

Abstract

A review of existing child developmental literature revealed the absence of the mother's lived experience in this sphere. The objective of this study therefore was to carry out a phenomenological exploration of women's sense of self after the birth of their first child, to illuminate the mother's experience in the context of child developmental theory.

Exercising a qualitative research methodology, data was collected and analysed in accordance with the procedures of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six experienced psychotherapists who each had a child aged between one and eight years old.

Analysis of the data revealed six major level themes i.e. Control, Loss, Polarised Emotions, Relationships, The Overwhelm of the Symbiotic Relationship and The Reclaiming of the Sense of Self. These were further analysed to reveal superordinate level themes which are presented with illustrative quotations from the data and a narrative account. Whilst the limitations of this study are discussed and critically evaluated, the conclusion was drawn that women do indeed experience a change in their sense of self after the birth of their first child and that this is manifested in a range of emotional and physical aspects of the self. Implications for the theory and practice of integrative psychotherapy are considered and suggestions for future avenues of research in this field are made in light of the issues raised in the discussion and the findings of the study.