

Laura Perls: From Ground to Figure

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Laura Perls, one of the pioneers of Gestalt therapy, was interviewed about the interplay between her personal life and professional life and about her opinions of Gestalt therapy today.

The scene is a familiar one to a New Yorker: the apartment house on one corner of Central Park with its nondescript, almost bland exterior; the doorman fighting his boredom to be pleasant, escorting me to the sixth floor; the dark hallway that seems almost cozy by contrast to the late November winds outside. A knock on the door, a lock unlatched, and Laura Perls is graciously greeting me. The apartment depicts the spatial efficiency that challenges most city-dwellers. Perls's home also reminds me of many homes I saw in Germany, with the accent on comfort and utility, not on glamour and fashion. The most comfortable room is dwarfed by a grand piano.

As I take off my coat in the small waiting room, I am struck by the single print in view, the stoic likeness of Sigmund Freud. Around the corner and toward the study is the likeness I had anticipated, a striking photograph of the vibrant Fritz Perls. Laura makes two cups of coffee, we settle into comfortable seats, and we begin the interview to the background of the noisy city traffic. Some of the magic of New York City must be its persistent, egomaniacal honking and tooting. Laura Perls provides a definite contrast to the city she inhabits.

Laura also provided a distinct contrast to her husband of 40 years. In fact, the differences between Fritz and Laura have been the subject of many biographical accounts since Fritz's death in 1970. In contrast to Fritz's earthiness, one colleague described Laura as

obviously patrician. . . . She is a lady, in the grand old meaning of that term: educated, alert, forceful, polite, discerning, critical, self-aware, delicate, gracious. She has also kept a sense of her Jewishness, not so it intrudes, the way a Bronx comedian uses it for cheap laughs, but as a deep part of her background. So Laura draws easily on a double *Kultur*: that of the high German culture of the 20th century and that of the intimate *shtetl*, the warmth of the Jewish life as it was preserved within the Posner family. (Rosenblatt, 1980, p. 8)

As I was attempting to arrive at some understanding of this unusual couple, I was reminded of one of my professor's injunctions near the end of my graduate training. His advice was that I identify an audience and develop my career to address that audience. "Your audience can be your students, your local community, your immediate colleagues, or the entire profession. The characteristics and size of your audience will help you make choices and will influence your behavior." For Fritz, Shakespeare's proclamation that "all the world is a stage" would not necessarily be an overstatement of his targeted audience. For example, Walt Anderson (1973) reported that one thing Fritz wanted but did not achieve before he died was to have his

picture on the cover of *Life* magazine. For Laura, it has always been quite different. Her audience is clearly her Gestalt colleagues, many of whom she has trained. This explains why Laura Perls is not exceptionally well known outside of Gestalt circles; it also explains the fierce loyalty the majority of key Gestalt figures have to her. Most public acclaim of Laura's contributions have been made by her colleagues over the past 15 years. I found myself asking, "Do they feel guilty that they ignored her while Fritz was alive?" Although I am not sure, I think not. Rather, in their maturity, it seems that many of Laura's colleagues perceive more fully what benefits they have received from her in their development. Her nurturance and tenacity helped them become key Gestalt figures; their gratitude acknowledges that she was key all along.

In 1980, a special issue of *The Gestalt Journal* was dedicated to Laura as a *Festschrift* (a collection of articles by colleagues, former students, etc., of a noted scholar, published in his or her honor) commemorating her 75th birthday. In it are many marvelous impressions and anecdotes of Laura submitted by her "audience." Several samples from the issue are presented below.

Daniel Rosenblatt, guest editor of the special issue, was clear about Laura's contribution to his professional career:

I can say simply that she changed my life. More elaborately, I can say that among my many experiences with therapists, she was the best, and I can still remember many of her words, and many of our sessions. Some of what I transmit to my own patients is directly attributable to what I learned from her. (p. 7)

Several contributors to the *Festschrift* seemed to need to set the record straight regarding Laura's contributions to the development of Gestalt therapy and her strengths relative to Fritz's. For example, Janie Rayne recalled:

