

Please complete front sheet

Course- Advanced Diploma in Psychotherapy

Name of Trainee: John Dray

Essay Title: Discuss your understanding of Contact in relation to relational Gestalt Psychotherapy. Reflect on your own process in relation to this. You are required to explain what relational Gestalt is. Discuss with reference to at least three authors.

Word Count: 2695

Date of Submission: 9 January 2023

Overall Score 59

Grade Pass

Date Received

2 ESSAY MARKING SCHEME Year 1 Only

Trainees Name: John Dray

Year: 1

1st Marker: Mel Ovens

Date Marked: 08/02/2023

Essay Title:

Assessment criteria & 1 st Marker Comments	Marks
✓ 1st Markers comments are in purple. ✓ indicates good point. Any therapeutic terms that needed explaining or defining are highlighted. The explanation is needed because there is a body of work that describes these concepts and the authors need to be acknowledged. The marker also needs to know you understand these terms. John, this is a competent and well thought through essay. There is a lot of good theory and exploration. It is lacking in examples from your own process or practice. I was moved by the Rev Tutu example and would have liked more of 'you' in the essay. You tackled a complex subject well and made some interesting points. Well done; your essay scored higher than most first year 1 essays, so the work was a good standard but lacking in a few areas.	
1. Organisation and Planning There needs to be a structured plan for the work with an introduction, development and conclusion. The work should address the essay title. ✓ A good essay plan, well executed. Great introduction. I think a literature review was needed on general gestalt terms such as contact boundary, self. Main body good and conclusion worked well but would have been improved with more personal reflections on your learning.	7/10
2. Argument and Application to Practice Own ideas will be developed and others included and referenced to show application of theory to practice and self-awareness. Where relevant, indicate further ways in which the themes could be developed. John, I think you had a good attempt at a congruent argument on contact linked to dialogic theory. You had your own unique ideas, but these were not linked to your own process or practice examples. I liked the example of amoeba but I think you needed examples of you at the contact boundary.	13/25
3. Theory and Analysis Theory must be used to support the essay title. It must be critically evaluated and clearly linked to specific areas of application including self-awareness and own process. You have used a lot of theory and mainly it used well. The lack of PHG is an issue comparatively to the relational school. I think by missing out the original view of contact, you had less to work with and occasions got slightly muddled on what theory. I liked that you understood there is a lot more to contact than the cycle. Again, too few personal examples and lack of own process.	16/25
4. Ethical and Anti-oppressive Practice Discussion of Ethical and Anti-oppressive practice and an understanding of the impact of intersectionality must be integral to the written work, reflecting the significance of such	7/15

practice within psychotherapy. Reference can be made to ethical dilemmas, boundary negotiations, legal matters, personal transference phenomena and any other issues related to power dynamics. Excellent that you included this section. You needed to reference Intersectionality. This is where you could again have used your own experiences more. You only used Rothschild here and in future several ethical texts will be required.	
5. Research and Referencing All work will be referenced and include a full bibliography. Harvard referencing system to be used throughout. Reference can be made to books, articles, journals and web links. A good range of texts. You used them well. There are some issues with referencing but generally well done. Needed more ethical texts. Accurate Bibliography.	7/10
6. Style and Presentation Assignments are to be typed and double spaced with pages numbered and named. Front sheets must be included. Marking will take into account spelling, grammar and adherence to word limit (+/- 10%) unless special dispensation has been agreed. Note 5 marks to be automatically credited for those writing in a 2nd language or with recognised learning needs. Excellent presentation. Your writing style is promising for future essays.	5/ 5
7. Reflection and Creativity The work demonstrates a good level of personal insight and a capacity to learn from experience. It provides an open and honest account of the learning process and an ability to reflect on how your own experience has shaped your approach to the work and understanding of the topic. I think you did explore your learning covertly. I think some more reflection was needed. The essay and conclusion in particular needed more of your process and learning.	4/10
Total	59%
Grade	Pass

Under 50% = REFER; 50% - 59% = PASS; 60% - 79% = MERIT; 80 % + = DISTINCTION

2nd Marker Comments: General Comments required if grade agreed.

