

Abstract

This research is a phenomenological investigation into the spiritual beliefs of a group of Gestalt Therapists and how these impact their practice as therapists. A qualitative approach was adopted as this allowed a detailed exploration of the co-researchers experience to be undertaken. This generated a wealth of data, from which the essence of the co-researchers' experience was obtained.

The literature suggests that the originators of Gestalt Therapy and their immediate contemporaries were at best neutral and often hostile to the spiritual aspects of therapy. However, in more recent years, several Gestalt Therapists have explored the spiritual dimension of Gestalt Therapy. In general, I-Thou encounters are shown to form the spiritual heart of Gestalt Therapy, a perspective that is echoed by the co-researchers in this study.

This study also shows that there is a universality of spiritual experiences amongst the co-researchers, in which their spiritual beliefs are grounded. They all regard therapy as a spiritual activity and their spiritual beliefs provide them with a significant source of support, guidance, development and inspiration for their therapy work. Also, this research suggests that spiritual practice is one way that therapists can prepare themselves for the dialogic I-Thou encounter at the heart of contemporary Gestalt Therapy.

There are several calls for a new therapy paradigm that incorporates the spiritual dimension into the therapy framework. This study suggests that any paradigm must take into account the disparate spiritual beliefs prevalent in contemporary society. Gestalt Therapy is shown to be both able to meet the needs of those seeking a spiritual dimension to therapy and sufficiently flexible to accommodate a wide range of spiritual beliefs.

The relatively small size of this study is acknowledged and recommendations for further studies to investigate spirituality in Gestalt Therapy in both greater depth and breadth are made.