I have spent many hours listening to Fritz Perls talking; I talked *with* him for quite a few. I admired and wondered at his marvelous and sometimes uncanny perceptiveness. But often I felt a nagging uneasiness that configurational thinking was not natural to Fritz. In spite of, or perhaps because of, his astute honing in on personality problems of the people he worked with, he appeared to miss out on the larger picture of personal interaction of which he was a part. Certainly my attempts to talk "about" Gestalt psychology with him were frustrating for me. I have not felt this in conversations with Laura; with her I sense easy access to basic ideas underlying both Gestalt psychology and therapy. Though she has received little credit for it, perhaps Laura was responsible for integrating Gestaltist thought more than anyone realized. (p. 80)

Daniel Rosenblatt also communicated a need to balance Fritz's contributions with Laura's:

It is safe to say she has had a part in the training of more Gestalt therapists than anyone else. And when Fritz was at his

wildest and wooliest, at his most depressed, when he had dropped out, wandering the world, she was there, maintaining the New York School of Gestalt Therapy, seeing that courses were offered, even answering the telephone and the letters. Just as she maintained a home for her children, so she maintained a home for the fledgling Institute; indeed, for decades its meetings were held in her living room. (p. 6)

The following anecdote, provided by Janie Rayne, described Laura's reaction to being compared to Fritz:

My first meeting with Laura was in California in the late 1960s when she led a small professional training workshop. Those of us who participated had experienced training sessions with Fritz Perls; some of us wanted to play the "let's-you-and-him-fight" game. Laura would have none of it. When someone asked her to compare her style of working with Fritz's, Laura's manner changed instantly. When she said, "I don't like your question and I won't answer it," Laura was formidable. I admired her stance. (p. 83)

Finally, Jennifer Andrews commented on the marked difference between the social Laura and the Laura at work:

After spending several [social] hours with Laura, I had not the slightest feeling of being observed or scrutinized. No therapizing whatsoever. Yet, in just a few minutes here [in a workshop], she had revealed herself capable of being aware of the slightest nuances of movement. . . . I remember feeling utterly exposed. (p. 70)

Laura Perls was born Lore Posner in 1905 in the town of Pforzheim, located on the north edge of the Black Forest in West Germany. Her father was a successful businessman; her mother was a woman of culture with significant musical talent. Laura was the oldest of three children. She grew up with the advantages of the upper-middle class. Music was an especially large part of her childhood and she was playing the piano by the age of 5. Each summer, she went to her mother's city of Hamburg and enjoyed the seaside.

Laura was 21 and a student when she met Fritz; he was 33 and an M.D. They were married 4 years later. Their life together would be marked by tremendous successes and equally dramatic trials. Because of the Nazi presence in Germany they had to leave their homeland in 1933 for Amsterdam, where they were penniless, and this was after they had achieved a good deal of financial security in Germany. In 1934, they moved on to South Africa, where they established a practice again and were quite affluent. After a dozen years in South Africa, however, they felt compelled to leave for both personal and political reasons. In fact, they left South Africa 2 years before the emergence of apartheid. After a short time in Canada, Fritz went to New York in 1946 and Laura and their two children met him there. New York has remained Laura's base; Fritz never really settled down again, moving from New York to the West Coast to Canada until his death in 1970.

Many people might be embittered by any one of the tremendous hurdles put in Laura's path through the years. Twice she was forced to leave everything behind and start over, both times with the responsibilities of children. She lost family, including her mother, in the concentration camps. For many years, she was denied the emotional and professional support of her husband. Yet the person who has evolved from all of this reflects life's goodness, not its pain. I would like to include one additional anecdote, this one told by Laura and reported by Daniel Rosenblatt. I found this little story particularly appealing because it helped me understand Laura's rejuvenating spirit and approach to life.

[This] is an anecdote Laura told me about her early days in New York City. Although she had lived in Berlin and

Johannesburg, she shared with many Europeans the fear of New York as a heartless megapolis, the "Metropolis" of Fritz Lang. When she came to live in New York in the late 1940s, having left a secure practice, a beautiful home with swimming pool, tennis court, servants, she worried about what she had come toward. Within the first days of her arrival in New York, she found herself in midtown tired and fearful. She stopped to rest for a few minutes in Bryant Park, just behind the New York Public Library. She sat with her thoughts, wondering how she could make a go of it in New York. At that moment, a squirrel stopped at her feet, begging for nuts. Laura reports that at this she took heart, for she realized that if big, tough New York City still presented an opportunity for squirrels to thrive, then she too could maintain herself, that life here was going to be all right. (p. 14)

ENTERING THE PROFESSION

J.B.: *You were a very ambitious young woman.*

L.P.: No, not ambitious. I had a lot of opportunity and I did a lot of things.

