

**The experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt
play techniques**

by

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ABSTRACT

The experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques

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Worldwide the older population increased by 0.4% between 1996 and 2001 alone, which currently amounts to 5 487 679 of the total South African population (approximately 51 million) (Statistics South Africa, 2013:2). With a percentage of 16.2%, Gauteng's older person population is arguably at the top end of the scale. Based on figures by the Department of Social Development, 13.7% of the population will be 60 years and older by 2050; thus an increase from the current 5.7% to 14.9% is expected. This could contribute to an increased need for the emotional support of older persons by social workers. Although some research has been conducted on creative Gestalt play techniques in groups for the aged dealing with physical health and reduced personal contact (O'Leary, Sheedy, O'Sullivan & Thoresen, 2003; Serok, 1986), little is known about their responses to creative Gestalt play techniques utilised on an individual level.

Therefore, it was the goal of this study to explore the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques. Within the context of this study, creative Gestalt play techniques refer specifically to drawing, clay and sand play. In order to achieve this research goal, a qualitative approach was adopted to

explore the experience an older person may have when communicating through Gestalt play techniques.

Applied research was considered the most suitable as the research findings emanating from this study could be used to propose practical guidelines for gerontological social work services. The collective case study was employed as the research design. The researcher recruited five (n=5) participants through two non-probability sampling techniques, namely purposive sampling followed by volunteer sampling from a residential facility in the Tshwane Metropolitan area. After five Gestalt play sessions with each older person, the data were collected during the sixth session by means of semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview schedule. Creswell's process for thematic data analysis was used to extrapolate themes and subthemes. The trustworthiness of the data interpretation was confirmed through reflexivity, peer debriefing and an audit trail.

The key findings of this study were that older persons experienced communicating through Gestalt play techniques positively as it was found that: (1) The techniques were spontaneous and mastery was experienced through the techniques; it was an appropriate way of communicating and it assisted the older persons to recall life events and memories from their past; some experienced uncertainty and anxiety during implementation of the technique. (2) The relationship an older person had with the researcher enhanced their experience of communicating through Gestalt play techniques. The projection techniques enabled the researcher to relate to the older person in the "here and now" and as such, it promoted a positive relationship between the researcher and the older person and also promoted communication. (3) The older persons also had specific experiences regarding the techniques that were implemented; they experienced the techniques to be cognitively stimulating, to enable fantasizing; techniques were simple and easy to apply and had a calming effect.

To improve service rendering to the older population and implementing Gestalt play techniques with older persons, the following recommendations are offered to social workers: to first build a trusting professional relationship with the older person as a positive relationship will let them feel that their stories and memories are important to the researcher; to provide an opportunity for older persons to be spontaneous, which furthermore could assist them to become aware of the “here and now”; to focus on techniques that will allow older persons to experience mastery during the implementation of the technique; to ensure that older persons have a positive attitude towards implementing the specific technique; to use materials that an older person could easily work with, despite the challenges they face as a consequence of old age; to be aware that the play techniques enable older persons to work through issues in their past, which surface during the sessions; to meet the older persons’ preferences as they may not feel comfortable with all the different creative Gestalt play techniques; to introduce social workers to Gestalt play techniques while working with older persons in order to render successful services; and to train social workers in implementing Oaklander’s ‘working model’.

Key words:

Older person/older persons

Gestalt play techniques

Drawing

Sand tray

Clay

Residential facility for older persons

Communicating

Tshwane Metropolitan area

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUALISATION

In this study, the researcher focused on the experiences of older persons when communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques. Irrespective of the vast number of research studies conducted in the field of play therapy, limited information is available on the utilisation of creative Gestalt play techniques with older persons. Hill and Brettle (2006:291) mention that creative Gestalt play techniques could be used as a working model when dealing with an older person; however, most studies tend to focus on play therapy with children. This study focused on the experiences of older persons when being exposed to creative Gestalt play techniques. Although some research has been conducted on creative Gestalt play techniques within groups for the aged (O'Leary, Sheedy, O'Sullivan & Thoresen, 2003; Serok, 1986), little is known about their responses to creative Gestalt techniques utilised on an individual level.

Scholars define play therapy as “a psychotherapeutic technique whereby the therapist attempts to give the child the opportunity to express his or her feelings verbally and non-verbally” (Gouws, Louw, Meyer & Plug in Blom, 2006:19). However, with this definition the assumption is made that children use play in a symbolic manner as a form for expressing emotions. Contrary to the previous definition, Oaklander (2007:193) mentions that children do not “necessarily need to verbalize their discoveries, insights and awareness . . . it is often enough to bring it out into the open.”

Oaklander (2007:193) also emphasises the importance of the creative Gestalt play therapy process. This process commences by building a relationship with the client. The social worker/therapist (henceforth referred to as therapist) will do this by developing an I-thou relationship, keeping the client in the here and now (awareness), taking responsibility, handling resistance and setting boundaries.

During the work process, the therapist also focuses on contact-making which includes sensory and bodily awareness. The therapist should confirm the client's sense of self but also enhance emotional expression and awareness, as well as self-nurturing.

In this study, research was done with older persons. An *older person* is considered "a person who, in the case of a male, is 65 years of age or older and, in the case of a female, is 60 years of age or older" (Older Persons Act 13 of 2006). Louw and Louw (2009:4) mention that there are three substages of adulthood, namely early adulthood, middle adulthood and late adulthood. Late adulthood is approximately between the age of 60 to death. In this research, the researcher studied a population in their late adulthood.

Reber and Reber (2001:300) describe Gestalt therapy as:

A form of psychotherapy associated with the work of Frederick (Fritz) Perls. It is based loosely on the Gestalt concepts of unity and wholeness. Treatment, which is usually conducted in groups, focuses on attempts to broaden a person's awareness of self by using past experiences, memories, emotional states, bodily sensations. In short, everything that could contribute to the person forming a meaningful configuration of awareness is an acceptable part of the therapy process.

The researcher made use of creative Gestalt play techniques to determine whether these techniques could facilitate interaction and communication with the older person. Creative Gestalt play techniques are defined as "aspects of art therapy, such as drawing, painting and playing with clay" (Blom, 2006:200). These techniques were used to depict projections that the older person experience in a non-threatening way. Porter (1989) (in Van der Merwe, 1996:139), a classic source in the field of play therapy, mentions that creative play work is "inventive, it can be manifested in various forms of art and handcraft. In a way, it is related to art therapy, but in a broader sense of the word." In this study the researcher specifically made use of clay, drawing and sand tray as creative Gestalt play techniques.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher made use of the Gestalt approach as a theoretical framework in this study. Consequently, this theoretical framework will be discussed in the context of this study.

1.2.1 Gestalt approach

Reber and Reber (2001:299) mention that Gestalt refers to the “unified wholes, complete structures, totalities, the nature of which is not revealed by simply analysing the several parts that make them up.” Fall, Holden and Marquis (2010:203) refer to the Gestalt as the “holist view of the human psyche”, known as holism. The psyche is considered to be an integrated whole which entails elements of a person’s physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. They are interlinked and inseparable from the whole being (Fall et al., 2010:203). Together with a person’s functioning as a *whole*, the Gestalt theory also views the person as being capable of becoming a self-regulated being, thus working to the potential of being balanced and able to meet needs as they arise (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:224).

The Gestalt theory comprises of core concepts that were suitable when working with Gestalt techniques and when determining whether an older person was able to communicate through them. In this research, the concept of *awareness* was used as explained by Henderson and Thompson (2011:224) in the sense that *self-regulation* requires *awareness* of one’s inner self and the environment. In being aware of oneself, the person needs to be able to meet the “figure” (the need at the moment) as other needs are being relegated to the “background”. Fall et al. (2010:208) mention that when a need arises one must first be aware of the need; without this awareness one will not be able to make contact with the environment or fulfil the need. This interaction with the environment is called *contact*, which as described by Henderson and Thompson (2011:225) is “recognizing what is occurring here and now, moment to moment” and thus being able to identify the need and trying to fulfil that need. Unhealthy functioning may follow if certain needs are not met; this is

known as *unfinished business* (Fall et al., 2010:209). Corey (2013:198) mentions that unfinished business means unacknowledged feelings which may cause unnecessary emotional clutter that may influence the present-centred awareness. This may cause the individual to be unable to connect with him-/herself¹, or others.

In using the Gestalt theory, the experiences that an older person had when communicating through Gestalt techniques, were better understood. The Gestalt theory provided an appropriate theoretical framework for the researcher to build on in order to determine the experiences of an older person communicating through creative Gestalt techniques. Contact and awareness of holistic aspects of the older person's life were explored. More detail on the theoretical framework follows in Chapter 2, paragraph 2.5.

1.3 RATIONALE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

To date, research focused predominantly on play therapy with children and adults. This is a limitation seeing that this theoretical model is applicable to all ages, including older persons. This research is timely in considering the possibility of utilising creative Gestalt play techniques with the older person. Although research has been conducted on play therapy with older persons in a group setting (O'Leary et al., 2003:136), older persons' experiences of creative Gestalt play techniques have not been researched.

Therefore, the research question, which guided the study, was as follows: "What are the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques?"

¹ For the sake of brevity, the masculine pronoun is used throughout as the generic pronoun and should be read as including female individuals. No gender discrimination is intended.

1.4 GOAL AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The **goal** of this study was to explore the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques.

In order to achieve this goal, the following **research objectives** needed to be reached:

1. To describe the use of creative Gestalt play techniques and the utilisation thereof with older persons;
2. To explore and describe both the positive and negative experiences of older persons communicating through Gestalt play techniques, specifically projection by means of clay, sand tray and drawing; and
3. To propose practical guidelines for social workers to implement creative Gestalt play techniques as a working method when dealing with older persons.

1.5 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach to answer the research question. In-depth interviews were conducted with participating older persons to explore their experiences of communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques. The research goal was of an exploratory nature since the researcher aimed to gain insight into an individual's (older person's) experience of communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95).

The researcher made use of constructionism as a research paradigm, as it is believed to answer the research question most truthfully (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:310). Constructionism was also chosen since the participants were actively involved in the research process. The research ontology was that the reality of the participants is taken as a given, because they had experienced it personally and they had given meaning to their experiences. The researcher exposed the participants to

three techniques, i.e., clay, sand tray and drawing, so that they could experience them personally and then explored their experiences thereof.

Applied research was most suitable for this research study as the findings could be used to propose practical guidelines to social workers for working and communicating with older persons through creative Gestalt play techniques. Applied research addresses specific concerns and offers solutions to address social issues (Neuman, 2006:27).

In this research study, the researcher made use of a case study as a qualitative research design. More specifically, the collective case study was utilised in order to consolidate and compare the experiences the older persons reported on. The researcher collected in-depth information regarding the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320).

According to Greeff (2011:342), “interviewing is the predominant mode of data or information collection in qualitative research.” The researcher made use of semi-structured, one-on-one interviewing, with questions contained in an interview schedule (Addendum A), in order to gain specific information regarding the participants’ experiences of the creative Gestalt play techniques used during the sessions.

After the data were obtained, the researcher used Creswell’s process for qualitative data analysis to analyse the data with the view to specifically undertake thematic analysis (Creswell, 2013:182-189). The researcher had to ensure trustworthiness through reflexivity and being able to have an audit trail. Reflexivity was a prerequisite for the researcher as she was aware of her own narratives and perspectives about the research and possible themes. In addition, the researcher recorded the interviews, with the participants’ consent, in order to review and verify data during

data analysis to avoid the influence of the researcher's predetermined knowledge and experience.

The study used non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, followed by volunteer sampling. Five older persons participated in this study.

Ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria (Addendum B) was obtained before the empirical study was undertaken. The following ethical considerations were applicable to this study: (i) The researcher had an ethical responsibility towards the participants and ensured that no harm was done to them, both emotionally and physically; (ii) The participants and legal guidance or family member all signed informed consent to acknowledge that they would like to participate in the study and that they could withdraw at any time (Addendum C); (iii) The researcher ensured the participants' confidentiality, through explaining to them that their names would not be mentioned during the reporting of research findings; (iv) The data will be stored for 15 years at the University of Pretoria; (v) The researcher, however, could not ensure anonymity as the researcher knows each participant by name, but their identity would be protected through the use of pseudonyms; and (vi) The researcher informed the participants that the data obtained would be published in a mini-dissertation; (vii) Participants were entitled to debriefing after the sessions.

More details on the research methodology will follow in Chapter 3, Section A.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following limitations need to be taken into consideration when reading this mini-dissertation:

- The sample only consisted of white older persons and is not a holistic representation of the broader older population in the Pretoria/Tshwane region of the Republic of South Africa.
- Research was only conducted at one residential facility situated in Pretoria, the Gauteng Province. The study is not representative of the Gauteng Province as a whole, or of the Republic of South Africa.
- All participants were Afrikaans-speaking, thus the study did not include all ethnical and cultural groups of the older population.
- Literature in the field of creative Gestalt techniques is often dated.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE MINI-DISSERTATION

The remainder of the mini-dissertation consists of the following chapters:

CHAPTER 2: UTILISATION OF GESTALT PLAY TECHNIQUES WITH OLDER PERSONS

The chapter focuses on the biopsychological functioning of an older person, the utilisation of Gestalt play techniques and how the techniques could be implemented with older persons.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter includes the findings regarding the experiences of older persons when communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques, as well as the interpretation

of the data. The research methodology is also explained comprehensively in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to conclusions, recommendations will be presented in the final chapter, in which the researcher will suggest practical guidelines for social workers who work with older persons regarding the use of creative Gestalt play techniques.

CHAPTER 2: UTILISATION OF GESTALT PLAY TECHNIQUES WITH OLDER PERSONS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The most recent census, Census 2011, compiled in South Africa revealed that the population consists of 52.98 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2013:2). Compared to the previous census conducted in 2001, the South African population had increased with 7 million. Gauteng is the province with the highest population. In 1996 the Gauteng Province comprised 19.3% of the total population. However, this province experienced an increase of 4% in population from 1996 to 2011. The mid-year population estimation indicated that 7.8% of the above mentioned population are above the ages of 60 years (Statistics South Africa, 2013:2).

The overall population in South Africa is increasing annually. The focus population (i.e., older persons) of this study was largely ignored by psychologists when it came to their development potential during adult years (Louw & Louw, 2009:3). The social work profession also tends to ignore the older population in social service delivery and research. The rationale for ignoring older persons is the fact that psychologists believe that older persons are mainly the product of their childhood experiences and thus most research is conducted on the development of children. Social workers often base their knowledge and insight regarding the different life stages on research done in the field of psychology. The lack of research on the life stage of older persons therefore negatively impact on the social worker's knowledge of this specific life stage. Research on adult development was only taken seriously about 50 years ago (Louw & Louw, 2009:3). The researcher has an interest in exploring how an older person may experience creative Gestalt play techniques.

Therefore the research question guiding this study is: “What are the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques?” Certain objectives need to be met in order for the researcher to be able to answer the above mentioned question. The goal of the study is to explore the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques. The literature chapter will assist the researcher to understand the population, explore research on this specific population and examine the potential of utilising Gestalt techniques with older persons. When implementing these techniques it is important for the researcher to have knowledge of the specific topic and the nature of the problem, thus the necessity of the literature chapter. An explanation of the theory on which the research is based, the background and core concepts will be discussed. Certain techniques, such as drawing, clay work and sand tray will be applied in this research study. The researcher will therefore discuss these techniques from a Gestalt approach. It is important for the researcher and the reader to gain thorough background knowledge of the research problem and of the population being studied.

2.2 OLDER PERSONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

There was research conducted with older persons in different countries. However, South Africa has a diverse population and a unique socio-political history; therefore similar research to indicate that an older person is better off mentally and financially than their parents were ages ago, is limited. It is important for the reader to understand the older population within a South African context.

2.2.1 Composition of older person population in South Africa

As stated above, the South Africa population currently comprise 52.98 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2013:2). Compared to the previous census conducted, the population is increasing annually, and Gauteng is the province with the highest population. Comparing the census of 1996, 2001 and 2013 mid-year estimation, there is a clear indication that the older population is increasing annually. During 2001, older persons represented 7.3% of the entire population. A mid-year

estimation was published in 2013, which indicated that the above-mentioned population had increased to 7.8% (Statistics South Africa, 2013:7). This indicates that the older population has increased by 0.5% since 2001 to date (Statistic South Africa, 2013:7). With a percentage of 16.2%, Gauteng's older person population is at the top end of the scale.

