

# **Re-constructing adolescent identity in the context of family violence within the Belhar community of Cape Town**

**C A PETERSEN**

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Thesis submitted for the degree *Doctor Philosophiae* in Psychology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

Promoter: Prof. H.B. Grobler

Co-Promoter: Prof. K. Botha

13 November 2015

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- All the school learners and life orientation teachers who shared their lives with me.

## DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER

I declare that the dissertation by **Charlene Petersen**, hereby submitted for the qualification PhD in Psychology at the North-West University, is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work for a qualification at/in another university/faculty. The ownership of all intellectual property pertaining to and/or flowing from the dissertation (including, without limitation, all copyright in the dissertation), shall vest in the University, unless an agreement to the contrary is reached between the University and the student in accordance with such procedures or intellectual property policy as the Council of the University may approve from time to time.

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## DECLARATION BY THE LANGUAGE EDITOR

I hereby declare that I have language edited and proofread the doctoral thesis- **Re-constructing adolescent identity in the context of family violence within the Belhar community of Cape Town** by Charlene Petersen for the degree PhD in Psychology.

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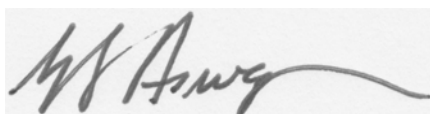
Linguistic proofreading and editing of:

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Bibliographies  
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The doctoral thesis by Charlene Petersen titled '**Re-constructing Adolescent Identity in the Context of Family Violence within the Belhar Community of Cape Town**' has been edited and the candidate has been advised to make the recommended changes.



ES van Aswegen

## **ABSTRACT**

### **TITLE: Re-constructing adolescent identity in the context of family violence within the Belhar community of Cape Town**

For many adolescents in South Africa, violence and crime constitute a way of life, having both direct and indirect effects on their psychological, emotional, developmental and physical wellbeing. Adolescent development has particularly been affected as it is embedded within the context of post-apartheid society. The process of identity development may be impacted by the culture of violence and particularly affected by family violence, leaving long-term effects that may further impact on constructing an integrated identity. Adolescents growing up in poverty-stricken communities with high unemployment, concomitant dysfunction within the family, lack of infrastructure, and high incidences of crime and violence have limited access to mental health services and with the increase of violence and crime infiltrating many homes, it is evident that there is a need for restorative therapeutic intervention with adolescents in South Africa.

The overall goal of this study was to explore and describe how adolescent identity in the context of family violence can be re-constructed. In order to address this goal the study explored and described the subjective experiences of adolescents regarding their sense of self in the context of family violence as well as described how a psycho-educational strategy may be used as a method for re-constructing identity in the context of family violence. The study further explored,

described and explained how the meanings adolescents from a Cape Town community give to family violence, contributed to re-defining their identity.

A mixed-methods approach was used in the primary study. Twelve participants were purposively selected for the study and included both male and female adolescents with ages ranging from 15 to 18 years from three secondary schools. The data were obtained through semi-structured individual interviews, psycho-educational intervention and pre-test and post-test assessment (Adolescent Self Concept Scale). The data was thematically and statistically analyzed.

The research findings show that adolescents' self-experience of family violence is complex and impacts on how they perceive themselves and interact with others, as well as how they foresee their future selves in a non-violent setting. The findings of adolescents' exposure to psycho-educational intervention and Adolescent Self Concept Scale suggest a significant change in the identity formation process in terms of how adolescents perceive themselves and their interaction with others within the context of family violence. This process therefore allowed adolescents to re-construct identity, through redefining the meanings they attached to family violence. The implications of these findings are that adolescents exposed to family violence can re-define the meanings they attach to family violence and further facilitate identity re-construction. Consequently researchers and therapists can become more informed on how to approach identity issues as a process emergent from a relational field and how to facilitate re-constructing an integrated identity.

**KEY WORDS: Adolescence; Identity; Family violence; Psycho-education; Re-construction**

## OPSOMMING

### **Titel: Herkonstruksie van adolessente se identiteit in die konteks van gesinsgeweld binne die Belhar-gemeenskap van Kaapstad**

Vir baie adolessente in Suid-Afrika vorm geweld en misdaad deel van hulle lewensbestaan, met direkte en indirekte gevolge op hul sielkundige, emosionele, ontwikkelings- en fisieke welstand. Adolessente se ontwikkeling word veral geaffekteer omdat dit gesetel is binne die konteks van 'n post-apartheid samelewing. Die proses van identiteitsontwikkeling kan beïnvloed word deur 'n kultuur van geweld en veral deur gesinsgeweld wat tot langtermyn-effekte kan lei wat die bou van 'n geïntegreerde identiteit kan benadeel. Adolessente wat groot word in armoedige gemeenskappe met 'n hoë werkloosheidsyfer met gepaardgaande wanfunksionering binne die gesin, 'n gebrek aan infrastruktuur asook 'n hoë voorkoms van misdaad en geweld het gevolglik minder toegang tot geestesgesondheidsdienste en met die toename van geweld en misdaad wat al hoe meer huislike omstandighede binnedring, is dit duidelik dat daar 'n behoefte vir herstellende terapeutiese intervensie met adolessente in Suid-Afrika benodig word.

.

Die oorkoepelende doel van hierdie studie was om te verken en te beskryf hoe adolessente se identiteit binne die konteks van gesinsgeweld geherkonstrueer kan word. Ten einde hierdie doel aan te spreek, het die studie die subjektiewe ervarings van adolessente ten opsigte van hulle sin vir self binne die konteks van gesinsgeweld verken en beskryf en ook hoe 'n psigo-opvoedkundige strategie gebruik kan word as 'n metode om identiteit binne die konteks van gesinsgeweld te verken. Die studie het bykomend verken, beskryf en verduidelik hoe die betekenis wat adolessente van 'n Kaapse gemeenskap aan gesinsgeweld gee, kan bydra tot die herkonstruksie van hulle identiteit.

'n Gemengde-metode benadering is in die primêre studie gebruik. Twaalf deelnemers was doelgerig geselekteer vir die studie en het manlike sowel as vroulike adolessente ingesluit tussen die ouderdomme van 15 tot 18 jaar van drie hoërskole. Die data is verkry deur middel van semi-

gestruktureerde individuele onderhoude, psigo-opvoedkundige intervensie en voor- en na-toets assesserings (*Adolescent Self Concept Scale*). Die data was tematies en statisties ontleed.

