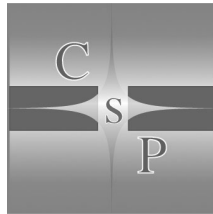


Handbook for Theory, Research, and Practice in Gestalt Therapy

Handbook for Theory, Research, and Practice in Gestalt Therapy

Edited by

Philip Brownell



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Handbook for Theory, Research, and Practice in Gestalt Therapy, Edited by Philip Brownell

This book first published 2008 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2008 by Philip Brownell and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-84718-607-6, ISBN (13): 9781847186072

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Part One:	
A Ground By Which to Think About Research in Gestalt Therapy	
Chapter One.....	2
Introduction and Purpose of the Handbook Philip Brownell, M.Div., Psy.D., Alan Meara, B.Sc., B.Com. (Hons), M.G.T., and Anton Polák, Ph.D.	
Chapter Two	27
The Need for Gestalt Therapy Research Eva Gold, M.S.W., Psy.D. and Stephen Zahm, Ph.D.	
Chapter Three	37
Qualitative Research Paul Barber, Ph.D. and Philip Brownell, M.Div., Psy.D.	
Chapter Four	64
Quantitative Research Leslie Greenberg, Ph.D.	
Chapter Five	90
Practice-Based Evidence Philip Brownell, M.Div., Psy.D.	
Chapter Six	104
Training of Therapists Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph, B.A., M.A. (hons), Peter Philipppson, B.Sc. (hons), M.Sc., Brian O’Neill, B.A. (hons), MAPS, and Philip Brownell, M.Div., Psy.D.	

Part Two:**A Method Worth Investigating**

Chapter Seven.....	124
A Unified Theory	
Sylvia Fleming Crocker, M.A., M.S., Ph.D.	
Chapter Eight.....	151
Phenomenological Method	
Todd Burley, Ph.D., A.B.P.P and Dan Bloom, J.D.; L.C.S.W.	
Chapter Nine.....	184
Dialogical Relationship	
Gary Yontef, Ph.D., A.B.P.P and Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph, B.A., M.A. (hons)	
Chapter Ten	198
Experimental Freedom	
Jungkyu Kim, Ph.D. and Victor Daniels, Ph.D.	
Chapter Eleven	228
Field-Theoretical Strategy	
Brian O’Neill, B.A. (hons), MAPS, and Seán Gaffney, M.A.	
Chapter Twelve	257
A Unified Practice	
Gary Yontef, Ph.D., A.B.P.P., and Peter Philippson, B.Sc. (hons), M.Sc.	

Part Three:**Gestalt Therapy Research Communities**

Chapter Thirteen.....	278
Gestalt Therapy Research Communities	
Philip Brownell, M.Div., Pys.D., and Joseph Melnick, Ph.D.	
Chapter Fourteen	292
Research Communities in Action: Three Examples	
Sari Scheinberg, Anna Johansson, Ph.D., Christine Stevens, Ph.D., Siobhán Conway-Hicks, B.A. (hons.), M.A.	

Chapter Fifteen	325
Conclusion Philip Brownell, M.Div., Psy.D.	
List of Contributors	330
Index of Subjects	340
Index of Persons	345

PREFACE

PHILIP BROWNELL

It would be most accurate to say that this book started at least a decade ago when it became apparent that the field of gestalt therapy was lagging behind other perspectives in gaining research support. Gestalt therapists knew, from the satisfaction encountered in their clients, that gestalt therapy "worked," but for the most part they lacked a body of empirical support for such an assertion. It's not that gestalt therapy had been proven ineffective, or for that matter, even inappropriate; it just had not been studied comprehensively.

Having said that, there were, to be sure, isolated instances of someone fostering formal, academic writing focused on gestalt therapy. Ansel Wolcott at Kent State University, for instance, supervised numerous dissertations by his students who studied various aspects of gestalt therapy. However, these studies did not proceed into the mainline psychological literature. Another researcher, Eleanor O'Leary, generated work in Ireland, and she wrote in 1992 in a book with a similar title as this one of the considerable need for research on gestalt therapy. Leslie Greenberg was also conducting gestalt-related research through his position at York University in Canada, but it was largely going by another name ("process-experiential").

So, while conversing among friends and colleagues in the gestalt world, a number of us started talking about writing a book that would address directly the needs for research, provide some tools, and help supply an impetus to generate research. The structure of the current book took form quickly, and I agreed to shepherd the group project to completion.

As one person put it, this has been an "ambitious" project. Our chapter authors are all busy people with multiple commitments. Many of us were working on other writing projects simultaneously. It was a challenge for so many people, spread out all over the world, to collaborate on aspects of one project, and it was a challenge to attempt to give it a unified feel.

Writing the book also proved to be a challenge in an unexpected way. We all could see the need for research in support of gestalt therapy. We all

got excited about the potential of this book, but there emerged an implication—someone was going to have to actually *do* the research. Established trainers quickly realized, "It won't be me; my calling is to train people to do therapy, not to do research." That echoes trainees who would cry, "What is this research stuff about? I came to learn how to do therapy." Unless we all take the challenges implicit in this book and open up the lens to include training and facilitation of research, we cannot expect people outside of gestalt therapy to do it. Thus, one of the challenges in writing this book is to face our own creation.