Furthermore, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (in Department of Social Development, 2006:10) predicts that worldwide the number of people in the age group 60 and above will increase from 2.8 million to 4.6 million by 2025, and 6.5 million by 2050. Based on these figures, 13.7% of the population will be 60 years and older by 2050, thus an increase from the current 5.7% to 14.9%. If this estimation is correct, older people will become an increasingly important target group for the rendering of specialised services.

Not only is there an estimation that the older population is growing, but there is a "strong indication that most present-day adults/older persons are mentally and financially better off than their parents were" (Louw & Louw, 2009:7). The Government News Network (in Louw & Louw, 2009:7) reported that people over 50 are more ambitious; they experience less stress and some have healthy eating habits. This has led to the point that people are living longer than two generations ago. It also needs to be stated that the above-mentioned study was conducted in a foreign country and it does not reflect South Africa's unique population and socio-political history.

As the population increases and live longer, it does leave South Africa with certain challenges. The older population puts additional strain on a government such as providing for physical and mental care, housing and financial needs (Louw & Louw, 2009:12). In South Africa, the number of social grants payable to older persons will increase. Emotional support to this population will be inevitable as they are increasing and, as mentioned by Louw and Louw (2009:11), helping professions should focus on developing in this area as the demand for services will increase and

will be needed urgently. Services can only be rendered efficiently if the service providers understand the population group and their development. The researcher will explore the life phase of an older person in order to understand the population.

2.3 OLD AGE AS A LIFE PHASE

The bio-psychosocial approach investigates the biological, psychological and social development of a person. The biological systems focus on “sensory capacities, organs and nervous systems, endocrine and immune systems and motor skills” (Louw & Louw, 2009:24). Biological systems focus on the physical development of the person. The biopsychosocial approach, according to Fava and Sonino (2008:1), allows “illness to be viewed as a result of interacting mechanisms at the cellular, tissue, organismic, interpersonal and environmental level.”

2.3.1 Development of an older person

The development of a person is affected by biological, psychological, sociocultural and life-cycle forces (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, in Louw & Louw, 2009:18) but for the purpose of this study the researcher will only focus on physical development and sexuality, cognitive development and social development. It is important to take note that although these aspects will be discussed separately, they are interrelated and each aspect of development affects the other. The physical development of a person can be described as the development of a person’s brain, his senses, muscle strength, stamina, physical appearance, physical health and menopause (in women). A person’s sexuality also falls in this category, and entails sexual behaviour patterns and sexual orientation. When considering the cognitive development of a person, aspects such as information processing memory (e.g. attention, concept of memory, intelligence, problem-solving, decision-making and language are considered. Social development comprises the characteristics of adult relationships, lifestyle choices, work, moral development, retirement and leisure. The researcher will discuss certain concepts in the text below to understand the population studied in this research.

2.3.1.1 Physical development

Physical development, as explained above, can be seen as brain functioning, physical appearance, and more. It is important to understand the development of the population and the challenges they may experience; thus the physical aspects are discussed as follows:

2.3.1.1.1 Brain functioning

The brain of the elderly begins to deteriorate after the age of 50; as a result of the deterioration, the number of neurons also decreases (Louw & Louw, 2009:52). Sigelman and Rider (2006:136) also state that most systems peak sometime between childhood and early adulthood, thereafter a decrease can be expected. Ageing can also cause the blood flow to the brain to start decreasing. This may imply a decrease in oxygen and glucose (Louw & Louw, 2009:52). Steinberg, Bornstein, Vandell and Rook (2011:549) mention that nerves conducting information to and from the brain become less efficient, causing more time for sensory information to reach the brain and for commands from the brain to reach the body in order to perform accurate responses.

It is important to consider the above-mentioned information as it may influence the pace at which play techniques be applied with an older person.

2.3.1.1.2 Vision

An older person's senses, such as vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch will deteriorate. Vision begins to deteriorate with the onset of middle-age. This will cause older persons to lose sight of objects near them and they will struggle to adapt their eyesight in the dark (Louw & Louw, 2009:54). Sigelman and Rider (2006:161) suggest that this may be due to their pupils becoming smaller and not adjusting as lighting conditions change; for example, an older person not being able to read low-contrast words in dim lighting. There are also changes in the retina and lens of the

eye. The elderly may also experience some emotional trauma due to their eyesight deteriorating.

2.3.1.1.3 Hearing

As the vision of older persons deteriorates, their hearing deteriorates as well. This is more common in males than in females (Louw & Louw, 2009:54). Sigelman and Rider (2006:165) agree with this statement and add that this could occur as many men worked in noisy industrial environments; however, men working in low-noise occupations may also experience hearing loss earlier than women. Hearing disabilities also cause other adjustments, for example, older persons need to adjust their educational, occupational and interpersonal levels (Louw & Louw, 2009:55), as they are not able to hear conversations with their peers, which influences interpersonal levels. A loss of hearing may be due to cochlear hair cells that gradually degenerate during adult years (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:165). Some older persons experience depression, low self-esteem and a low quality of life due to deteriorating hearing.

2.3.1.1.4 Taste and smell

A loss of taste is common during old age due to a loss of sensitivity of the taste buds (Louw & Louw, 2009:55). Sigelman and Rider (2006:167) mention that, although older persons tend to lose their sense of taste, this varies from person to person depending on environmental factors. Steinberg et al. (2011:547) suggest that the number of taste buds does not decline, but their taste sensitivity do. Older persons' ability to smell also decreases. This may result in older persons being more exposed to danger as they might not be able to respond to dangerous gas leaks or spoiled food (Louw & Louw, 2009:55). Sigelman and Rider (2006:167) state that while older persons may not be able to identify dangerous objects by using their sense of smell, cognitive difficulties may also contribute, such as not being able to identify or having difficulty to identify the name of the danger being sensed, thus not only having problems with their senses.

2.3.1.1.5 Muscle tone and balance

Due to the deterioration of the sensory systems, older persons may have a poorer sense of balance than when they were younger (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:139). This then causes them to walk slower, which may also affect their cardiovascular functioning and result in a loss of strength. Louw and Louw (2009:56) add to this by also mentioning that as their muscle strength declines it may cause older persons to fall or hurt themselves. Steinberg et al. (2011:547) state that with age, receptors in your ear decline, thus causing a person's balance to be affected and influencing their chances to fall. As their muscle strength and stamina decrease, it will affect the functioning of the heart, as blood dispersion to their muscles slows down.

2.3.1.1.6 Hormones

An older person also experiences hormonal changes as he reaches the age of 60 years and older. Women tend to reach menopause, which is defined as the stage where women reach the end of their menstrual cycle and this takes place during the stage of mid-life (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:137). They will experience hot flushes and are reported to experience mild depression and temporary emotional distress. It does have an influence on their levels of anxiety, anger and job dissatisfaction, but according to Greene (in Sigelman & Rider, 2006:138), women who experience severe psychological problems, most probably experienced these symptoms before reaching menopause.

In the same way that women experience menopause, men also experience andropause which indicates that they also have lower levels of testosterone and a variety of symptoms such as low libido, fatigue, lack of energy and loss of pubic hair (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:139).

2.3.1.1.7 Physical appearance

Physical changes become apparent during the middle years as skin become less elastic, more wrinkled, dry and thin. Skin will show small black and blue marks as blood vessels break and tend to heal slower as the repair function of cell and blood vessels are slowing down (Louw & Louw, 2009:57). Obvious changes occur, such as hair progressively losing its glow and becoming grey.

2.3.1.1.8 Physical health

With age, the immune system decreases in several ways, increasing an older person's chances of falling ill and being exposed to diseases (Steinberg et al., 2011: 550). Louw and Louw (2009:61) state that it is important to maintain good health while a person is in early adulthood in order to maintain good health in late adulthood. Steinberg et al. (2011:553) agree by stating that previous injuries may contribute to health problems in terms of later health. Louw and Louw (2009:61) mention that there are serious fatal illnesses that may cause serious adjustments to later life, influencing psychological well-being and healthy ageing as well. Illnesses such as HIV and Aids, a stroke, cancer, hypertension, tuberculosis and diabetes mellitus also influence healthy ageing.

2.3.1.1.9 Sexuality

Steinberg et al. (2011:550) mention that most people assume that older people are not interested in sexual activity. The truth is that sexual activity does decline at old age, but many older people value sexual intimacy and it is viewed as an important part of experiencing emotional closeness (Gott & Hinchliff, 2003 in Steinberg et al., 2011:550). Louw and Louw (2009:81) agree with the above-mentioned as they also mention that "although there is a decrease in most cases, sexual needs, interest and capacity remain very much alive, even at a very advanced age."

Sexual orientation is a very important part of sexuality and is being referred to as “an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to men, women or both sexes” (Louw & Louw, 2009:83). Sexual relations are very closely tied to intimate personal relationships that would meet needs of love, attachment and intimacy. Sexual orientation is also a nonsexual physical affection between partners, on-going commitment, mutual support and sharing the same goals and values.

As mentioned above there are different physical challenges an older person may experience, such as vision and hearing which deteriorate as time passes. As physical challenges arise, a person also experiences cognitive challenges. It is important for the reader to understand that not only should an older client’s physical development be taken into consideration, but also his cognitive development as they interlink. A discussion will follow explaining cognitive development such as attention, information processing and memory.

2.3.1.2 Cognitive development

Louw and Louw (2009:93) state that when considering cognitive development it is important to know that it consists of attention, information processing speed and memory. When regarding a person in his late adulthood, certain higher cognitive abilities, e.g. intelligence, problem-solving and decision making can also be identified.

2.3.1.2.1 Attention

Attention, according to Whitbourne and Whitbourne (2011:126), involves the “ability to focus or concentrate on an aspect of experience while ignoring other features of that experience, to be able to shift the focus as demanded by the situation and to be able to coordinate information from multiple sources.” Attention is often a fleeting cognitive state, but it is a necessary first step to receiving information (Louw & Louw,

2009:91). If attention is not given and a lapse in attention occurs at a crucial time, it could have disastrous results.

2.3.1.2.2 Information processing

Information processing refers to the amount of information a person is able to take in, as well as the processing and preparing for a response (Louw & Louw, 2009:94). The ability of a person to process information quickly is advantageous in many areas of life, such as recognising a person's face or voice or quickly responding to a question that was asked. Reaction time, according to Steinberg et al. (2011:549), can be defined as "the length of time that is needed to respond to stimuli." The reaction time of older persons becomes slower with age and thus it effects their general intellectual functioning.

2.3.1.2.3 Memory

Sigelman and Rider (2006:215) mention that older persons become upset when they realise that they are forgetting certain information such as names and items. This is due to them recognising this occurrence as a sign of ageing. A person has three different systems of memory (Steinberg et al., 2011:558). The first is *sensory memory* which receives information from the senses within one to two seconds and then fades unless the information is attended to in which case it will then be passed on to the working memory. The *working memory* actively processes and manipulates the information (Louw & Louw, 2009:96). The working memory is necessary for activities such as learning, reasoning and comprehension. The working memory can hold up to seven items of information within a period of 15 to 25 seconds. Thirdly, the *long-term memory* retains memory for a longer period of time, ranging from several minutes to a lifetime (Louw & Louw, 2009:97). The capacity of information stored in the brain is virtually unlimited (Steinberg et al., 2011:558).

Cognitive development includes attention, information processing and memory. These three developmental aspects are very important in processing information shared with an older person and them being able to respond. If this development stage is not met, it may influence older persons' abilities to communicate with their family and peers which will directly influence their social development as they will not be able to interact socially as they cannot communicate. Social development as a development stage will be discussed briefly in order for the reader to understand the influence social development may have on the functioning of an older person.

2.3.1.3 Social development

Some characteristics of adult relationships can be identified as intimacy, attachment and social networks. If a person does not experience these aspects it may lead to a crisis (thus them being isolated) and not being able to move to the following psychosocial developmental stage. Their families and where they came from is therefore very important during this developmental stage.

2.3.1.3.1 Intimacy

Intimacy needs to be developed during early adulthood. Individuals need to first establish their personality before they can experience intimacy (Erikson, 1963 in Louw & Louw, 2009:189). Meyer, Moore and Viljoen (2008:203) state that the development crisis is characterised by intimacy versus isolation. If the individual had achieved this development challenge, they do experience love.

2.3.1.3.2 Attachment

Attachment can be explained as the "strong affectionate tie that binds people together" (Louw & Louw, 2009:194). As infants form a bond with their parent, the adult also forms a bond with their partner. This bond involves love of the partner, deep attachment, commitment and emotional intimacy (Hatfield & Rapson, in Sigelman & Rider, 2006:413). The attachment style the person experienced during

infancy seems to have far-reaching implications throughout the lifespan of an adult. The way in which a person thinks, feels and behaves are not only caused by the immediate environment, but are also formed while being an infant (Louw & Louw, 2009:194).

2.3.1.3.3 Social networks

Sigelman and Riger (2006:411) state that as adults marry, have children and take on more work responsibility, their social networks tend to shrink. This may also differ depending on their ethnic group. Social networks provide support in various forms: some provide emotional support and others expressive support (Louw & Louw, 2009:196). There are, however, different models when looking at social support, but this will not be discussed, as it is not directly relevant to this study.

All of the above-mentioned are important, but there are certain other factors that may also influence the social development of the older person; such as whether the client was married or not; whether he/she has a husband/wife, children, stepchildren or grandchildren; whether he has friends or siblings remaining. An important question may also be whether the client is still working or retired? The client's moral development should also be taken into consideration when looking at his social development. What is the client's reasoning behind his actions?

The above-mentioned aspects were discussed as the therapist needs to consider these aspects while utilising play techniques with the older person. It is important to take note of development, especially cognitive development as this aspect is mainly addressed during therapy with adults. During the implementation of Gestalt play therapy techniques, cognitive functioning will be used during the exploration of their experiences as the therapist will only focus on the client being aware and taking responsibility and teach them to move from environmental support to self-support, as stated above.

As all the developmental stages of an older person were discussed in-depth, it can be noted that throughout the stages of development, challenges may arise as their physical body and mind (cognitive) deteriorate which directly influence their social development. The challenges an older person may experience will be discussed next.

2.4 CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY OLDER PERSONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Older persons may experience numerous challenges. Potential physical, social, economic and psychological challenges will be explored.

2.4.1 Physical challenges

Sigelman and Rider (2006:136) mention that the body is gradually declining as a result of aging, thus implying that the “heart or lungs will not be able to meet the demand of exercise; your body won’t be able to regulate temperature and the immune system to fight diseases.” As mentioned above, an older person may experience loss of senses, causing him to experience certain challenges. Louw and Louw (2009:55) state that physical challenges have certain safety risks as an older person will not be able to respond to dangerous gas leaks or spoiled food. If food does not have much taste, the older person will lose interest; lack of proper nourishment could cause weight loss (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:168). The older person experiences a decline in his senses, influencing sensory memory, as memorising is affected if hearing and vision are impaired (Steinberg et al., 2011:558). As a result, working memory is affected, as he will not be able to repeat a large number of items on a list.

Daily tasks are a challenge to older persons as they get tired of carrying groceries or climbing stairs, as aging bodies have a greater disadvantage when it comes to tasks which entail maximal strength, speed or endurance (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:140).

2.4.2 Social challenges

Louw and Louw (2009:258) state that ageism is one of the challenges an older person may experience. This indicates that an older person may experience discrimination based on their chronological age. Some researchers also indicate that an older person may experience change in locus of control (internal and external), which indicate how much control people have over conditions in their lives. Most older persons experience more external locus of control than internal locus of control as they are often compelled to retire, which may lead to a loss of income and health. Erber (2013:311) mentions that they may also experience poverty, as many older persons are dependent on social grants. Poverty entails more than only “being deprived of health care, food and other daily living expenses” (Louw & Louw, 2009:264). They experience helplessness which may cause them to feel uncertain about the future and this may alienated them from society.

On the other hand social dependency could refer to them experiencing satisfying interpersonal relationships and gaining social support from their environment.

2.4.3 Economic challenges

Older persons also regard dependency as a challenge as they become economically and physically dependent (Erber, 2013:23). Louw and Louw (2009:265) add to this by mentioning that they also become dependent psychologically and socially. Especially in the South African context, most older persons are dependent on social grants as this is seen as their only income.

2.4.4 Psychological challenges

Psychologically older persons become dependent as they experience illnesses such as Alzheimer's and psychiatric disorders, for example depression. Sigelman and Rider (2006:477) mention that it is known that an older person is more likely to take his own life than an adolescent is.