Die navorsingbevindings toon dat adolessente se selfervaring van gesinsgeweld kompleks is en 'n impak het op hoe hulle hulself verstaan en met ander interaksie het asook hoe hulle hul toekomstige self in 'n nie-gewelddadige omgewing sien. Die bevindings van adolessente se blootstelling aan psigo-opvoedkundige intervensie en aan die *Adolescent Self Concept Scale*, dui op 'n beduidende verandering in die identiteitsvorming-proses met betrekking tot hoe adolessente hulself en hul interaksie met ander binne die konteks van gesinsgeweld sien. Hierdie proses het dus adolessente toegelaat om hulle identiteit te herkonstrueer deur die betekenis wat hulle aan gesinsgeweld koppel, te herdefinieer. Die implikasies van hierdie bevindings is dat adolessente wat blootgestel word aan gesinsgeweld die betekenis wat hulle aan gesinsgeweld heg, kan herdefinieer en sodoende identiteit kan herkonstrueer. Gevolglik kan navorsers en terapeute meer ingelig word oor hoe om identiteit-kwessies te benader as 'n proses wat te voorskyn kom uit 'n verhoudingsveld en hoe om die herkonstruksie van 'n geïntegreerde identiteit te fasiliteer.

**SLEUTELWOORDE: Adolessensie; Identiteit; Gesinsgeweld; Psigo-opvoedkundige strategie; Herkonstruksie**

## **PREFACE**

The article format was utilised in the presentation of the research results, as described in Academic rule A.7.2.5, stipulated by North-West University as revised in 2010. The formulation of the articles is in accordance with stipulations of the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Psychology and Developing Societies and Psychology and Violence*.

The articles were written according to the development of the research process. Section A reflects the planning phase and is therefore written in future tense, while the articles and Section C describe the complete process.

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## **Section A: Orientation to Contextualising the Research Project**

### **Introduction**

The youth of South Africa are regarded as valued assets of the nation. They are the hope of our future. The new generation of youth constitutes the foundation of our society; as future leaders they can thus contribute to sustaining a healthy developing society such as South Africa (South Africa. The Presidency, April 2011).

For young people to gain recognition and their rightful place as valued citizens of South Africa, their need for healthy development should be addressed. This urgency is evident in the words of Nelson Mandela at the first public opening address in 1994 as he stated that, youth's "needs are immense and urgent; therefore without them there can be no future". There is therefore an urgent appeal to reclaim and restore youth at risk of the effects of family violence. Therefore the purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of adolescents in the midst of family violence, and how to restore adolescent identity within this context.

The study is presented in a journal article format consisting of four sections as stipulated by the North-West University (NWU). Section A provides an overview of the broader research study, contextualisation, problem statement, and focus of the research. Within this, a brief literature review and methodology are outlined. Section B consists of three journal articles focusing on the research results produced by the implemented mixed-method approach study design utilised for the study. The focus of Article 1 is on self-experiences of adolescents in the context of family violence. Article 2 addresses the need for re-constructing identity in the context of family violence through the use of psycho-educational strategy. Article 3 further explores, describes and explains the process of identity formation in the context of family violence.

Section C contains a conclusive summary and recommendations pertaining to the research outcomes. Lastly, Section D provides addenda (in CD format) that elaborate on the research study and furnishes evidence of research data.

### **Conceptualisation of Research Study and Problem Statement**

As the first generation of born-free adolescents growing up in a new democracy of post-apartheid South Africa, many young people had anticipated a decrease in violence. However, in view of statistics, crime and violence have become endemic in South African society.

Adolescents in South Africa are therefore often confronted with increasing levels of crime and violence and find it difficult to cope with the consequences (Africa Check, 2014; Collins, 2013).

It is presumed that many South Africans view violence as a means of resolving conflict and have encouraged the practice of violence to settle disputes within the confines of their homes. Collins (2013) supports this argument and suggests that interpersonal violence is rooted in and reinforced by South African culture, where many forms of violence are accepted as normal. According to Thaler (2011), collective violence has largely been replaced by interpersonal violence, such as family violence, which has an increased presence in many families.

The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) in South Africa confirms the presence of a high culture of violence in families. More than 20% of adolescents reported that they had witnessed aggressive disputes between family members, while one in five adolescents had witnessed or experienced violence at home (Burton, 2007). Young people are exposed to violence as direct victims, and also as witnesses to acts of violence perpetrated against others. In 2008, 53.4% respondents indicated that family members often lost their temper and 11.1% indicated that they had seen family members intentionally hurting one another (Leoschut,

2009). According to Statistics South Africa (2012), more cases involving crime within the household have been reported. However, owing to unreported cases of violence, it is presumed that crime statistics are an inaccurate reflection of crime incidence, and these statistics are likely to increase (Africa Check, 2014; Crime Stats SA, 2013; Statistics South Africa, 2012). In the international arena, family violence is on the rise and statistics show an increase in occurrence. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) conducted a multi-country study on domestic violence and found, for example, an increase in intimate partner and sexual violence.

For many adolescents in South Africa, violence and crime constitute a way of life, infiltrating every aspect of their lives, and rendering the culture of violence normative, with both direct and indirect effects on their psychological, emotional, developmental and physical wellbeing (Burton, Leoschut, & Bonora, 2009). The cycle of violence is further perpetuated from generation to generation by normalising and internalising the culture of violence (Burton, 2007; Ward, 2007). Adolescent identity is particularly affected by family violence, leaving long-term effects that may further impact on constructing an integrated identity. This requires urgent restoration.

### **Rationale for Study**

From the above argument it is evident that there is a need for restorative therapeutic intervention with adolescents in South Africa. Accessibility to mental health services and promotion of mental health needs for adolescents are lacking, and with the increase of violence and crime infiltrating many homes, the need for an accessible intervention is urgently required (Flisher et al., 2012; Lund, Boyce, Flisher, Kafaar, & Dawes, 2009).

