

## Gestalt Cycle: The Resistance of Commerce

Anil Thomas  
NLP Master Practitioner &  
Gestalt Therapist  
Mumbai, India

Smruti Pusalkar  
Fergusson College  
Pune, India

This brief report throws light on the evolution of humans, the various universal emotions that exist like happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise and anger and the biological basis of the human brain, the two different hemispheres, the lobes and the functions that it performs. It is based on the idea that a link exists between human emotions and the needs that individual desires to have in their life. This explanation surrounding needs and their fulfilment is explained by the means of the Gestalt Cycle that is also known as the Cycle of Experience in Gestalt psychology. In therapy it shows, how there are different stages of fulfilment that an individual has to go through to achieve and restore a sense of balance that has been lacking if not it leads to neurotic and psychotic illnesses in a person which can prove to be detrimental to a person's wellbeing. Gestalt Therapy can help the individual accept these previously suppressed emotions and gain a new sense of self as the awareness increases. Secondary information, researches and data analyses were used to summarize and make the reader understand this report.

*Keywords:* Gestalt Cycle, Needs, Emotion, Neurotic & Psychotic Illness, Therapy

### Introduction

To begin with, human beings constitute a large part of the world which is full of various living beings, and their species along with it consists of a constant cycle of life and death. Plants, animals, insects and humans all live together on this same planet yet humans are starkly different from the other species. Some of the various questions surrounding this that would jumble the human mind are what makes them different? How do we classify them as evolved? Why are humans more complicated despite belonging to the species of animals? To gain a better insight and perspective to the above questions we go back to understand the evolution of humans. The famous Greek philosopher, Aristotle first distinguished between humans and other living species over 2000 years ago. The human ability to communicate using language

helps us to create a community, have a culture of our own, think, etc. and that in turn makes us different from any other living being and what sets us apart from the rest is the evolved brain structure and human emotion.

We as humans experience various emotions like happiness, sadness, anger and much more. Although emotions may be an internal process, they are the external depiction of how an individual may be feeling internally. It is the "feeling" aspect of consciousness that has three aspects: physical arousal, behavioral reaction and inner awareness about the feeling. The physiological reaction is in the form of an increased heart rate, dilated pupils, perspiration, increase/decrease in blood pressure, etc. while the behavioral aspect involves one's facial expressions, body movements, gestures, voice modulation, tone and pitch. Some of these behavioral aspects tend to be universal, but while understanding emotional expression cultural differences should be taken into consideration. Largely the latter is divided into two, individualistic or collectivistic. For most people feelings and emotions are similar but there are distinct differences between the two. Emotions are physiological states that are generated subconsciously while feelings are subjective experiences of emotions that are driven by thoughts and reflections.

Paul Eckman, during the 1970s, identified six basic, universal emotions. These include happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise and anger. He later went on to add pride, shame, embarrassment and excitement to this list too. Robert Plutchik proposed a wheel of emotions that resembled the wheel of colors.

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This research was by Anil Thomas and co-authored by Smruti Pusalkar  
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Sub Editor: Susan Cuntinha

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to

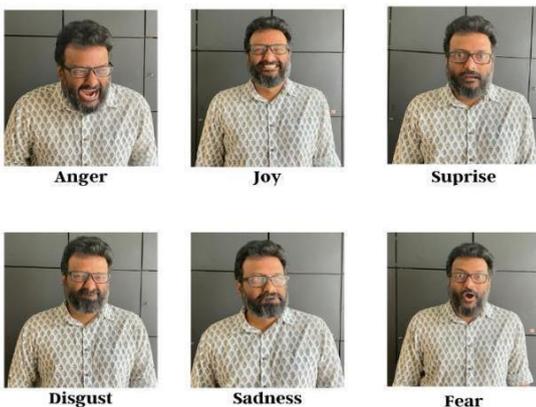
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According to his theory, emotions act like building blocks that go from basic to more complex emotions.