Major life events and daily hassles are often challenges that an older person experiences. Stawski, Sliwinski, Almeida and Smyth (2008:2) state that an individual needs to avoid being exposed to a situation that can have a negative effect on his emotions. Daily hassles such as a traffic jam, a flat cell phone battery or forgetting an appointment and unexpected life events may have a significant effect on how a person adjusts.

An older person may also experience mental health challenges, for example dementia, depression, anxiety disorders, delirium or Parkinson's disease (Louw & Louw, 2009:274-282). As mentioned above, old age may also influence an individual emotionally and thus needs to be addressed. Play techniques, from a Gestalt approach could address these challenges and will be discussed in the section below.

2.5 THE GESTALT THEORY AS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING OLDER PERSONS

The background of the Gestalt theory will be discussed, as well as the philosophical underpinning of the theory in order to understand the foundation on which this research will be based and data will be analysed. Some core concepts will be discussed in order to clarify the nature of the Gestalt theory and the relevance thereof for this study.

2.5.1 Definition of Gestalt theory

The Gestalt theory is defined, according to Fritz and Laura Perls (in Fall et al., 2010:203), as “the assumption that meaning is best derived and understood by considering the individual’s interpretation of immediate experience” and is “grounded in a holistic view of the human psyche.” Corey (2013:195) agrees with this definition by also stating that the Gestalt approach is “experimental in that clients come to grips with what and how they are thinking, feeling and doing as they interact with the therapist.”

2.5.2 Background of the theory

The Gestalt approach was first described by Frits Perls while he was in South Africa for a period of 12 years (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:222). Frits Perls and his wife, Laura opened a private practice and they wrote a book, with the title *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* (Fall et al., 2013:202). During this time they formulated the basic ideas underlying what they would call the Gestalt theory. They moved to New York, where the Gestalt theory was born. ‘Gestalt’ is a German word that can be explained as follows (English & English in Henderson & Thompson, 2011:222):

A form, a configuration or a totality that has, as a unified whole, properties which cannot be derived by summation from the parts and their relationship. It may refer to physical structures, to physiological functions, or the symbolic units.

2.5.3 Philosophical underpinnings of the theory

The philosophical underpinnings of the Gestalt theory contain elements of the psychoanalysis theory merged with an existential humanistic therapy (Fall et al., 2010:203). The Gestalt theory is grounded in the assumption that a person would better understand the meaning individuals ascribe by interpreting their immediate experiences (Fall et al., 2010:203). Corey (2013:194) mentions that this is an existential approach, as special attention is given to existence as the individual

experiences it. This affirms the individual's human capacity to grow and heal through interpersonal contact and insight. Perls (in Fall et al., 2010:203) believes that:

The psychoanalytic compartmentalization of the psyche into id, ego and superego promoted a fragmented view of people. He considered the psyche an integrated whole in which a person's physical, emotional and spiritual elements are intertwined and inseparable to make the whole being.

Frits and Laura Perls (in Fall et al., 2010:205) also drew inspiration and philosophical meaning from phenomenology and holism as a concept from scientific models like the field theory and formed elements of the Gestalt theory by using these concepts. The field theory and the word 'field' represent the 'here and now' and interaction between the organism and the environment. The *field* is made up of the *ground* and the *figure*, "the part of the ground that emerges into the organism's immediate awareness" (Fall et al., 2010:204). If a need (figure) arises, the organism mobilises energy to fulfil the need. If the need is fulfilled the ground returns to normal until a new need (figure) arises. If it should happen that the need is not met, the figure may then become a distraction to the organism which may lead to disorders (Fall et al., 2010:205).

In order to clarify the nature of Gestalt theory, the core concepts of this theory will be discussed in the following section.

2.5.4 Core concepts to the theory

In this section six basic concepts of the Gestalt theory will be discussed, namely holism, contact, awareness, organismic self-regulation, polarities, fragmentation and the structure of the personality.

2.5.4.1 Holism

The meaning of the word 'Gestalt' is 'whole' or 'completion' (Corey, 2013:196). This concept can be regarded as the most important concept of the Gestalt theory (Blom, 2006:22). All of nature can be seen as unified but the whole is however different from the sum of its parts. This means that a person is regarded as a whole and thus one aspects of the self is not superior to another (Corey, 2013:19). Perls makes the statement (in Thompson & Rudolph, 2000:164) that the person should be seen as a total organism.

Gestalt attends to the whole individual including his thoughts, body, memories, emotions, behaviour and dreams (Corey, 2013:196). Aronstam (in Blom, 2006:22) mentions that although the individual functions as a whole, it cannot function without the environment. The environment is needed to satisfy his emotional or physical needs. The psyche and the body are two different parts; although one can distinguish between different parts of the body and the psyche, these components can never be seen as separate (Blom, 2006:22). If an individual therefore experiences certain emotions, it will influence other components, for example different parts of the body (Blom, 2006:23).

Some people have learnt to separate their body from their psyche, which may cause such a person to be fragmented. The Gestalt theory attends to this by helping individuals to learn how to reintegrate their bodies and psyche in order for them to function as an integrated entity (Blom, 2006:23).

In this study the researcher will not just focus on certain parts of the body and psyche, but the individual will be regarded holistically. Play techniques will enable the researcher to focus on the older person's body, emotions, thoughts and behaviour in order for the researcher to apply this concept of holism and to view the participant as a holistic individual.

2.5.4.2 Contact

Contact can be defined, according to Yontef and Jacobs (in Henderson & Thompson, 2011:225) as “the interaction of the person with the environment... recognizing what is occurring *here and now*, moment to moment.” Blom (2006:29) states that “contact takes place as soon as the organism uses the environment to satisfy its needs.” Zinker (in Corey, 2013:199) makes the statement that for good contact to take place, the individual needs to be clearly aware, have sufficient energy and be able to express himself.

Healthy contact can be described as a person using his senses, emotions, awareness of his body and the ability to use his intellect by expressing ideas, thoughts and needs (Oaklander, 1999 in Blom, 2006:29). Corey (2013:199) mentions that healthy functioning will take place as soon as the individual is able to make contact and withdraw in order to integrate what was learned. By doing this, the individual’s needs are being met and growth takes place.

If contact takes place, it is necessary for boundaries to be set. Boundaries are important as they provide an opportunity for the individual to learn. If boundaries are rigid or inflexible, no growth would take place (Blom, 2006:30). This is known as isolation. Confluence is the opposite of isolation and takes place when an individual does not have clear contact boundaries, thus the individual will be affected by all contact and/or influences from the environment. If this takes place it is known as a contact boundary disturbance (Blom, 2006:30). This term can be described in the following manner:

2.5.4.2.1 Contact boundary disturbances

Resistance is developed as a means of coping with life situations; resistance can be positive as well as problematic, and many contemporary Gestalt therapists refer to these kinds of resistance as ‘contact boundary phenomena’ (Corey, 2013:199).

Polster and Polster (in Corey, 2013:199) state that there are five different kinds of contact boundary disturbances, namely: introjection, projection, retroflexion, deflection and confluence. The researcher will briefly discuss these specific disturbances below.

Introjection

Introjection is described by Corey (2013:199) as the “tendency to uncritically accept others’ beliefs and standards without assimilating them to make them congruent with who we are.” Fall et al. (2010:210) mention that individuals are so open to the environment that they would take in both nutritious and toxic materials. Individuals will sacrifice their own beliefs and opinions and accept the point of views of others without questioning their credibility. This, according to Blom (2006:32), may include ideas, beliefs, thoughts, attitudes and behaviours. Yontef and Simkin (in Blom, 2006:32) state that this may cause individuals to develop a rigid personality which could interfere with them being able to self-regulate and may lead to the development of unfinished business.

Assimilation is the opposite of introjection, which indicates that the individual is able to take in information, deconstruct the information and retain that which is applicable to them; and if not applicable, discard the information (Blom, 2006:32).

Projection

Projection can be described as “the tendency to hold the environment responsible for that which happens in the self” (Aronstam, 1989 in Blom, 2006:33). Corey (2013:199) mentions that projection can be described as aspects of oneself that is disowned by assigning these to the environment. Those attributes of a personality that are inconsistent with a person’s self-image, is assigned to others, by blaming them for the problems experienced. An individual would avoid taking responsibility for the person he is, as he sees qualities in other people that he refuses to release in himself; this may cause the individual to remain powerless to initiate change (Corey,

2013:199). This suggests that individuals cannot accept responsibility for their own emotions or behaviour, but tend to hold others around them responsible.

Blom (2006:34) states that projections can also be used positively or used in a constructive way. In creative work (clay, sand tray and drawing) parts of the self can be projected onto the object and/or technique being used. Gestalt therapy helps individuals to accept those parts of the self, which they are projecting onto others, thus enhancing their awareness of their self-identity and helping them to connect with the environment in a self-nurturing way (Blom, 2006:34).

Retroflection

Retroflection means that “a person does to oneself what one would really like to do to the environment; one turns self-enhancing impulses back on oneself” (Fall et al., 2010:212). People relying on retroflection would take action as a result of experiencing fear, guilt, embarrassment or resentment (Corey, 2013:200). Blom (2006:36), Fall et al. (2010:212), as well as Corey (2013:200) state that the most common emotion being retroflected, is anger. Since an individual’s childhood he is taught not to express anger, as it may be inappropriate at times, thus causing the person to retroflect the emotions inwardly. The above-mentioned authors state that this tendency may manifest in psychosomatic symptoms, such as headaches, stomachaches, asthma or depression. Retroflection, according to Blom (2006:36) may at times be to an individual’s advantage, such as responding in an appropriate manner; that is according to the social norms set by society. She however states that the individual needs to be aware of this. Corey (2013:200) clearly mentions that the individual is typically not aware of these maladaptive styles of functioning. Gestalt therapy helps an individual to discover self-regulatory systems that will enable him to deal with maladaptive functioning realistically.

Deflection

Deflection can be described as “avoiding direct contact with other people – in other words, reducing awareness with the environment, for instance avoiding eye contact during a conversation or changing the subject” (Blom, 2006:36). Some individuals will attempt to diffuse or defuse contact through certain behaviours, for example by using humour, abstract generalisation and questioning rather than making use of statements (Corey, 2013:200). This is used as a manner of coping with painful experiences through possible anger outbursts, fantasising or daydreaming. Individuals experiencing deflection as a contact boundary disturbance are often vulnerable and responsive to their emotions and cannot control them, which may present in unsuitable behaviour (Blom, 2006:37).

Confluence

Confluence is known to occur when there are no boundaries between the individual and the environment (Blom, 2006:34). This suggests that the individual assumes that other individuals experience the same feelings and thoughts as they do (Corey, 2013:200). This contact boundary disturbance is found among individuals who experience a need to be accepted and to be liked. Individuals who experience confluence “do not have boundaries that separate the “I do” from the “not I” – in other words the self from the environment” (Blom, 2006:34). Oaklander (in Blom, 2006:35) mentions that children act as pleasers and thus would do anything that is expected of them and often do not have a strong sense of self. They are out of touch with their needs and preferences and they over-identify with others (Fall et al., 2010:211).

Confluence can be used in a positive manner when there is natural and healthy contact between the individual and other people (Blom, 2006:35). Blom (2006:30) makes the statement that healthy functioning will take place if the individual is able to distinguish between aspects that belong to him and aspects which are foreign. They need to be able to make relevant contact and withdraw from the environment in order to do effective organismic self-regulation and also in order for them to complete the Gestalt in their foreground.

2.5.4.3 Awareness

Awareness can be defined as a “full use of all the senses, touching, hearing, seeing, tasting and smelling” (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:224). Self-regulation may and cannot take place if an individual is not aware of his inner self and the environment.

People that are aware of their needs and environment easily know when problems or conflicts can be resolved or not. A person who is aware can function as a healthy person. His focus is on one need (the figure) and he is able to move other needs into the background. When a specific need is met, the Gestalt is complete. This specific need will move into the background as a new need (figure) arises. If this action, as explained above, functions smoothly, the person may be seen or is characterised as a healthy person. Henderson and Thompson (2011:225) mention that for persons to be able to satisfy their needs, close the Gestalt, it is essential to complete their needs and move on to another need. They must be able to manipulate their environment and themselves to be able to complete the need. Direct experience and a focus on the here and now are therefore essential.

2.5.4.3.1 Here and now

Polster and Polster (in Corey, 2013:197) came up with a thesis suggesting that “power is in the present”. The researcher concurs that often individuals would rather talk about the past and what should and could have been, rather than focusing on the present and what can be done. Corey (2013:197) mentions that “as clients direct their energy toward what was or what might have been or live in a fantasy in terms of the future, the power of the present diminishes.” Individuals may at times talk about their feelings as if they are not experiencing these feelings at present. Gestalt therapy aims to empower individuals to become aware of their present experiences and feelings.

Gestalt therapy does recognise that some feelings and memories of the past will emerge, due to a lack of closure. If it influences the individual's ability to focus on the present, past experiences can be dealt with by bringing these feelings into the present (Corey, 2013:198).

Corey (2013:199) mentions that some therapists focus only on interruptions, disturbances and resistance to contact, which often end up preventing the individual from experiencing the present in full. When resistance functions in a chronic way, it often contributes to dysfunctional behaviour. Resistance is adopted typically from our awareness.

2.5.4.4 Organismic self-regulation

The figure formation process is interconnected with self-regulation as a concept. This means that the equilibrium is disturbed by the emergence of a need, sensation or interest (Corey, 2013:197). Blom (2006:23) states that new needs will arise continuously; this will cause some discomfort, until the individual finds a way to satisfy his needs, thus causing him to grow. After discomfort is experienced and the need is met, equilibrium or balance is restored. The need as mentioned above may be physical, emotional, social, spiritual or intellectual (Blom, 2006:24).

2.5.4.4.1 Figure formation

The figure formation process is described by Corey (2013:197) as “the process how individuals organize experiences from moment to moment.” Some aspects of the environment may emerge from the background into the foreground, thus the individual's dominant need at the moment will influence the process (Frew, 1997 in Corey, 2013:197).

2.5.4.4.2 Unfinished business

Schoeman (1996:37) explains unfinished business as “unexpressed feelings or concerns and unsatisfied needs.” Corey (2013:198) agrees with Schoeman, but adds the following to his description of unfinished business: “when figures emerge from the background, but are not completed and resolved, individuals are left with unfinished business, which can be manifested in unexpressed feelings such as resentment, rage, hatred, pain, anxiety, grief, guilt, and abandonment.”

If emotions are not dealt with, these feelings will linger in the background and the individual will carry these feelings into the present; this will affect making contact with themselves and others (Corey, 2013:198). The effects of unfinished business may result in some blockage within their bodies such as feelings of hate and other emotions.

2.5.4.5 Polarities

Gestalt theory indicates that the personality consists of polarities (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996 in Blom, 2006:39). Yontef (in Blom, 2006:39) describes polarities as “parts that are opposites that complement or explicate each other.” Henderson and Thompson (2011:226) state that people tend to flounder between “existing dichotomies in their lives such as biological-cultural, personal-social, think-feeling and unconscious-conscious.”

Organismic self-regulation can lead to the integration of these polarities and if this does not happen it may cause fragmentation (Yontef, 1993 in Blom, 2006:40). The aim of Gestalt therapy is to integrate polarities in order for the person to function optimally and have a well-integrated personality.

2.5.4.6 Fragmentation

Fragmentation may be explained as the way in which people tend to discover or deny a need (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:226). The person may not be able to express aggression, as he experiences the inability to know what he needs. This is known as fragmenting one's life. Similarly Perls (in Blom, 2006:22) mentions that we have learnt how to separate our bodies from our psyche – this means to live as a fragmented person. Blom (2006:24) makes the statement that if a person's need is not met, it often leads to fragmentation and an incomplete gestalt. This may cause contact boundary disturbances, which will affect the individual's natural process of organismic self-regulation (Blom, 2006:31). It is important for individuals to identify the fragmenting of their lives in order for them to be able to function optimally.

2.5.4.7 Personality structure

Perls (in Blom, 2006:42) mentions that the structure of the personality consists of five layers. These layers indicate how people fragment their lives and as a result, are unable to achieve success. These layers, which can be regarded as steps, can be considered as a manner to improve the Gestalt way of life (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:230). The layers of the personality are distinguished as the synthetic/phony layer, the phobic layer, the impasse layer, the implosive layer and the explosive layer. These layers of neurosis will be expanded on in the following section.

