Investigating supports

Lewin’s field (or situation) is only ever a field of a certain person at a certain time in a certain place. It follows from a field perspective that what is supportive for the person in one situation does not necessarily transport to being supportive in another situation. At a micro level a teacher returning from work may or may not feel supported at the sight of her three-year-old son depending upon the constellation of her field at that moment. If preoccupied with the lesson for the following day’s assessment, she may feel very differently to a situation where she has just had a successful day and school holidays have commenced. At a macro level certain cultures will be more supportive of an embodied way of being whilst others will support a more cognitive way of being. In defining support Lee and Wheeler (1996) asked what kinds of connection/disconnection lead to rich figure formation with the possibilities for increased interconnection within the situation.

Experiential exercise

Draw a map of your supports including all types of relationships: interpersonal, hobbies, interests, activities, challenges, withdrawal and any other supports that may apply for you. Now consider in what circumstances each of these potential supports moves into being less supportive or a pressure, for example, the need to keep up with friends may become a burden at times. Then consider what best supports you physically: nourishing healthy food, firm ground to stand upon, furniture that is supportive, exercise, sufficient sleep, warmth, a healthy and inspiring environment. Can you build upon your supports?

As therapists we need to be sufficiently supported ourselves in order to be able to truly support our clients (see Point 95). We need a healthy work–life balance, if we support ourselves well we will be better equipped to support our clients. If we are consistently under-supported in our lives and work then our clients pick up on this on-going field event.
Support and connection are vital components in any healing process. Persistent disconnection due to a lack of support for contact can lead to various forms of physical and psychological dis-ease. As we shall see in the following point, reactions such as guilt and shame are maintained through a disconnection with the current field and a connection with an archaic isolating field in which there was a lack of support.

In the past gestalt has been guilty of failing to build sufficient relational ground to support challenge or catharsis. Such figure therapy looked impressive and dramatic, but without sufficient ground-support meaningful change does not take place. Likewise, inadequately trained self-appointed ‘gestalt therapists’ have abused experiments such as the empty chair, inaccurately billing an experiment that lays on the surface of the ‘therapy’, as oil on water, as gestalt therapy. Therapists need to be supported in their work with a coherent theoretical philosophy to be able to support their clients ethically with care and wisdom.

Now more than at any other time in history we live in a field where we can achieve a level of gratification almost instantly. Speed seems to be of the essence from fast food to faster broadband. We can use caffeine to keep us going, alcohol to relax us. Within such a cultural field it is not surprising that clients often arrive looking for quick remedies to presenting problems that are supported by a complex matrix of creative adjustments formed over time. Although the presenting issue may be managed, and in the short term this may be supportive, for lasting change the issues that are supporting the presenting issue need to be addressed. Addressing such sediments ways of being cannot be done by simply thinking it through. We need to create an embodied field. If a client rushes into our therapy room in a dis-embodied state, the gestalt therapist might pay attention to the impact the client’s way of being is having upon her bodily reactions and invite the client to do likewise.

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12 There is a twenty-minute video session of gestalt therapy by Fritz Perls with a client called ‘Gloria’ that was filmed and is still held up as an example of gestalt therapy. It is this twenty-minute film that has caused the most misconceptions and misunderstanding about the approach.
in any healing of support for psychological actions such as action with the olating field in build sufficient is. Support is a broad area and to break it down it may be useful to consider three areas: What supports the client? What supports the therapist? What supports are needed in the current situation?

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