Second marker's additional comments in turquoise, and formatting and other minor errors highlighted.

John, there is much to like in this essay – with just a little more of 'you' and your own process, you would almost certainly have moved into the Merit category. A really good first WPI essay! Well done.

On formatting: when you mention an author in the body of your text, e.g., Clarkson (1989) argued that ..., don't place their names in parentheses, as grammatically that makes no sense. Only when you are providing a reference outside of your own sentence do you place their names in parentheses along with the date of the text referred to.

Anything you don't understand, just ask for clarification!

Grade agreed Between Both Markers?

YES

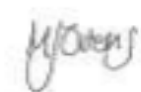
If NO, the 2 markers will discuss and may alter the mark to agree.

If the markers do not agree then the second marker will grade the essay and average grade will be given.

Average Grade if required.

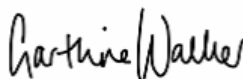
See Handbook section 3, Policy 15 if you wish to appeal this.

1st Marker Signature:



Date: 08/02/23

2nd Marker Signature:



Date: 14/02/23

Please use this document to write your essay. Start on the next page.

Discuss your understanding of Contact in relation to relational Gestalt Psychotherapy. Reflect on your own process in relation to this. You are required to explain what relational Gestalt is. Discuss with reference to at least three authors.

Introduction

'Contact' is a central term within Gestalt therapy. However, it seems to have a multitude of nuances. This is my dilemma as I approach the concept of 'contact' in Gestalt psychotherapy. I have an opportunity to explore some of the nuances in the different meanings of contact. I will then explore Bloom, Stawman and Yontef's views on whether Gestalt therapy was always relational, whether that is a relatively new phenomenon and whether dialogic theory provides a bridge. ✓ a good intro but say how you intend to answer the question. You can also add a sentences or 2 on your argument that you will critique. It is good practice to have the years after the names above.

Literature Review

In this essay I will sometimes use 'Gestalt' or 'Gestalt therapy', rather than 'Gestalt psychotherapy'. ✓ a usual convention is to write GT My intention is that both of these refer to 'Gestalt psychotherapy'. Throughout the essay I will draw on Clarkson (1989), Hycner & Jacobs (1995) and Joyce & Sills (2018) primarily to underpin my understanding of Gestalt therapy. I will use Clarkson (1989) as the main model for the 'contact cycle'. (Zinker, 1978), (Fogarty, Bhar, Theiler, & O'Shea, 2016), (Spagnuolo Lobb & Lichtenberg, 2005), (Polster & Polster, 1974) and (Mierkowski, 2022) will give different perspectives on the meaning of 'contact'. ✓ only the years need to be on brackets. Given my former work as a Christian minister, I will draw on the spiritual writings of (John of the Cross, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, 1991) and an example from (G.M.

Yontef, 1993) as I think that these have strong parallels to parts of the Dialogic Theory of (Buber, 2018). (Jacobs & Hycner, 2009), (Bloom, 2011), (Stawman, 2009) and (G. Yontef, 2009) will help with my exploration of the relational in Gestalt therapy. (Rothschild, 2000) is referred to as her examples of **boundaries** have helped me understand contact-boundaries. ✓

Contact

In my opinion As in many disciplines, psychotherapy suffers ??? from using words from everyday life. While in many disciplines words have a single, precise meaning in psychotherapy the meaning of words can vary wildly. Gestalt uses the same word 'contact' for many different, but related concepts. ✓ here I would start with the view of PHG 1951 and move forward in time with the development of GT