J.B.: *Didn't you first want to be a lawyer? There weren't a lot of women at that time doing that sort of thing, were there?*

L.P.: You see, when I was a child, I was a musician. I started to play the piano when I was 5. Then, after the war (World War I), when I was 16 or so, I thought that I should do something more socially useful. And, so, first I thought I would become a doctor, but I met somebody who was interested in women's development and who knew of opportunities that had opened up, and I thought that I might go to law school and work in family law, juvenile court work, and so forth, which were new at the time. I was one of the first women in law school in Frankfurt, but I soon realized from lectures I had already taken in psychology that I wasn't really interested in law but only in the psychological aspects of law.

J.B.: *Even with those aspirations, you don't consider that particularly ambitious for a woman at that time?*

L.P.: No, no. And personally I was not ambitious in the sense of being competitive.

J.B.: *Were you from a family who supported your becoming a professional woman?*

L.P.: Yes, they supported my going to the *gymnasium* (a secondary school for students preparing to enter a university), which was not the usual thing. At the time there was only a boys' *gymnasium*; the *gymnasium* for girls came only after I was out of school. I went to a girls' school, and one day the director of the school called my father and said, "We can't offer this child enough. She needs to be at the *gymnasium*." So, I became the only girl in the class.

J.B.: *That must have made you feel very special.*

L.P.: On one hand, yes. On the other hand, it was a very precarious situation. I was the only girl, I was just 12 and a year younger than all the others, and I was the only Jew. So, if I was ambitious in any sense, it was not to be the best, and I made an effort never to be the first. I made sure I was always second or third.

J.B.: *Once you got interested in psychology, what were your aspirations?*

L.P.: At that time, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I was just interested. When I switched from law to psychology, my father said, "*Brotlose kuenste*," which means "breadless arts." But when we emigrated from Germany, we were among the first to make a living. We didn't have any money, but we had our capital up here. (points to head)

J.B.: *Was your interest always in psychotherapy?*

L.P.: Well, when I met Fritz, who was in psychoanalysis, I had already put in a few years in Gestalt psychology. I was doing preliminary research for my doctoral dissertation.

J.B.: *Was it Fritz's influence that steered you toward psychoanalysis?*

L.P.: Well, actually I went into psychoanalysis because I wanted to be "in" on the jargon Fritz and a friend of his were using.

They were analyzing everybody around, including me! I wanted to know what they were talking about. So, I became involved in training analysis.

J.B.: *Did you enjoy your training in analysis?*

L.P.: It was difficult at first. I was with a woman analyst who Fritz also worked with, and then she went to Hamburg. Then I worked with Carl Landauer, who was one of the original Freudian analysts. He was very open and was freer than most analysts at the time. He was a friend of Ferenczi and Groddeck, and they were also more active and less dogmatic. Wilhelm Reich, whom Fritz worked with later, was a student of Ferenczi's. Actually, my training in analysis was as good as one could get at the time, both at the Frankfurt Institute and later in Berlin. Otto Fenichel was my supervisor. I didn't learn anything directly from him. You learn from him when you read him, but as a supervisor he didn't say a word. He just listened to me reporting my cases and he didn't comment or criticize.

J.B.: *In that vein, you commented elsewhere that Tillich and Buber had influenced you more than had any psychologist or psychoanalyst.*

L.P.: Yes, they were my philosophy teachers in Frankfurt. They were far more stimulating than most other professors. In their lectures, one felt directly addressed, one didn't feel lectured to. Of course, they were both preachers and every lecture was more of a sermon.

THE YEARS WITH FRITZ

J.B.: *How did your professional relationship with Fritz begin?*

L.P.: Well, at first through analysis. Then in Berlin, where we were married, Fritz worked not only as an analyst but as a neurologist. He was doing lots of physical treatment and all kinds of radiation treatments. I learned to do that too, and I helped him. At the time, I was still in control analysis. Then in

South Africa in 1934, we both had a practice and started the book, *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* (Perls, 1947). I was in on everything in the beginning, and we discussed everything together. However, I left most of what I produced to Fritz. Actually, *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* took off on something I had done in Berlin, some research I had done on the feeding and weaning of infants and the transition from the sucking to the biting stage. That was then extended into what became the chapters on mental metabolism in the book. I wrote a couple of chapters myself—"The Dummy Complex" and the insomnia chapter.