In addition, we are all different people who have differing backgrounds, cultures, lifestyles, beliefs, theoretical emphases, and ways of practicing. Creating a book with so many different people involved was not an easy thing to accomplish. I have attempted to reflect differing theoretical perspectives in the various chapters by the use of footnotes, clearly identifying myself as the "Editor" in order to differentiate myself from the respective authors. Hopefully, the reader will not find that distracting or intrusive.

Resources

O'Leary, Eleanor. 1992. *Gestalt therapy: Theory, practice, and research*. New York: Chapman & Hall.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my clear appreciation and thankfulness to a few people. Some made it possible to get this book published. Some were involved early in the process; others came later.

Erving Polster, Brad Johnson, and Rodger Bufford all read the prospectus and provided initial suggestions that made it more interesting and marketable. Erv is a well-known gestalt therapist, theorist, writer, and trainer of gestalt therapists. Conversation with him was encouraging just in the fact that he took interest in the project and thought it was worthwhile. Brad is an Associate Professor in the Department of Leadership, Ethics and Law, U.S. Naval Academy, and a faculty associate in the Graduate School of Business and Education, Johns Hopkins University. He is active with the American Psychological Association, and he had helpful suggestions with regard to writing for the more general field beyond gestalt therapy. Rodger is a Professor of Psychology and Director of Integration for the Graduate Department of Clinical Psychology at George Fox University, one of my former mentors, a well-respected writer, and a clear thinker. I am grateful for their early contributions to marketing the prospectus that eventually lead us to Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

I also want to thank Vaughn Mosher and Jennifer Smith at Benedict Associates Limited, where I have my practice in Bermuda. They have patiently waited for this book to be completed. Benedict is a very exciting place to work, because it offers a rich mix of psychotherapy, psychological assessment, organizational development, coaching, substance abuse work and employee assistance counseling. There is *never* a dull moment!

I also want to extend a special note of appreciation to Vaughn for his support and interest in starting the Gestalt Training Institute of Bermuda, because it took initial form with his help and partnership while the book was being written.

I'd like to thank my colleagues at the Association for the Advancement of Gestalt Therapy, an international community, for their patience when I became frazzled in our conference planning; the book was taking priority.

I also appreciate every one of the chapter authors and feel grateful for the privilege of working with them. Thank you, one and all, for your friendship, your passion and energy for what we do, and your wisdom and competence. You enrich my life.

Last, I think of my family. A person doesn't just suddenly, from nowhere, edit a book like this. I came to this project after years of writing and interacting with gestalt colleagues, and that took me away at times from my family. Before that, I came to gestalt therapy from my experiences in the ministry, and that also took me away from my family. So, I'd like to say "*Thank You!*" to Matthew, Zachary, and Anastasia—my children. You are all great people, and I am blessed to be your father, to see your lives progressing and to be included as our family grows still further by the ways you live, the people you love, and the things you do. In that regard I include Netta as well, a relatively new and valued member of our family.

I'd also like to express my appreciation for my wife, Linda, who has had to put up with me being preoccupied. She packed up our entire place and arranged to move house while I was editing. She is a wonderful person! I not only share a place to live with her, but also a way of life and a sense of purpose that makes what we do and have together more than it might seem to observers.

Related to that, let me make a personal observation. In the book, Brian O'Neill and Seán Gaffney present a picture of "the field," and as I read that description, and as I wrestled with their working and conceptualizing, I realized two things: for me, sensitivity to the field is like playing music, because you have to yield to it in order to hear both what you possibly could play and what you actually are playing. If you take your "eyes" and "ears" off it, you sink into the sea. To me, and to Linda, the field is spiritual. It is experienced physically, emotionally, relationally and so forth, as Sylvia Crocker describes beautifully in her chapter, but beyond all those things, the field is spiritual.

To me and to Linda this view of the field is a "God-in" perspective. This book "came" to us as a function of just this kind of field; further, for us, that God-in perspective is related to our faith in Jesus.

Beyond all these matters I also want to express gratitude to the people at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for all the many ways in which they have been part of this project, and continue to manage it.

—Philip Brownell
Southampton, Bermuda
2008

PART ONE:

**A GROUND BY WHICH TO THINK ABOUT
RESEARCH IN GESTALT THERAPY**

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK

PHILIP BROWNELL, ALAN MEARA,
AND ANTON POLÁK

Scientific belief is not the product of us alone or of the world alone; it is the product of an interaction between our psychological capacities, our social organization, and the structure of the world. The world does not "stamp" beliefs upon us, in science or elsewhere. Still, science is responsive to the structure of the world, via the channel of observation.

—Peter Godfrey-Smith

This is a book about gestalt therapy. This is a book about research. Consequently, this is a book about the ideas inherent in both, the methods they employ, and the means by which people give credence to each.

Warranted Belief in Gestalt Therapy

Gestalt therapists believe that what they do when they practice gestalt therapy is effective. Some might say that they know it works and, therefore, do not need to prove that it does. They know this because of their personal experience of working with clients and seeing those clients improve, grow, change, and take on more healthy and satisfying lives.

Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, and that He sacrificed Himself as the Passover Lamb to take away the sins of the world. Christians would say that through their personal relationship with God they do not need to prove such things; the Spirit of God within them testifies to the veracity of these assertions, their experience of a dialogical relationship with God informs them, and even though there is no certainty (Taylor 1992), their belief is warranted (Plantinga 2000). They know what they know.