Some use contact as part of any of four different stages in the Gestalt. (Spagnuolo Lobb & Lichtenberg, 2005). This is explained in "*Initially only four stages of contact were described: fore-contact, contact, final contact, and post-contact. These terms were later developed into a heuristic tool: the cycle of contact/awareness/experience. This cycle describes the 'ideal' interactive process of contact and withdrawal of organism and environment...*" (Fogarty, Bhar, Theiler, & O'Shea, *et al* 2016, p. 39). Zinker uses contact as part of the Gestalt cycle (Zinker, 1978, p. 97) and even has his own variation of the cycle as a wave. Thus 'contact' can be understood as part of the Gestalt cycle or as another term for the whole cycle. ✓

Against these uses of the word 'contact' (Joyce & Sills, 2018, p. 129) discuss whether the word continues to have meaning. Mierkowski suggests that the use of the term 'contact' remains valid despite its use in everyday language. (Mierkowski, 2022) ✓ Place the full stop after the inline reference not before it.

My thought is that 'contact' *is* useful as a term, but I find that it continues to change! Hycner & Jacobs (1995) (loc. 26) identify three 'generations' of therapy theorists who use terms differently - the theory has continued to develop since then.

Contact/Process

As mentioned, an important aspect of contact is both as the 'Gestalt cycle' at the heart of Gestalt therapy theory and the stage of 'final contact' within that cycle. In the version described by Clarkson (Clarkson, 1989, p. 29) with the stages: sensation, awareness, mobilization, action, final contact, satisfaction and withdrawal. The cycle can be impaired in many ways. These 'impairments' are often referred to as 'interruptions' to contact. ✓ by which authors? An 'interruption' suggests a discontinuous break. So others need to name them here would re-frame interruptions as 'moderations' to contact. Instead of suggesting a discontinuous break, a 'moderation' suggests a continuum of possible adverse modifications to contact. This re-framing makes 'interruptions' more consistent with Field Theory in Fogarty, Bhar, Theiler, & O'Shea (2016) (p 39). The terms within Gestalt Therapy are so intertwined that looking at any one aspect brings with it the whole theoretical underpinning of Gestalt Therapy. From simply looking at contact, I have to bring in Field Theory, Figure and Ground and Dialogic Theory amongst others. Before I get to that, I want to look at the relational debate within Gestalt therapy theory.

Relational

Jacobs & Hycner (2009) brings together many noted Gestalt psychotherapists to find out if Gestalt therapy is relational. For some, e.g. G. Yontef (2009), it always was, with the caveat that there were bad characterizations of Gestalt in the 1960's that were not (p43): *'There is an attitude in some Gestalt therapy circles [...] that need is a weakness, a flaw. the patient/trainee is needy; the therapist/trainer is self-sufficient, and the therapist's job is to frustrate the*

manipulation of the needy patient. Stawman (2009) suggests that Gestalt was not relational but that it IS progressively becoming more relational in waves (pp. 11-36). He sees Gestalt therapy as having evolved through four waves. In this essay I will only explore the first two: "Organism-environment", "I-thou". ✓

One way of exploring 'organism-environment' is by imagining an amoeba on microscope slide. here I would be to say how this is described in PHG before the example The crenulated surface of the amoeba is where the amoeba physically experiences its environment. In response to its environment it may deform to move, or to engulf food particles. For the amoeba one aspect of the contact boundary is a literal, physical boundary - its surface. The client (amoeba) came along with his problems. The benevolent, self-sufficient psychotherapist (microscopist) helps the client discover their contact-boundary, their 'me' and their 'not me' (Stawman, 2009, p. 13). ✓ interesting, but John you could use an actual example from your process or your experience as client / therapist.