The socio-political shifts within a society such as South Africa have impacted on and perpetuated violence on multiple levels of society. South Africa was exposed to a culture of violence, since the apartheid era was characterised by political violence that resulted in socialisation into a culture of violence. Through the process of socialisation, violence has

become a norm and has been internalised by many adolescents as acceptable. This is especially true for adolescents growing up in poverty-stricken communities with high unemployment, concomitant dysfunction within the family, lack of infrastructure, and high incidences of crime and violence (Burton, 2007; Stevens & Lockhat, 1997). Adolescent development in particular has been affected as it is embedded within the context of post-apartheid society. Therefore, the process of identity development may be impacted by the culture of violence as indicated above. Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses, and Seekings (2010) and Yoder (2000) regard adolescent development in South Africa as different from the traditional view of adolescent development. Despite this view, it is universally accepted that during the phase of adolescent development, identity formation is both a significant and integral task (Arnett, 2010; Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Identity formation involves the exploration and testing of alternative ideas, beliefs, and behaviours, marking this period as one of both dramatic change and uncertainty for adolescent development (Erikson, 1968).

Being exposed to continued violence from childhood, may predispose adolescents to a higher risk of exhibiting problems in various developmental areas, including social development, relationships with peers, and achievement at school, as well as engaging in crime, violence and antisocial behaviour (Jefthas & Artz, 2007; Evans, Davis, & DiLillo, 2008).

According to Gestalt Theory, healthy self-development occurs in the presence of healthy contact making and interaction between the self and environment. A constant awareness and interconnectedness between self and others is, therefore, necessary (Joyce & Sills, 2010; Philippon, 2009; Yontef, 1993). If contact is disrupted by environmental factors, it will lead to difficulty in forming an identity (Grobler, 2009). Adolescents who are exposed to family violence may find difficulty in constructing a healthy sense of identity, and as a result experience difficulty in exploring and testing alternative ideas, beliefs, and behaviours needed to form a separate and unique identity from others. Exposure to family violence further

influences the manner in which contact is made between self and the environment and consequently may lead to behavioural and emotional issues (Makhubela, 2012; Schwartz, Pantin, Prado, Sullivan, & Szapocznik, 2005).

The identity formed might be fuelled by false identification based on assumptions and beliefs taken from the environment of family violence. The false identification may therefore hamper adolescents' ability to make contact with the environment in a spontaneous, deliberate way (Grobler, 2009; Spagnuolo Lobb, 2013; Spagnuolo Lobb & Lichtenberg, 2005).

Adolescents may be more likely to engage in crime, violence and antisocial behaviour as an unhealthy way of creatively adjusting to the environment. Even if the creative adjustment is regarded as unhealthy, it is still acknowledged as making contact and adjusting to a changed environment (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2013).

It is clear from the conceptualisation of this research study that its significance was constructed out of the need for more restorative intervention strategies with adolescents who have been exposed to family violence in the Belhar community. From the researcher's position as a psychologist within the Belhar community, an increasing number of adolescent case referrals have been received from parents and schools presenting problems ranging from gangsterism, bullying, truancy, and acting-out behaviour, to suicide attempts. Statistics from the local police in the Belhar area indicate an increase in the prevalence of domestic violence cases over the past few years. Most of the clients referred are adolescents exposed to family violence. Life orientation teachers and social workers within the Belhar community further attest to the high incidence of adolescent case referrals resulting from family violence. Q Adams (Personal communication, June 16, 2013) and S Overmeyer (Personal communication, August 15, 2012) state that most learners who are disruptive at school come from backgrounds embedded in family violence. Considering the increase in incidence, family violence may have impacted on

adolescents' identity issues and led to subsequent behavioural problems (Makhubela, 2012; Makubela & Debuso, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2005).

Issues on adolescent identity formation and family influence have been explored by Goldblatt (2003), Hammack (2006), and Ward (2007), but there has been limited research on adolescents' subjective experiences of family violence, for instance, the manner in which violence affects their positions and roles within in their families. Empirical research on understanding the role of the family in adolescent identity formation, and the relationship between family functioning and identity development, is a valuable contribution to the pool of empirical knowledge (Goldblatt, 2003; Hammack, 2006).

Literature on adolescent identity has mainly been inspired by Erikson's (1968) theory of identity and has resulted in significant empirical and theoretical elaboration, but has failed to recognise context and variability within the process of human development (Goldblatt, 2003; Hammack, 2006; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Meca, & Richie, 2012). The recognition of context and variability in human development has called for the production of a more integrated approach towards literature on identity formation. The theoretical model of Erikson is regarded as a useful starting point for understanding adolescence within the context of South Africa; however it inadequately captures the diverse social, political and cultural underpinning that constitutes the meaning and experience of adolescence in a post-apartheid era (Bray et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2012; Stevens & Lockhat, 1997; Venn, 2010). This theoretical model for understanding adolescent development thus limits our understanding of the experiences of marginalised, indigenous or other groups of youth deviating from the dominant population group (Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Wyn & White, 1997; Yoder, 2000).

An integrated approach needs to be adopted and extended to foster an understanding of identity development in adolescents, while considering the social, political and cultural underpinnings of a multicultural and diverse society. It is the researcher's opinion that such an

integrated identity development approach, which accounts for holistic development, may constitute what it means to be an adolescent in the post-apartheid era. Currently contextual factors resulting in adolescent identity issues are poorly accounted for, and require researchers to take cognisance of the unique way South African adolescents experience this developmental phase and effects aroused by contextual factors on their development (Norris et al., 2010; Venn, 2010).

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Babbie (2008) and Nieuwenhuis (2007), a framework is a conceptual structure for observing and understanding research information and reveals how experiences are understood. It can be viewed as an intellectual structure upon which research and development in a field of enquiry is based. Two theoretical frameworks, namely the Gestalt approach and the Ecological Systems theory, formed the basis of the research study upon which adolescent development in the context of family violence may be understood.

#### **Gestalt Theoretical Approach**

The Gestalt therapeutic approach can be regarded as an integrated approach that views identity holistically by contextualising it within the field, and refers to the self-organised whole that constitutes the interconnectedness between events and life experiences of a person (Lewin, 1943; Parlett, 1991). Gestalt theory, which is rooted in humanistic and existential perspectives, refers to the self and identity as a process rather than a fixed entity. Polkinghorne (1991) further describes it as always in flux, and changing rather than stable. Identity development is thus seen as a process of development and growth. This approach views the organisms (e.g. adolescents) and environments (e.g. family context) as shared wholes, engaging in relation to the other in creating the organism/environment field. The Gestalt approach views the adolescent as a relational emergent phenomenon in a constant process of configuration and re-configuration within the context of the organism/environment field. Development cannot be

separated from the context in which the adolescent lives; the two are inextricably linked (Jacobs, 2005; Wheeler, 2000; Yontef & Jacobs, 2010).