Just as some might say that Christian belief is actually unjustified, irrational, and unwarranted, others might claim that gestalt therapy is ineffective, irrational, and unsupported. (Indeed, one popular saying attributed to its founder suggests people should lose their minds and come to their senses.¹) Because of this and other assumptions about gestalt therapy, many people assign gestalt therapy to the same explanatory category in which they would also place Native American rituals, experiential treatments for generalized anxiety disorders, and “born again” Christianity (Wampold 2007).

Warrant depends on a properly functioning cognitive process—the ability to think—in which evidence is produced, “enough of which is what makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief...” (Plantinga 2000, xi).² Warrant is an epistemic value statement; to attribute warrant to a belief is to evaluate that belief favorably, and there are degrees of justification involved with any such attribution (Plantinga 1993a & 1993b). One might, for instance, have greater reason to believe that four plus five equals nine than to believe that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Warrant is the appraisal of both beliefs and the withholding of belief, and it is fair to consider the means of attaining such warrant.

Is warranted belief achieved by means of logical argument, empirical evidence, or both? Do gestalt therapists actually think about what they are doing, and if so, is what they think reasonable and do they have enough evidence to support their belief in the efficacy of the modality they practice, or is it possible that they are just instinctively reacting out of an essentially atheoretical experientiality while whistling past graveyards and making some lucky guesses?

Individual belief requires nothing more than a person to be persuaded, and what it takes to accomplish that can vary, being completely

¹ The actual wording is as follows: "And the aim in therapy, the growth aim, is to lose more and more of your 'mind' and come more to your *senses*." Perls, Frederick S. (1976). *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*. p. 53. New York: Bantam Books.

² For a thorough and rigorous treatment of the concept of warrant, the trilogy by Alvin Plantinga is recommended. This consists of *Warrant: The Current Debate* (1993a), *Warrant and Proper Function* (1993b), and *Warranted Christian Belief* (2000). Although writing from a theistically favorable perspective about epistemology, his systematic development of subjects related to the attribution of warrant bear directly on the issues involved in the evidences that any given approach to psychotherapy is justified. As supplement to that set, one might also consider John Dewey's *The Quest for Certainty* (1929), "Coherentist Theories of Epistemic Justification" (Kvanvig 2007), "Epistemological Problems of Testimony" (Adler 2006), "The Epistemology of Religion" (Forrest 2006), and "Certainty" (Reed 2008).

idiosyncratic. Any given gestalt therapist is free to believe whatever he or she may choose to believe about the effectiveness of what they do. However, when it comes to public agreement, other criteria press for consideration. At the most basic level another person's opinion counts. In the wider professional arena funding agencies, credentialing bodies, and ethical committees make deliberate decisions, and they do so in the effort to establish whether or not any given practice is warranted. There are various terms associated with warrant (authorized, funded, ethical, valid, or *evidence-based*), but they are all antecedent to the construct that provides justifiable reason to do, believe, or think something. Warrant surpasses individual belief.

This book advocates an organized and systematic approach to the evaluation of gestalt therapy that includes theory and research as means by which warrant is achieved. It asserts that gestalt therapy is warranted, suggesting "warrant" as a more helpful category than what many regard to be a reduction in the movement for evidence-based treatments, and it offers descriptions of gestalt therapy methodology so that the practice of gestalt therapy might be more clearly identified, lending to research on that method and consideration of resulting empirical support. This book also attempts to encourage the global community of gestalt therapists so that a robust body of research is produced that does not simply seek to prove something to which researchers were already committed, but, more than that, to use research to refine and further develop the theory and practice of gestalt therapy.

An Orientation to Research in Theories of Science

Science has been described as the systematic process of generating and testing theories in which such theories are evaluated according to parsimony, ease of communication and stimulus for producing new insights, responsiveness and flexibility with regard to new evidence, internal consistency, falsifiability, and external validity (Breakwell, Hammond, and Fife-Shaw 1995). Many scientists deny that there is any clear scientific method in the processes of science, pointing out that, to the contrary, scientists actually operate with an *orientation* toward science; that is, they work with a critical attitude toward the findings of their work, including a search for flaws in it, for weaknesses and inconsistencies in their thinking, and the perspective on explanations as being just "tentative stages in a never-ending process of successive approximations" (Pedhazur and Schmelkin 1991, 150). Alan Kazdin (2003) asserted that science is based on the accumulation of empirical evidence through systematic and

careful observation of phenomena of interest. He further claimed that the methods employed in that process were based on the key tenets of parsimony, consideration of plausible and rival hypotheses, replication, and caution and precision in thinking. “Method” in such a process “encompasses diverse principles, procedures, and practices related to the conduct of research,” (ibid, 9) and methodology helps to organize sources of problems that emerge in drawing inferences as well as the solutions to the problems and practices that can help draw *valid* inferences.

It is one’s philosophy of science that brings a person to describe the processes by which it is carried out, and the philosophy of science has changed over time. A complete treatment of the philosophy of science is beyond the scope of this book; however, since the way people think about science influences how they think about research, it is necessary to ground any consideration of research focused on gestalt therapy in some kind of understanding of science and the scientific method.

If there is a scientific method, in psychology it consists of (1) *observation and experimentation*, (2) *quantification or mathematization*, and (3) *theoretical or conceptual analysis* (Machado 2007). The first amounts to the actions researchers take to generate theories and test hypotheses. It includes matters of research design, selection of subjects, and the assignment of subjects to various groups. The second consists of analyzing the data generated by the application of the method in the design, formulating laws and models on the basis of empirical findings, and discovering the mathematical links between variables and other statistical operations. This is, currently, a major emphasis in experimental psychology. The third involves the action researchers engage in when they evaluate the clarity of scientific concepts, the explanatory power of competitive hypotheses, or evaluate the consistency of laws and scrutinize arguments. The goal of conceptual analysis is to increase the conceptual clarity of a theory (Laudan 1977). Thus, the observation that generates empirical data that can be analyzed statistically is useless without a philosophical framework that enables good thinking with regard to the relationships and implications of the data.