**These universal emotions are as follows:**

- **Happiness** (a pleasant emotional state characterized by feelings of contentment, joy and well-being)
- **Sadness** (a negative state of being that is characterized by feelings of disappointment, grief, hopelessness and sorrow)
- **Fear** (it is an emotional response to an immediate threat)
- **Disgust** (a feeling of repulsion or unpleasant feeling)
- **Anger** (it is characterized by feelings of hostility, agitation, frustration and irritation)
- **Surprise** (it is a brief and physiological response to an unexpected event)

**Figure 1**  
*Title: Universal Emotions*



**Note:** The above figure is an illustration of emotions that are universally accepted across the globe and were identified by Paul Eckman as six basic emotions that do not differ culturally in their meaning and acceptance.

Biologically, humans share traits with the great apes although they have a larger brain, larger body size, longer childhood and life than us, we share the same ancestors who had the same characteristics and this process of evolution is called homology. Focusing on the brain it is divided into three sections: forebrain, midbrain and hindbrain which comprises of ventricles and neurons. The forebrain develops into the cerebrum, the midbrain into the brainstem and the hindbrain into the regions of the brainstem and cerebellum. Furthermore, the walnut structure in humans is divided into two hemispheres, connected by nerve fibres called the corpus callosum. Where the left hemisphere is responsible for controlling all the muscles on the right-hand side of the body along with being responsible for speech (Broca's area), language (Wernicke's area), mathematical calculation and fact retrieval, the right hemisphere

controls the left side of the body and also plays an important role in visual/auditory processing, spatial skills and artistic ability. The function of the brain stem is to regulate the most primitive aspects of life. The limbic system is responsible for memory and emotions, which includes our responses to reward and punishment, and it is the area in the brain that is located between the brainstem and the two cerebral hemispheres and is made up the amygdala, the hypothalamus, and the hippocampus whilst being responsible for controlling human emotions and memory.

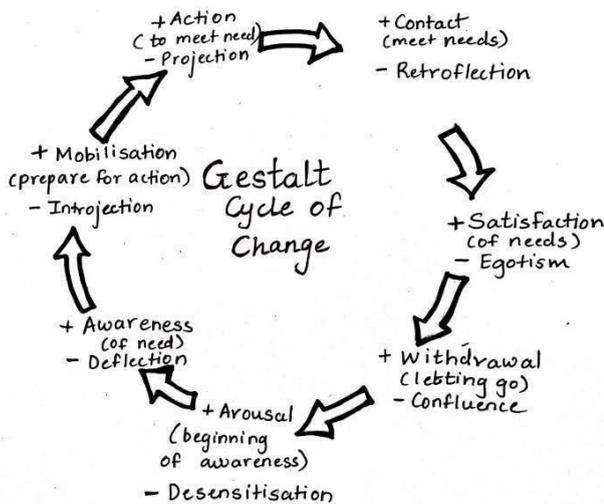
What differentiates humans from other animals is the presence of a larger cerebral cortex which is the outer layer of our brain that governs our language abilities, helps us acquire complex skills, create tools, and live in social groups. In humans, the cerebral cortex is wrinkled and folded, rather than smooth as seen in most other animals. This creates a greater surface area and size that increases the capacity of humans for learning, remembering, and thinking. The frontal lobe is responsible for thinking, planning, memory, and judgment whereas the parietal lobe controls bodily sensations and touch. Then the temporal lobe is primarily responsible for hearing and language, while the occipital lobe is primarily responsible for vision. These complexities of the human mind and body make human beings different from other living beings. We have many physical, cognitive, academic needs that satisfy many human wants. Majority of the time, these needs are not in isolation, but are present together. The individual, based on individual requirements, prioritizes these needs and organizes them in the hierarchy of importance. If the need is fulfilled, the individual achieves satisfaction, but sometimes, some external stimuli interrupted these needs. Various Gestalt psychologists understood this hierarchy of needs was in detail. The fulfilment of needs was thought to be in a cyclical order that proceeds in a rhythmic pattern to meet the needs of every individual. Every new and emerging need becomes part of this cycle and remains to be a part of it until attended to and then fades into the background. This is known as self-regulation.

