

## 2. Abstract

Gestalt psychotherapy has no formally articulated dream theory. References to dreamwork in gestalt literature are usually demonstrative rather than theoretical. Where theory is articulated, dreams are most frequently explained as projections of the dreamer, and dreamwork proceeds from this assumption. There has been no significant questioning of this theoretical position. This research study aimed to: begin an enquiry into this area by exploring the possibility of working with dreams using modifications to contact other than projection; create a stimulating experience in which gestalt therapists would be able to develop their practice; and explore the potential for using grounded theory to develop gestalt theory through research. Five gestalt psychotherapists each took part in a dreamwork experiment that involved working on a dream of theirs using modifications to contact other than projection. A follow up interview then explored the potential impact of the therapists' experiences in the experiment on their practice with clients. Grounded theory was used to analyse the data, and a theory of *reflexive encounter* was constructed to account for the researcher's experience of events. This research suggests that existing gestalt theory limits the possibilities when dreamwork takes place, and offers a theoretical framework that allows for the integration of a wide range of dreamwork approaches into gestalt practice. In addition, this research demonstrates the potential power for combining experimental action research with grounded theory in developing a discovery-oriented research tradition that closely matches the values of gestalt therapy itself.