If I am looking through the microscope, my contact with the amoeba is through my sight. I could argue that (for me) the contact boundary Ref First described in PHG is at the surface of the retinas in my eyes. The contact boundary is not in the same location for all the beings involved in contact. This is described by Perls (Perls, 1973/1976, p. 16ff) but I like the summary in (Polster & Polster, 1974, p. 99) that 'Through contact, each person has the chance to meet the world outside himself nourishingly.' ✓ Here is the change. I am not just aware of 'me' and 'not me', I am aware of the amoeba - a being within the environment. The amoeba can be characterised as 'organism-environment', but I am in an 'I-it' Ref Buber relationship ? a little confused here I it with the amoeba? A person? This essay? . Similarly, for Gestalt therapy to be relational there has to

be a relationship. This brings me to the introduction of dialogic theory and the second of Stawman's waves ("I-thou"). ✓ Ref Buber

Dialogic Theory

Contact is explored extensively by Buber (Buber, 2018 1923) in his seminal work, 'I and Thou'. Within this book Buber explores contact ? Buber discussed the need to show up, inclusion, and the between; I can't remember him writing about contact. between 'I' and the 'other', specifically looking at 'I-it' and 'I-thou' relationships. This work is the underpinning of dialogic theory within relational Gestalt therapy. I found a spiritual, philosophical work. ✓

Buber shares much with the spiritual writings of John of the Cross, a 16th century mystic (John of the Cross, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, 1991). John exemplified and developed a type of prayer called contemplation. Rather than pursuing God the contemplative would wait in stillness for an awareness of the presence of God to arise. Ideally, there would be no expectation of the way that God would reveal, only that there was the possibility that God would reveal themselves. John writes of being completely 'known' by the experience. Relational Gestalt makes space in the here and now to facilitate the client discovering who they are and accepts them as they present themselves. ✓ again an example from your process or ministry could illuminate the point here. Gestalt uses experiments and phenomenological 'noticing' (Joyce & Sills, 2018, p. 115), whereas contemplation is a much more passive process. Similarly, Gestalt aspires to transcend particular faith frameworks (Joyce & Sills, 2018, p. 107). There may be an 'Aha moment' where the client and therapist truly recognise the 'being' of the other. With that moment Gestalt therapy has moved from the first of Stawman's waves to the second. ✓ aha is a moment of contact

A consequence of contact between I and other, and the boundary that divides the two, gives us an awareness of 'self'. ✓ *example please* As Sills, Lapworth, & Desmond *et al* (2012) (p 18) put it, 'This is how we describe the self in Gestalt: the process of contacting that occurs at the boundary between the organism and its environment. This boundary is not only physical. Psychologically, a clear sense of ourselves happens in the same way.' Through contact we discover who we are and the 'self' in Gestalt is not static but a process. ✓

I will look at meetings with celebrities to categorise relationships described by Buber. I have met with a number of celebrities and it is difficult for them to make meaningful contact with individuals in the adoring crowd. The fans deal with the object of their adoration in an 'I-it' fashion. In this situation the celebrity is the figure in their ground (Joyce & Sills, 2018, p. 26). The celebrity has a sea of adoration in front of them and it is difficult to really notice individuals. ✓ *when have you been missed?* It may be that the fans are just 'ground' with no true figure. I was once invited along to see the Most Reverend Desmond Tutu, former archbishop of Cape Town. He came up to me, clasped both my hands, stared deeply into my eyes in a loving manner, said some words and a memorable and deep connection was made. It felt like a true 'I-thou' moment where we had a true human connection, I was truly 'seen'. We had a moment of mutual knowing that lasted for an instant. ✓ *Buber and contact in action. Sounds an amazing experience. Also, this is the first example I feel I have made contact with an aspect of you, I would have liked more examples.*

Similarly, Yontef explains the difference in working with Fritz Perls, where he did not feel 'seen' and working with Jim Simkin where he felt able to be fully and truly himself. (G.-M. Yontef, 1993, pp. 43–44) In the same passage he summarises this as '*Contact is appreciation of differences*'. ✓ *nice* This 'appreciation of differences' suggests a distinction between 'I' and 'other', so it is now time to look at where contact occurs. It is ironic that in G.- Yontef (2009) argues that Gestalt

therapy always was relational when he was not 'seen' by Fritz, one of the founders of Gestalt therapy! For example, on p. 37 that if you think Gestalt therapy was ever non-relational then you did not understand Gestalt theory well enough! Yontef's argument may or may not be true. However, I would argue that if other psychotherapists and clients experienced Gestalt therapy as being non-relational then the theory is irrelevant. ✓ John I think you may have hit on an interesting point. Originalist GT (Bloom 2011) could be relational but it was not dialogical. Contact is seen in a different way through a Buber dialogic lens than in PHG (1951/1994).