Science is conducted using the natural attitude. Husserl contrasted the phenomenological attitude with the natural attitude in order to contrast his philosophy with psychology. The natural attitude is that perspective in which one is involved in a “world-directed stance when we intend things, situations, facts, and any other kinds of objects” (Sokolowski 2000). It is the default condition. By contrast, the phenomenological attitude is the focus a person has when he or she reflects on the experiences obtained while in the natural attitude. The naturalism found in the scientific method

has also been applied to the philosophy of science so that people have studied the processes and activities of scientists in the same ways that they have studied genetics or chemistry.

When Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951) wrote *Gestalt Therapy, Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (PHG), they were in the forefront of what Thomas Kuhn (1962) called revolutionary science. Gestalt therapy was originally conceived of as a revision of Freud (Bowman and Nevis 2005), and it remained rather anti-establishment for many years. The larger picture of which gestalt therapy was a part, though, was a sea change from the positivism of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century science (Godfrey-Smith 2003; Proctor and Capaldi 2006) to a post-positivist and constructivist era (Robson 2002, Creswell 2009) in which elements of logical empiricism remain, but they do so in modified form and embedded in a context in which metaphysical considerations once regarded as non-science have become relevant and exciting once again (see below). That revolution in science has come and gone, led by Kuhn and others, and it is time for gestalt therapy to let go of the past and to move more fully into the stance of what could be called normal science. That means gestalt therapists do not need to protest so loudly against positivism, because even though vestiges of it still exist in experimental psychology, they do so as backwater eddies when compared to the larger enterprises of science.

From Bacon to Laudan and Beyond

Francis Bacon is generally regarded to be the source of the method of induction in science: generalizations are based on careful analysis of specific instances. That approach dominated and was influential until the middle of the 20th century. Simply stated, it essentially relied on Aristotle's approach in which observations lead to explanatory principles that eventuate in deductions that give rise to additional observations. The principles established through this process, though, typically become so influential that they take on the force of a priori assumptions with regard to successive issues, and thus provide foundations upon which future science develops. Thus, this general approach is also the basis of foundationism in science, in which basic (or foundational) principles stipulate how science ought to be conducted. Both logical positivism and falsificationism were foundational philosophies in science.

The inductive method and the foundational approach to science were both set aside by those who applied naturalism to the study of science itself, utilizing the history of science, and formed theories about the ways

in which science has actually been conducted (instead of the ways in which it was supposed to be carried out); thus, Thomas Kuhn emphasized the shifting of scientific paradigms in sudden revolutions that diverged from normal science, Imre Lakatos stressed research programs in the effort to resolve the conflicts between Popper's falsificationism and Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions, and Larry Laudan focused on research traditions (Proctor and Capaldi 2006).

In a fascinating example of this approach to the philosophy of science, Maurice Finocchiaro (1992) studied Galileo's various writings and correspondence to track his shift to Copernicanism; he wanted to see what the salient factors had been in the way that scientist had actually worked as opposed to the dominant hypothesis that scientific theories were formulated logically and were persuasive according to their predictive power and simplicity. He concluded that Galileo had gone through three stages in the development of his thinking. In the first stage he

... judged Copernicanism largely on the basis of its general and external problem-solving success in the physics of motion and its explanatory coherence in the astronomical field; during the second stage, he judged it largely on the basis of these criteria *plus* empirical accuracy; and after 1616, he judged it largely on the basis of these four criteria *plus* its relationship to his religious beliefs. At no time did he judge its acceptability largely on the basis of predictive novelty or of simplicity. (ibid 65)

Thus, two influences lead to a shift in perspective from a positivist to a post-positivist philosophy of science in general and in the field of psychology in particular. First, naturalism was applied to thinking about how people actually conduct science. Second, figures of interest shifted in psychology itself. As psychologists moved away from strict behaviorism, with its method of behavioral measurements for instance, and returned to the study of subjective, unobservable experiences, positivism became "untenable as a philosophical foundation for psychological inquiry and was replaced by postpositivistic notions of an underlying reality..." (Hoyt and Bahti 2007, 203). Subjective experience was regarded to be latent as opposed to directly observable or measurable, so measures and theories had to become validated by a process of successive approximations "...with attention to sources of error and bias in quantitative

measures...and careful consideration and gradual elimination of plausible rival explanations for study findings."³ (op.cit.)

One of the key differences among the post-positive philosophers of science and their thinking is around the construct of the incommensurability of theories. Kuhn's sense of paradigm shifts asserted that competing theories were incommensurable with the dominant paradigm; that is, normal science was all about supporting and reinforcing the dominant paradigm even while teasing out its various nuances and applications. When a crisis with the dominant paradigm ushered in a revolution in science, then a rapid shift took place as a new dominant paradigm appeared. Lakatos disagreed and saw the sequence of theories within a research program as linked by logic so that there could be a number of theories under consideration at the same time, but the core of them would not change, and the alternatives would radiate out from that core and be linked to it in some way. Others who also diverged from Kuhn considered Lakatos's solution unsatisfactory. The weaknesses in his system were overcome by Laudan, who used the term "traditions" instead of paradigms or programs. For him divergent theories could be simultaneously considered, but these did not have to be linked together in any substantive fashion. Indeed, sometimes a researcher might accept a given theory, believing it to be true, while at other times a researcher might devote time and energy in the pursuit of a competing theory that he did not necessarily even hold to be true (Godfrey-Smith 2003). Laudan looked upon theories in a pragmatic fashion, and thus for him theories provided more or less answers to the problems addressed by those theories. For Laudan, the theory with the greatest power for solving problems was the most useful theory, and theories could be held and considered alongside others over the course of relatively great spans of time while the final judgment was developing. Thus, another difference with Kuhn is that Laudan did not believe in the rapid shift in paradigms.

