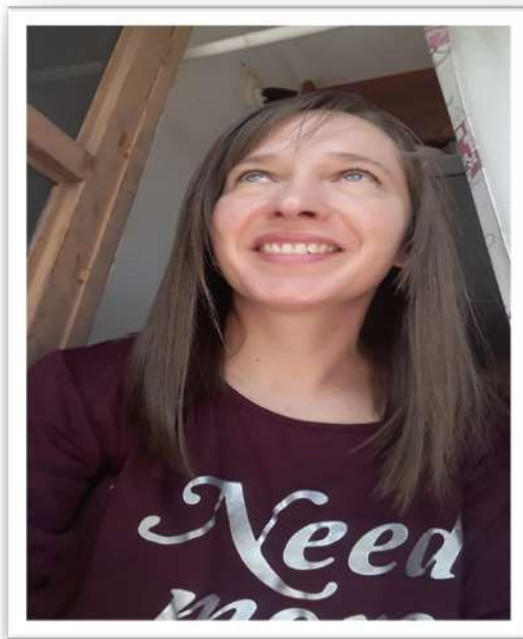


Chatting with.... “Humans of Gestalt”

Every now and then, Astrid Dusendschön invites colleagues for a chat around little things that do lots.

In this EAGT Winter 2020 newsletter issue, Heather Anne Keyes and Kamila Bialy agreed to join this proposal.

Dear Heather and Kamila, thank you for accepting this interview. Thanks for thinking of us – I am surprised by how well-received this project has been and appreciate the support we have found in the community.



AD: First, I would like to invite you to present yourselves professionally and, if you wish, personally, and also how you got to meet

H: I am currently a work-from-home mom of two kids, two dogs and two hamsters in Durango, Mexico. My undergraduate studies were in social anthropology/Latin American Culture, and I did my MA in Gestalt Psychotherapy here in Mexico where I have lived for 19 years and been practicing for 15.

I coordinate the Asociación Mexicana de Psicoterapia Gestalt Contemporánea to support the Gestalt therapy community through professional development and networking opportunities such as

conferences, workshops, residentials, peer groups as well as editing our semi-formal Journal. (www.gestaltmexico.org).

As far as I know Kamila and I have only ever been on opposite sides of a dancefloor/conference dinner... so we are “internet friends” but we have friends in common and are connected through our exchanges of ideas on the IAAGT member email list. Now, we share pictures of our pets and my kids, silly day-to-day thoughts, worries and life events with each other.

K: Since you studied in Poland some years back, perhaps, Heather, our paths crossed then :D

I live with my partner in one of the Polish cities and yet in every possible moment we travel and stay for a while with our two cats in the countryside.

I work both as a sociologist (researcher and academic teacher) and a therapist (work individually, with groups, and train students of psychotherapy in Poland and abroad). I also am a member of New Gestalt Voices where I can exploit to the fullest my belonging to two different professional worlds.

AD: You have set up together the project "Humans of Gestalt". When and how did this project emerge for you both?

H: This project formally began for me with the following statement on the IAAGT email list:

11/29/2019 4:07:00 PM Eastern Standard Time

I am willing to start a series of video interviews with founders/past presidents/elder members and whomever else wishes to participate and upload them for AAGT.... I am curious, trying to be constructive... I have been meaning to ask these kinds of questions – I have been trying to figure out "who's who" and piecing organizational history together for myself since 2012 and wanting to do something to support the community having a sense of self, history, identity and lineality (if that's a word).... much of why I am moved to come "back" now and propose these particular things - have to do with Bud's (Feder) death and thinking of all the things we never talked about - same experience I have had with three other friends and colleagues who died with interviews and projects pending between us over the past couple of years. AND it is about my ridiculous creative energy building up again and wanting to play more and seeing "what's next."

Kamila responded to the post, and we built a “guide” for the interviews from my initial set of questions. I borrowed the name from the “Humans of New York/Bombay etc.” series which collects short auto-biographical bits from everyday people. Knowing Kamila and I share an enjoyment of photography, we decided to collect some of our Humans images from different Gestalt events to form a collage and our webdesigner Jorge Bueno put together the “look” for the project from there.