J.B.: *From what I've read about Fritz, he was irascible, undisciplined, and restless. Whatever attracted you to this man?*

L.P.: Well, Fritz wasn't only those things. He was extraordinarily bright, very witty, charming, . . . and very sexy.

J.B.: *From outward appearances, it would seem that the most stable part of your life together was in South Africa. Were those happy years?*

L.P.: Mostly. We each had our own practice and we wrote the book. During the later years, Fritz served in the army and was not stationed in Johannesburg where we lived, but rather about 30 miles away. Later, he was even farther away as an army psychiatrist in hospitals. At that time, we had a kind of weekend marriage. We were very busy and life was very concentrated. The children were young. We had several servants, which one could have in South Africa. It was a good life.

On the other hand, gradually it became somewhat boring. The circle of friends we had were mostly German immigrants, artists and writers, along with some South African writers and artists. But it was a very narrow circle and very separate from ordinary society. So, it was kind of inbred and everybody knew everybody, knew everything about everybody, slept with everybody! It was very tight. As soon as they had an opportunity,



most of these people left South Africa and either went to London or Israel. We wanted to leave too, not only because of the social situation but because of the political situation. Most of the time that we lived there was under the Smuts government, which was more democratic. We were rather active, or allied with people who were very active, in left wing politics and in representing natives. We wanted to be out before the 1948 elections. Fritz left in 1946 and I went in 1947 with the children. We didn't want to give up the house and the practice immediately because we didn't know if he could make it into America.

J.B.: *From South Africa, you came to New York?*

L.P.: Fritz first went to Canada to wait to enter the United States. He worked there for a few months. He was advised not to start in New York because there would be too much competition. I don't think anyone had any idea of our professional potential.

J.B.: *Did you always have that sense of your potential?*

L.P.: We both had it. But in South Africa there wasn't really anyone who could criticize our work or direct us in any way. In a way, we were untested. On the other hand, I don't think it would have been possible to develop our own approach to the extent that we did if we had stayed in Berlin under the tutelage and the protection and restriction of the Psychoanalytic Institute.

J.B.: *When did you realize that Fritz would become synonymous with Gestalt therapy?*

L.P.: It came gradually and mostly in his last years when he was on the West Coast and was somehow amalgamated with

"Fritz came from the theatre originally, and he needed the applause."

the whole West Coast attitude, which, for him, was a kind of liberation from professional constrictions. Fritz didn't really become an international figure until after his death. He only did one workshop in Europe.

J.B.: *Have you ever been surprised by the attention his work received?*

L.P.: No. It didn't surprise me because Fritz was a showman and he found a milieu that responded to it. Fritz came from the theatre originally, and he needed the applause. He also had more theatrical talent than I did. That worked out well for the demonstration workshops. I am less theatrical but more thorough in a lot of ways.

J.B.: *As I review Fritz's life from New York on and the restlessness he displayed, I assume that there was some unfinished business in his own life. Was there?*

L.P.: I think there was a lot of unfinished business in his life. There was unfinished business with me and a great deal of unfinished business with his father. His father humiliated him continually. Therefore, he always had to prove that he wasn't as his father made him look. On the other hand, his father was always restless, in a different way, of course. He traveled a lot

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and everywhere he went, he founded Free Mason lodges. And Fritz, although on a different level, started different groups everywhere he went. And I think it was an unrealized identifi-

cation with his father. You see, children always introject what they can't cope with. They imitate consciously what they like and what they want to be like, but they introject what they can't stomach in any other way, unaware that they are doing it.

J.B.: *Did you have any unfinished business with Fritz at the time of his death?*

L.P.: Actually, no. I had finished a lot of it when he was still alive. For some years I felt somewhat resentful that he never acknowledged my collaboration in the whole development of Gestalt therapy. He acknowledged it in the first introduction to *Ego, Hunger and Aggression*, but when it was published later by Random House with a new introduction, he left it out. And he was pretty hostile for a while altogether. But in the last years, we were on good terms. When he was living on the West Coast, I would go out occasionally and he would come here.

