

Chapter 6 Love in Psychotherapy. From the Death of Oedipus to the Emergence of the Situational Field

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Location

2,378 love is a concept which (though taken for granted) proves difficult to define, for both the therapist and the patient.

2,382 The Therapist's Love

2,390 We can distinguish between two kinds of love the therapist may have for the patient: one linked to the role and one that springs spontaneously from the situation.

2,393 As Gestalt therapists, we answer without a shadow of a doubt that our profession is an art, and that therefore emotional involvement is an intrinsic part of the method of treatment.

2,394 involvement is real, her/his feelings toward the patient are genuine,

2,395 But can this involvement of the therapist be called love?

2,396 Erving Polster (1987) in his book Every Person's Life is Worth a Novel, when he defined the treatment attitude of the therapist as a search for the hidden fascination of the patient;

2,398 revitalizes the patient's ability to be interested/interesting.

2,399 Polster

2,400 translates in terms of fascination/interest/aesthetic attraction the concept of the vitality and spontaneity of contact between organism and environment, maintaining the hermeneutic reference to the concept of novelty, excitement, and growth in the human personality from the founding text

2,402 This, for us Gestalt therapists, is a good way of defining the therapist's love: the task of the therapeutic intuition and "love" is to rediscover the fascination the patient has concealed.

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- 2,404 The healing love is a sort of spotlight illuminating the other's beauty, a light that makes visible, in the relationship, the harmonic vitality inherent in the integrity with which the other is in the relationship,
- 2,407 When the therapist wonders: "What really attracts me in this patient?" s/he is directing the spotlight of her/his therapeutic love in such a way that the patient can reawaken, as s/he looks at her/himself in this light, the sense of her/his own beauty, which implies the spontaneity of his/her being-there (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2003b).
- 2,423 The professionalization of psychotherapy in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s – with the general acceptance of an ethical code – drew attention to the ethical respect for the patient's request, and the possible use of sexuality in psychotherapy was clearly and definitely banned in the psychotherapeutic relationship.
- 2,426 this question must be answered: "What is the specific way in which Gestalt therapy regards sexual feelings and feelings of love?"
- 2,427 set these feelings at the contact boundary, hence seeing them as functional to
- 2,428 the relationship, and to the situational field which patient and therapist create.
- 2,430 The patient's love obviously cannot be disputed: it is the form taken by commitment in the various therapeutic situations. The patient offers the therapist the access code to an intimate history,
- 2,432 the "institutional aspect" of the patient's love: it is the fact of being a patient,
- 2,435 as a diagnostic tool: excessive trust or reluctance to trust certainly gives the therapist a key to read the patient's habitual relational patterns.
- 2,439 every emotion the patient feels for the therapist is
- 2,440 a specific response, appropriately modulated for that therapist, within the frame of reference of the relational patterns that the patient intends to modify.
- 2,449 Love in Therapy as an Emergent Event at the Contact Boundary
- 2,451 love that springs up in certain situations and not in others, and which may imply physical attraction, hence sexual feelings.

- 2,451 special nature of the therapeutic encounter may involve the profound desire for total intimacy,
- 2,454 For Gestalt therapists, the perception (and hence also the emotion) of the patient or the therapist is a process that occurs not “inside” the individual, but as co-creation in the space “between” in which their experiences are realized.
- 2,455 attraction that may be felt
- 2,456 has meaning in the relational pattern the patient her/himself triggers.
- 2,456 the therapist who is attracted to a particular patient might discover that this patient is, so to speak, “used to” parental love.
- 2,465 old love that can be experienced by the patient in a new situation.
- 2,466 challenge for the therapist is to provide a clearer, more courageous love, so as to relocate the positive aspect of this love in a non-manipulative context, and cause the patient to experience her spontaneity on the ground of a clear relationship.
- 2,475 The patient’s attraction toward the therapist can be understood
- 2,476 the healing factor will not be the positive response of the therapist to this attraction (which instead would disorient her), but rather the fact that the patient feels seen and appreciated by him in her intentionality of contact
- 2,477 this can restore the spontaneity of the patient’s love.
- 2,478 the patient tells the therapist that she has had a dream about making love with him. The therapist listens to what she is telling him and how, and then he says: “I’m struck by the effort you’ve made to overcome your shyness and embarrassment. I appreciate the trust you have in me, and the courage with which you face your relationship with me”.
- 2,489 Gestalt epistemology allows the inclusion of the spontaneity of the therapist and of the patient in the therapeutic process, even in borderline cases such as the feeling of love and sexual attraction.