K: I immediately got fond of Heather's idea, and this exciting Gestaltung started with both of us on board. My contribution was to approach an everyman woman of our Gestalt community, and in so doing to encourage people to form this world-wide process with us.

AD: Have there been elements that have made the process slowing down and difficult, have there been elements that have made the process easing and speeding up?

H: The response from our friends and colleagues and from the international Gestalt community has made this project largely a joy to bring together. People have been open, candid, trusting, and insightful. The interviews have felt intimate, and when we are able to

physically meet as a community again, I am sure I will feel like I have about a hundred new friends.

It does feel massively strange to imagine how "seen" we will have been though, as I am particularly prone to work "backstage" and tend to hide in plain sight at conferences etc. with administrative functions rather than taking a microphone or stepping on stage if I can possibly avoid it.

Technology and the exponential growth and normalization of ZOOM meetings has obviously made the nature of this project "click" with the state of the world these past few COVID months. Among lockdowns and uncertainty, these are times which have us all looking for connection and community, dealing with who we are and how we are in isolation, understanding what our relationship is with others, with our work, with our world and with Gestalt.

We have had some issues with boundaries and expectations, both among ourselves and with participants in some cases, but have generally enjoyed the clarity that these challenges have brought us about who we are, the values we hold and how we choose to work.

It has been empowering to work as independent “researchers” and to step outside of the pressure to “do research” in an empirical tradition... we have been enjoying the mixture of creative, multi-media documentary work with an investigative spirit and the freedom from pressures to “format and publish”- we have made the process transparent, and allow viewers, participants and listeners to make their own meanings from their interaction with the material we have been able to generate. This truly is a relational, co-created experience.

K: I like what you are saying here, Heather, about freedom to act on our own, which eventually led us to respond unintentionally to a larger field’s needs. From the very first moment people were immensely appreciative, both the interviewees and the audience. We hadn’t planned it this way, but the launch of the project coincided with Covid’s outbreak. All over the world we felt lost and isolated, we desperately needed to connect, to feel one another, to understand some deeper sense of it all. So, the first months were both frantic and exciting for our project.

And with the time some tiredness came; we had been hyperactive all the way through and there came a moment that called for self-care. Again, this coincided with Covid’s imposing regime: people were fed up with Zooming, they were starting holidays, etc. On the other hand, a social media effect started to set in. As a consequence, some people wanted to have a retake of their interviews, some were dissatisfied with the statistics of their performance, etc.

Autumn has brought in a new energy, good and warm as an autumn sunlight. We have accepted two new people on board: Tomas Diveky and Beatrice Valantin. We have felt supported, and so each of us could start to envisage her own ways of extending our project and also prepare to present it at some research conferences.

AD: Did you set yourself any objectives when beginning with this project, have you been surprised by what emerged at its contact with the environment vs what you had imagined?

We have been reflecting and dealing with those emergent figures through our own newsletter, sharing thoughts and allowing change to happen there. We have been encouraged to present and will be at the Research Conference in Hamburg 2021, and will likely begin some “sub series” threads on recurring themes that people have brought to their interviews.

I am starting a “remembering Laura” series in the Oral History vein, and can easily imagine discussions around death and dying, race and racism, social justice, gender and sexuality from a HUMAN perspective among therapists developing in the future like the ones Kamila is co-creating with NGV.

The conversation and the connections with colleagues are inseparable from my own work on other projects here in Mexico and internationally, especially in relation to issues of diversity, inclusion and equity. The systemic issues of power and privilege that

have come up in the interviews are significant, and the potential for Gestalt therapy and the people involved in it to do meaningful work is absolutely undeniable.