J.B.: *Do you think he was intimidated by your quiet kind of authority?*

L.P.: I don't think he was intimidated. I had become critical of him. As I mentioned earlier, I was only 21 when I met him. I was from a small town and was still a student. He was 33, a doctor, and a psychoanalyst. But, of course, doing analysis, having a practice, and having children, I grew up too. And any kind of criticism, not just from me, would devastate him and reactivate the original reaction to his father. As a result, he would always escape from criticism in some way. He also escaped from comparison with others. He always started something new and was the generator.

J.B.: *You were a fascinating couple, yet very different from each other.*

L.P.: Yes, but we had a lot in common and we remained married while living apart.

ON THE TRAINING OF THERAPISTS

J.B.: *What are some of your thoughts on the training of therapists?*

L.P.: There is something in general that I want to say. The wider and deeper the education of the therapist, the more he or she can work with all kinds of people on a deeper level. Just an early specialization in something—and a superficial one at that—learning all kinds of techniques and a "bag of tricks," that is not what I would consider a good preparation to be a therapist, or anything for that matter.

J.B.: *So you don't believe that specialization within psychology is adequate preparation for practice?*

L.P.: I don't think psychology exists in its own right, really. People who don't know literature, for instance, or history and anthropology, can't possibly be great psychologists.

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J.B.: *You have been training therapists for decades. Have there been changes in your trainees over the years?*

L.P.: When I was seeing more clients, I had a kind of elite practice. To a great extent they were artists and writers, very creative people. That was very stimulating for me. And then, of course, colleagues like Paul Goodman or Paul Weisz, who died very early, were erudite and extraordinary intellectually. Now I am training only professionals who are certified or certifiable. It doesn't make sense training others. Sometimes others are more gifted and more widely educated, but they can't make it financially if their clients aren't being remunerated from their insurance, which doesn't pay for noncertified therapists. But I am getting more people now who have been trained academically, who have degrees or are getting them, who are intelligent

and interested, but who are not very educated in the way I would call educated.

J.B.: *They don't have a good liberal arts base.*

L.P.: That's right. They read only professional stuff, they talk shop or gossip, but hardly anything else seriously.

J.B.: *They're not interested in the bigger picture.*

L.P.: Very few. There are always a few. But those who came to the New York institute in the early years were, by and large, better educated, to a great extent through their own efforts.

J.B.: *Do you think those who break new ground are likely to be more gifted or are the differences between those students and today's a function of our changing values regarding professional training?*

L.P.: There are different values now, along with more and more specialization. We specialize too early and the so-called liberal arts education starts far too late. It starts, if at all, in college. When I matriculated from the *gymnasium*, we had had 9 years of Latin and 6 years of Greek, 6 years of math and science, and, of course, history and geography. We read Aristotle and Plato in Greek! Remember, this was in high school. We hardly value languages at all now. Students study a little Spanish because it has become necessary but for no other reason.

J.B.: *At this point, are you doing both training and therapy?*

L.P.: Mostly training and occasionally some individual therapy for those who have been in the group and want some extra sessions. I used to do it the other way around. I started doing individual therapy with two sessions a week, then one session and one group. Now people come directly for training groups and most of those with whom I work have had some analysis or therapy. I do group therapy for professionals only.

J.B.: *Then most of your work is in groups?*

L.P.: Yes, although at the moment I have only one group running. I usually have two or three. I think many professionals now go to younger therapists who are recommended to them. I also do not want to work quite as much anymore. I still do a lot of outside work. In November I did a workshop in Swarthmore. The month before that I did one in New Orleans. In the winter I will go to the West Coast and the institutes there. Again, I usually work with outside groups only if they consist of professionals involved in some sort of training. I don't do any kind of growth workshops.

J.B.: *As you work with trainees, what do you perceive as the most valuable attribute in a therapist?*

L.P.: A growing awareness and the ability to empathize with the client and, at the same time, to stay separate.

J.B.: *That sounds like something Carl Rogers would say.*

L.P.: Ah, no. Carl Rogers is much more helpful. We are, perhaps, a little more daring. Apart from being present and available, we are less directly supportive.

J.B.: *You have said elsewhere that as a therapist you work with a combination of contact and support.*

L.P.: Yes. Usually, people work with the concept of contact and people have contact, either good contact or erratic contact or no contact, but contact is really only as good as the psychological support behind it.