This all points to important differences between the positivist and foundational approaches to science and the post-positive era in which the test of ideas is not whether they refer to "objective, distinct, value-free, and cumulative science" (Laudan, Laudan and Donovan 1992, 4) but to what degree they have utility and provide the greatest number of answers.⁴

³ Ironically, with advances in the application of technology to neuroscience, there is renewed interest in "observing" correlates of consciousness through such procedures as fMRI studies.

⁴ The current debate in psychology over the warrant for realism vs. the warrant for instrumentalism (Cacioppo, Semin and Berntson. 2004, Haig 2005a, Ramey and Chrysikou 2005) harkens back to the influence of John Dewey in *The Quest for*

In the pursuit of the greatest number of answers, current scientific methodology utilizes two different research strategies that can lead to warranted knowledge claims. These are *consequentialist* and *generative* approaches.

Consequentialist strategies justify knowledge claims by focusing on their consequences. By contrast, *generative strategies* justify knowledge claims in terms of the processes that produce them. Although consequentialist strategies are used and promoted more widely in contemporary science, both types of strategy are required in an adequate conception of research methodology. (Haig 2005b, 383)

What are the consequences if dialogue is actually a superior way of conceptualizing the two-person field of the working alliance? Using a consequentialist approach in research, a person would use the results of dialogue and compare them with the results of using some other method. A generative approach, by contrast, might consider what qualitative processes resulted in the assertion that dialogue formed a superior way of conceptualizing the working alliance; here people might refer to anecdotal evidence, philosophical development and rigor, contrast and comparison with other conceptualizations of the working alliance, and so forth (everything contributing to such an attribution). The consequentialist and generative approaches are two kinds of processes, and both contribute to the generation and comparative evaluation of theories over time; consequentialist strategies usually take a quantitative path, while generative strategies can be seen as more closely aligned with qualitative methods.

Finally, this latter thought, the consideration of multiple theories, is related to the concept of abduction, which has already been discussed by inference to the best explanation (Haig 2005b); it is an approach to doing science that replaced the inductive-deductive method. It is decidedly pragmatic.

Abduction, by its very nature, forces people into estimates of consilience, or how well a theory fits with theories from other domains (Proctor and Capaldi 2006). Consilience is not a new idea (it has also been known as the unity of knowledge), but applied to the relevance of gestalt therapy, it serves as perhaps a new and helpful heuristic.

Certainty (1929/1988). Dewey had a decisive effect on pragmatism, and pragmatism's manifestation in psychological research *is* instrumentalism. That such instrumentalism cannot escape ontological issues is an essential point in that debate and something Alan Meara addresses in this chapter.

The Assimilative Power of Gestalt Therapy

Consilience occurs when a theory explains at least two different classes of data, and that can happen within one domain, such as biology, or across domains such as between biology and psychology. One example of abduction and consilience to which gestalt therapists can relate is the explanatory power found in field theory (chapter eleven, this volume), which came from physics. Gestalt therapy theory, as a whole, is itself a rather remarkable example of how consilience works, because it is a collection of various theories from various domains that have “hung together” and formulated a theoretical identity of its own. It is not merely a collection of disparate ideas, such as multi-modal therapy; these ideas overlap, converge, harmonize and now form a unity (chapter seven, this volume). In the same way, now, gestalt therapy harmonizes with other ideas in other domains even though those domains may not realize it (chapter two, this volume). The consequence of that is important, as the reinforcement resulting from consilience between gestalt therapy and other clinical approaches demonstrates the value in each; some research conducted under the rubric of one would certainly apply to the other.

Another consequence is that gestalt therapy, being already a consilient attractor, makes it relatively easy for gestalt therapists to assimilate practices from other perspectives whenever there is a point of unity (for example, between field theory and systems or ecological psychotherapy; between the concept of the dialogical relationship and such things as attachment theory, object relations, client-centered therapy, or the transference-oriented therapies; between the existential and phenomenological aspects of gestalt therapy and the constructivist aspects of cognitive therapy; or whenever there is a connection between the experimental freedom in gestalt therapy and the experiential aspects of other approaches such as psychodrama, play therapy, art therapy, and behavioral therapy). Gestalt therapy is quite “user friendly” in its assimilative and integrative power.

Even though there is a unity in gestalt therapy theory (chapter seven, this volume), and a concomitant unity in its practice (chapter twelve, this volume), the gestalt therapy “tent” is a large one. Gestalt therapists have diverse emphases in their work.