Adolescent exposure to a violent family environment is thus always in a process of configuration. Configuration of self is based on a configurational reflex that creates clusters of characteristics that over time may develop into selves. This means that our different personal experiences are clustered into a unified pattern that over time forms into selves. The configuration process is embedded with the organism/environment field and difficult conditions of the field often impact on the process of self-configuration, leading to flawed summations of self (Polster, 2005). The family context of many adolescents of the Belhar community is often characterised by family violence and victimisation, and exposure to family violence can become internalised and be integrated into the self. The identity that is formed consists of selves that are constructed in such a way to provide the adolescent with some means of coping with difficult field events (Grobler, 2009). This view is further supported by Philippson (2009), and McConville and Wheeler (2001), who state that the self develops in relation to the environmental field and the individual will construct a self to adapt to the environment. This approach is unique in enabling adolescents to self-regulate and find balance, by moving them through periods of developmental disequilibrium (Joyce & Sills, 2010).

Approaching adolescent identity within the South African context from a Gestalt therapeutic approach, which views the self as a process that constantly changes and configures into multiple selves, will inform the psycho-educational stance of this research study, and facilitate the re-construction process of identity within the context of family violence. It is apparent from previous research studies (Bray et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2012; Venn, 2010) that there is a need to contextualise adolescent identity and provide empirical research on interventions that will support youth identity restoration. Some of the relevant literature based

on the Gestalt approach is dated and not as recent as research requires, references used in the text are therefore outdated, but still provide historical and academic relevance for this study.

**Gestalt founding principles.** The following principles are seen as the three founding pillars, namely, *Phenomenological theory*, *Field theory* and *Holism*, upon which the Gestalt approach is built and viewed as relevant to this research study (Joyce & Sills, 2010; Maurer & Gaffney, 2005; Woldt & Toman, 2005).

***Phenomenological theory.*** Phenomenological theory refers to being with the client in the here-and-now, remaining close to the client's own experience, and exploring the meaning the client ascribes to his or her experiences. The theory focuses on the internal world of the client, the external world of the environment, and the interaction between these two (Joyce & Sills, 2010; Woldt & Toman, 2005). In this research, the subjective experiences of the adolescent's self within family violence context are explored.

***Field theory.*** According to field theory, the individual is never regarded as a separate entity, but rather seen as part of the field (Wheeler, 2000; Woldt & Toman, 2005; Yontef, 1993). The field, according to Lewin (1943), refers to a self-organised whole of life experiences of a person. This includes socio, cultural and ethnic influences; therefore all processes, problems and solutions are the result of the interaction between the individual, his or her environment, and perceptions. In the field everything is interrelated and interconnected, and the individual has to adapt to the field to maintain equilibrium of self (Parlett, 2005). Through this process, a person strives towards growth and balance (Joyce & Sills, 2010).

The research study focuses on how the fields, especially the microsystem such as family, school and community systems, are interconnected and influence the process of identity formation of adolescents in the context of family violence. As indicated by Goldblatt (2003); Makhubela (2012); Schwartz et al. (2005), and Ward (2007), environmental factors such as family violence have an impact on the identity process of adolescents. This approach views the

self and identity as emergent from a relational field and defines the self as the complex system of contacts necessary for adjustment in a difficult field (Grobler, 2009; Philippson, 2009; Polster, 2005; Yontef, 1993).

**Holism.** From a holistic theory, the individual is the total sum of his/her separate parts. The theory of holism suggests that all parts of a whole are connected and cannot exist separately from the whole. The individual is therefore not separate from his or her environment, and can only be fully understood as a part of that environment (Jacobs, 2005; Yontef, 1993). Holism is one of the fundamental concepts of the Gestalt therapy approach. Smuts (1926, p. 87) referred to holism as a process of “creative synthesis”, whereby “the resulting wholes are not static but dynamic, evolutionary, creative. It is a unified synthesis which includes not only the present, but much of the past and even its future”. This study refers to the internal and external fields of the adolescent.

### **Other underlying principles of Gestalt therapy.**

*Awareness.* According to Joyce and Sills (2010), within the Gestalt context, awareness means to be in contact with oneself and one’s environment. Awareness is an observation of the self and others, the choices one makes, and it focuses on the present. Effective awareness is grounded in and energised by the dominant need of the organism. It requires the individual to be knowledgeable about the self, his or her current situation and the self in relation to that situation. Any denial of the situation may result in the disturbance of awareness. Meaningful awareness is constituted by the self in the world, dialogue with the world, and awareness of others. It is not an internally focused introspection.

Awareness is accompanied by *owning*, which refers to the process of knowing one has control and responsibility for one's own behaviour and feelings (Yontef, 1993). Awareness of self constitutes the subjective experiences of self and is important for healthy self-regulation

(Joyce & Sills, 2010). Through heightened awareness of the self in the context of family violence, healthy self-regulation and configuration can take place.

*Change.* Change and growth form part of the Gestalt approach. Gestalt therapists believe in individuals' potential to change, grow and resolve their own problems (Joyce & Sills, 2010). Change in one area affects the sub-systems in the field. The researcher is of the opinion that growth and change are constant, and adolescents exposed to family violence are in a process of change, therefore the self and identity are constantly in a process of growth and change.

*Organismic self-regulation.* Gestalt holds that all people attain the ability to change, adjust and solve their own problems. Following from this perspective, the researcher accepts that the population has the ability to grow and change; each person has an internal regulator to find balance in his or her life. This is reflected by Perls (1976, p. 33), who contends, "If you understand the situation you are in and let the situation you are in control your actions, then you learn to cope with life."

