

ABSTRACT

This study explores how Gestalt psychotherapists know that their therapeutic approach is helpful to the clients they work with, and it considers the field conditions out of which the various types of outcomes occur. The research investigation is centred on psychotherapists' perspectives and does not include a first-hand perspective from clients. The context for the study is the current debates and dissension around 'evidence-based practice' within the psychological therapies professions. Semi-structured interviews and a modified form of Grounded Theory were used to gather information and analyse the data respectively. The findings, which are based on data produced from a sample of nine participants, signify that it is the distinct moment by moment working with what is co-created in the *therapeutic relationship* itself, that enables clients to make changes. The interview material also revealed that a variety of types of outcomes emerge in Gestalt psychotherapy and participants tended to discuss these in terms of, heightened awareness, more availability for contact, improved relationships, increased capacity for self-regulation, and improved functioning in life; as opposed to talking in terms of their clients *feeling better*. All participants referred to several ways that they evidence the effectiveness of their work and the majority use CORE evaluation forms as one of their ways of doing this. The study also highlights the complexity and problematic nature of analysis of data pertaining to 'effectiveness of psychotherapeutic practice.' The literature review encompasses perspectives and findings from both the positivist/empiricist and constructivist traditions of research investigation, with discussion around the consequent dichotomy of Empirically Supported Treatments (EST's) versus Empirically Supported

Relationships (ESR's). I have also drawn on constructs of interpersonal neurobiology and research-based theories within neuroscience, which adds a scientific and noteworthy dimension to this debate, and one which makes it difficult to ignore the value of working with, what Gestaltists call *the in-between* of the client – therapist *relationship*.

Key words: Gestalt psychotherapy, relationship, treatment, evidence-based practice, practice-based evidence, positivist traditions of research, constructivist forms of research, grounded theory, randomised controlled trials, neuroscience.

INTRODUCTION

In my practice as a Gestalt therapist over the past eleven years (five years of which were pre-qualification) numerous clients have reported on how they have benefited from the therapy, including experiences such as: more enriched relationships, increased level of self-acceptance and self-support, increased energy, being better able to be gentle and compassionate towards themselves, making significant life changes, feeling 'more grown up,' living a more fulfilling life etc. Also, my own past experience of several years of personal Gestalt psychotherapy enabled me to re-embody what had become lost and disowned aspects of myself and hence make the transition from what had been a largely self-limiting way of being in the world to making significant shifts in my life and relationships. I thus feel I have enough experience to substantiate 'my truth' as to the effectiveness of Gestalt therapy 'in my life' both personally and professionally. Nonetheless, I have often heard, read and been party to discussions with other