This brings me to (Bloom, 2011), a review of the book that contains both Stawman's and Yontef's chapters. Here he characterises the discussion between those who would claim that Gestalt therapy was always relational and those who would say that it has become relational (p. 297). He does not refer to 'waves' but 'turns'. He sees the that the 'relational turn' brings with it an 'ethical turn': *'The relational turn in Gestalt therapy is an ethical turn. I refer to an ethical turn since what is figural to the relationalists in psychotherapy are the interpersonal qualities of the therapy relationship itself; and not the therapy as if it were practiced only upon an autonomous patient by a removed therapist. The Gestalt therapist is a responsible part of the process, not merely an active expert facilitating the process. The Gestalt therapy is the Gestalt therapy relationship.'* (p.300) ✓ He goes on to argue that even though Fritz and Lores Perls and the other founders of Gestalt therapy were aware of Buber's work that it did not become central to Gestalt therapy theory until the therapy became relational. (p. 301) ✓

Ethics

Once there is a relationship, there come clearer ethical considerations. In the therapeutic relationship we are not dealing with equals, but a vulnerable person presenting their issues and the psychotherapist. The psychotherapist makes themselves available, but there need to be

boundaries. Rothschild explores boundaries and her understanding of how they can affect the therapeutic relationship. Rothschild (2000), 141ff plays with physical boundaries and how they affect the 'comfortableness' of the client. One of the features of psychotherapeutic practice is that we do not (normally) know the client when they enter the room. They bring to the space and to the relationship what they want to and withhold what they want to. We do not know the client's race, religion, queerness, gender identity, neurodiversity or the intersectionality ✓ Ref Intersectionality of their identity. In order co-create a therapeutic relationship, relationality would seem to demand that we truly 'see' the other person. Like John of the Cross we make available the possibility of an 'I-thou' meeting. In making ourselves available as psychotherapists, we need be aware of our own 'self' in all its intersectional glory and our contact-boundaries. ✓

Conclusion

In summary contact for me, refers to the ability to be present and fully engaged in the current moment, both with oneself and with others. ✓ This contact reveals itself at the contact-boundary, which gives rise to the concept of 'self'. ✓ Ref Just as the contact-boundary is dynamic, so the Gestalt concept of 'self' is as a process rather than static, a verb rather than a noun. ✓ Ref The description of contact within Gestalt literature produces a philosophical framework within which Gestalt therapy sits. However, that is rather like giving an alien several detailed descriptions of how to make an eyeball and expecting the alien to know what the experience of colour is. The understanding of contact comes from experiencing it and the modifications that prevent it. This experience can then be compared to the experiences of others working in Gestalt Psychotherapy. This is similar to the methodology used in (Fogarty, Bhar, Theiler, & O'Shea, 2016) to compare Gestalt therapist practices. ✓ what have you learnt

What is relational? it means that the therapist is not like a scientist observing and interacting with an amoeba on a microscope slide. To be relational means that the therapist and the client have a therapeutic relationship. That the therapist truly 'sees' the client. With this relational nature come various ethical imperatives that I have only touched on here. ✓

The only thing we can be certain of within Gestalt therapy is that both the understanding of 'contact' and 'relation' will continue to develop as theory and practice try to align. I would have liked a more overt sense of why you find contact to be a useful term, which you stated at the outset. Perhaps structuring the essay around that argument rather than Gestalt concepts might have helped draw that out more.

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