2.5.4.7.1 Layers of neurosis

Henderson and Thompson (2011:230) describe the layers of the personality as the five layers of neurosis. These layers can be described in the following manner:

- *The phony layer.* This layer represents people trapped in trying to be what they are not. This layer is characterised by many conflicts that are never resolved. People need to find integration to complete polarities.
- *The phobic layer.* As people become aware of their phony games, they become aware of their fears that maintain the games they play. This

experience is often frightening for individuals and may cause them to fall back on the phony layer.

- *The impasse layer.* This is the layer that people reach when they shed the environmental support of their games and find that they are not aware of a better way to cope with their fears and dislikes. People would then move into external support. People often become stuck here and refuse to move on, as they are afraid of change and would rather bear a life of limited awareness.
- *The implosive layer.* People become aware of how they limit themselves, and they begin to experiment with new behaviours within the counselling setting. The exploration of new behaviour may be scary and awkward at times as they learn to discard their old ways.
- *The explosive layer.* If experiments with new behaviours are successful outside of the counselling setting, people can reach the explosive layer, where they find much unused energy that had been tied up in maintaining a phony existence.

Perls believed that the client's body would be a better indicator of the truth than the client's words and that awareness of hidden material could be facilitated by acting out feelings (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:230).

Gestalt therapists emphasise direct experiences. They focus on achieving awareness in the here and now to block the client in any attempt to break out of this awareness. Gestalt is concerned about the total existence and integration of the client, not about symptoms and analysis. Incomplete gestalts are referred to as "unfinished" situations. Perls was of the opinion that the aim of therapy is to help clients to help themselves grow, to mature and take charge of their lives and to become responsible for their lives (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:230). Henderson and Thompson (2011:230) add to this by saying that Gestalt interventions "are breakthrough mechanisms that help clients reframe their problems into manageable projects, resolve decision-making conflicts, and find a reasonable balance between taking too much or too little responsibility in their lives."

The ultimate measure of success in Gestalt therapy is the extent to which clients grow in awareness, take responsibility for their actions, and move from environmental support to self-support (Thompson & Rudolph, 2000:167).

The researcher will make use of the Gestalt principles as a theoretical approach when working with older persons. As mentioned above, the researcher aims to explore the experiences of older persons when communicating by means of creative Gestalt play techniques. Gestalt play techniques will be described in the following section.

2.6 THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CREATIVE GESTALT PLAY TECHNIQUES

McMahon (in Blom, 2006:133) states that the aim of working with an individual's drawing (clay work, sand tray work) is not to interpret the creative work, but rather to explore the art work in terms of the meaning it has for the individual. In the text below the reader will first be introduced to different creative Gestalt play techniques and the advantages thereof. Furthermore, each technique implemented in this research will be discussed in order to clarify the specific technique. Lastly, the researcher will explain how these techniques will be implemented by making use of Oaklander's working model (Oaklander, 2007:5; Blom, 2006:133).

2.6.1 Creative Gestalt play techniques

Davis and Pereira (2014:262) make the statement that "play, in itself, is inherently creative". Van der Merwe (1996:138-139) points out that creative play has certain advantages. These advantages are described as follows:

- Drawing can be relaxing and create a therapeutic atmosphere;
- Creative play can promote communication;
- Creative play is helpful in gaining information on the subconscious level;

- Creative play may be used for assessment;
- Creative play may provide an opportunity for expression of feelings which may lead to personal growth and insight;
- Creative play may help an individual who is emotionally frozen or blocked to be able to share;
- If the individual is praised for being creative, it may improve his self-image and he may feel that he has achieved success.

Sand play (creative play) makes clients aware of their unconscious fantasies and allows them to symbolically communicate their stories (Sangganjanavanich & Magnuson, 2011:265). The creative process of play improves cognitive skills as it allows for decision-making opportunities, without the pressure of judgement (Davis & Pereira, 2014:267). Creative play techniques have certain advantages, as stated above. These techniques will be used to facilitate communication and to explore what an older person experiences, when being exposed to these techniques. Blom (2006:138) mentions that creative play techniques assist a person to project, own and directly express emotions during the stage of emotional expression. There are certain steps necessary for emotional expression and projection to take place during the use of projection techniques. These steps are described by Oaklander, 1999 (in Blom, 2006:129):

- The person must be willing to take part in the technique, such as drawing and sand tray;
- The person should share information on the projection with respect to how it felt when understanding the activity;
- The person should become part of the projection, for example the picture, in order to look at the situation from the perspective of the object;
- The story is told when a person can identify with the object in the projection and dialogues will then be carried out between objects;
- It is important to note patterns, themes, polarities and places of resistance throughout.

It is important for the person to first own their projection on a symbolic level (in the story, picture they drew), before they can move to the personal significance thereof (Blom, 2006:130). During this study the researcher made use of three play techniques, namely drawing, clay work and sand tray. These play techniques will be discussed in-depth.

2.6.1.1 Drawing

Allan (in Van der Merwe, 1996:138) mentions that three approaches can be used when drawing as a technique is applied, namely the directive, non-directive and partly directive approaches. A non-directive approach implies that an individual may draw anything he would like to draw, thus making him feel comfortable. A direct approach can be explained by giving the individual more direct instruction, for example, asking him to draw a specific picture or feeling. A partly directive approach can also be used, for example when an individual prefers to draw a specific object. Drawing can be used to build a relationship. The individual can be asked to draw a specific picture if he does not know what to draw, such as a specific feeling, a dream, a self-portrait or an important event.

Geldard and Geldard (2008:197) state that this technique provides the individual with the opportunity to make strong statements in acceptable forms, such as in the case of aggressive behaviour. By providing individuals with a medium to express their emotions, they are prevented from acting out as the anger or socially unaccepted behaviour can be expressed in a contained environment (Geldard & Geldard, 2008:196). Blom (2006:130) agrees with this statement and adds that it may provide coping strategies to the individual, which could then lead to positive behaviour. Blom (2006:130), as well as Geldard and Geldard (2008:196) indicate that drawing as a technique can facilitate communication as an individual who is not able to communicate may use the symbolic language of drawing to express his needs regarding the past, present and future.

Geldard and Geldard (2008:200) state that when using drawing as a technique the goals may include enabling the individual to:

- tell his story;
- express repressed or intense emotional feelings; and
- gain a sense of mastery over events which he has experienced or are experiencing.

Drawing is known as a technique to improve an individual's self-awareness and to come into contact with his emotions (Blom, 2006:130). Individuals may experience mastery which in return improves their sense of self and which may teach them new coping strategies for the future. Clay work as a creative play technique will be discussed next.

2.6.1.2 Clay work

Cass (in Van der Merwe, 1996:146) mentions that clay "is a primitive play material in the same category as water, soil, mud and sand." Oaklander (2007:67) makes the statement that clay's "flexibility and malleability suits it to a variety of needs." Clay as a medium has many functions during an interview or therapy session. Blom (2006:140) mentions that clay can be used as a medium for sensory contact-making and as a projection technique during the phase of emotional expression. This being said, it is important to note that some older persons with arthritis may find it difficult to work with clay; thus the researcher made sure that the clay was soft and malleable. Clay provides opportunities for the individual to experience mastery as well as a few more advantages, according to Oaklander (2007:67) and Blom (2006:140):

- Individuals may change the form of the clay as they wish, as it is soft and flexible;
- Clay does not have rules as it can be bent and shaped, which will provide a sense of mastery;

- Clay can be used as a form of releasing aggression, by punching and pounding it;
- Clay provides a bridge for verbal expression which may stimulate a quiet individual to share more or may also improve poor verbal skills.

Geldard and Geldard (2008:188) state that clay enables a person to be creative and by being creative, emotions within the individual may emerge that could be expressed. Blom (2006:140) concurs and also mentions that individuals can control their emotions by owning these emotions and by being able to direct their aggression toward the object and/or the clay.

Geldard and Geldard (2008:190) propose the following goals when working with clay. According to them working with clay provides the opportunity for the individual to:

- share while making a shape that symbolises a person;
- provide outward expression to internal processes; and
- project feelings as the person can recognise and own his inner feelings associated with his physical expression.

Clay as a medium is therefore flexible and provides opportunities to enhance self-awareness, mastery and an improved sense of self. Sand tray as a creative play technique will subsequently be discussed.

2.6.1.3 Sand tray

Sand tray work as a technique can be described as an “opportunity to use symbols, within a defined space, to tell their story” (Geldard & Geldard, 2008:182). Miller and Boe (in Blom, 2006:134) define sand tray as a form of non-directive projective play, where certain figures (representing someone or something) are placed in wet or dry sand.

Sand tray, according to Allen and Berry (in Blom, 2006:135) has a unique therapeutic value and it can be described as follows:

- Sand tray provides sensory stimulation;
- Boundaries are set by the size of the sand tray;
- Miniature toys and figurines are provided; own material need therefore not be created;
- Sand play provides the opportunity to take total control of actions as figures placed in the sand tray can be positioned and moved around. A specific situation can therefore be depicted;
- Sand tray encourages an individual to have verbal discussions where poor verbal skills are present and may also encourage non-verbal communication where the individual has defence mechanisms;
- Trauma can be externalised as it provides an opportunity to handle the trauma, by developing a sense of control;
- Sand tray promotes the expression of emotions such as aggression and anxiety, which individuals may often feel are difficult to come in contact with.

Drawing and clay work have certain advantages, as indicated above. Sand tray as a medium also has various advantages such as making the individual aware of 'unfinished business'. This activity provides control and it offers boundaries which may lead to promoting the sense of self (Blom, 2004:136). Sand tray, according to Geldard and Geldard (2008:182) provides the person with an opportunity to use symbols to tell his story, recreate certain images, events or situations from the past or present and explore opportunities for the future. Sand play "does not completely depend on verbal expression, but does promote communication and shared meaning through the storylines developed in the play" (Lu, Petersen, Lacroix & Rousseau, 2010:57). Clients achieve clarity regarding their history, current situations and hopes for the future through constructing a reality, important to them visually in the sand (Sangganjanavanich & Magnuson, 2011:265).

Oaklander is considered the founder of Gestalt play therapy. The manner in which her working model can be used during the application of certain play techniques, will be discussed in the following section (Blom, 2006:17). In this research, Oaklander's working model was applied with regards to communication by means of the three creative play techniques.

2.6.2 Oaklander's working model

Drawing, clay work and sand tray work are examples of creative play techniques. Creative play is often implemented as projection techniques. Oaklander's therapeutic steps can be used for any projection during Gestalt play therapy (Blom, 2006:129, 134). Oaklander's 'working model', which comprises 14 steps can therefore be utilised to explore creative play. These steps will subsequently be discussed (Oaklander, 2007:53; Blom, 2006:133).

- Step 1: Motivate the individual to share his experiences while implementing the specific technique, as well as the manner in which the task is tackled. How the task is approached and completed is also focussed on, thus looking at the individual's process. Oaklander regards this as the sharing of the self.
- Step 2: The individual will be asked to share the drawing or picture by describing it in his own way. This is seen by Oaklander as further sharing of the self. The individual is motivated to explain the picture as intended by the individual.
- Step 3: Motivate the individual to explain the various parts of the drawing or picture in detail, by describing shapes, colours and objects. Self-discovery is promoted on a deeper level as the individual is asked to elaborate on the specific aspects of the picture. While parts are explored, the meaning thereof is clarified, making it more obvious for the researcher and the individual.
- Step 4: Request that the drawing or picture be described as if the individual is the picture, by using words, such as: "I am this picture; I have red lines all over me."

- Step 5: Choose specific parts of the picture with which the individual can identify, for example: “Be the blue square and describe yourself further – what you look like, what your function is, and more.”
- Step 6: Ask questions that will help the process, namely: “What are you doing?” or “Who is helping you?”; “Who are you closest to?” Questions like these will originate from an ability to “get into” the projection together with the individual. Such questions could promote many possible ways to exist, function and relate.
- Step 7: Focus the individual’s attention on sharpening his perception in that a certain part of the picture is highlighted and overemphasised by asking, for instance: “Where are you going now?” or “What is she going to do next?” Encourage the individual to go as far as he can go with a specific part, especially if there is some energy or excitement within you or the individual or if there is a lack of energy or excitement. If the individual seems uncertain, suggestions could be proposed, which could then be verified.
- Step 8: Request that a dialogue takes place between different parts of the picture, such as between the dog and the house.
- Step 9: Encourage the individual to pay attention to colours. Enquire about the colours used when making the pictures or for objects and ask questions, for example: “What do bright colours mean to you? What do dark colours mean to you?” Make statements like “this looks darker than these” to encourage expression or “it looks as if you pressed hard on this.” The individual must be as aware as he can of what he did, even if he is not willing to talk about it.
- Step 10: Pay attention to tone of voice, posture, facial expressions, breathing and silences. Silence could possibly mean thinking, remembering, fear or awareness of something. These clues can be used to promote flow when working, for example observing a person’s facial expression and verbalising it to him could clarify feelings that the person may experience.
- Step 11: Ask or help the individual to own his drawing or picture or parts of his picture. Ask questions such as: “Have you ever felt this way? Does this fit in with your life?” Questions like these should be phrased carefully and gently.

- Step 12: Leave the drawing at this point and pay attention to unfinished business that comes to the foreground from some of these projections. Sometimes “unfinished business” is precipitated directly by the question “Does this match your life?”. Sometimes the individual will become quiet and a specific look will cross his face. You might ask, “What just happened?” and the individual may start to explore or explain something in his life now or in the past that relates to his present life situation, but sometimes he may just reply “Nothing.” Explore further in terms of the questions asked in step 11.
- Step 13: Seek possibly omitted parts in the picture and pay attention to these. Pay attention to unfinished business that could possibly surface.
- Step 14: You can focus on what is in the picture and also on what is not, thus the opposite. It is important to first work with what is comfortable for the person, before proceeding to difficult or uncomfortable places or subjects. Find possible solutions to problems and stay with the figure-foreground (Oaklander, 2007:53; Blom, 2006:133).

Blom (2006:134) mentions that when these techniques are applied, the person is first guided to own his projection on a symbolic level. The person will then be guided to proceed to a level of reality, as he tries to find similarities to his own life. It is very important not to make interpretations, but rather verify possible hypotheses with the older person, therefore linking them to his own life. This will promote awareness and integration. The opportunity to project emotions serves as catharsis and may contribute to the completion of unfinished business.

2.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter the older population and the challenges they may experience due to their life stage were described. It is clear that with old age certain daily tasks may become a challenge. Applying creative Gestalt play techniques may improve communication and psychological challenges may decrease.

The Gestalt theory and play techniques, as a way of communicating with older persons, were discussed. With this in mind, it is necessary to subsequently discuss how the researcher implemented the above-mentioned techniques by using the Gestalt theory as foundation, and to report on the research methods that guided the study. Furthermore, the next chapter will focus on the research findings and provide an interpretation thereof.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the research findings regarding the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques, as well as the interpretation thereof, will be discussed. The research methodology will also be explained comprehensively in this chapter.

This chapter will focus on the following research objective of this study: To explore and describe both the positive and negative experiences of older persons communicating through Gestalt play techniques, specifically projection by means of clay, sand tray and drawing.

Chapter 3 is presented in two sections. Section A will contain the research methodology, while Section B will outline the research findings and provide an interpretation thereof.

SECTION A: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section the research approach will be discussed, as well as the type of research used during this study. The research design that was used and the research methods, which include the population and sampling method used, will also be outlined. The researcher will also explain how the data collection took place and how the researcher analysed the data.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

This study adopted a qualitative approach to answer the research question, namely “*What are the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques?*” In-depth interviews were conducted with participating older persons to explore and describe their experiences of communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques. The research purpose was of an exploratory nature since the researcher aimed to gain insight into an individual’s (older person’s) experience of communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques. Furthermore, a lack of basic information about the utilisation of creative Gestalt play techniques with older persons exists and thus warranted an exploratory study since this is a relatively new area of interest (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95).

The researcher worked from constructionism as a research paradigm, as she aimed to answer the research question most truthfully (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:310). Additionally, constructionism was chosen since the research participants were actively involved in the research process. The research ontology of this study is that the reality of the participants is taken as a given, because they have experienced the communication through creative Gestalt play techniques personally and they gave meaning to their own experiences.

3.2.1 Type of research

Applied research was most suitable for this research study as the findings could be used to propose practical guidelines to social workers for working and communicating with older persons through creative Gestalt play techniques. This type of research addresses specific concerns and offers solutions to address social issues (Neuman, 2006:27). In this study the researcher considered *what* an older person experienced when communicating by means of creative Gestalt play techniques, and *how* he or she experienced the communication.