This need for achievement of satisfaction comes from the tendency of humans or any other organism to seek balance. All organisms have the need to attain an equilibrium that can be achieved by the fulfilment of these needs. This state of balance is known as homeostasis. Homeostasis may be an internal or external experience that an individual may attain through psychological, physical or spiritual experiences related to oneself or others.

Gestalt psychologists have devised a "Gestalt Cycle" or "The Cycle of Experience". It is known that one is always a part of this Gestalt cycle, as long as one is aware. This cycle goes from sensation to satisfaction and involves intermittent "blocks or interruptions". Boundary disturbances or blocks can be seen as repeating patterns in the individual which interfere with the healthy

functioning of the individual at the organism/environment boundary. These boundary disturbances can also be seen as self-regulating acts and could also have protective functions.

**Figure 2**  
*The Gestalt Need Cycle*



**Note:** The above diagram illustrates the various stages of fulfilment that an individual needs to pass through in order to achieve a sense of balance in their life. It is known as the Gestalt Cycle or The Cycle of Experience.

The Gestalt cycle offers a representation of human to environment contact. According to Siminovich and Van Eron (2006), “awareness of the COE [Cycle of Experience] provides the skilled Gestalt coach with a way of identifying more precisely where processes become ‘stuck,’ thereby preventing learning and change, and for creating interventions that help clients recognize for themselves the habitual locations and patterns of becoming stuck”.

**The stages of fulfilling these individual needs to achieve a state of balance and intermittent blocks include**

1. **Sensation:** Sensation can be an internal or external stimulus in the form of a need or demand that the individual wants to fulfil to achieve homeostasis. This is the first stage of the Gestalt cycle where an individual feels something such as an emergence of imbalance but one is unable to articulate this feeling. For instance, Jane hears a growling sound in her stomach and a feeling that resembles hunger. Desensitization occurs when there is a shutting down of numbing of sensations. The individual neglects or disregards their sensations.

Desensitization is the resistance in the cycle of Gestalt at the sensation stage which acts as a block in the process of acquiring balance. Here, Jane is likely to ignore the growling sound in her stomach as it is bedtime and she would rather sleep than tend to this feeling in her stomach.

2. **Awareness:** Being aware is the next stage in the cycle in which the individual becomes aware of their need. In this stage according to the example, Jane becomes aware that she is hungry. She realizes that the growling in her stomach was due to hunger. However, there can be resistance in this stage too, which can cause one to be unaware of the need. Deflection means to turn aside from direct contact so as to reduce one’s awareness and feedback from within oneself, others or the environment. For instance, here, Jane will try to distract herself by watching a movie or trying to sleep, to distract herself from the discomfort that the growling stomach is causing.

3. **Mobilization:** In this stage, the need becomes more and more significant. It becomes clearer and generates energy in the direction of satisfaction. Considering Jane’s situation, she will most likely think about what food to have in order to satisfy her hunger. A block that may occur in this stage is Introjection. It is the “swallowing” of an experience without questioning. Example, Jane will probably try not to think about getting food because she has already had her dinner and she shouldn’t eat anything past her dinner-time.

4. **Action:** At this stage, a person actively reaches out for possibilities to do whatever is necessary to achieve the balance. One may try to overcome obstacles and experiment with different forms to achieve an end. At this stage in the cycle, Jane may go to the kitchen and decide on what to prepare or what to heat up from the fridge. One may experience resistance at this stage which is known as Projection. This is a trait, attitude, feeling, belief or behaviour that does not belong to oneself. It involves attributing one’s feelings or desires to another, anticipating behaviour from someone else, which originally has roots in one’s own fears or flaws. In Jane’s case, she may not get up to satisfy her hunger because her mother would get angry at her but in reality, she refuses to get out of the comforts of her bed out of laziness.