*Contact Modification.* Healthy contact means striving towards balance to meet the individual's needs. However, interruptions in contact between the self and the environment can cause imbalance within the natural flow, resulting in needs not being satisfied. Modification in contact refers to the individual's modification of contact making with the environment to regain balance, which may prove to be an unhealthy method of contact making (Clarkson & Cavicchia, 2014, Sills, Lapworth, & Desmond, 2012),

*Configuration of selves.* The self is regarded as a system of contacts and the organisation of experiences into clusters of characteristics (Latner, 2000; Polster, 2005). Polster (2005) refers to the self as a summation of a large or small cluster of characteristics within the person that guides his/her behaviour and feelings. He refers to the creation of self as a natural gestalt formation. Through the process of configuration, many selves are created that are

outside the person's awareness. Awareness of these selves may impact on identity. This research study uses the process of re-constructing identity as postulated by Polster's Gestalt theory on diversity of selves. Polster (2005) refers to healthy parts of identity – not split off or dissociative selves – that emerge from awareness. Through the identification of these healthy selves the individual is able to foster an integrated identity. The tailoring process, which refers to the restructuring and reshaping of different selves, forms the foundation of Polster's theory on diversity of selves, and enables the individual to become aware and identify the different selves, therefore leading to re-construction of the self. It further forms the foundation for understanding adolescent identity within the context of family violence.

The Gestalt approach has humanistic and existential elements that facilitate holistic integration, as it views adolescent development as process of change within the organism/environment field. It further views development as holistic and adaptive to the environment, where there is a constant interaction between the two entities to form a whole (Jacobs, 2005; Joyce & Sills, 2010; Yontef, 1993). Awareness and change are two major components of this approach; with heightened awareness of self, adolescents become knowledgeable about self in the context of family violence and this allows for facilitation of change, growth and healthy configuration of self. Through growth and change, adolescents will be able to self-regulate, find balance and be able to control their actions and cope with difficult field events such as family violence. Adolescents will also become aware of how to strive for balance and identify unhealthy ways of coping with a context of family violence. They will further discover new ways of coping through awareness of diversity of selves and how the healthy selves can foster an integrated identity within the context of family violence.

## **Ecological Theory of Human Development**

The ecological model of human development defines the ecological environment as a set of interconnected structured systems on various levels: individual, family, educational, communal, and cultural levels. The co-dependence of levels requires joint participation at various levels and intercommunication between the individual and environment. The individual is therefore constantly developing and is a product of change (Bronfenbrenner, 1987; 1995). The levels of the exosystem are interrelated and impact on adolescent development (Burton, 2007). The ecological system consists of five levels: The microsystem refers to the system that is in direct contact with the individual, and typically will include the family system. The mesosystem refers to the interaction between the different systems within the microsystem; therefore it focuses on the interconnectedness between systems and the impact on the individual, which could refer to family instability impacting on the individual. The exosystem refers to a setting that does not involve the individual directly, but still affects the individual, such as at community level, where decisions are made that impact the individual. The macrosystem/chronosystem refers to the socio-political and cultural environment that affects the individual. This system can either have a positive or negative effect on the individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The levels of the ecological systems theory cannot be studied independently, as they are co-dependent, directly and indirectly affecting one another (Yontef, 1993).

From this argument it could be understood that the family context impacts on identity development, but the broader field such as the community in which adolescents reside also has an impact on the identity development of adolescents. Many adolescents in this study reside in Belhar, which originated with the promulgation of the Group Areas Act No. 41 of 1950. Under the Group Areas Act, Belhar was established as a suburb for the relocation of disadvantaged communities living in the Cape Peninsula. Many of these relocated communities were forced to

leave behind a sense of belonging and community, and this further impacted on community identity (Adhikari, 2005; Erasmus, 2000).

Today evidence of this social disparity and lack of social cohesion and identity still exists; it is evident in the underdeveloped commercial facilities and paucity of constructive recreational activities, lack of youth supervision, and prevalence of high gang activity. This has contributed to a lack of social cohesion and the identity necessary for the building of a community. According to residents, the increase in crime and violence has turned this area into one of the worst crime areas in the Cape Peninsula (Cloete & Van Dongen, 2004). Further evidence of social disparity, crime and violence within the Belhar community emerges from the behavioural and psychological problems adolescents present with. There are an increasing number of adolescent case referrals from parents and schools presenting with problems ranging from gangsterism, bullying, truancy, and acting-out behaviour, to suicide attempts.

Both the ecological and Gestalt approaches used in the study complement each other as they refer to individual functioning within the field/system and being influenced by systemic coherence. These approaches examine figure/ground structures such as family and the individual, development of awareness, and altering of behaviour, and contribute to a theoretical conceptualisation of the research.

### **Definition of Concepts**

#### **Adolescence**

Adolescence is a key period of preparation for adulthood and it represents one of the critical transition phases in the lifespan, characterised by growth and change. Adolescence is a time for potential growth that signifies an interactional relation among biological, psychological, and social processes. Even though adolescence is regarded as a time of growth and potential, adolescents are often at risk of the social contextual factors that impact on development (Arnett, 2010; Erikson, 1968; WHO, 2014).

## **Family Violence**

Family violence can be seen as any behaviour that is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling and which occurs in current or past family, domestic or intimate relationships.

Family violence is characterised by one partner or family member using abusive behaviours/tactics to intentionally obtain power and control over a victim. The abuse is intentional and systematic, increasing in frequency and severity over time (Chan & Yeung, 2009). Family violence includes a wide range of aggressive and violent acts towards a family member exerted by another member within the domestic realm. It may manifest in the form of spouse abuse, child abuse, or abuse of parents, but family violence is not limited to these relations (Chan & Yeung, 2009).

The term ‘family violence’ is regarded as preferable in this study as it pertains to a larger sample group not limited to partners or de- factos but strives to include mothers, children, men and extended family (Chan & Yeung, 2009; Victoria, Department of Human Services, 2013). In this research study, participants were drawn from different family systems, ranging from nuclear to extended families.

## **Self and Identity**

The process of identity formation defines aspects of the self to others and refers to a sense of continuity, uniqueness and affiliation. Identity formation further leads to a number of issues where the individual gains a conscious sense of comprehension of himself/herself as a discrete and separate entity, as well as identifying with roles, values, beliefs, and lifestyles that mark individuality. Identity is a complex concept that continues throughout the lifecycle, correlating with the perceptions of others (Arnett, 2010; Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Identity is not only constructed in relation to self, but in relation to the environment, and allows the

individual to experience awareness of coherence and distinctiveness of self. Identity refers to the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that remain consistent across different situations and contexts. The self, self-concept and identity are the mental constructs shaped by the context in which an individual develops and determine behaviour (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012; Swann & Bosson, 2010). Self and Identity are crucial concepts in the exploration of identity. For a healthy re-construction process, self-awareness allows for the conscious knowledge of self and identity and therefore it is essential for introspection of self and to recognise oneself as separate from others. Exploring the self and identity in adolescents can therefore provide much needed empirical knowledge on the process of identity and identity re-construction.