3.2.2 Research design

The researcher employed a case study as a qualitative research design. More specifically, the collective case study was utilised. The researcher obtained in-depth information regarding the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320).

More specifically, the collective case study was used to understand the population being studied. In this study, the researcher explored a certain number of cases, which facilitated the comparison. Thus the different experiences participants had when communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques were compared and analysed for germane themes.

3.2.3 Research methods

In the section that follows, the researcher will focus on the research methods, especially on the criteria the researcher used to recruit the participants. The researcher will also focus on data collection which entails the manner in which information was obtained from the participants and how the researcher analysed the data.

3.2.3.1 Study population and sampling

The population applicable to this research was all the older persons residing at a specific residential facility within the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. Patton (2002:244) mentions that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. The sample size depends on “what one needs to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be accomplished with available time and resources.” In this study, the researcher made use of non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, followed by volunteer sampling (Strydom & Delport, 2011:392,394). The researcher requested

the nurse overseeing all caretaking of the older persons residing at the specific residential facility to provide a list of individuals who comply with the inclusion criteria mentioned below. The participants had to:

- be willing to provide informed consent in writing;
- not have been diagnosed with Dementia or Alzheimer's;
- be physically capable of undertaking activities associated with creative Gestalt play techniques;
- be without severe arthritis, which impairs fine-motor operation;
- be able to communicate in English or Afrikaans; and
- be above the age of 60 in the case of women and above the age of 65 in the case of men.

Once the list with possible participants was ready, the nurse in the employment of the residential facility informed the older persons about the study, its goal and objectives. As such, potential participants were recruited through purposive sampling. Only the older persons who volunteered after recruitment (i.e., volunteer sampling) were included in the study. Since the data collection process was labour intensive, the researcher limited the number of participants to five, i.e. the first five older persons who volunteered their participation. Although five participants could be considered limited, it was deemed adequate for an exploratory study of this nature.

3.2.4 Data collection

Interviewing in qualitative research is the predominant mode of data collection (Greeff, 2011:342). The researcher made use of semi-structured, one-on-one interviewing, with an interview schedule² containing the questions that guided the interviews, in order to gain specific information regarding the participants' experiences of communicating through the creative Gestalt play techniques used during the sessions. The participants were exposed to three techniques, as indicated below (Creswell, 2013:161).

² Addendum A

- Session 1: Building of relationship and trust
- Session 2: Creative Gestalt play technique implementation: clay
- Session 3: Creative Gestalt play technique implementation: sand tray
- Session 4: Creative Gestalt play technique implementation: drawing
- Session 5: Conclusion and termination
- Session 6: Semi-structured interview with participants

During session two to four the researcher made use of Oaklander's 14 steps, which Oaklander (2007:53) refers to as her "working model" for facilitating projections (Oaklander, 2007:53-56). These steps guided the researcher to discuss and explore participants' drawing/sand tray/clay creation. The researcher did not interpret the participants' drawings, sand tray or clay work, but it was explored with the participants. Oaklander's 14 steps allowed the researcher to facilitate a discussion of the projection and link it with the reality of the participants' lives (Blom, 2006:34).

As mentioned, the researcher gathered research data by means of a semi-structured interview. The focus of this interview was on the participants' experiences of communicating by means of creative Gestalt play techniques.

3.2.5 Data analysis

Patton (2002:432) states that qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. This may indicate that the researcher reduced the "volume of raw information, sifting significance from trivia, identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal." Data were analysed according to Creswell's process for qualitative data analysis.

❖ Creswell's process for analysing qualitative data

The qualitative data were analysed as follows (Creswell, 2013:182-189):

Step 1: Organising the data

In the early stages of the data analysis process, researchers will typically organise their data. This may be by making use of computers as long as the data are easily accessible (Creswell, 2013:182). The researcher made use of an audio recording during the collection of the data. Once all the information was obtained from the participants, the researcher transcribed the interviews. The data were arranged systematically according to the questions asked during the semi-structured interviews.

Step 2: Reading and consideration of data

Creswell (2013:183) mentions that the researcher must first immerse him/herself in the data by viewing the data as a whole. The researcher should see the bigger picture before breaking the data down into parts. In this study, the researcher first scanned through all the databases, in other words, all the field notes from observations, interview transcriptions and audio recordings, to identify ideas. In this way, initial categories were identified.

Step 3: Describing, classifying and interpreting data into codes and themes

In this step, researchers build “detailed descriptions, develop themes or dimensions and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature” (Creswell, 2013:181). The analysis was conducted according to thematic analysis. The researcher first described what was observed during the interview, but in the context of the setting of the participant. Thereafter, data coding commenced, which entailed the identification of themes and subthemes (Neuman, 2011:49).

Step 4: Interpreting the data

Creswell (2013:187) mentions that “interpretation of data involves making sense of the data and abstracting beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of data.” In this study, data were interpreted according to hunches and insights, but also according to the theoretical framework adopted for the study. The researcher’s interpretations were also linked to previous research on creative Gestalt play techniques.

Step 5: Representing and visualising the data

This is the final stage of data analysis according to Creswell (2013:187). The researcher presented the data in written format supported by creative visual images, such as tables.

During a qualitative research study, the researcher needs to ensure that the data that were obtained and analysed are trustworthy (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:419).

3.3 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Lincoln and Guba (1985) (in Creswell, 2013:246) mention that trustworthiness can be established by using unique terms such as credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability and confirmation. Lietz, Langer and Furman (2006:441) mention that to ensure trustworthiness, the researcher must look at “utilized reflexivity, audit trail, triangulation by observer, peer debriefing, member checking and prolonged engagement in order to manage the threats to trustworthiness.” In this study, the researcher utilised the following strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data analysis process and reporting:

- **Reflexivity** – The researcher used reflexivity by involving a colleague to double-check the data obtained from the study. Using reflexive communication with another colleague can enhance the data analysis. The researcher was also aware of her own narrative and perspective around the theme and research topic and prevented these from influencing the data analysis process or the data reported on in this chapter.
- **Peer debriefing** – The researcher engaged in a dialogue with a Master of Social Work candidate in Gestalt play therapy about the data analysis. Since the candidate is familiar with the techniques, this minimised the potential effects of reactivity and bias (Lietz et al., 2006:441).

3.4 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was of importance when conducting this research. In qualitative research, pilot studies are usually informal. The researcher made use of a participant who did not form part of the study. The participant had the same characteristics as those in the main study and resided at the same residential facility. The main purpose of the pilot study was to determine whether the play techniques chosen by the researcher was suitable for the main study (Strydom & Delpont, 2011:394). The researcher also tested the interview schedule in order to correct poorly phrased questions and to determine whether relevant information could be obtained by means of the interview schedule. During the pilot study, the researcher established how much time would be involved and what the costs would amount to. The researcher realised after the implementation of the pilot study that the techniques should be implemented in a different order. The researcher adjusted the sequence of the techniques by implementing clay work first and drawing at a later stage. The researcher did not make any changes to the interview schedule.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The first important aspect of research and using participants is to protect them against emotional and physical harm. This fact is especially applicable to older

persons who are often more vulnerable and sensitive than their younger counterparts. Strydom (2011:114) confirms the above-mentioned statement and adds that the researcher has an ethical responsibility towards the “discipline of science and to be accurate and honest in the reporting of research.” An important step, according to Louw and Louw (2009:39), is to obtain permission for the research from the organisation’s ethics committee. The researcher obtained written permission from the residential facility where the research was conducted³. The study also received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria.⁴ The following ethical aspects were considered in this study:

- **No-harm:** The researcher may not use any procedures that could pose physical or emotional harm to the individual (Strydom, 2011:115). This was especially applicable when conducting this study as some of the creative Gestalt play techniques were physical in nature. Therefore, the participant’s age and physical health were considered. Creative Gestalt play techniques may also cause possible emotional harm, as play techniques may evoke “unfinished business.” However, the researcher succeeded to limit harm and it was therefore not necessary for any one of the participants to be referred for counselling once they were debriefed.
- **Informed consent:** The researcher should inform the participants of all aspects of the research. In this study, the participants were informed that they would attend five sessions during which play techniques would be applied, and upon completion, an interview would follow. The researcher formulated questions in a manner which the participants could comprehend (Strydom, 2011:117).

The researcher obtained written consent; however, the participant had the right to discontinue participation at any time. The researcher informed the

³ Addendum D

⁴ Addendum B

participants that information obtained from the interview would be used to enhance the utilisation of creative Gestalt play techniques with a view to enable social workers to communicate adequately with older persons. The researcher obtained permission from the participants to record the interview session.

In addition, a family member/legal representative of each older person had to co-sign the informed consent⁵ form as per requirement of the research site.

- **Violation of privacy/anonymity/confidentiality:** The researcher informed the participants about the manner in which confidentiality would be maintained (Louw & Louw, 2009:40). In this study, the researcher made it clear that participants' names would not be published in subsequent reports (Strydom, 2011:119). All information and forms/notes would be stored safely at the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years. In this research study, the participants were not ensured of anonymity, seeing that the researcher knew the participants; however their privacy and confidentiality were guaranteed.
- **Publication of findings:** The researcher made it clear to the individuals that the data gathered would be published in a mini-dissertation after completion of the study. However, under no circumstances would their names or the name of the residential facility be mentioned in this report (Strydom, 2011:126).
- **Voluntary participation:** The researcher made it clear in the informed consent letter that participation was voluntarily. If at any stage a participant no longer wished to take part in the study, participation could be terminated immediately (Strydom, 2011:116). However, no participant terminated their participation in the study.

⁵ Addendum C

- **Debriefing:** During the first session the participant was not debriefed as this session only focused on building a relationship. After session two, three and four the researcher made sure that, at the end of the session, ten minutes were devoted to the termination of that specific session. The participant's emotions regarding the specific session were dealt with and none of the participants were referred for counselling, as it was not requested. Throughout sessions two, three and four, the researcher prepared the participants for session five, which was the conclusion and termination session.

The research methodology was discussed in Section A. The researcher outlined the research approach used in this study, the type of research, research design, the research methods being used and the ethical considerations the researcher applied during the implementation of the creative Gestalt play techniques and the research process. In the next section, the research findings and the interpretation of the data will be discussed.

SECTION B: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The research findings will be divided into two different sections. In Section 1 the researcher will discuss the biographic profile of the participants and in Section 2, themes and subthemes will be substantiated with quotations from the participants' descriptions which will be controlled with literature.

3.6 SECTION 1: BIOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The researcher obtained the biographical details of the participants during the data collection interviews. There were five participants of whom four were females and one male.

Table 1: Biographic profile of the participants

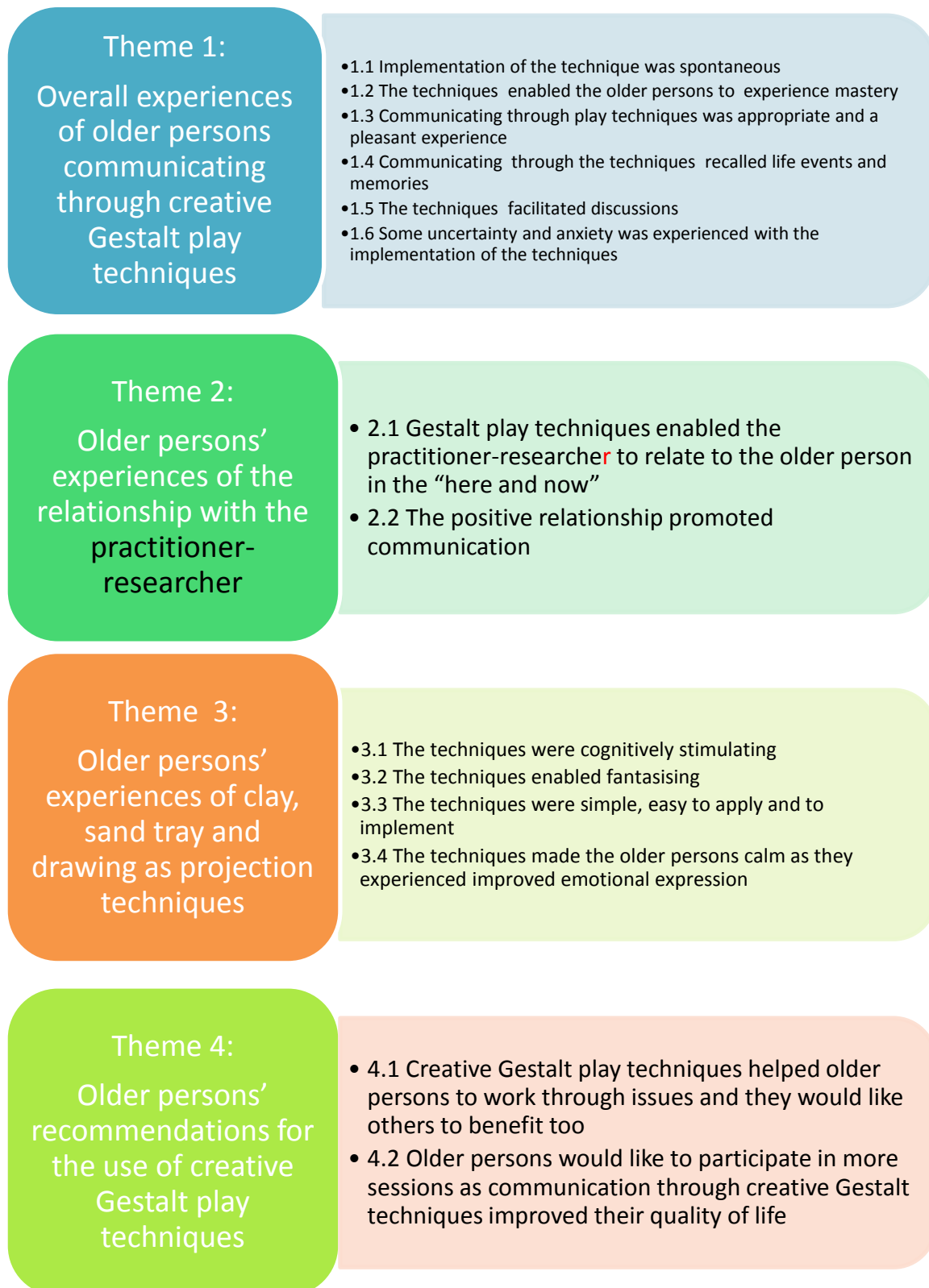
	Age	Gender	Race	Mother tongue	Marital status	Mobility	Occupation/qualification
Participant 1	83	Male	White	Afrikaans	Widower	Walks unassisted	Employed at a railway station
Participant 2	82	Female	White	Afrikaans	Widow	Wheelchair	Employed at a postal office
Participant 3	90	Female	White	Afrikaans	Widow	Walking stick	Teacher
Participant 4	97	Female	White	Afrikaans	Widow	Walking stick	Seamstress and employed at fabric shop
Participant 5	78	Female	White	Afrikaans	Widow	Walking stick	Employed at a local newspaper

As specified in Table 1, the average age of the participants was above the age of 80 years at the time of the research. Only one participant was male and the other four who participated were female. Afrikaans was the common language spoken by the participants. Most of the participants were able to walk by themselves although one participant made use of a wheelchair. All the participants' partners were deceased. All the participants were employed after completing their scholastic and/or tertiary education. Only one of the participants was not able to complete school, as the family did not have the finances at that stage.

3.7 SECTION 2: THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

This section will focus on the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques. The information obtained was categorised in four themes and subsequent subthemes, namely:

Figure 1: Graphical representation of Themes and Subthemes



Each of the abovementioned themes and subthemes will be discussed, with verbatim quotations from the interviews as well as controlled with the literature, and where possible, interpreted with the theoretical framework underpinning this study, i.e. Gestalt theory.

THEME 1: OVERALL EXPERIENCES OF OLDER PERSONS COMMUNICATING THROUGH CREATIVE GESTALT PLAY TECHNIQUES

The participants experienced the implementation of play techniques spontaneously; they experienced a sense of mastery, and communicating by means of the techniques seemed to be a pleasant experience. The play techniques also enabled them to recall life events. The play techniques facilitated discussion and, although the overall experience was positive, some participants became anxious while implementing the play techniques. This will be discussed in-depth in the subheadings below.