J.B.: *Should the therapist be offering the support?*

L.P.: As little as possible. Rather, the therapist should find out what supports are available in the client and what supports are lacking. It is important to actually experience how they [clients] are interfering with their own support. The therapist must experience how, where, and when they are interfering with their breathing, coordination, and mobility.

J.B.: *So a person's own support is the most important kind of support.*

L.P.: Yes, that is right.

COMMENTS ABOUT GESTALT THERAPY

J.B.: *Gestalt therapy is very popular among clinicians. Is that as it should be?*

L.P.: I have my reservations about the popularity of Gestalt therapy. It is similar to what has happened to psychoanalysis. Everyone uses the jargon but knows less and less about it.

J.B.: *You don't think there are many pure Gestaltists out there?*

L.P.: Oh, there are some. I think most psychologists, if they read anything at all, read *Verbatim* (Perls, 1969) or they see one or two films and then they think they are Gestalt therapists.

"I have my reservations about the popularity of Gestalt therapy. . . . Everyone uses the jargon but knows less and less about it."

But these are only very small aspects of what one can do in Gestalt therapy. Gestalt therapy is much more than just a technical modality.

J.B.: *I have wondered at times if the theory behind Gestalt therapy is just too difficult, too much effort for most therapists.*

L.P.: The original *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth* (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951) was written for professionals. The theoretical part was written mostly by Paul Goodman, who was himself very erudite and wrote for peers rather than for kids. It takes a lot of concentration, but so does almost anything that is worth doing. And Gestalt therapy is not a one-track thing.

J.B.: *Gestalt therapy does include some very dramatic tools that give the therapist a good deal of power in the therapy situation regardless of the therapist's theoretical mastery. Because of this, do you think that Gestalt therapy is abused more than other therapies?*

L.P.: I think it is being abused. For instance, Fritz's demonstration technique, the hot seat, to use it indiscriminately with everybody is irresponsible and ignorant. With very sick people, you shouldn't use it at all. Because it's so insufficient, it's being combined with other techniques and approaches, with Transactional Analysis, with body awareness, with bioenergetics, with art, with anything! This just shows that people have not really understood the term *Gestalt*, which really is a philosophical and aesthetic concept. Within this framework, you can use really any technique as long as it is experiential and existential.

J.B.: *Along the same line, what would you consider to be one of the major distortions of Gestalt therapy today?*

L.P.: Gestalt therapy should not be mistaken for an encounter therapy, in the sense of making prestructured demands on the client, but rather should experiment only to the degree that support is available.

J.B.: *Which concept of Gestalt therapy do you think has most influenced the larger body of psychology?*

L.P.: Well, we were among the first to develop existential techniques and existential methods. There was an existential philosophy but not what is now called existential therapy.

J.B.: *Freud was criticized for putting too much emphasis on the sexual. Yet Gestaltists often seem to repeat this emphasis, focusing on the sexual blocks or sexual energy of the person. How important is our sexuality to our mental health?*

L.P.: It is one aspect of human functioning. Today it is no more important than the others because we are much freer sexually. Actually, in some ways, there is also a kind of bravado about sex, for example, breaking through the boundary harder than needed. This shows itself in an overemphasis on sex, sexual freedom, and sexual know-how. There is so much talk about sex that it becomes desexualized. It becomes only technique. Overall, however, what was seen as the problem years ago is now accepted to quite an extent as "how it is."

J.B.: *The importance of belief systems and how they affect therapy is getting a lot of attention lately. Do you think that belief in a deity makes it harder to be involved in Gestalt therapy?*

L.P.: It depends on the kind of God you are talking about. If one believes in a grand old man with a long white beard "up there," which is rather infantile, then that would contradict our personal power. But our own power is only one aspect of the energy that permeates everything. There's no contradiction between our belief in a deity and a sense of our own power unless we experience it as a contradiction.

J.B.: *What about the unconscious?*

L.P.: No, we Gestaltists don't really operate with the concept of the unconscious so much as a sliding scale from minimal awareness to full awareness.

J.B.: *Do you do much work with dreams?*

L.P.: I work with dreams but only if it happens to come up. I also work with dreams in demonstration workshops. If it is a 2-day workshop, I'm interested in the dreams that occurred the night of the first day. I also work with repetitive dreams because they indicate unfinished business.