### **Identity Re-Construction**

According to Corbin and Strauss (1987), re-construction of identity refers to the process of reintegration of identity through exploring new and unused aspects of self. Polster (2005) indicates that through exploration of the self and identity as facilitated by the tailoring process, an increased awareness of self and identity will engender greater insight and knowledge. Redefining the self would mean giving different meaning to the different selves. This process of redefinition will then lead to integration into the identity process, which will lead to re-construction of identity.

### **Psycho-Educational Strategy**

The psycho-educational strategy was used as a tool to facilitate change in the identity formation of adolescents exposed to family violence. The psycho-educational strategy consists of therapeutic and developmental skills that facilitate the process of change. The re-construction of identity often occurs within the process through awareness and dialogue. The

psycho-educational strategy aimed to bring about awareness of self in the environment of family violence.

Through the psycho-educational strategy, the tailoring process could be executed through the restructuring and reshaping of introjection – ideas, beliefs or attitudes absorbed from the external environment and making them part of the self without critically evaluating them. By bringing different selves into awareness, participants are able to rename and claim them. These selves can be transformed in the process of tailoring, where the person becomes aware of the different selves as well as the different roles assumed in different situations (Polster, 2005). The tailoring process allows the individual to gain a positive configuration. Participants, through experience of the psycho-educational strategy, gain the desired insight and awareness required for identifying the various selves, and are able to recreate the self within the context of family violence.

### **Research Questions, Goals and Objectives**

The above arguments show clearly that adolescent development has been impacted by the increase in family violence in South Africa. Research also further indicates that mental health resources in South Africa are limited and inadequate in meeting adolescent mental health needs. From this argument it is evident that research on adolescent identity within the family violence context needs further exploration, as well as the development of restorative interventions that will enhance adolescent development.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the need for further exploration in the area of adolescent identity and family violence, a central research question and sub-questions were formulated. The central research question is broad in nature and calls for the exploration of the central phenomenon. Sub-questions are more specific, narrowing the focus of the topic (Creswell, 2009).

**Central research question.** How can adolescent identity in the context of family violence be re-constructed?

To answer the central research question, the following sub-questions are asked:

What are the subjective experiences of adolescents regarding their sense of self in the context of family violence?

How can a psycho-education strategy be used as a method for re-constructing identity in the context of family violence?

How does the meaning that adolescents give to family violence, contribute to re-constructing their identity?

### **Central Theoretical Argument**

The research study hypothesised that through exploring the experience of the self in the context of family violence, a heightened awareness of self will occur. Heightened awareness of the self will facilitate the re-construction of self and identity in the context of family violence. It is presumed that if adolescent identity formation is addressed within the context of family violence, the identity of adolescents will be re-constructed. Exploring and investigating the meaning adolescents ascribe to family violence can facilitate the process of re-constructing their identity. The psycho-education strategy can be used as a method for re-constructing identity in the context of family violence.

Little empirical research examining the process of identity formation within the context of family violence is available, resulting in a gap in the body of empirical knowledge about identity formation in adolescents. The hypothesis that was constructed from the central argument therefore examines whether adolescent identity in the context of family violence can be re-constructed?

Producing such empirical knowledge may serve to inform restorative intervention strategies with adolescents and increase their accessibility.

### **Research Goal and Objectives**

The term ‘goal’ implies the broader, abstract conception of the end towards which effort is directed, whereas ‘objectives’ describe the more concrete, measureable steps used to attain an overall goal (Fouché & De Vos, 2005). The aim of this study is to explore and describe how adolescent identity in the context of family violence can be re-constructed.

#### **The objectives are as follows:**

- To explore and describe the subjective experiences of adolescents regarding their sense of self in the context of family violence – Article 1.
- To describe how a psycho-educational strategy may be used as a method for re-constructing identity in the context of family violence – Article 2.
- To explore, describe and explain how the meaning that adolescents from a Cape Town community give to family violence, contributes to re-defining their identity – Article 3.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Approach and Design**

The research study aims to explore, describe and explain how adolescent identity may be re-constructed within the context of family violence in the Cape Town area. To address the objectives of the study, an embedded mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining both qualitative and quantitative data, with the quantitative strand embedded within a larger body of qualitative data to provide a holistic understanding of the problem. The mixed-methods approach concurrently allowed for the collection of both types of data of a single phenomenon.

In addition, it allowed for a comparison of various research findings, highlighting

similarities and differences to produce validated research findings (Ivankova, Creswell, & Clark, 2007). The research data of this study is primarily qualitative in nature and the quantitative data is embedded within qualitative methodology. The research follows a case-study approach with individual participants to gain an in-depth understanding of identity reconstruction and family violence. The case study approach provided access to (person and specific group phenomenon) and provided insight into this particular issue. The semi-structured interviews and psycho-educational strategy generated qualitative data from participants, while the Adolescent Self-Concept Scale (ASCS) was used as a one-group, pre-test–post-test design to generate quantitative data from participants. The mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data, was implemented to provide an expanded understanding of the research problem and increased the likelihood that the findings and interpretations would be more valid and reliable (Babbie, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Ivankova et al., 2007).

### **Research Procedure**

**Pilot study.** The research process began with conducting a pilot study with four adolescents from the Belhar community, Cape Town. The purpose of the pilot study was to test and ensure the applicability of the measuring instrument and research procedure, as well as the feasibility of the study within a South African context. The semi-structured interview questions were assessed for both suitability and appropriateness. By administering the semi-structured interview questions to participants, the researcher was allowed to gauge the intelligibility, ambiguity, and reliability of each item of the instrument as described by Strydom (2011). The psycho-educational strategy was implemented to evaluate if the procedure was suitable for the purpose of the investigation and could yield reliable outcomes aligned with research objectives.

The ASCS measured identity composition and the items were examined on different scales for ambiguity, assessment of language, understanding, and relevance within the South

African context. The ASCS was adapted for the South African context by Vrey and Venter (1983) and norm tables were found to be appropriate for this sample group. Thereafter, the Western Cape Education Department was contacted for permission to conduct the empirical research study at three schools in Belhar, a Cape Town suburb.