Subtheme 1.1: Implementation of the technique was spontaneous

All participants experienced that the implementation of play techniques occurred spontaneously and that they did not have to think about what they needed to create; their projection/creation occurred automatically. Blom (2006:130) confirms the findings of this study as she indicates that play techniques may encourage spontaneity. The participants expressed themselves as follows:

*“Ja, dit was maar net soos die een ding na die ander toe gelei het.” /
[“Yes, it was just as one thing leading to another.”]*

“Nee, dit was nie dat ek, jy weet as jy sommer net wil sit en teken of iets skryf dit het outomaties net gekom en ek het dit gedoen.” / [“Well, it was not that I, you know when you want to sit and draw or write something; it happened automatically and I did it.”]

“Nee, en toe het dit asof dit van self gekom het, maak so iets, maak bietjie iets meer snaaks - nie net ‘n ronde balletjie of ‘n dingetjie nie. . .” / [Well ... and then it come out of the blue, make something, make something funny - not just a small round ball or a little thing.”]

The researcher observed the participants implementing a technique, while interacting about their picture in a spontaneous manner (Geldard & Geldard, 2008:185). Siampani (2013:10) mentions that “[s]andplay leads to a spontaneous creative process and play where there is no right or wrong.” This statement correlates with the findings of the research as the participants experienced the implementation of the play techniques in a spontaneous manner. Oaklander (2007:169) mentions that “adolescents choose items from the shelves which appeal to them, without too much planning, or that they build their world as they see it and feel it.” The participants could do the sessions spontaneously without planning; each object during clay, sand tray and drawing were produced automatically; the older persons could create something that appealed to them. The Gestalt theory focuses on the persons’ direct experience, resulting in them being spontaneous during the session while their experiences are explored. The focus was on the here and now, thus promoting the participants’ awareness of the self in the present moment.

Subtheme 1.2: The techniques enabled the older persons to experience mastery

The interviews revealed that most of the participants experienced mastery after the implementation of the techniques. They felt satisfied with their picture and they felt they were able to do something that they had never done before. Oaklander (2007:67) agrees with this when stating that the technique can lead to “a sense of control and mastery.” The following expressions were made by the participants:

“Wel eintlik het ek ‘n tevrede gevoel gehad dat ek nou hier iets uit dit kon skep. . .” / [“Well I actually felt satisfied that I could now create something from this.”]

“. . . ek het meer ‘n tevredenheid gehad dat ek iets kon gemaak het.” / [I felt satisfied that I was able to make something.]

“Nee, dit was vir my regtigwaar opwindend om die wurm te maak en ek het nooit in my lewe daaraan gedink nie, maar in elk geval dat hy so na my oog, het hy vir my so na wonderwerklike gelyk. Dat ek ‘n wurm kon maak en dat hy na een lyk.” / [Well it really was very exciting for me to make the worm and I would never in my life thought of that, but to me he looked

like a miracle. That I made a worm and that he actually resembles one.”]

“Hoe sal ek nou sê . . . ek het nou ook ietsie bereik wat ek nog nooit probeer het om te maak nie en dat ek nou die kans kry om te wys dat ek ook ietsie kan maak van die klei en dis hoekom ek hom heeltyd gebrei het om te kyk lyk hy vir jou na ‘n wurm of nie.” / [“How can I put it . . . I have now also accomplished something that I never tried making and that I got the chance to show that I can also make something out of clay. That is why I was kneading the clay all the time to see if it was resembling a worm or not.”]

“Ja, dit het, nee my ervaring was toe hene mos maar ek kan nog iets doen . . . sin van tevredenheid.” / [“Yes, it did, well my experience was but I can still do something ... a feeling of satisfaction.”]

Geldard and Geldard (2008:191) state that play techniques enable a person to “experience success and satisfaction in completing a creative task.” Sadovoy et al. (in O’Leary, et al., 2003:1) mention that psychotherapy with older persons restored their sense of mastery. Data analysis revealed that the participants experienced satisfaction with the results seeing that they were able to implement the play techniques. If these findings are considered from a Gestalt perspective, it is clear that the participants experienced a sense of mastery. Blom (2007:130,141) confirms that the implementation of play techniques may lead to an experience of mastery. The Gestalt theory indicates that the experience of mastery enhances a sense of self and contributes to an experience of a positive self-concept (Blom, 2006:107). It is important for an older person to have a good self-concept as in later life older persons have a more realistic view of themselves. Older persons become content with who they are, idealistic dreams are relinquished; they become accepting of their past and satisfied with who they are (Louw & Louw, 2009:170). As mentioned above, the participants felt that they could do things they had never done before and that contributed to them experiencing feelings of satisfaction and pride.

Subtheme 1.3: Communicating through play techniques was appropriate and a pleasant experience

The participants indicated that they experienced the sessions as pleasant and that the manner of communication was appropriate. The participants expressed themselves as follows:

“Ja-nee, ek moet vir jou sê die onderhoude was vir my aangenaam gewees, ek het regtig van die onderhoude gehou en was nie gespanne gewees nie.” / [“Yes, I have to tell you the interviews were very pleasant, I really enjoyed the interviews and I was not tense.”]

“Dit was vir my baie interessant gewees . . . eerlikwaar ek het dit baie geniet.” / [“I found it very interesting; honestly I enjoyed it a lot.”]

“Dit was aangenaam gewees.” / [“It was very pleasant.”]

“Dit was dit was vir my vreeslik lekker. Jy kan nie dink hoe dit met my gereageer het nie.” / [“It was, it was very enjoyable. You can’t think how it reacted with me.”]

Overall the participants experienced communicating through the use of an activity rather than just talking to the researcher, positively. They felt that this manner of communication was appropriate and they enjoyed this different way of communicating. The participants were willing to participate in mastering specific techniques. As mentioned by Oaklander, mastering a technique is necessary during the projection (Oaklander in Blom, 2006:129). Lu et al. (2010:62) used sand tray with children diagnosed with autism and they concluded that interaction with the researcher and teachers were enjoyable as the children succeeded in communicating their stories to fellow learners. Geldard and Geldard (2008:170) mention that “the visual picture then enables the person to tell their story and thus to practise communication skills.” The visual picture therefore also enhanced the ability of participants to communicate, even when applied to older persons.

Subtheme 1.4: Communicating through the techniques recalled life events and memories

The participants specified that most of them experienced that the techniques brought back memories from their childhood, as well as memories that they did not talk about every day. Sandplay as a technique can bring back childhood memories (Siampani, 2013:56). Geldard and Geldard (2008:182) mention that play techniques can explore specific past, present and future events. Butler (1963, in Sigelman & Rider, 2006:313) suggests that older persons engage in a process called “life review” in which they reflect on unresolved conflicts of the past in order for them to find new meaning in life. The following excerpts from the interviews testify to this finding:

“Ja, weet jy dit het vir my so teruggevoer na jou jonger jare en jy kon jou beleef in daai klei en goed en dit het jou herinneringe gebring het wat mens nie aldag oor praat en wat eintlik al vergete was.” / [“Yes, you know it took me back to my younger days as I could relive through the clay and it brought back memories that you don’t talk about every day and that were actually forgotten.”]

“Dit het my laat teruggedink aan my en die kinders. Die kleinkinders wat by my kom kuier het en hoe ek [by] hulle reaksie uitgelok het op sekere dinge wat hulle moes doen.” / [“It made me think back about the children and I. The grandchildren who visited me and how I would let them to perform certain tasks to see their reaction.”]

“Ja baie herinneringe. Oor die dinge wat jy gehoor het en wat jy gesien het, soms van hulle het jy beleef.” / [Yes, many memories. About the things you heard and that you saw and some of them you experienced.”]

Geldard and Geldard (2008:170) state that certain techniques, like the imaginary journey, may allow individuals to get in touch with memories, which may help them to relate easier to their perception regarding events in their lives. It encourages the participants to communicate through role-play or fantasy and it helps to develop a visual picture of events that they had experienced and to place these events in a chronological order. What we deal with in therapy may relate to childhood memories, experiences or introjections and we may still be doing things that we did in our childhood as a way of surviving (Oaklander, 2007:299). Corey

(2013:198) states that according to the Gestalt theory, if the past makes regular appearances in the present, usually because the person had not completed a task in their past, it has such an effect on the person's present attitude and behaviour, that it can be dealt with by bringing it into the present as much as possible. The utilisation of play techniques and the memories the techniques brought back, were positive experiences, which enabled the participants to disclose.

Subtheme 1.5: The techniques facilitated discussions

The findings underscore that the creative Gestalt play techniques enabled the participants to share their experiences and it enabled the discussions to flow easily. Blom (2006:135) states that play techniques can encourage verbal discussion. The participants expressed themselves as follows:

“Die eintlike speelgoed wat ek gesien het, het my laat dink wat ek kan doen.” / [“The toys what I saw, allowed me to think about what I can do.”]

“Kyk, mens praat nie altyd met almal oor dinge van die verlede nie, maar as mens dit hier so uitpak dan kom dit spontaan so terug in jou en jy onthou die belewenisse wat jy gehad het en die dinge wat jy gesien het. Dit was baie interessant.” / [“Look, you don't always talk to everyone about things from your past, but if you unpack it here, it comes back spontaneously and you remember the experiences you had and the things you saw. It was very interesting.”]

“Nee kyk, hierdie sand was daar om vir jou die aanknopingspunt te begin.” / [“Well see, this sand was there for you to begin the discussion.”]

“Beslis, as jy nie daai prentjie gehad het nie, het ek mos nie geweet waarom kan ek nou eintlik praat nie, dan moet ek uit die lug uit gryp. En daardie manier om te kommunikeer by dit wat ek voel daar is.” / [“For sure if I didn't have that picture I would not have known what to say and then I would have to make something up. I can then talk about what I feel.”]

Toys and objects with particular symbolic meaning are used when communicating by means of play (Oaklander, 2007:166). Blom (2006:130) adds to this statement by highlighting that play techniques facilitate communication. Most of the older persons experienced play techniques as interesting and an effective way of starting a

conversation. Using symbols when implementing a technique can help a person to develop a visual picture of events which they experienced and to place these events in chronological order (Geldard & Geldard, 2008:170). The goal of the Gestalt application is to achieve a deeper sense of awareness, which requires a person to be able to live in the here and now (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:238). The participants were able to identify that play techniques enhance communication. Sand play may enhance levels of socialisation and communication (Ferreira, Eloff, Kukard & Kriegler, 2013:112). The older people also experienced communicating by means of Gestalt play techniques as positive and they became aware of the here and now when communicating about their feelings in the present moment.

Subtheme 1.6: Some uncertainty and anxiety was experienced with the implementation of the techniques

Some of the participants experienced a degree of uncertainty when the techniques were implemented. They felt uncertain regarding the implementation of the techniques, which could arise from feelings of anxiety. The participants made the following statements:

“Dit is die eerste keer in my lewe wat ek so onderhoud voer; ek sou nooit so in my lewe met ‘n wildvreemde mens praat nie.” / [“It is the first time in my life I had an interview like this, I would never in my life have talked to a stranger like this.”]

“Ek was baie bekommerd oor wat ek gaan praat. Ek het nie geweet of ek met ‘n hoogsgeleerde sal praat of is dit sommer ‘n lieplapper nie.” / [“I was very concerned about what I will have to talk about. I did not know if I will have to talk to a highly educated person or just a loafer”].

“Angstig. . . ek het daai goed nou uitgekies en waar moet ek nou pak of met waar moet ek nou begin. Dit is nie so maklik om die stokkies nou by mekaar te sit nie.” / [“Anxious . . . I choose the items and where should I place them or where should I start. It is not that easy to put all the sticks together.”]

“Ek het nie geweet wat moet ek maak nie, ek het glad nie ‘n idee gehad wat kan ek nou daarmee doen dat dit die moeite werd is nie en ek het gedink miskien maak ek nou daai goed en jy dink dit is belaglik.” / [“I did not know what I should do, I did not have a clue, what I can make with it, that will be worthwhile. I thought maybe I will make this and you will think that it is ridiculous.”]

There is not much known regarding children/adults experiencing anxiety before the implementation of play techniques. Previous research revealed that children who present with behavioural issues tend to quickly indicate themes of anxiety during play therapy and concluded that it may be due to overly authoritarian parenting or education style (Davis & Pereira, 2014:268). Children are more likely to explore new activities, while an older person might be unsure regarding what to expect and how to implement the task given to them. Siampani (2013:40) conducted a study using sand tray therapy with older persons suffering from dementia. The research findings revealed that the individuals with dementia experienced inner anxiety and tension during the process, which was handled in a group setting (Siampani, 2013:40). By keeping the above-mentioned study in mind, it may indicate that an older person could experience anxiety while implementing Gestalt play techniques. The statements obtained from participants during this study confirmed the findings of the study mentioned above.

Although it is clear that most of the participants experienced the study positively overall, it also became apparent that the relationship between the participants and the researcher played an important role in them having a positive experience. In theme two, the relationship the participants had with the researcher will be discussed.

THEME 2: OLDER PERSONS' EXPERIENCES OF THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER

From the interviews it was gathered that the older person's relationship with the practitioner-researcher also influenced their experience in a positive manner. It seems that the sessions helped the participants to communicate and to feel that their stories and experiences were important to the practitioner-researcher. The older persons felt that the practitioner-researcher was 'present', while their memories and experiences were being shared, thus also enabling them to experience the communication by means of creative Gestalt play techniques positively. In the subthemes below the findings will be discussed regarding the participants' experiences of the relationship between the practitioner-researcher and the participants and how that contributed to them experiencing the "here and now".

Subtheme 2.1: Gestalt play techniques enabled the practitioner-researcher to relate to the older person in the “here and now”

The participants revealed that due to their relationship with the practitioner-researcher they felt that their memories and stories were important. Geldard and Geldard (2008:192) state that asking the participants how they felt when implementing the technique will enable the person to get in touch with their “here and now” experiences. Sand play work may bring you down to the “here and now” while allowing the unconscious to tell a story (Siampani, 2013:13). This could enable the practitioner-researcher to create cohesion and a bond between herself and the participant, which could be difficult to establish through verbal expression. The sand tray made nonverbal communication possible. The participants expressed themselves in the following manner:

“ . . . jy was so spontaan, dit was lekker om met jou te gesels oor hierdie dinge en jy het dit verstaan, so saam so asof jy saam gelewe het om hierdie dinge nou te herleef saam met my. So het ek gevoel.” / [. . . you were very spontaneous, it was enjoyable to talk to you about these things, you understood them, as if you were living with me though my experiences. This is how I felt.]

“In elk geval dit is iets wat ek nog nooit gedoen het nie en daarvoor sal ek tot die dag wat ek gaan, bly wees, want dit het vir my gevoel hoe lekker kan ‘n mens gesels as jy jousef kan uiting gee saam met iemand wat ook saam jou kan lag.” / [“In any case, it was something I have never done before and for that I will be grateful until the day I die. I experienced how well you can communicate if you can express yourself, with someone who can laugh with you.”]

“Dit is net goed wat daar opgekom het en ingekom het, wat ek nie vooraf beplan het nie.” / [“It is just stuff that come up that I did not plan for.”]

In Gestalt therapy, the focus during the first few sessions with the individual is normally to build a therapeutic relationship. During this stage, according to Blom (2006:57), it is important to promote the individual’s awareness of the present as it is the only reality the “practitioner-researcher” can work with. By keeping the participants in the present and aware of the “here and now”, the practitioner-researcher built a relationship with the participants according to the Gestalt theory (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:227). The participants experienced a positive

relationship with the practitioner-researcher which is emphasised in the subtheme below.

Subtheme 2.2: The positive relationship promoted communication

The participants revealed that they experienced the relationship with the practitioner-researcher in a positive manner. The older persons experienced the relationship to be more humoristic and spontaneous as it developed. Authenticity in a relationship with the service user allows for natural, spontaneous interplay between the individual and the “therapist”, without inhibition, censorship or unnecessary anxiety (Geldard & Geldard, 2008:12). The participants stated the following regarding their relationship with the practitioner-researcher:

“Ja, ... beslis, beslis was dit vir my positief gewees. Ek het dit baie geniet en ek het die manier wat jy dit vir my aangebied het, geniet. Ek het jou geselskap geniet en ek het jou glimlag geniet. Dit was vir my baie lekker gewees.” / [“Yes, ... indeed, indeed it was very positive, I enjoyed it a lot and I enjoyed the manner in which you presented it. I enjoyed you company and your smile. I enjoyed it a lot.”]

“Ek het ook baie geleer met ons verhouding en om met mekaar te gesels en eerlikwaar ek het dit verskriklik baie geniet . . . jy was so spontaan, dit was lekker om met jou te gesels oor hierdie dinge en jy het dit verstaan.” / [“I also learnt a lot with our relationship and communicating with one another and honestly I enjoyed it a lot ... you were very spontaneous, I enjoyed talking to you about these things and you understood.”]