When it comes to the philosophical commitments associated with research, some consider “quantitative methods” part of the positivist approach, while others see the situation with more complexity. Some consider qualitative methods to be ripe with postmodern relativism and rather useless for establishing evidence, while others see more compatibility between gestalt therapy and qualitative methods but also

reject postmodernism as such. Chapter three considers the use of qualitative methods, and chapter four discusses the use of quantitative methods. Simply put, the professional discipline of gestalt therapy needs both in order to establish sufficient warrant. Such multi-method, or mixed method (Creswell 2009) research programs are necessary because phenomena are multifaceted, with multiple components (Eid and Diener 2006). Quantitative and qualitative approaches pose different and complementary strengths and weaknesses (McGrath and Johnson 2003); so, they can each add to a comprehensive research tradition.

An Orientation to Thinking About Gestalt Therapy

As some gestalt therapists have been known to say, gestalt therapy addresses the “is-ness” of the current moment. It is about the “here and now.” It is also about the “what and how.” To consider such things is immediately to be drawn into a contemplation of *what* actually is and *how* any given person is constructing or experiencing that. While these considerations are part of the ground of gestalt therapy, they are equally important to any research conducted on gestalt therapy.

What Actually Is

The naturalism inherent to the processes of science might be objected to by some gestalt therapists who view the methods of gestalt therapy as largely phenomenological (and phenomenological process as largely about the relative ways of knowing in epistemology—see below).

One of us (Alan) proposes that if we consider the issue of ontology in undertaking research, then new research methods may be called for in exploring the processes and efficacy of gestalt therapy, in particular methods based on critical realism and complexity theory.

While it is important to be clear on the epistemology in any research project, it is also necessary to consider ontology in order to define a position on what results mean; that is, how they generalize, and, thus, to what degree they might be externally valid. As Mathews, White and Long (1999) claimed, the ontological position defines the conceptualization of social reality, which in turn identifies subjects of inquiry, issues worthy of attention and methods of demonstration.

At the most general level, epistemologies may be considered as subjectivist or objectivist, as can ontologies, and thus combinations may be constructed that represent various research positions (Johnson and Duberly 2000). Positivism for example was represented by an objectivist

ontology and epistemology, while postmodernism is by a subjectivist ontology and epistemology. The latter position is criticized by Johnson and Duberley (2000) as relegating science to a self-referential exercise with no common ground for judgment between theories. When research in psychology resembles the positivist approach, it seeks to experiment in conditions that are relatively closed in order to enhance prediction, thus producing, however, results that may not generalize outside the laboratory, which in turn threatens external validity. Critical realism (Bhaskar 1989) is one of the few perspectives that accepts a relativist epistemology, but not a relativist ontology.⁵

Bhaskar (1978) presents an objectivist ontology that is stratified into three domains: the real, where interacting causal or generative mechanisms reside (independently of our knowledge of them); the actual, where events may be observed to occur (independently of our experience of them); and the empirical, where events are measured or experienced. Rather than establishing law-like correlations associated with constant conjunctions of events in a nomothetic approach, critical realism describes the operation of causal tendencies or powers, and examines their effects with empirical evidence. A critical realist use of case studies, for example, sheds light on specific conditions under which generative mechanisms act, and these explanatory idiographic studies are “epistemologically valid because they are concerned with the clarification of structures and their associated generative mechanisms, which have been contingently capable of producing the observed phenomena (Tsoukas 1989, p. 556).”

While others, such as Maturana (1988), Harre (1986), and Shotter (1993) criticize elements of critical realism, it is gaining recognition as an appropriate paradigm and guide to methodology, notably also within nonlinear research (Manicas and Seccord 1983, Tsoukas 1989). However, application of critical realism to research is not common (Johnson and Duberley 2000), and there are no agreed upon methodological prescriptions consistent with a relativist position on epistemology. The possible contribution of critical realism to psychotherapy research has been explored by Baillie and Corrie (1996) in challenging reality as created through discourse only.

⁵ Evolutionary naturalistic realism (ENR) is another theory worth investigating; what these both present are examples of naturalism at work in a post-positivist era. Naturalism stresses the continuity of philosophy and science. ENR claims all knowledge is theoretical knowledge, known by way of theory; thus, science is charged with the integration of theories to form a coherent worldview, and the means by which science carries out this mission is the focus of its method (Haig 2005a).

Complexity theory is an umbrella term that captures the theoretical insights generated originally from the discovery of deterministic chaos in nonlinear dynamical mathematical models, extending to later discoveries through modeling of and analyzing natural and social systems. The potential of self-organization and other related nonlinear systems theories for social system research on change has been widely recognized (Gregerson and Sailer 1993, Loye and Eisler 1987, Nonaka 1988, Thietart and Forgues 1995, 1997, and Weick 1977). The advantages of nonlinear dynamics in exploring how change occurs in individuals, groups, and organizations, were outlined by Lichtenstein (2000), who contended that nonlinear dynamics based theories are playing a more important role in interpreting transformation, particularly through the theory of self-organization. He pointed out that the assumptions for nonlinear dynamics are fundamentally different to traditional mechanistic models.

The ontology of nonlinear systems theories asserts that the natural and social worlds are open systems with interdependency between ‘elements’ of any given system. This is consistent with Bhaskar’s stratification. For example, in the Benard cells a force (gravity) exists in the real domain, comes into play at the actual level when the cells form, and may or may not be observed in the empirical domain. There is indirect support in the literature for this position, for example from Archer (1995) who stated that critical realism’s explanatory framework incorporates unpredictable yet explicable outcomes resulting from the interplay of generative mechanisms and structures, and in Thietart and Forgues’ (1997) identification of attractors as structures in organizational evolution. As was mentioned earlier, some complexity researchers attempt to apply a positivist epistemology, a practice that Bhaskar criticizes in terms of an “epistemic fallacy,” which collapses epistemology and ontology into one another, the separation of which is central to Bhaskar’s position. In accepting a relativist epistemology-that knowledge (not reality) is socially constructed-the means for judging theory comes from an appeal to the causal mechanisms located in external reality and the efficacy of human actions in achieving outcomes (Johnson and Duberley 2000).