A pre-selection questionnaire was used to identify potential participants. The pre-selection questionnaire consisted of questions that could identify adolescents who had been exposed to family violence. All the potential participants were invited to a brief meeting with the researcher and life-orientation teachers where the research procedure and objectives were explained by the researcher. The potential participants could then decide whether or not to participate in the study. Consent forms were distributed at school for them to take home for their parents to sign, in view of their minor status. Completed consent forms were returned to the researcher at a follow-up meeting. A group of 12 adolescents participated in the final study.

The pre-test ASCS was administered and measured identity constructs before the implementation of the psycho-educational intervention strategy. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 12 participants. The semi-structured interviews measured information on adolescent identity, perception of self within the context of family violence, experiences of family violence, coping strategies, and participants' views of their future self without violence (see Addendum B).

After completing the semi-structured interviews, the participants were introduced to a psycho-educational strategy compiled from the Gestalt models of Blom (2006) and Schoeman and Van der Merwe (1996). The purpose of the psycho-educational strategy was to engender a heightened awareness of identity (identifying and naming the different selves) in the environment of family violence, and an awareness of the configuration of identity within the context of family violence, together with the diversity of self that could bring about a re-constructed identity. The psycho-educational strategy method was implemented over a five-

week period, consisting of a visual projective technique that was implemented using clay to explore identity (see Addendum B). A post-test ASCS was conducted eight weeks later with participants to verify whether observed change within identity constructs had taken place (see Addendum B and B1).

### **Sampling**

This research study utilised a non-probability, purposive sampling method where the researcher aimed at obtaining data on adolescent identity in the context of family violence. The sample was taken from a homogeneous population of adolescents exposed to family violence in the Cape Town suburb of Belhar. The population group was homogeneous, as all adolescents come from the same kind of background of family violence. Participants also came from the same community within Cape Town area and resorted within the same socio-economic and race group.

The pre-determined criteria for inclusion of participants were male and female adolescents between 15 and 18 years of age who were exposed to recurring family violence, able to speak both English and Afrikaans, and who did not form part of any therapeutic group at the time of the research. Twelve adolescents who had experienced continuous family violence over a period of time returned consent forms after their parents had provided consent and were selected to participate in this research study. The group consisted of 11 girls (ranging between 15 and 18 years) and 1 boy (17 years). The sample used in the study is relatively small and this can be ascribed to the fear of stigma and of being labelled by other learners. Learners also reported that some parents were loath to give permission for children to participate, expressing fears of social welfare interventions and legal implications.

| Participant Code           | Age | Grade | Gender | Type of violence                                                                         |
|----------------------------|-----|-------|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>Participant JR/ P1</u>  | 15  | 8     | female | Physical and emotional abuse- (mother and uncle)                                         |
| <u>Participant CP/ P2</u>  | 17  | 10    | Male   | Physical violence, parents, self -harm behaviour                                         |
| <u>Participant JM /P3</u>  | 16  | 9     | female | Physical and emotional abuse, witness between brothers and towards parents               |
| <u>Participant KD/ P4</u>  | 18  | 11    | female | Witnessing of physical and emotional abuse between mom and dad                           |
| <u>Participant RD/P5</u>   | 15  | 8     | female | Physical violence and property damage, sister using drugs cause of family violence       |
| <u>Participant AP/P6</u>   | 15  | 8     | female | Family violence caused by aunt and uncle, witness violence between mom and dad           |
| <u>Participant HH/P7</u>   | 15  | 8     | female | Arguing between mom and daughter,                                                        |
| <u>Participant NA/P8</u>   | 15  | 8     | female | Conflict between mom and step dad, caught between them                                   |
| <u>Participant LP /P10</u> | 15  | 8     | female | Violence between family members- in law family, bullying at school                       |
| <u>Participant L/P11</u>   | 18  | 11    | female | Exposed to drugs in family, constant arguing and family conflicts between foster parents |
| <u>Participant LB/P12</u>  | 16  | 10    | female | Family violence between mom and dad, physical beatings from dad                          |

Participants came from nuclear or single-parent homes, or were alternatively placed in foster care. Two participants were placed in foster care while other participants reported living with extended family members such as grandparents, aunts or uncles. None of the participants reported receiving professional help, although some participants received support from life-orientation teachers, extended family members and peers. One participant was referred to social services for further support.

### Data Collection

In the research study, the researcher was responsible for the collection of data. All data was collected from the three secondary schools that constituted the primary research site. Data collection was completed by conducting a pre- and post-test assessment, semi-structured interviews, and visual projective techniques as part of a psycho-educational strategy. The

researcher was responsible for all data collection to ensure reliable observation and perception, as well as for reviewing of literature and controlling of data against findings in the literature.

The first method of data collection was the one-group, pre-test–post-test assessments, where behaviour was measured before and after psycho-educational intervention within one group. The ASCS measured for change in identity constructs over a period of time. The scale measures self-concept and identity constructs and has been proved to be a reliable and valid assessment tool (Vrey & Venter, 1983). In this research study, a third method of data collection comprised semi-structured interviews with a set of predetermined open-ended questions that guided the researcher and allowed for the identification of new emerging information regarding adolescent identity and its constituted selves. Observation of the visual creative materials and the use of a video recorder were used as supportive methods of data collection for the psycho-educational strategy to explore the issues related to identity in the context of family violence. Through observation the researcher gathered data by watching the behaviour of participants and how they engaged with the visual creative material and related it to their experience of self in context of family violence.

The video camera is recognised as a data-collection tool and has been used to verify observational data and to add depth by providing data that cannot be reliably obtained through observation (Caldwell & Atwal, 2005; Demuth & Mey, 2013). This data could further be used to verify and confirm observational data and verbal transcriptions obtained, thereby increasing the richness and trustworthiness of the data (Bowman, 1994; Caldwell & Atwal, 2005).

Categorisation of the data could be developed more fully after viewing the tapes and adopting an open-minded stance, allowing the data itself to influence the research outcome. The data was also used to confirm and verify the oral transcriptions of the research and contribute to the trustworthiness of the research data (Caldwell & Atwal, 2005).