“Nee, ons, die verhouding wat ons hier geskep het dit is nie, jy was vriendelik met my gewees, en ek het dit regtig geniet - as ek dit nou so kan sê. Ek was nooit uhm gespanne; dit was vir my ‘n natuurlike gevoel as ons sommer so oor ‘n koppie koffie kan sit en gesels.” / [“Well, we, the relationship that we created here, it was not, you were friendly towards me and I really enjoyed it - if I can now say this: I was never tense; it was very natural for me that we communicate with one while having a cup of coffee.”]

The excerpts indicate that the participants experienced the relationship between the practitioner-researcher and themselves as positive. They enjoyed laughing together and that the sessions were spontaneous as they experienced that the practitioner-researcher understood what they were feeling. Playfulness and humour are important contributions to building an I-thou relationship with the participant (Blom,

2006:109). By implementing humour, according to the Gestalt theory, the practitioner-researcher was not just building the I-thou relationship, but the participants' sense of self was strengthened as playfulness, imagination and humour could enhance their sense of self (Blom, 2006:109). It is the goal of the "therapist" to enhance the communication skills of participants who are not able to express feelings, thoughts and experiences through words, but rather symbolically acting out their feelings, resulting in them to experiencing an improvement in communication throughout the session (Davis & Pereira, 2014:265).

During the discussion of Theme two it became apparent that the relationship between the participants and the practitioner-researcher was important, as it promoted communication. While the study was conducted, the participants also had specific experiences regarding the techniques that were implemented during the study. In Theme three the experiences that the older persons had while communicating through clay, sand tray and drawing as projection techniques will be discussed.

THEME 3: OLDER PERSONS' EXPERIENCES OF CLAY, SAND TRAY AND DRAWING AS PROJECTION TECHNIQUES

The participants specified that they experienced play techniques such as clay, sand tray and drawing as stimulating on a cognitive level. During the implementation of the techniques, participants experienced the following: they were able to fantasise; they found the implementation of the techniques easy; they felt calm during the sessions and they believed that the techniques improved emotional expression. These elements, experienced by the participants, will be discussed in-depth.

Subtheme 3.1: The techniques were cognitively stimulating

The participants experienced play techniques to be stimulating. Oaklander (2007:167) states that she observed how a client moved objects around while playing with a doll and she mentions the "degree of emotional and cognitive 'shifting

of gears' involved" was exhausting for her as a researcher. The following expressions were shared by the participants:

*"Dit het die brein aan die gang gesit om te dink wat moet jy doen."
[Deciding what to do, activated the brain.]"*

"n Mens moet jou brein wakker hou. . . ja-nee, dit is nie nou asof jy 'n kunswerk gedoen het nie, maar jy het iets gedoen, jy geniet dit om so bietjie iets anders te doen as wat jy gewoonweg doen." / ["You have to keep your brain active. . . yes, it is not as if you made a work of art, but you made something, you enjoyed doing something that differs from what you usually do.]"

"Ek het of ... ek het na die tyd daar in die kamer gaan sit en gedink, jinne, ek sou nooit so iets gedink het nie, nooit . . ."/ ["I did or... I thought afterward when I sat in my room, my goodness, I would never have thought something like this, never]"

Play techniques can help the participants to develop insight through finding resolutions for issues they experience (Geldard & Geldard, 2008:182). Most of the participants sat and thought about the technique afterwards and reviewed what they had done. The participants enjoyed the stimulation of having to think about what was required of them. Although there is an age-related decline in an older person's ability to structure and processes their cognitive functioning, it is necessary to consider the functional aspects that an older person needs to address cognitively as demands of everyday life arise (Louw & Louw, 2009:113). As older persons experience a decline in their cognitive functioning, Gestalt play therapy can help them to stimulate their minds.

Although there is not much information available on children experiencing play techniques as stimulating, it is clear from this research that an older person experiences play techniques to be stimulating. From a Gestalt perspective it is clear that the participants were able to value the "here-and-now" in order to experience each minute fully as they valued the fact that the technique was stimulating (Henderson & Thomspson, 2011:224).

Subtheme 3.2: The techniques enabled fantasising

The participants revealed that play techniques enabled them to fantasise. Play techniques provide the opportunity for individuals to handle trauma through externalising trauma by means of fantasies. They experience a sense of control over inner impulses as their trauma is being resolved (Blom, 2006:136). The participants stated the following:

“Ja, toe ek nou aanvaar dit is ‘n wurm toe sien ek hom kort-kort; hy kom hierso by die grond uit.” / [“Yes, when I accepted the fact that it is a worm, I saw it frequently; it emerged from the soil/ground.”]

“Ek is die koppie en nou kan ek met die ptering praat: jy moet mooi staan want ek moet binne in jou staan – daai soort van goed.” / [“I am the cup and now I can speak to the saucer: you have to stand properly, seeing that I have to be placed inside you - that sort of stuff.”]

“Dit is al en al somer maar net verbeelding.” / [“It is all and all just imagination.”]

The participants could fantasise that the objects they made were moving. Geldard and Geldard (2008:174) mention that some play techniques can help a person fantasise about possible future relationships. Fantasies from a Gestalt perspective are seen as a metaphoric expression of the content of self-experience in which unfinished business can be brought to the foreground as the person is unaware of this content (Blom, 2006:169). Fantasising according to the Gestalt theory can help a person to acquire effective coping strategies, to promote a sense of self (experiencing sense of control and opportunities to make choices) and to complete unfinished business in his foreground.

Subtheme 3.3: The techniques were simple, easy to apply and to implement

The participants expressed the fact that they found the play techniques easy and simple to implement. Blom (2006:141) mentions, that “[i]t provides the person with a sense of mastery, in that they can bend the clay and shape it as they wish. There are

no specific rules for using it.” The following expressions were forwarded by the participants:

“...want dit was darem nou nie so ingewikkeld gewees nie.” / [“it was really not that complicated.”]

“toe het ek nou vir my, hoe kan ek sê, ek het dood gemaklik gevoel.” / [“If was as if, how can I say, it felt extremely comfortable.”]

“. . . dit is maklik en dit is eenvoudig en vir my was dit baie, baie interessant gewees.” / [“. . . it is easy, it is not complicated and I found it very, very interesting.”]

“Dit is nie ‘n swaar ding om te doen nie, dit is nie vuil ding om te doen nie . . . Ek kan nie sien hoekom dit enigsens nie lekker is nie of irriterend of wat. Ek meen enige mens wil mos nou lekker rustig wees.” / [“It was not a difficult thing to do, it is not dirty . . . I cannot see why it would at all not be enjoyable or be irritating. I mean any person would like to be relaxed.”]

During the data analysis process, it became apparent that the participants experienced the implementation of the play techniques to be easy. The participants’ sense of self was improved as they experienced mastery while the techniques were applied. The play techniques provided the participants with the opportunity to experience mastery (Blom, 2006:130). Oaklander (2007:67) mentions that play techniques should be considered as an attribute as it is wonderful for utilisation and that “it is easy to become one with the clay.”

Subtheme 3.4: The techniques made the older persons calm as they experienced improved emotional expression

The creative Gestalt techniques made the participants calm and allowed them to feel relaxed. These findings are supported by Oaklander’s (2007:67) statement that when she works with clay the experience leaves her feeling “good and relaxed.” Blom (2006:130) also states that these techniques can help people to express their thoughts and emotions. The participants stated the following:

“Ja, ek het ontspan.” / [“Yes, I relaxed.”]

“Oe ja, ja regtig. Al het ek dit net reg gekry om ‘n ou wurmpie te teken, is ek dankbaar bly dat dit my so ver gekry het om bietjie uiting aan myself te kry. Jy weet die swaarkry en nie lekker lewe gehad het, so dit is so bietjie weg van my af. Ek gaan my nou nie meer daaroor bekommer nie, dit is dinge, waaroor sal ek my nou bekommer; dit is dinge wat verkeerd geloop het vroeër jare... ek kan sê vandag sal ek my lewe weer so oor hê sodat ek beter met my lewe kan werk.” / [“Ohh, yes, really. Although I could only make a worm, I am grateful that it got me to express myself. You know the hard times and that I did not have an easy life, with this it is a bit removed from me. I won’t worry about it anymore, why should I as it is things that happened years ago... I can say today could I live my life over I would do ti better..”]

“Dit het vir my dadelik laat voel, rustiger laat voel. . . Jy is rustig as jy daar sit en jy teken ‘n ietsie of jy teken miskien ‘n prentjie af of wat ookal.” [“I immediately felt calmer . . . You are calm when you sit there and draw something or you copy from another picture, or whatever.”]

The participants voiced the fact that they experienced the play techniques to be soothing and relaxing. Geldard and Geldard (2008:195) confirm the participants’ feelings when they postulate that play techniques help and allow the child to come in contact with his/her feelings and enable appropriate expression of emotions. Sand play can bring creativity, feelings, beliefs and memories to external reality for the individual to witness (Siampina, 2013:9). It releases emotions through the implementation of these techniques. Considered from a Gestalt perspective, the participants experienced the technique as promoting a sense of self and to strengthen their self-esteem (Oaklander, 2007:67). The acknowledgement of negative experiences in the past allowed the participants to see that these experiences need not necessarily be part of their future.

Under this theme, the participants’ experiences of the techniques specifically were considered. They experienced the techniques to be cognitively stimulating, and that the techniques enhanced fantasising. The techniques were simple and easy to implement and participants felt that the techniques had a calming effect and improved emotional expression. As the study continued, the participants also made certain recommendations. In the theme below, the recommendations the participants made regarding possible future studies are outlined.

THEME 4: OLDER PERSONS' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE USE OF CREATIVE GESTALT PLAY TECHNIQUES

The data analysis process revealed that most of the participants experienced the interviews and sessions to be very enjoyable and interesting. The participants experienced that play techniques helped them to work through issues and they declared that they would like others to benefit from this experience as well. Most of the participants also specified that they would like to participate in similar sessions in future.

Subtheme 4.1: Creative Gestalt play techniques helped older persons to work through issues and they would like others to benefit too

The participants experienced that play techniques helped them to work through issues such as “unfinished business” that surfaced during the sessions. The use of creative, expressive and projective techniques are important to help clients express parts of themselves that they keep secret and locked up (Oaklander in Siampani, 2013:40). Geldard and Geldard (2008:182) mention that play techniques may help to “gain a cognitive understanding of the elements of events in their life and thus gain insight into those events.” The material used in sand play had therapeutic value as they represent a specific symbolism (Blom, 2006:136). As older persons are exposed to sand tray as a specific technique, they are expressing something within themselves. When the story regarding the scene in the sand is being told, they are expressing more of themselves on another level and if they own various parts of the picture, integration takes place (Blom, 2006:136). This may promote the person's awareness of his/her unfinished business. The participants expressed the following:

“As jy byvoorbeeld 'n tesis daarvoor wou geskryf het, dit moes iewers in 'n boek en jou toekomstige student moet daaruit leer. Jy moet nie alleen kennis daarvan dra nie, jy moet dit deel.” / [“If you for instance want to write a thesis about this, it must be somewhere in a book and future students must learn from it. You should not be the only one with this knowledge, it should be shared.”]

“... nadat ek so met jou gesit en praat het, dit het my gekry op so punt dat ek nou kan sê, die duiwel met 'ou duiwel' en ek gaan nou ek weet nie hoeveel jaar ek nog gaan lewe nie, en dat ek nou die laaste tyd van my lewe [is,] gaan ek nie meer my so bekommer oor dinge wat

jare terug gebeur het nie, want dit rem jou af . . . Om heeldag te teem en te loop en ‘worry’ oor dinge wat nie meer vandag vir my die moeite werd is nie dit het net my eie lewe ‘n bietjie swaarder gemaak.” / [“After I sat and talked to you, it brought me to a point where I can say, to the devil with the ‘old devil’ and I don’t know for how many years I will still be alive, but the time I have left I won’t worry about things that happened years ago, because it just drags you down... To complain all day long and walk around worrying about things that are no longer worthwhile, it only made my own life more difficult.”]

“Ek dink daar is baie mense op hierdie aarde van ons wat sou goed kon gedoen het en beter hulle lewe kon gelei het as hulle met sulke sessies kon werk.” / [I think there are many people on this earth who would have benefited and lived their lives in a better way if they could have formed part of such sessions.”]

“Is dit nie fantasties nie? Dit was vir my die uitgangspunt gewees: ek is hier om vir jou te help en julle kan ander mense weer help.” / [“Is this not fantastic? For me, it was my starting-point: I am here to help you and you can then help other people.”]

Unfinished business is addressed by means of projection techniques, such as drawing, clay and sand tray work. This may lead to unfinished business being completed. This, in return restores the balance in the life of an individual in order to improve overall functioning (Blom, 2006:201). The inputs obtained from the participants indicated that they experienced the play techniques as useful and some unfinished business surfaced during the implementation of the techniques. Sand play therapy often brings a person back to childhood memories (Siampani, 2013:22). The participants indicated that they felt that their functioning improved, as they were able to work through some of their issues. The premise of the Gestalt theory is for the individual to become aware of living in the “here-and-now”. By participating in this research, they experienced closure regarding unfinished business (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:228).

This subtheme is intertwined with the next subtheme, as the participants experienced some unfinished business that arose during the sessions, which they had to deal with. As unfinished business was addressed, they experienced an improvement in their quality of live.

Subtheme 4.2: Older persons would like to participate in more sessions as communication through creative Gestalt techniques improved their quality of life

The participants reported that they would like to attend more sessions using Gestalt techniques as they felt their quality of life improved after their participation in the study. The participants stated the following:

“Man wat ek nou nou sê, ek sal eintlik vra of nee nie vra nie, maar wens dat alle kinders en grootmense so ‘n sessie kan bywoon om te sien wat kan ‘n mens uit jousef uithaal, as mens net probeer.” / [“Let me tell you, I would like to ask, or no not to ask, but wish that all children and grownups could attend such a session to see what you can deliver, if you just try.”]

“Ja, ek sal dit doen, ek sal dit doen, ek besef nou eers wat dit vir jou kan beteken. Ek sal dit definitief doen, dit help ‘n mens om eintlik reguit te kyk en nie te sukkel langs die pad nie.” / [“Yes, I will do it, I only realise now what it can mean for you. I will definitely do it, it helps you to see straight and not to struggle along the way.”]

“Ek sal vir jou so sê, as ek weer die kans kry om weer deur sulke sarsies te gaan, sal ek dit definitief weer doen.” / [“I want to tell you, if I have the opportunity again, to be part of sessions like this, I will definitely do it again.”]

The quotations indicate that most of the participants experienced the sessions to be useful and that these sessions improved their quality of life. During the sessions, the participants obtained the opportunity to complete unfinished business. Ferreira and Read (in Blom, 2006:2003) state that if “unfinished business” is addressed the Gestalt is resolved and integration of the fragmented parts within the self will then take place in order for individuals to function as a whole. A person will develop a stronger sense of self, as they are able to address their discomfort by themselves. This is known as the individual experiencing holism (Corey, 2013:196).

Henderson and Thompson (2011:228) postulate that the ultimate measure of success within the Gestalt therapy process is when clients grow to awareness and take responsibility for their choices and actions and then move from environmental support to self-support. The participants experiencing holism indicated that they are

moving to self-support as their unfinished business was resolved and their needs were met.

3.8 SUMMARY

In Chapter 3 the researcher focussed on the research methodology, the data findings and the interpretation thereof. The research methodology was divided into the research approach, type of research, research methods and ethical considerations. In Section B the researcher discussed the research findings and provided an interpretation. This section was divided into two sub-sections. The first section consisted of the biographic profile of the participants and in the second section the analysis of themes and subthemes were outlined.

In Chapter 4 the focus will be on the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the mini-dissertation. In this chapter, the researcher will indicate whether, and to what extent, the research goal and objectives were achieved. The research question will also be answered by offering the key findings of the study. Lastly, recommendations will follow for social workers working with older persons with the aid of creative Gestalt play techniques and recommendations for future research will be provided.

4.2 RESEARCH GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The **goal** of the study was to explore the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques.

This goal was achieved through the research objectives that are outlined below, and the description of their respective accomplishments.

The **research objectives** of the study were as follows:

- **Objective 1:** To describe the use of creative Gestalt play techniques and the utilisation thereof with older persons

This objective was achieved in Chapter 2 (paragraph 2.6) where creative Gestalt play techniques were described in depth. The implementation of the Gestalt play

techniques was described according to Oaklander's 14 steps for utilisation of projection techniques.