K: My interest has started to focus on generational difference; the resulting excitement does not concern 'cohorts' in demographic terms, rather 'generations' defined by the shared historical life experience as well as the shared symbolic references. In cooperation with New Gestalt Voices Radio I intend to invite guests, Humans interviewees, and in this way open up a forum on generational difference, what it is like, what kind of processes it triggers, how we are dealing with it, why it is important, why we keep avoiding it, etc.

It is surprising to me that even though our objectives were not related to a social critique approach, just the opposite, to connect, to meet, to create an archive of what is, power related themes started to emerge and what we did, we did not ignore them.

AD: What was your initial intention, has it changed more or less with its implementation?

We are happy that we decided to take a more personal turn, leaving the "talking about theory" parts for another day, and are pleased to have moved beyond a single organizational community as we realized how deep the waters are and how far-reaching the roots and branches of the Gestalt community really are.

We are also satisfied with having made the choice to include a diversity of voices, languages, ages and levels of experience rather than just giving more airtime to the established "figures" in the Gestalt world.

How many interviewees have you had at this time where we are speaking? What countries / continents do they come from, what typology (students / young professionals / confirmed professionals)? Dispatch ladies / gents?

The numbers from the project are quite impactful for us to see:

40.7k views, 4.9k hours watched, 1.1k subscribers on youtube

192 videos, 7 languages (English, Polish, Spanish, French, Slovak, Czech, Greek)

4 regular interviewers, one guest interviewer

We will present more details and share more at our upcoming presentations at the IAAGT Online Research Colloquium on Jan 31st, 2021 which you can register for here:

<https://www.cognitofirms.com/AssociationForTheAdvancementOfGestaltTherapy/ResearchCommitteeOnlineColloquiumSeriesRegistration>

We have been officially accepted to present at The Gestalt Research Conference in Hamburg, Germany in Sept 2021 <https://research-conference-hamburg2021.com/>

AD: How is your project financed?

We would like to remind people that this project is independent, so we truly appreciate any support you would like to offer as a donation:

https://paypal.me/heatherannekeyes?locale.x=en_US

AD: How and where to find Humans of Gestalt:

Humans of Gestalt website: www.humansofgestalt.com

Humans of Gestalt on Youtube:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIdyGm_4yX10StN70_pnXxQ

And the audios are uploaded weekly to our webpage as an ad-free podcast.

AD: Dear Heather and Kamila, thank you for your time and availability to join in this chat and accept to play with me. Congratulations for your presentation-to-come in Hamburg 2021. And yes, I wish this will create new forms of contact when we meet “live” in congresses etc. All the best to you and hats off, ladies!



As I had the pleasure to join this project end of last August with an interview by you, Heather, I'd like to add my personal experience. When I came across information on your project and the proposal “any one ‘human of gestalt’ can join”, my initial push was “go”! Then, things became more concrete... Heather, you contacted me, a date was set... and my thinking started - “what on earth am I putting myself into agreeing to

do, what intention is my “go” made of, who do I think I am to contribute, I have nothing interesting to say “, ... simply put: I was scared and my neurosis had some space to “shoot up”.

Then we discussed, Heather, and you allowed things for me to calm down by outlining that nothing would be put online if I did not want to, or could be taken off from youtube at any time, later. Relief.

At the moment the interview started I realized I had not “prepared” anything - I could have been watching for example former interviews and get an idea of the questions. OK, I thought, here I am (again...) jumping in the water with lots of “play” energy...

Well, I have to say that I am most happy to have done so and to rely on your warm welcoming and tranquille presence, Heather, which allowed me “just to be”.

I liked being surprised by your questions and letting me go with the flow, with this subtle attention not to escape from the intimacy of our contact that invited to be fully present and at the same time not getting into some kind of personal “striptease”, if I may use this word.

I was happy to have “dared” the interview experience. Then came another step: how do you feel when you see yourself on a video, hear your voice and listen to what you say? This can be quite an experience and taming to go through.

Post-contacting process was on its way, and some months later, now, I see this as an experience that sustains growing, and also that contributes integration of one’s own lifepath – at least that’s what it has been for me.

I can only but encourage ones and others to join!

Warmly,

AstridDecember 2020.