

SEEING THE WOOD FOR THE TREES:  
THE EXPERIENCE OF GENOGRAMS AND FAMILY SCULPTING  
DURING CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY MASTERS TRAINING.

by

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*Dedicated to my father, Peter Sylvester Meese,  
for his multi-dimensional influence across my life span.*

*You are always there.*

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## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore students' subjective and collective experience of an experiential family therapy module within the Clinical Psychology Masters training programme. It looks at the perceptions of nine trainee therapists who used genograms and family sculpting to present their family of origin. The study takes place after the completion of the practical internship year with the purpose of exploring relevant emotional, cognitive, social and therapeutic effects of this module.

A literature survey reveals that the use of genograms and family sculpting during training has received little research interest as most studies have primarily focused on their use during therapy with clients and in supervision. There is a scarcity of literature available that pertains directly to psychologists themselves and their wider social context. An exploratory review has been made to supplement the literature and pertains to experiential programmes in training in general and the psychologist's self in training.

The epistemology that directs this research falls within a postmodern frame. The experience is viewed from within the broad systems perspective. This approach acknowledges the dynamic and recursive interactions which occur between and within systems, and permits a broad perspective to be taken that is inclusive rather than exclusive.

A qualitative research design was selected as it lends itself particularly well to the study of the 'lived realities' of people within their context and allows the information gained from the study to guide the research process. Semi-structured open-ended in-depth interviews were used as they allow for greater freedom and fewer restrictions regarding direction for the participant. A thematic analysis was carried out in order for the central themes of the experience to emerge. These themes were discussed extensively and integrated with the literature available. The multigenerational family presentation seems to create greater awareness of patterns and roles and these insights have a pervasive impact in many contexts. Understandably, the trainees feel emotionally overwhelmed as they become both observer and observed, viewing their interaction from a third-person perspective. This awareness of process results in a loss of spontaneous response and initial debilitation which is associated with feelings of loss and isolation. The self-exploratory behaviour gives rise to a reflexive reconstruction of self as a result of the

access to new meanings regarding the dynamics and relationships within the family system, which enhances understanding of the complex interplay of systems, and ultimately facilitates the processes of integration, repair and resolution.

#### KEY TERMS

Genogram; family sculpting; family of origin; experiential training; feedback; containment; vicarious learning; insight; isolation; individuation/differentiation of self; emotional autonomy; self-direction; systems theory; cybernetics;

#### OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie beoog om studente se subjektiewe en kollektiewe ervarings van 'n ervaringsgebaseerde gesinsterapie module tydens die kliniese sielkunde magisteropleiding te ondersoek. Die persepsies van nege terapeute in wording wat genogramme en gesinsbeelding gebruik het om hul gesinne van oorsprong aan te bied word in oënskou geneem. Die studie vind plaas na die studente hulle internskappe voltooi het en het ten doel om die relevante emosionele, kognitiewe, sosiale en terapeutiese effekte van voorgenoemde module te ondersoek.

'n Literatuurstudie toon dat die gebruik van genogramme en gesinsbeelding tydens opleiding weinig aandag geniet. Navorsing in hierdie verband is tot dusver grootliks gemik op die gebruik van hierdie metodes in 'n terapeutiese verband. Weinig literatuur is beskikbaar wat die klem plaas op sielkundiges en hulle breër sosiale kontekste. 'n Oorsig word in hierdie studie aangebied ten opsigte van ervaringsgebaseerde programme in die algemeen asook ten opsigte van die self van die sielkundige in opleiding.

Die studie is aangepak vanuit 'n post-modernistiese epistemologie. Studente se ervarings word beskou vanuit 'n breë sistemiese raamwerk. Hierdie benadering gee erkenning aan die dinamiese en rekursiewe interaksies binne sisteme en bied die geleentheid vir 'n inklusiewe eerder as 'n eksklusiewe perspektief.

Daar is besluit op 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetode aangesien laasgenoemde besonder waardevol is in 'n ondersoek na die geleefde realiteite van 'n groep individue. Hierdie metode laat ook toe dat enige informasie wat tydens die proses ingesamel word gebruik kan word om die navorsingsproses as 'n geheel te rig. In-diepte semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is gebruik as metode van data insameling aangesien respondente hierdeur groter vryheid toegelaat word om hul ervarings sonder oormatige direksie te deel. 'n Tematiese ontleding is vervolgens gedoen ten einde sentrale temas bloot te lê. Hierdie temas is breedvoerig bespreek en met relevante literatuur vergelyk. Die gesinsaanbieding wat oor verskeie generasies strek blyk 'n groter bewustheid van patrone en rolle te skep en die insigte hieruit verkry blyk 'n diepgaande impak te maak wat oor verskeie kontekste strek. Studente voel te begrype emosioneel oorweldig tydens die proses waar hulle terselfertyd die rol van waarnemer en waargenomene vervul. Hulle verhoogde bewustheid van proses gee aanleiding to 'n gebrek aan spontane response en 'n aanvanklike gevoel van magteloosheid wat gepaardgaan met gevoelens van verlies en isolasie. Self-

ondersoekende gedrag gee aanleiding tot 'n refleksiewe herkonstruksie van die self as 'n resultaat van die ontwikkeling van nuwe betekenis rakende die dinamiek en verhoudings binne die sisteem. Die ontwikkeling van hierdie nuwe betekenis dra by tot 'n groter begrip van die komplekse interverwantskappe binne sisteme en uiteindelik tot 'n proses van integrasie, genesing en resoluksie.

#### SLEUTELTERME

Genogram; gesinsbeelding; gesin van oorsprong; ervaringsleer; terugvoer; geborgenheid; waarnemingsleer; insig; isolasie; individuasie/self-differensiasie; emosionele outonomie; self-gedreweheid; sisteemteorie; kubernetika

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