- **Objective 2:** To explore and describe both the positive and negative experiences of older persons communicating through Gestalt play techniques, specifically projection by means of clay, sand tray and drawing

The research findings and interpretations in Chapter 3 (see Section B: Research findings and interpretations) report on the participants' experiences of communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques. The data (qualitative findings) were interpreted from a Gestalt perspective and the life-span theory of older persons. Older persons experienced the communication through Gestalt play techniques as positive and stimulating (see Chapter 3, subtheme 3.1: *The techniques were cognitively stimulating*). The older persons also experienced some anxiety when implementing the projection techniques, such as drawing (see Chapter 3, subtheme 1.6: *Some uncertainty and anxiety were experienced with the implementation of the techniques*).

- **Objective 3:** To propose practical guidelines for social workers to implement creative Gestalt play techniques as a working method when dealing with older persons

Chapter 4 (paragraph 4.4.1) outlines the practical guidelines for social workers working with older persons using creative Gestalt play techniques as a working method in order to improve service rendering to the population studied.

This study aimed to answer one **research question**, namely:

“What are the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques?”

Based on the research findings, it was concluded that the older persons experienced the communication through creative Gestalt play techniques as follows:

- Older persons were of the opinion that the implementation of the techniques were spontaneous.
- They experienced mastery and they felt that it was an appropriate way of communicating as it was a pleasant experience.
- The techniques also facilitated general discussions.
- The techniques assisted older persons to recall life events and memories from their past.
- Some of the older persons experienced uncertainty and some experienced anxiety, while implementing the techniques.
- The relationship that the older persons had with the researcher (i.e., therapist) enhanced their experience of communicating through Gestalt play techniques.
- The projection techniques enabled the researcher to relate to the older person in the “here and now” and as such, it promoted a positive relationship between the researcher and the older person and also promoted communication.
- Older persons had specific experiences regarding the techniques that were implemented, such as that the techniques:
 - were found to be cognitively stimulating.
 - enabled older persons to fantasize.
 - were simple and easy to apply.
 - had a calming effect on the older persons, and
 - improved emotional expression amongst older persons.

The conclusions regarding the key findings (as indicated through the answering of the research question) will be discussed next.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be reached regarding the older persons' experiences of communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques from literature as well as the qualitative research findings:

❖ Literature

The following are key conclusions from the literature in terms of the use of creative techniques from a Gestalt perspective with older persons:

- Limited research has been done in terms of applying Gestalt play techniques with older persons. The rationale is that psychologists believe that older persons are mainly the product of their childhood experiences and thus more research is conducted with people during other developmental stages during the life cycle.
- The older population is growing every year according to Statistics South Africa and thus places additional strain on, amongst others, the government in terms of services, such as physical and mental care, housing and financial needs (Louw & Louw, 2009:12). In South Africa, the number of social grants payable to older persons is increasing and puts financial strain on the government. Furthermore, as the older population is increasing, it places additional strain on social workers to render appropriate gerontological services.
- During old age, a person's brain functioning starts to deteriorate as oxygen to the brain slows down. The nerves conducting information to and from the brain also become less efficient, slowing down sensory information to the brain and increasing time for commands from the brain to reach the body in order to perform accurate responses.
- The eye sight, hearing, taste and smell of older persons deteriorate as they reach older age, which may influence the implementation of Gestalt play techniques. The muscle tone and balance of older persons are also influenced which may indicate that the Gestalt play techniques that are considered for implementation need to be well chosen and appropriate.

- Older female persons may experience hormonal changes which may include hot flushes.
- It is reported that older persons may also experience mild depression and temporary emotional distress. It does have an influence on their level of anxiety, anger and job dissatisfaction.
- Older persons may also experience that their cognitive abilities decrease as they may have a short attention span, and their information processing and memory may be affected when they reach old age.
- The social development of older persons is affected as they may not experience intimacy anymore due to the loss of their husband/wife or life partner. They may not experience any form of attachment anymore.
- Older persons may experience physical, social, economic and psychological challenges as they move into a different life stage.
- Creative Gestalt play techniques do have certain advantages, such as creating a relaxed atmosphere, promoting communication, gaining information on a subconscious level, providing an opportunity for emotional expression and insight. Gestalt play techniques therefore promote self-image as the individual feels that he is succeeding and it may help the individual who is emotionally frozen to be able to share.
- The Gestalt play techniques promote opportunities to be creative and to improve cognitive skills as decision-making opportunities are enhanced without the pressure of judgment. Play techniques make individuals aware of their unconscious fantasies and allow them to symbolically communicate their stories.
- Drawing as a technique facilitates communication as individuals who are not able to communicate, may use the symbolic language of drawing to express their needs regarding the past, present and future. Drawing enables individuals to gain a sense of mastery over events which they have experienced or are experiencing. When mastery is experienced, it provides individuals with a sense of self and it may teach them new coping strategies for the future.
- Clay as a technique may form a bridge for verbal expression which may stimulate quiet individuals to share more or may improve poor verbal skills. It

is flexible and provides opportunities to enhance self-awareness, mastery and an improved sense of the self.

- Sand play is known to be sensory stimulating; it encourages individuals to have verbal discussions where poor verbal skills are present and may also encourage non-verbal communication where individuals display defence mechanisms. Sand play makes individuals aware of ‘unfinished business’ and provides them with an opportunity to use symbols to tell their story, re-create certain images, events or situations from the past or present and explore opportunities for the future.

❖ **Qualitative research findings**

The following represent the key conclusions from the research findings:

- The creative techniques enhanced the older persons’ ability to be spontaneous, which helped them to become aware of the self in the present moment (i.e., “here and now”).
- The older persons experienced mastery during the implementation of the techniques as it was simple and easy to implement. If a person experiences mastery his/her sense of self is improved and a positive self-esteem develops.
- The older persons experienced the techniques as calming and relaxing; they had a positive attitude while implementing the play techniques, and afterwards their positive experience improved their sense of self and self-concept.
- The older persons experienced an improved self-concept which could assist them to accept their past and to become content with who they are.
- The visual images (i.e., the picture/models they had to create during sand tray, drawing and clay work) enabled the older persons to tell their story and helped them to practise (and even improve) their communications skills.
- The techniques enabled the older persons to work through past experiences and could result in resolving some unfinished business in their lives. The older persons’ overall social functioning improved due to the “unfinished business” that was addressed during the implementation of Gestalt play techniques. As

the techniques enabled the older person to fantasise, it also gave them a sense of control over inner impulses. Fantasising also improved coping strategies, promoted self-control and enabled the completion of “unfinished business”.

- The play techniques offered the older persons, who were not used to communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques, the opportunity to start a conversation with greater ease.
- The techniques enhanced living in the “here and now” and enabled the older persons to be aware of their circumstances, as well as their experiences and feelings.
- Even though anxiety was initially experienced by some participants, their overall experience of the sessions were positive.
- The positive relationship which the older persons experienced with the researcher enabled them to feel that their stories and memories were important to the researcher. It also had a positive influence on the older person’s feelings towards the research and in terms of participating in the study.
- The humoristic and spontaneous manner in which the researcher approached the older persons made them feel comfortable and enhanced the working relationship. The older persons also experienced the researcher to be understanding of their feelings and the circumstances in which they found themselves.
- Through using humour to strengthen the I-thou relationship, the researcher also reinforced the older persons’ sense of self.
- Applying play techniques were experienced as stimulating by the older persons, both during and after the session. Cognitive stimulation is very important during old age as the brain needs constant exercise.
- The older persons shared personal experiences about themselves during the implementation of the techniques. They were able to own various parts of their stories, which indicated that integration took place during the research study. As integration took place they developed a stronger sense of self which enabled them to address their discomfort. Addressing issues allowed the

older persons to function in a holistic manner and experience a stronger sense of self.

In the next section of this chapter the researcher will discuss recommendations with practical guidelines for social workers to implement creative Gestalt play techniques as a working method when dealing with older persons.

4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are presented in two subsections. Firstly, the researcher will recommend guidelines for social workers to implement creative Gestalt play techniques as a working method when dealing with older persons. Secondly, the researcher will propose recommendations for future research.

4.4.1 Recommendations for social workers using creative Gestalt play techniques with older persons

Based on the key findings and conclusions emanating from this study, the following guidelines are proposed for social workers working with older persons while making use of creative Gestalt play techniques:

- Social workers need to provide an opportunity for older persons to communicate in a spontaneous manner, which could assist them to become aware of the “here and now”. Creative Gestalt play techniques provide social workers with tools to enhance relationships with the older person as service user.
- Social workers should focus on techniques that will allow an older person to experience mastery during the implementation of the technique. If older persons experience mastery, it could enhance their sense of self and enhance a positive self-esteem.
- Social workers should ensure that older persons have a positive attitude towards implementing a specific technique, as some older persons might not

identify with, for example, drawing. If older persons do not have a positive attitude about the specific projection technique, their implementation of the technique might not be effective. Another play technique could then be considered.

- Social workers need to make use of materials that older persons could easily work with, such as clay and sand tray, despite the challenges they face as a consequence of old age. The sensory experience of sand tray work and clay work could promote open communication.
- Social workers should be aware that the techniques could enable older persons to work through issues of their past which might surface during the sessions. Some issues need to be addressed over a longer period of time, depending on the nature of the “unfinished business” that needs to be dealt with.
- Social workers need to explain to older persons that they may initially feel some anxiety when communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques. Communicating in this manner is however an interesting and stimulating mode of communication.
- Social workers therefore need to first build a trusting professional relationship with the older person, as a positive relationship will enable the client to experience that their stories and memories are important to the researcher.
- Gestalt play techniques need to be introduced to social workers working with older persons in residential facilities, doing home visits or as part of their case load, in order to render effective services to older persons. If Gestalt play techniques are used as a method of intervention, the older person will most likely experience the completion of “unfinished business”, cognitive stimulation, the enhancement of emotional expression and being able to share their life experiences.
- Social workers need to receive training on Gestalt play techniques and the implementation of Oaklander’s ‘working model’ in order to implement the creative play techniques.

4.4.2 Recommendations for future research

It is recommended that:

- Similar research studies should be extended to other residential facilities in the Tshwane Metropolitan area in order to compare whether older persons in different areas identify similar benefits of communicating through creative Gestalt techniques.
- The guidelines originating from this study should be implemented in practise and strengths and limitations need to be determined in terms of gerontological social work services.
- The sample only consisted of white older persons and was not a representation of the broader older population in the Pretoria/Tshwane region, or the Republic of South Africa. Future research should be expanded to other ethnic groups in South Africa.
- The study could also be extended to older persons who experience the early stages of dementia as the experience of the techniques could be cognitively stimulating and could possibly form part of brain exercises.

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ADDENDUM A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:
EXPERIENCES OF OLDER PERSONS COMMUTATING THROUGH CREATIVE
GESTALT PLAY TECHNIQUES**

SECTION A: IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION

Interview Protocol	
Time of interview	
Date	
Age	
Gender	
Race	
Place	

SECTION B:INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS

1. How did you experience the working sessions?
2. How did you experience the techniques (explore before, during and after implementation)?
 - 2.1 Clay
 - 2.2 Sand tray
 - 2.3 Drawing
3. If you think about clay as a technique ...
 - 3.1 Do you think this technique can be used effectively with older persons?
 - 3.2 Do you think this could assist/Did the technique enable you to air/ventilate aggression (beat or throw clay)?
4. If you think about sand tray as a technique ...
 - 4.1 How did the technique encourage verbal expression?

- 4.2 How did the technique contribute to you expressing emotions – for example aggression, anxiety?
5. If you think about drawing as a technique ...
 - 5.1 To what extent was the techniques helpful in becoming aware of emotions?
 - 5.2 What techniques would you suggest to be most suitable?
 - 5.3 How did the technique encouraged creativity, self-expression and spontaneity?
6. Do you consider creative Gestalt play techniques as positive or negative in facilitating communication? Motivate.
7. Would you consider using Gestalt play therapy as an intervention method, if needed in the future?

ADDENDUM B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Committee

13 March 2014

Dear Prof Lombard

Project: The experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques
Researcher: JE Smit
Supervisor: Dr LS Geyer
Department: Social Work and Criminology
Reference number: 12307302

Thank you for your response to the Committee's correspondence of 5 March 2014.

I have pleasure in informing you that the Research Ethics Committee formally **approved** the above study at an *ad hoc* meeting held on 13 March 2014. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should your actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

The Committee requests you to convey this approval to the researcher.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

Prof. Karen Harris
Acting Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: karemn.harris@up.ac.za

Research Ethics Committee Members: Dr L Blokland; Prof M-H Coetzee; Dr JEH Grobler; Prof KL Harris(Acting Chair); Ms H Klopper; Dr C Panebianco-Warrens; Dr C Puttergill; Prof GM Spies; Dr Y Spies; Prof E Taljard; Dr P Wood

ADDENDUM C: INFORMED CONSENT



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Department of Social Work & Criminology

Researcher: Ms J.E. Smit

Contact number: 083 411 9870

Participant's identification details:

INFORMED CONSENT

- Title of the research study:** The experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques.
- Goal of this study:** The goal of this study is to explore the experiences of older persons communicating through creative Gestalt play techniques.
- Procedures:** I, the participant, expect to be part of six working sessions to be conducted by the researcher. The procedures regarding the sessions will be as follows:
 - The researcher will conduct a series of six interviews with me where after certain questions regarding my experiences of each of the creative Gestalt play techniques will be explored.
 - The research will be divided into two parts. The first part consists of five working sessions, and the last part will consist of an interview. The working sessions and interview will take place at Villieria Old Age Home and will be scheduled for approximately an hour per session. The time and frequency of both the working sessions and the interview will be negotiated between me and the researcher. The researcher will be utilising an audio recorder during the interview to capture the data accurately.
- Risks and discomforts:** I will not be subjected to any physical harm, but may experience discomfort when working with clay or sand. The techniques may cause some emotional discomfort. The researcher will make every effort to conduct this research in a manner that will minimise the risk of harm. Thus, debriefing will take place after each working session. If I should experience any negative effects after the working sessions, a social worker will be available for counselling at Villieria Old Age Home or at an organisation in the surrounding suburb.
- Benefits:** There will be no financial benefit for participating in this study. However, I will contribute to the improvement of service rendering to older persons as these techniques may improve communication with older persons and could subsequently improve therapeutic services for older persons. Social workers could use creative Gestalt play therapy techniques as a working model and way of communicating with older persons.
- Participant's rights:** I am not obligated to be part of this research study. If at any point, before or during the study I feel like withdrawing, I will be allowed to do so. This will be effective immediately and I will not experience any negative consequences whatsoever.

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7. **Confidentiality:** The information obtained from me will be kept confidential and will be protected. Transcriptions and audio recordings will be locked in a cabinet and the only persons having access to the data will be the researcher, a colleague and the research supervisors. The results of this study may appear in professional publications, but my identity will not be shared, unless required by law.
8. **Queries:** If more information is desired about the research and the findings, please feel free to contact the researcher as per particulars provided on the first page.

My signature indicated that I (the participant/family member/legal representative) understand the information provided by the researcher as set out in this document. All my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I am freely giving consent to participate in this study. I am aware that the research data will be archived for a period of 15 years at the Department of Social Work and Criminology in line with UP policy.

I will receive a signed copy of this informed consent form.

I _____ (name and surname of participant) hereby provide my consent to participate in this study.

I _____ (name and surname of family member/legal representative) hereby provide my consent for _____ (name and surname of participant) to partake in this study.

This document was signed at _____ on the _____ day of _____ 201.....

Signature of participant: _____

Signature of Family member/legal representative: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

ADDENDUM D: LETTER FROM RESIDENTIAL FACILITY



HEALTHNICON CARE CENTRE

Telephone: (012) 332 0599

E-mail: gerhard@healthnicon.co.za

PO Box 12939
Queenswood
0121

1085 Hertzog Street
Waverley
Pretoria
0135

Enquiries: G Herman

Reference:

13 March 2013.

Dear Mrs/Miss Smit.

Permission to conduct research.

We have pleasure informing you that your request to conduct research at this facility has been approved on the following conditions.

- Written permission must be obtained from both the subjects being used in your trials, as well as their families.
- The research will be conducted at times which will not adversely impact on the patient's care and daily routine. The sister-in-charge of the facility will assist you in this regard.

We trust that this endeavour will be to the benefit of all parties involved.

Sincerely yours.

Gerhard Herman
Business Manager.

Member: Ms S A Geyer