenance of a healthy couple bond over time is plainly one of the most challenging relational tasks we face in human development. By the same token, studying, facilitating, and intervening in this relationship and its problems must be among the most challenging tasks for therapists, and one that is much less frequently addressed

and written about than the topics of individual work and family therapy, within which couples therapy is often subsumed. People having difficulties with intimate friendships are commonly counseled to go into individual therapy, or possibly group therapy, to explore what ails them.

Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb outlines the three dimensions of the experience of couples: who do we live with? What keeps us linked? And we fight as a way to fill the relational void. (Spagnuolo Lobb, M., 2007)

According to Hasidic saying, the motto of life is “Give and Take.” Everyone must be both a giver and a receiver. Those who are not are a barren tree. By Richard Borofsky and Antra Kalnins Borofsky a life is the activity of exchange, or the activity of giving and receiving. And in intimate relationships we exchange attentions, feelings, favors, meanings, intentions, dreams, and eventually, perhaps, vows. We see intimate relationships as an elaborate economy of experience that is given and received between two partners. This process of exchange is the means by which bonding occurs. Relationships are not, we believe, made in heaven-or in hell. Rather, bonds between two people are co-created moment by moment, year after year by the process of giving to and receiving from each other.

The health of a relationship, like the health of an economy, depends on the ease and frequency of exchange. When this exchange goes well, relationships thrive. Both partners become increasingly present, alive, and aware. They become deeply connected with each other, yet are respectful of their separateness. Partners are able to freely share with each other the unique truth of their experience and both are able to value, receive, and learn from the contact with each other’s otherness. There is a reciprocity or balance of giving and receiving so that both partners are equally givers and receivers. The exchange is fair and mutually empowering. There is also an acknowledgment of both partners’ interdependence. Both partners recognize that each has a limited range of experience and limited capacities, and that they need each other’s differences. Through giving and receiving each has access to new possibilities, and, through the exchange of these possibilities, both partners become more flexible, compassionate, and whole human beings.

When the process of exchange between partners is not working, the relationship and both partners suffer. There is a weakening of the bond that connects them. There is also a sense that nothing is changing, that they are stuck with each other’s limitations, and that either is teaming or growing in the relationship. Often there is also a power struggle between partners in which they try to control, devalue, and even hurt each other. This is the relationship hell. (Gordon Wheeler, Stephanie Backman, 1994, pp. 327-328)

Though when couples keep fighting it may be a useful creative adjustment for one or both to withdraw, both for themselves and their children. And most importantly of all, its important to assist couples inn becoming more aware. To talk about and experiment with being a couple creates the possibility that they can change. Their ability to talk about and discuss their patterns of being a couple adds significantly to their ability to meet and stay with the difficult experiences of being a couple and offers hope and support for their wisdom as a couple.

Thinking about Gestalt couples therapy Hunter Beaumont notes: “I think about actual people I’ve worked with; I see their faces, I hear their voices. For the most part, they are good people, sincere, capable of love and hope, willing to work hard in therapy. They come to therapy because they are caught in a cycle of disappointed hopes, of hurt and anger, and they know that they are destroying their love for one another in spite of their good intentions” (Gordon Wheeler, Stephanie Backman, 1994, p. 83).

In couples’ therapy many people feel they are losing themselves and risking capture in the union.

Serge and Anne Ginger outline the main situations couples are faced with:

- The couple wishes to remain together, review and enrich their relationship
- The couple is contemplating separation: they wish to attempt “a last chance”, or else the decision is already taken but they wish to prepare, and succeed in their separation, without too much disruption to their personal life or to their children
- The couple is already separated and wishes to review and solve residual, affective, material, family or social problems
- One of partners wishes to undergo couple therapy, and the other refuses
- The problems arising are essentially: - emotional - sexual - social or legal (divorce, custody of children, sharing out property)
- Particular couples: - elderly couples (or presenting a great age difference)
- inter-cultural couples (or inter-racial)
- homosexual couples
- mother-child couples (or father-child), whether or not in mono-parental homes
- brother and sister couples (or twins)
- co-workers or co-therapists (Ginger, S. and A., 1999)
- As I mentioned above about my therapeutic experience the requests of main

situations I faced with are:

- to remain together, review and enrich their relation
- find yourself and maintain their union

It's natural, that a destroyed relationship is connected with losing and losing yourself means to lose sensation of their boundaries.

Conclusions

Contact is not just togetherness or joining. It can only happen between separate beings always requiring independence and always risking capture in the union. "At the moment of union, one's fullest sense of his person is swept along into a new creation. I am no longer only me, but me and thee make we" (Erv and Miriam Polster, 1974).

It can be noted that in a relationship before one person notices another person, one should notice oneself. It implies noticing and be aware of one's feelings, thoughts, what choices one makes being in contact and what needs are these choices connected with. To be able to ecologically share this with another person, in order to be seen and then give space to another person for the same, the person needs skills and experience. This ability is called spontaneity and with it a relationship becomes healthy.

Hence the spontaneous human ability to be fully present at the contact boundary with the environment is shaped for the couple by the ability to maintain the spontaneity of seeing, feeling attracted, allowing oneself to be changed by the other-precisely as other, by the other we do not expect, by the other novelties.

Personal relationships occur at the contact boundary. The more the partners meet in the fullness of their senses, the more they aware of the totality of the experience they co-create when they meet. The result of gestalt therapists is when a couple will have the ability to perceive their contact boundary clearly, with all the senses awakened.

Couple relationships are thus seen by Gestalt therapy as a continuous co-creation of the contact boundary, as an experience that lies "between" the partners, not as a projection onto the other of personal experiences.

As Margherita Spagniolio Lobb notes, with her theory of self as a process of contact and withdrawal, Gestalt therapy shows how couples realize, or avoid, the intention to

reach and be reached by the other (Spagnuolo Lobb, M. S., 2007).

So it's important to intend to focus mainly on how couples interrupt their intention to contact, thus losing their spontaneity, and how instead they creatively adjust. Feelings like shame, anger, and love are basic elements of this process.

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