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- 2,492 the Gestalt view the therapeutic relationship is real, in it the habitual relational patterns are brought into focus, in search of a new solution, and in order to find it the therapist and the patient gamble with their true feelings, maintaining the context of the therapeutic situation, in which on one side treatment is sought and on the other it is provided.
- 2,501 the idea of making conscious what is not conscious has generally remained the central core of all psychotherapies.
- 2,506 in the final analysis the aim of psychotherapy remains for them that of making “sayable” what is “unsayable”.
- 2,507 Some new techniques used in psychotherapy, for instance, can be said, on the one hand, to have challenged the concept that the client needs to say and understand the experience
- 2,509 Daniel Stern (Stern et al., 1998b) states that the implicit relational knowledge is what is truly responsible for much therapeutic change, and many psychotherapists have been debating this topic (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2006a).
- 2,511 the patient does not need an understanding of symptoms to get better.
- 2,514 implicit relational knowledge is defined as non-verbal, not conscious but not repressed (Stern et al., 1998b);
- 2,515 Gestalt therapy has been based on procedural knowledge since its birth: it mainly observes the relational patterns the patient comes into contact with together with the therapist, from breathing and bodily relational processes to the relational meaning of dreams told to the therapist (see Isadore From’s theory in Müller, 1993).
- 2,524 the paradigm of truth that is never external to a happening but arises from the relationship itself and belongs indissolubly to its texture.
- 2,525 allows us to move away from the intrapsychic viewpoint,
- 2,526 toward the postmodern viewpoint, where the “power of truth” has been replaced by the “truth of the relationship”.
- 2,528 Erving and Miriam Polster,

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- 2,528 used to teach that Gestalt therapy has to do with now-for-next rather than with here-and-now (Polster and Polster, 1973).
- 2,530 the person's proactive tension towards the fulfillment of an intentionality of contact, not the sublimation of the impulses.
- 2,534 It is the intentionality of contact implicit in the field that determines the meaning of the experiences, not the inner needs of the single individuals.
- 2,537 "Treatment" consists of helping the patient not to understand and control, but to live fully, respecting her/his natural ability to regulate her/himself in the situation.
- 2,539 Our culture, which has developed the worship of individualism, does not make us accustomed to seeing the plurality of relationships. The word "relationship" generally summons up an individual who encounters another individual. We think of the mother-child relationship, for instance, rather than a field of relationships.
- 2,546 The intersubjective viewpoint (see, among others, Mitchell, 2000; Stern et al., 2000; Beebe and Lachmann, 2002) may be a valid tool to describe the perception at the contact boundary. If the mother feels neglected by the father, the child (even though this feeling has not been communicated explicitly to her/him) notices the mother's forced breathing, her sad face, her lowered eyes; s/he looks at the father and sees that the father is pensive and peeking at the mother. So the child knows that the father knows what is wrong with the mother.
- 2,552 the child's perception is oriented toward the contact boundary between mother and father, as well as, respectively, toward the contact boundary between her/himself and the mother, and between her/himself and the father.
- 2,568 In the therapeutic setting, the patient never sees the therapist in isolation but always as part of a relational field.
- 2,569 interesting to ask the patient: "If you think of someone alongside your therapist, whom do you imagine?", "What does this person know about your therapist?", "What do you imagine that your therapist knows about this person?", "In your opinion, what do they both think of you?".

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| 2,573 | this work brings to light a key aspect of “implicit relational knowledge” and gives the therapist a better-defined understanding of contact-making with the patient. |
| 2,645 | The love of both therapist and patient is the context of the therapeutic situation. Feelings, including sexual feelings, are the figures emerging from a ground of complex perceptions |
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