5. **Final Contact:** In the final contact stage, a person feels fully motivated to achieve their need and hence act on fulfilling it. Here, in this stage Jane will actually eat the food that she heated from the fridge. The contact boundary in completing this stage of the cycle is known as Retroflection. It occurs when a person turns his stored up, mobilized energy back upon himself instead of out

into the environment. We choose to forget that once an action is taken and it can reach satisfaction but in turn that hampers the completion of the cycle. Taking an example of a student, they need to attempt an exam but due to the fear of failure, they simply don't go to the exam centre, only to fail regardless.

6. **Satisfaction:** After the final contact stage has been fulfilled, one experiences a sense of satisfaction as their need has been fulfilled. Example: Jane feels satisfied after eating the food now that her hunger was sufficed. The contact boundary at this stage is known as Confluence, which is when we choose to go with someone else's need. We choose others needs to be more important than ours and act in accordance to their needs. Considering the example of the Covid-19 Pandemic, much like many others, Ajay decided to hoard groceries due to the fear of lockdown as his wife and neighbors told him that that was the right thing to do. Despite his internal objection to this, he decided to go along with others.

7. **Withdrawal:** This is the stage when one closes a cycle. When the cycle is over, one would return to sensation and wait for a new need to fulfil and restart the cycle of experience with a new need all over again. Example, Jane is satisfied, not hungry and neither uncomfortable hence she will now go back to her bed. However, the block that might hamper achieving complete satisfaction is known as Egotism. This contact boundary takes away the satisfaction that we may feel after fulfilling our need and hence we may not be able to attain withdrawal from the gestalt cycle. For instance, Jane has had her food and is no longer hungry, but after consuming her food, she immediately feels guilty as she thinks that she has eaten too much and has evaded her mother's rules of not eating past dinner time and she concludes that she is now going to gain weight because of her overeating. The most important consideration here is that one needs to be aware of the need that one has to fulfil in order to achieve balance and satisfaction. One needs to be conscious of what the need is and then take steps towards fulfilling it, but, it is only fair to say that not always would one be aware of these needs due to various environmental factors that may cause a delay in fulfilling the need. In Jane's case, she may have faced various blocks in fulfilling her need due to environmental factors such as her mother's annoyance about eating food at night, weight gain, or sometimes even her own laziness and hence she may have to suppress her need of hunger.

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Theoretically completing a cycle to fulfil the need seems easier, but in reality, one may have to encounter quite a number of resistances. These resistances show internal defenses which may affect satisfaction. This blockage in the path of achieving homeostasis is what causes a negative consequence in our mind and body. According to Gestalt psychology, the mechanisms of defense gestalt that Fritz Perls labelled as "neurotic mechanisms" - refers to those disruptions or barriers that blocks awareness. Gestalt therapy considers them as the remainders of previous tendencies that avoid taking conscious actions and behave in a certain way to protect oneself from the threat of the environment. They are self-interruptions in the cycle of experience. If a need remains unfulfilled and one is unable to achieve the desired result, the individual may experience negative feelings such as anger, confusion, annoyance and disappointment that will divert their energy to a certain number of possibilities that will not allow them a full interaction with the environment but risk behavior only based on these neurotic-defenses. The dissatisfaction that is caused by the unfulfilled needs may also have a physical manifestation that may not be a conscious response. Taking the example of Aditi, who claimed to suffer pain in her chest, she told her therapist that she felt a sense of pressure in her chest and it would intensify during certain situations to an extent where she would almost feel like she can't move. She had visited several doctors who had found nothing biologically concerning, in her case and hence was ultimately advised to visit a therapist to analyze her mental health. After therapy, Aditi was able to connect with herself consciously only to understand that she has been feeling these overwhelming emotions since her father's death about two years ago and for the first time she started to understand and accept the grief and her emotions. Upon further analysis, she was able to understand that her emotions were suppressed due to cultural factors such as one has to be strong and get over it and move on in life. She often used strategies for deflection such as not to cry as it had been ingrained in her that she has to stay strong to support her grieving mother. After a few therapy sessions, she was able to release her suppressed emotions and return to a healthy, conscious state of body and mind.

