

ABSTRACT

Through this study of ‘How do Female Gestalt Psychotherapists Experience Midlife?’ I embarked on a journey exploring the experiences of midlife, first through the existing literature and then through a Qualitative Phenomenological research approach. Eight Gestalt psychotherapists were engaged as co-researchers using a semi structured, one to one, in depth taped interview. Through the interview I sought to elicit how a Gestalt psychotherapist experiences midlife.

A review of the literature brought into stark relief how midlife is a significant experience in the life cycle. The idea that the human being stops growing on reaching adulthood, has been replaced by a belief that midlife can offer a rich experience. Midlife needs to be researched further so that narratives, particularly women’s, will eloquently portray this phase of life.

Through the data analysis a number of themes came to the foreground; midlife was experienced as a real event in the co-researchers’ lives, as a time of bodily change, a deterioration of the physical appearance and energy level. Menopause was experienced as a significant event which can happen at midlife or earlier. Both in the literature review and in the findings, menopause was sometimes mistaken for the whole midlife experience which tends to reduce midlife solely to a biological event. Psychological processes, like acceptance, maturity, spirituality, integration and growth, amongst others, were seen as strongly emerging and encompassing these women’s lives to the point of loving and caring for the ageing body. Relationships at midlife take a different stance; intimate relationships grow more into companionate relationships, sexuality diminishes while intimacy can grow. Friendships become very significant while relationships with adult children shift to a more independent role. The relationship with parents changes to a more supportive and caring one. There also seems to be an awareness about community involvement. Midlife seems to be a time of internal growth and containment. The findings might contribute in a small way to the ongoing debate in Gestalt circles as to whether Gestalt therapy will benefit from its own developmental theory that acknowledges the various phases in a person’s life journey.