One area where research methods have been developed is in Chaos Theory. Chaos theory is an acknowledgment in the sciences of the nature of *world* as an open system (Gregerson and Sailer 1993). The errors, noise or variations that both the physical and social sciences have sought to exclude from experimenting, in the search for causal and predictive laws, are in fact part of open system growth, change, or adaptation. Chaos theory emerged from the study of mathematical models of nonlinear dynamical equations where the relationships between parameters are not

simply additive and where values at a certain time are influenced by prior values (Gleick, 1987).

There are many mathematical techniques that address the measurement of fractals and attractor dynamics that are beyond the scope of this chapter; however, one technique that assists the search for attractors is time series embedding. Rather than beginning with a model, the researcher begins with multiple data points measured over time. The data are plotted in a suitable state space, and patterns of stability and change are potentially revealed (Sterman 1989, Kiel 1993).

From a methodological perspective, Eisenhardt (1989) raised the issue of beginning from a theory-free ideal; however, others (Jankowski and Webster 1991) recognized that some framework is necessary for data analysis, which in Bhaskar's (1989, p.18) terms is "antecedently existing cognitive materials." The history of nonlinear dynamics research shows that specific *a priori* models of self-organization processes are not directly helpful in selecting parameters that might reveal dynamics of stasis or change. The parameters chosen to define system behaviors are not those necessarily involved in mechanisms that come into play at bifurcation. Thus, Whetten (1989) recommended the replacement of hypotheses of outcomes with propositions of relationships. This would be an example of a generative approach to science that emphasized the processes supporting such propositions.

In summary, the nonlinear systems ontological position is consistent with gestalt therapy theory and also the critical realist position, as shown in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1: Comparative Ontologies

Gestalt Therapy	Transcendental/Critical Realism	Chaology
(Korb, Gorrell & Van de Riet)	Bhaskar Manicas and Seccord	Gregersen and Sailer
<p>The nature of reality is an ongoing, constantly changing process. Objects are also processes, not observable except for special equipment.</p> <p>All things exist in relation to other things and are thus engaged</p>	<p>Three domains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -real: generative mechanisms which exist independently of observed events -actual: observed events -empirical: experienced events. <p>Stratified systems with emergent properties</p> <p>Space and time causally inert</p>	<p>The nature of reality is a dynamic, recursive process, which contains chaotic and nonchaotic characteristics, and exhibits self similarity.</p>

in process. Consequences are not necessarily explainable by causality.		General processes are determinable, but specific outcomes are unpredictable.
---	--	--

While the use of these emerging research options is not straightforward, they are worth exploring as ways to develop a research agenda that truly addresses the *is-ness* of gestalt therapy.

How We Experience

Another of us (Anton) is concerned with one of the bottom lines of gestalt therapy in the experience of an individual, especially in how that is conceptualized by philosophical phenomenology and existentialism⁶. This is important, because naturalism in science that does not include the human person is a transcendental scientism which itself is flawed and unreal (Cacioppo, Semin, and Berntson 2004; Ramey and Chrysiou 2005). Even though the use of the phenomenological method in gestalt therapy is conducted in the natural attitude (chapter eight, this volume), many gestalt therapists speak about it as if they were conducting a phenomenological reduction—the use of the phenomenological method in philosophy. While chapter eight considers the method in the conduct of therapy, it is helpful initially to address phenomenology in some of its basic concepts.

Psychology developed at the end of the nineteenth century as a descendant of philosophy and experimental physiology. This fact, together with the ambition of the first psychologists to be accepted as true scientists, led psychology from the very beginning to study human phenomena with the same methodology used then by the more *mature* physics, chemistry or biology, that is, by means of experimental analysis. The deterministic, natural science model predominated then, still predominates in contemporary academic psychology now, and it is necessary to admit that psychology is heavily indebted to it as far as the understanding of human mind and the research methods involved in the growth of the field. The further evolution of psychological thinking has shown, however, the limitations of this scientific psychology. Scientific psychology is at its wits' end when it is expected to explain or understand

⁶ For an explication of how the phenomenological method is applied to the practice of psychotherapy—specifically gestalt psychotherapy—see chapter eight, for chapter eight picks up on these thoughts and carries them in a specific direction.

the essence of being human, that is, subjectivity—the individual inner experience.

It is true that human beings are physical objects in the physical world. However, we are not only objects. We are also subjects. We have the capacity to be aware of stimuli, and, in contrast with other beings, we are the only ones who are aware of being aware. This is awareness of awareness; conscious awareness is the quality characterizing the human experience. Experience begins with awareness, and it is acknowledged through awareness. This reflective awareness means the capacity for continual observing, interpreting what is going on, deriving and creating unique meanings, choosing intentions, and in this sense being the source of what is actual for a person. Awareness is not otiose; it is orienting, appreciating and approaching, choosing a technique, and it is everywhere in functional interplay with manipulation and the mounting excitement of closer contact. The perceptions are not mere perceptions; they brighten and sharpen, and attract. Throughout the process there is discovery and invention, not "looking on..." (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman 1994, p. 164). A person embodies this process, and if we want to understand any given person as a subject, we have to take into account his or her unique, unrepeatable subjectivity.