### **Neurosis and Neurotic Illnesses**

Neuroses are mental disorders that are generally characterized by anxiety, stress, depression and unhappiness. It involves some facets of the personality that are affected by the disorder but contact with reality and insight is still retained by the person. The starting point of neurosis involves some form of stress and there is often a close relationship between the personality of the individual and the illness

itself. Symptoms of neurosis may include fatigue, emotional disturbance, inability to cope with stress, anger, etc.

**The various types of neurosis are as follows**

- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder** (It is characterized by unwanted and irresistible thoughts, ideas or feelings)
- **Somatoform Disorders** (It involves the manifestation of psychological distress in physical form when in reality physical illnesses may or may not be present)
- **Anxiety Disorder** (It is a negative mood state that is characterized by bodily symptoms of physical tension and by apprehension)
- **Depression** (It may be described as feelings of extreme sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness and a loss of interest or pleasure which affects an individual's life)
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** (This is a syndrome that can be diagnosed among individuals who have endured or witnessed a highly traumatic event)

**Psychosis and Psychotic illnesses**

Psychosis is a severe form of mental imbalance which involves emotional, behavioral and cognitive disturbances and a radical loss of touch with reality. Psychotic disorders often tend to have genetic causes while some other causes tend to be brain trauma, abuse, extreme stress, etc. During psychosis, one's thoughts and perceptions become distrustful and disturbed and one may have trouble differentiating between reality and hallucinations. However, psychosis is not an illness in itself it is rather linked to underlying mental conditions. Example: Those with psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia, are more likely to have psychotic episodes (psychosis) and during this one may have disorganized thoughts may experience changes in thinking, behavior, perception and emotions; ignore personal hygiene, experience hallucinations and delusions, lack of motivation and a general difficulty in daily functioning. Drugs, including cocaine, amphetamine, methamphetamine, LSD, etc. can also trigger psychosis.

**The various types of Psychosis are as follows**

- **Schizophrenia** (characterized by changes in behavior, hallucinations, delusions)
- **Schizoaffective Disorder** (characterized by mood disorders, schizophrenia)
- **Schizophreniform Disorder** (Diagnosed for those individuals who have the symptoms of schizophrenia for one to six months)
- **Brief Psychotic Disorder** (People with this illness have a sudden, short period of psychotic behavior, often in response to a very stressful event)
- **Delusional Disorder** (This disorder is characterized by the absence of any other symptoms of schizophrenia except delusions)
- **Shared Psychotic Disorder** (This illness may be diagnosed to a person when one develops symptoms of delusions simply because of a close relationship with a delusional individual)
- **Substance-Induced Psychotic Disorder** (This condition is caused by the use of or withdrawal from drugs, such as hallucinogens)
- **Psychotic Disorder Due to Another Medical Condition** (Hallucinations, delusions, or other symptoms may happen because of another illness that affects brain function)
- **Paraphrenia** (It has symptoms similar to schizophrenia)

**Conclusion**

Treatment options in Gestalt psychology focus on gaining awareness and encouraging the individual to live in the present moment. Through therapy, clients tend to learn about the suppressed feelings that the individual may find to be threatening or difficult to even accept. Therapy can help the individual accept these previously suppressed emotions and gain a new sense of self as the awareness increases. This focus on here and now helps the individual to stop dwelling on their past or anticipate the future which may lead to anxiety. Therapy encourages dialogue between the individual and the therapist which ultimately leads to introspection.

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