J.B.: *So you trust that dreams are metaphors?*

L.P.: In Fritz's language, dreams are "messages." Dreams are existential representations of the total state of the client at that particular time in his or her life. Of course, one can approach dreams in many ways, and one way is by identification with everything in the dream. This is more like a dramatized free association. Fritz always remained much more of an analyst than he realized.

J.B.: *Do you think it's helpful for people not in therapy to keep dream journals or to try to work with their dreams on their own?*

L.P.: They can work with their dreams up to a point. But very often they can't get through the block themselves because they are the block. They often need to work with muscular tension to dissolve the fixed behavior pattern.

J.B.: *You mention muscle tension. Do you do much body work?*

L.P.: I do a lot of body work. Actually, when I do a demonstration workshop, I start simply with the body awareness that I happen to have. I came to my approach not through Reich but through modern dance, which I did from my childhood on. I still do some of the exercises. The methods I was trained in were to a great extent derived from Yoga and other Eastern exercises (Sufi, Tai Chi) that I was not aware of at the time. Only later did I see the similarity between my exercises and Eastern disciplines, though there is more mobility in what I do, more swinging, more improvisation.

J.B.: *Looking at the ways psychology has developed, do you think we have outgrown Freud?*

L.P.: Well, I don't really know if we should outgrow Freud entirely. Without him, we wouldn't be where we are today. It would be rather ungrateful of us.

WOMAN AND PROFESSIONAL

J.B.: *What has been the most enjoyable part of your nonprofessional life?*

L.P.: Friendship with very gifted and creative people. Music. Until a few years ago, I still played chamber music with professional people. I can't do it anymore. I am usually away in Europe for 3 months in the summer, working mostly and spending a few weeks with childhood friends from my old hometown. For the most part, I'm without a piano during that time and as I get older I can't catch up technically when I get back to New York. I'm distinctly an amateur now, though I played at the level of a professional once.

J.B.: *How much of your time have you given to music?*

L.P.: I play nearly every day. Now, I play for only about an hour or so, but I used to play much more.

J.B.: *Have you every tried to integrate your music with therapy?*

L.P.: I have never done music therapy but I have worked with musicians. I've even worked with musicians on their instruments, among other things.

J.B.: *Did you ever have a midlife crisis?*

L.P.: Yes, in a way. I had a hysterectomy when I was 47 or 48. After that, I felt like I was getting old. But that passed. And until about 2 years ago, I didn't really feel like I was getting old.

"I have set fewer and fewer [career] goals. If one just keeps going, one is liable to get somewhere."

I knew I was getting older but only lately, with the emergence of cataracts and some arthritis here and there, have I felt the real effects of age. I'm nearly 80.

J.B.: *As you review your career, would you say that your goals have been met?*

L.P.: I have set fewer and fewer goals. If one just keeps going, one is liable to get somewhere. Of course, in my early years, I thought I would be a writer or a musician, but that has taken more and more of a backseat. I would like to have written more. Presently, I am trying to get my articles and essays together to make a book out of them, but it is difficult.

J.B.: *Do you wish you had ever worked in academia?*

L.P.: Not really, no. No, I think that might have interfered. I am really very lucky—I never had a job in my life! When we started doing psychoanalysis, it wasn't accepted yet in the universities.

"I still think that if women are to achieve anything in the professions now, they must be smarter and more persistent than many men who make it, sometimes with minimal gifts."

J.B.: *How do you think professional women are doing in the United States?*

L.P.: Well, you know we had that problem after World War I in Germany. A few years ago, somebody asked me if I would join a women's liberation group. I said, "I did already, when I was a student, and I have been liberated ever since." I still think that if women are to achieve anything in the professions now, they must be smarter and more persistent than many men who make it, sometimes with minimal gifts.

J.B.: *Do you think women are continuing to gain ground?*

L.P.: I think so; I hope so. I think there was an overenthusiasm for a while and some exaggeration. Any development takes time.

J.B.: *Do you think we give up too much to be professional women?*

L.P.: I can only speak for myself—I have given up nothing! I don't compete with men. Some women are competing instead of just doing.

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EDITORS' NOTE. This interview is based on edited transcripts of audiotapes that are housed in the AACD Library.

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