The founder of phenomenology, German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) set as his goal establishing a rigorous scientific philosophy that could become a base for all other sciences. Though he was not the first philosopher using the term "phenomenology," he supplied it with new meaning. Husserl's thinking (1972) provides a sharp critical contrast with the positivistic philosophy that developed in the natural sciences. Scientists in these fields saw their task as discovering the laws governing nature, and they did not ask themselves whether these laws might be humanly knowable yet remain independent of human ways of knowing. Therefore, the task of phenomenology is the study of things in how they appear through our consciousness and, through this, the nature of awareness itself. The specific methods phenomenology developed were adopted later by philosophers of the existential school such as Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (for more detailed discussion on existential philosophy see Spinelli 1989; Gaffney 2006; Dreyfus and Wrathall 2006). When these two approaches (existentialism and phenomenology) are—despite some differences—joined together and applied to the phenomena of human psychology, they create a suitable philosophical starting point for that form of practical psychology which is psychotherapy. We as therapists deal with the existential situation of our clients, and we look for those unique individual styles people use in

the process of organizing their worlds. In other words, we look for their ways of experiencing their worlds, how they interact with their environment and create meanings, and how they participate actively in what happens to them.

Scientific naturalism in psychology has been known to view the person and his or her environment (things, objects surrounding him or her including others) as separate, distinct, and independent entities, as objects that can be studied in a detached fashion. The phenomenological perspective does not view persons as mere objects. Instead, phenomenology speaks of the person as *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger 1962), which points to the indissoluble, unseparable unity of the individual and his or her world. In other words, no individual exists apart from the world; conversely, the world does not exist in a meaningful way apart from persons living in it. One constitutes the other. This notion can be difficult to understand for people who grew up in a world characterized by the dichotomy between object and subject. Valle, King, and Halling (1989) explained this interdependency with Rubin's familiar ambiguous drawing of "vase/profiles." What we see as foreground (e.g. vase) cannot exist without background (profiles). If we remove any of them, the other disappears, too. And the same is true for people and their world; if we discard one, it becomes meaningless to talk about the other. This means the human individual is contextualized. It is impossible to conceive of a person without the world that surrounds him or her.

The major assumptions of phenomenology are based on concepts Husserl (1972) defined while studying subjective experience. As it is known, in the beginning he came with the appeal: *back to the things themselves* (Spinelli 1989). He saw the task of his philosophy as the exploration of subjective experience—consciousness—in order to find out how consciousness imposes itself upon and obscures "pure" reality. He had hoped to be able to set conscious experience aside so as to arrive at "what is." From his philosophical pursuits two concepts were derived that have key importance for the proper understanding of the phenomenological approach: *intentionality* on the one hand and the *noematic and noetic* focuses of intentionality on the other.

Franz Brentano believed that our consciousness is always directed towards the real world (ibid.), and it is always making an effort to interpret that world meaningfully. He called this *intentionality*. In Husserl's conception intentionality identifies the fundamental relationship which is the basis to all our meaningful constructs of the world. Our consciousness is *always consciousness of some thing*; it is always focused on some thing. Consciousness *can never exist without an object*; it always needs a

stimulus, and it is always reaching out to a stimulus that is the part of the real world and trying to interpret it in a meaningful manner. Thus, knowing the ultimate reality of any object is not feasible because even at the most basic level of consciousness this inevitable act of interpreting occurs; we always interpret our world as an object-based world. Any reality which presents itself to our consciousness must be explained or get some meaning, we cannot tolerate meaninglessness. And the process of getting meaning begins with interpreting this reality as an object. Sensory data, that is, our visual, auditory, tactile perceptions, and other reactions to the stimuli of the physical world, are being interpreted so that we respond to these stimuli as if they were objects. Even if we were able to put aside all the meanings we give to a stimulus, what we would be left with in the end would be the interpretation of it as an object. Thus, *intentionality* means "a basic *invariant* relationship that exists between the real world and our conscious experience of it" (Spinelli, 1989, p. 12). Every meaning of the world is based in this relationship; every meaning is *intentionally derived*. This is the reason why there is no possibility for us to know the "pure" reality. Our access to it is limited by *intentionality*.

Husserl's further finding was that every act of *intentionality* is made up of two experiential foci, which are always evoked simultaneously. He labelled them as *noema* and *noesis*. The term *noema* is used for *what* we are experiencing, i.e. an object we are focused on, and the term *noesis* is used for *how* we are experiencing it, which contains all the possible cognitive and affective elements every human being adds to the experience of a given object. These two foci have their origin in the unique personal experience of the person. They are always present simultaneously, and they cannot be separate from one another in any experience. For instance, if we recollect any experience from the past, we shall recall not only the events of this experience but also the way of experiencing it.

Noesis also accounts for the fact that our interpretations of the world, the meanings we ascribe in them, are not identical from one person to the next. Our experiences cannot be identical. Being the members of the same species and the same culture, we share the same psychobiological limitations and sociocultural contexts. They form a common (shared) base for our mental interpretive frameworks, yet each of us adds variables derived from our individual lives, our individual experiences. Meaning is created through the combination of the *what* and *how*.

This conception of *intentionality* inevitably leads to a number of further conclusions of essential importance. If our consciousness is always consciousness of some thing, if it cannot exist without objects showing themselves in it, it also means that the very existence of a person, being