

Fritz Perls

Fritz Perls¹⁾ was a German-born psychiatrist and psychotherapist who is best known for co-founding the school of psychotherapy known as Gestalt therapy²⁾. He developed this approach in the 1940s and 1950s and it became a popular form of psychotherapy in the 1960s and 1970s.

The main focus of Gestalt therapy is on the individual's present experience and how they perceive and interact with their environment. Perls believed that people often get stuck in patterns of behavior that are not beneficial to them, and that by becoming more aware of these patterns, they can make changes that will lead to a more fulfilling life.

One of the key concepts in Gestalt therapy is the idea of "figure and ground." This refers to the idea that people tend to focus on certain aspects of their experience (the "figure") and ignore others (the "ground"). Perls believed that by bringing attention to the ignored aspects of the experience, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their behaviour.

Another important aspect of Gestalt therapy is the emphasis on self-responsibility and self-awareness. Perls believed that individuals are responsible for their own actions and that by becoming more aware of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, they can take control of their lives. This is in contrast to traditional psychoanalytic approaches, which often focus on past experiences and childhood traumas as the root cause of current problems.

Perls also emphasized the importance of the therapeutic relationship in Gestalt therapy. He believed that the therapist should be a non-judgmental and empathic listener, who can help the individual to explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a safe and supportive environment.

In addition to his work in psychotherapy, Perls also wrote several influential books on Gestalt therapy, including "Ego, Hunger and Aggression" (Perls, F., 1942,1947) and "Gestalt Therapy Verbatim." (Perls, F., 1969) These books helped to popularize the approach and to train new therapists in the method.

Influences

Fritz Perls was influenced by a number of different fields and ideas, including psychology, philosophy, and Eastern spiritual practices. Some of the main influences on his development of Gestalt therapy include:

- **Psychoanalysis:** Perls was trained as a psychoanalyst, and many of the concepts and techniques he used in Gestalt therapy were influenced by this field. However, he rejected the traditional psychoanalytic focus on the past and childhood traumas, instead emphasizing the importance of the present moment and self-awareness.
- **Existentialism:** Perls was influenced by the ideas of existential philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, who emphasized the importance of human existence and the individual's freedom to make choices. This idea is reflected in Gestalt therapy's emphasis on self-responsibility and the individual's ability to change their behavior.
- **Phenomenology:** Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that emphasizes the importance of direct experience and the study of how people perceive and understand the world around them. This idea is reflected in Gestalt therapy's focus on the individual's present experience and

how they perceive and interact with their environment.

- **Eastern spirituality:** Perls was influenced by Eastern spiritual practices such as Zen Buddhism and Taoism, which emphasize the importance of mindfulness and being present in the moment. This idea is reflected in Gestalt therapy's emphasis on mindfulness and the importance of being fully present in the therapeutic relationship.
- **Humanistic psychology:** Humanistic psychology is a field that emphasizes the importance of understanding the whole person, including their thoughts, feelings, and behavior. This idea is reflected in Gestalt therapy's holistic approach, which focuses on the integration of different aspects of the self.

Overall, Fritz Perls drew from various fields and ideas to create a holistic approach for his therapy and it is evident in the approach of Gestalt therapy. He sought to integrate different perspectives in his work and create a unique approach that emphasized self-awareness, self-responsibility, and the importance of the present moment.

Contributors to Gestalt Therapy

There are several other well-known Gestalt therapists who have made significant contributions to the field. Some of these include:

- **Laura Perls³⁾**: Laura Perls was the wife of Fritz Perls and co-founder of Gestalt therapy. She was a trained therapist and also a key figure in the development of the approach. She is known for her emphasis on the importance of body awareness in therapy, and for her work in the areas of group therapy and couples therapy.
- **Paul Goodman⁴⁾**: Paul Goodman was a philosopher and social critic who was also a co-founder of Gestalt therapy. He is known for his emphasis on the importance of community and social issues in therapy, and for his work in the areas of education and political activism.
- **Isadore From⁵⁾**: Isadore From was a student of Fritz Perls and one of the early practitioners of Gestalt therapy. He is known for his emphasis on the importance of the therapeutic relationship and for his work in the areas of group therapy and family therapy.
- **Erving Polster**: Erving Polster was a student of Fritz and Laura Perls, and continued to develop and innovate the gestalt therapy approach. He is known for his emphasis on the importance of self-expression and creativity in therapy, and for his work in the areas of group therapy and organizational consulting.
- **Charlotte Selver⁶⁾**: Charlotte Selver was a student of Fritz and Laura Perls, she was a pioneer in the field of sensory awareness and body-centred approaches in psychotherapy. She is known for her emphasis on the importance of somatic experience in therapy, and for her work in the areas of group therapy and workshops.

