

Abstract:

This study presents the essences of the embodied lived experience of the psychotherapist's use of playful self within a therapeutic relationship. The subject emerged from the author's personal interest in the phenomena.

The literature review explored historical and contemporary research and identified that the playful self was under researched. The review emphasised play's relevance to the relational and developmental approach to Integrative Psychotherapy, and highlighted questions that this qualitative study endeavoured to fill.

The heuristic process, congruent with the author's philosophical and phenomenological position, was chosen to capture authentic experiences through a small-scale study and aimed to contribute to how the phenomenon of the playful self is used within the field of Integrative Psychotherapy.

Four qualified psychotherapists from differing modalities, familiar with relational and developmental approaches, were enlisted as co-researchers. The reflexive, ethical, qualitative study utilised embodied relational listening during the process of semi - structured interviews (Moustakas: 1994) to explore subjective experiences.

The themes and the shared essences became illuminated during data analysis, resulting in a creative synthesis that captured the embodied knowing (Sultan: 2019).

Overlapping themes emerged which were categorised as:

- Making sense of the playful self
- The ways

- Affect/Effect: on self; on other; the co-created space
- The Conditions: socio-cultural considerations; organisational factors

The findings highlighted the subjective, paradoxical, complexity to the use of the playful self and described how it is used judiciously within the therapeutic relationship to offer a reparative experience.

The 'conditions' were identified as factors in how active the playful self is within a psychotherapeutic context. With insights such as socio – cultural considerations; how the playful self was integrated and described, indicated that there was scope for further research.