

THE USE OF GESTALT THERAPY AS AN ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT
TECHNIQUE WITH PRIMARY SCHOOL GIRLS
WHO HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

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From my heart to yours, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Esther and Ooppel Greeff, and my fiancé Rishan Chetty, who carried me through the years of my studies and provided me with the opportunity to better my life through the pursuit of higher education.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I, Melanie Oelofsen, declare that:

**THE USE OF GESTALT THERAPY AS AN ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE
WITH PRIMARY SCHOOL GIRLS WHO HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED**

is my own work and that all references appear in the list of references.

MELANIE OELOFSEN

DATE

SUMMARY

THE USE OF GESTALT THERAPY AS AN ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE WITH PRIMARY SCHOOL GIRLS WHO HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

by

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The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the use of Gestalt therapy as an alternative assessment technique with two primary school girls who have been sexually abused. The empirical study of limited extent, was *qualitative* in nature and conducted from the *interpretivist* paradigm. I used two *in-depth clinical case studies situated within the context of psychotherapy outcome research* as research design. I developed and implemented *alternative assessment based on Gestalt therapy* and employed *observation, interviews, informal discussions, analysis of documentation, a reflective diary, field notes and visual data* (photographs and original media) as data collection and documentation methods. I purposefully selected two primary school girls who have been sexually abused as participants in the study.

The findings of the study were, firstly, that Gestalt therapy could be used as an effective alternative assessment technique with the target participants as it seemingly provided a safe setting to express emotions, fears and needs related to the trauma of sexual abuse. In this regard, a finding was that the primary participants had to deal with challenging emotions including anxiety, fear, aggression, anger, hatred, rage, sadness and depression. A related finding was that they experienced a need for love, unconditional acceptance, support and protection. Similarly, the study found that they also displayed negative behaviour such as inadequate social behaviour, restlessness and withdrawal from challenging social situations. Most importantly, utilising this mode of assessment rendered insight into the defence mechanisms they employed such as denial, avoidance, suppression and escapism. Secondly, alternative assessments based on Gestalt therapy seemed to have a positive effect on both participants, as indicated by change during and after the process of assessment in terms of emotions, behaviour and the use of defence mechanisms.

LIST OF KEY CONCEPTS

- Alternative assessment
- Clinical case study situated within psychotherapy outcome research
- Educational psychological assessment
- Educational psychological intervention
- Gestalt therapy
- Interpretivism
- Primary school girls
- Psychosocial support
- Qualitative research
- Sexual abuse

“They had been initiated into a strange twilight fraternity where explanation would be forever impossible. Everybody understands this, as they did themselves, dimly. It did not need to be mentioned. Everyone was sorry, as they were themselves. However, there was nothing that could be done about it. Tenderness was all that could be given, and like most of the labelled human emotions, it meant nothing when put alongside the intensity of the experience”

(Author unknown).

“We build walls around our hearts because of our need to defend ourselves from the more difficult aspects of existence. Most often the defended stance prevents us from hearing other voices. We retreat into safe containers to lick our wounds or to block the reception of new ones”

(Author unknown).

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