"Ego, Hunger and Aggression"

"Ego, Hunger and Aggression: A Revision of Freud's Theory and Method" ([Perls, F., 1942,1947](#)) is a book written by Fritz Perls and published in 1969. In this book, Perls critiques Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and develops his own approach to psychotherapy, which he called Gestalt therapy.

The book is divided into three parts: "Ego," "Hunger," and "Aggression." In the first part, Perls critiques Freud's concept of the ego, arguing that it is too passive and that individuals need to take more responsibility for their own behaviour. He also critiques the idea of the "death drive," which he believes is an overly negative view of human behaviour.

In the second part, "Hunger," Perls critiques the idea that human behaviour is driven by unconscious desires and instincts, such as the sexual drive. He argues that people are motivated by more than just these basic drives, and that other factors, such as the need for self-expression and creativity, also play a role.

In the third part, "Aggression," Perls critiques the traditional psychoanalytic view of aggression as a destructive force. Instead, he argues that aggression can be a positive force that helps individuals to assert themselves and to make changes in their lives.

Fritz Perls' work in Gestalt therapy has had a significant impact on the field of psychotherapy. His emphasis on self-awareness, self-responsibility and the importance of the therapeutic relationship has helped to change the way many people think about mental health and the role of therapy in promoting well-being.

Three approaches to psychotherapy. [motion picture] by Rogers, Carl R. (Carl Ransom), 1902-1987; Perls, Frederick S; Ellis, Albert, 1913-2007; Shostrom, Everett L., 1921-1992; Psychological & Educational Films (Firm)

Books

- Perls, F., Ego, Hunger and Aggression ([Perls, F., 1942,1947](#))⁷⁾
- Perls, F., Gestalt Therapy Verbatim ([Perls, F., 1969](#))⁸⁾
- Perls, F., In and Out the Garbage Pail ([Perls, F., 1969](#))⁹⁾
- Perls, F., The Gestalt Approach and Eye Witness to Therapy ([Perls, F., 1973](#))¹⁰⁾
- Perls, F., Hefferline, R., & Goodman, P., Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality ([Perls, et al., 1951](#))¹¹⁾

¹⁾ Fritz Perls [Wikipedia](#)

²⁾ Gestalt_therapy Gestalt therapy [Wikipedia](#)

³⁾ Laura Perls [Wikipedia](#)

⁴⁾ Paul Goodman [Wikipedia](#)

⁵⁾ Isadore From [a2gestalt.com](#)

⁶⁾ Charlotte Selver [Wikipedia](#)

⁷⁾ Ego, Hunger and Aggression - Full Book [archive.org](#)

⁸⁾ Gestalt Therapy Verbatim - Full Book [archive.org](#)

⁹⁾ In and Out the Garbage Pail - Full Book [archive.org](#)

¹⁰⁾ The Gestalt Approach and Eye Witness to Therapy - Full Book [archive.org](#)

¹¹⁾ Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality - Full Book [archive.org](#)

1. ^ ^{a b c} Perls, F., 1942,1947. *Ego, Hunger and Aggression*. ISBN 0-939266-18-0.

2. ^ ^{a b} Perls, F., 1969. *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*. ISBN 0-911226-02-8.

3. ^ Perls, F., 1969. *In and Out the Garbage Pail*. ISBN 0-553-20253-7.

4. ^ Perls, F., 1973. *The Gestalt Approach and Eye Witness to Therapy*. ISBN 0-8314-0034-X.
5. ^ Perls, F., Hefferline, R., & Goodman, P., 1951. *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*. ISBN 0-939266-24-5.

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