

Abstract

A phenomenological study of the experiences of six lapsed Catholic therapists was conducted. The interest for the study arose out of the author's own experiences, and also because a significant gap was identified in the published psychotherapy literature. Six themes emerged as defining the essence of the experience of Catholicism: introjection vs. assimilation, fear, self-denial, transpersonal experience, shame, and a sense of a closed society.

The findings are discussed with reference to the theory and practice of Gestalt psychotherapy. The concept of dialogue, central to Gestalt psychotherapy's methodology, emerged as significant in both construing the deformative nature of the participants' experiences, and in considering the psychotherapeutic approaches most likely to heal the legacy of those experiences.

The implications of the study for further research are outlined.