## Data Analysis

In the study the pre- and post-assessment ASCSs were manually scored and the results were verified with existing norm scores. The quantitative results were further statistically analysed with a *t* test at significance level of  $p \leq 0.05$  to measure significant change within the different items on the scales. A Cohen's *d* test was done to establish the strength of the effect (see Addendum E).

The results of the semi-structured interviews were thematically analysed. The thematic data analysis consisted of the analysis of data sets in six phases that were transcribed and analysed until significant and recurring themes were identified. The guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2013) were used to conduct the thematic content analysis.

Step 1: Familiarisation with the data: Reading and re-reading the existing data from transcripts and making notes on initial ideas.

Step 2: Generating initial codes: Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set.

Step 3: Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes and gathering all relevant information for each potential theme to emerge.

Step 4: Reviewing themes: Verifying the themes in relation to the coded extracts and generating a thematic map of the analysis.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes: Refining the specifics of each theme and names for the theme.

Step 6: Final stage of analysis: Selecting compelling extract examples, doing final analysis of selected extracts.

In the study, the verbal transcriptions were coded and thematically analysed according to the guidelines of Braun and Clark (2013). Furthermore, the researcher reviewed and analysed all audio-visual recordings to acquaint herself with the presented data. 'Retrospective analysis'

was conducted by means of audio-visual data supplying more depth to the data while simultaneously increasing the quality and complexity of data (Caldwell & Atwal, 2005; Demuth & Mey, 2013).

Categorisation of the data was developed further after viewing the tapes. The researcher adopted an open-minded and unbiased stance, allowing the data itself to influence the research outcome. According to Roos (2012) and Roos and Ferreira (2008), visual representations often reflect the conscious meaning that participants project about a particular phenomenon. The researcher analysed the visual creations of self by observing specific objects participants made and how these objects were related to the research question. Additionally the visual data was used to confirm and verify the verbal transcriptions of the research. The audio-visual data was thematically linked to transcribed data (Silverman, 2010). A comparison between visual data and transcribed data was done to ensure congruency and identify any discrepancies between the two. The visual data was used to confirm and complement the transcribed data, ensuring the trustworthiness, validity and reliability of the data. An external researcher was appointed to additionally analyse the qualitative data. This was done to control for bias and to assist in establishing the trustworthiness of the data.

### **Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness of the Research Study**

#### **Reliability and Validity of Quantitative Results**

The purpose of implementing a pilot study was to test and ensure the applicability of the measuring instruments and research procedures as well as the feasibility of the study in the South African context. The ASCS measured the identity composition and each item was checked on the different scales for ambiguity, language and understanding and its relevance to the South African context. The *t*-test differentiated between the pre-test–post-test and clearly showed that it is designed to measure identity change and therefore is a valid tool as it measures

what it is intended to measure. The ASCS has been used in previous studies and has proved to be valid and reliable in the South African context (De Beer, 2008; Theron, 2006; Vrey & Venter, 1983). Furthermore, the instrument attained a reliability coefficient of 0.89 for all the different scales, while the validity of the instrument was found to be highly significant at both 0.01 and 0.05 levels in previous studies (Vrey & Venter, 1983).

### **Trustworthiness of Qualitative Findings**

The semi-structured interview questions were checked for suitability and appropriateness of questions. By administering the questions to the participants, the researcher checked for understanding, wording of each question, and ambiguous items, as well as ensuring that the questions measured what they were supposed to measure (Strydom, 2011). The psycho-educational strategy was implemented to check if the procedure was suitable for the purpose of the investigation as well as having the potential for a reliable outcome concomitant with the research objectives.

As part of the trustworthiness criterion, crystallisation was applied. Crystallisation is a methodological framework that merges the various forms of data and analysis while simultaneously fostering a deeper understanding of phenomena within an interpretive methodology. The researcher examined both the qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis to reflect on the process of analysis and identify certain patterns and themes reflected by the data (Borkan, 1999; Henning, 2004). It further allowed for the correlation of data, resulting in a more descriptive understanding of the research while facilitating the construction of a detailed and rich representation of the data (Ellingson, 2009).

The trustworthiness of the research process is paramount when working within a qualitative research paradigm. The research findings were therefore tested against the four-item

criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, ensuring the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility was addressed by the researcher's demonstrating the true picture of the phenomenon investigated, that is, identity in the context of family violence. The purpose of credibility is to ensure that the enquiry has been accurately identified, described and represented. The researcher ensured a match between the participants' views, and representation of these views in the research results (Schurink, Fouché, & De Vos, 2011). The researcher ensured that research outcome is transferable, by showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts. Dependability was addressed by thoroughly reporting the methodological process within the study. The researcher accounted for both changes in research conditions and in design. This will enable future researchers to follow proper research practices by duplicating this research process (Schurink et al., 2011).

The issue of confirmability was demonstrated by striving to maintain objectivity. By implementing the mixed-methods approach, confirmability was promoted and reduced the effect of researcher bias (Shenton, 2004). The researcher maintained objectivity by critically analysing all decisions and actions taken during the research process. Further steps to maintain objectivity and trustworthiness were implemented by evaluating her own interpretations and critically evaluating her own perspectives and decisions (Schurink, et al., 2011). Through appointing an external transcriber, confirmability and objectivity were ensured.

### **Credibility of the Researcher**

The researcher purposefully avoided all possible preconceptions and assumptions that may have resulted in biased interpretations of adolescent experiences which are consistent with the rule of *epoché* (Bronwell, 2012; Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Spinelli, 2005). This was performed by means of bracketing any personal biases she might have regarding the

adolescents and their experience of family violence. To avoid placing any significance or importance on emerging themes in the analysis process, the researcher treated each aspect with equal value, which is consistent with the rule of horizontalisation (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Spinelli, 2005). The researcher used the principle of immersion, where she immersed herself in the process of examining the data by reading and examining certain portions of the data (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Through the process of immersion, the researcher could reflect on the analysis experience as well as identify and articulate patterns or themes noticed during the immersion process.

An external researcher was also appointed to substantiate recurring themes extracted from the data by the researcher. This process was implemented to control and reduce bias and to establish the trustworthiness of the research data. The external researcher also had to sign a letter of confidentiality. Interpreting qualitative data requires the researcher to reflect upon the entire research context. Reflexivity was ensured by the researcher's awareness of her effect on the process and outcomes of the research, based on the premise that knowledge cannot be separated from the knower (Steedman, 1991). This places the focus on the research process itself, while the researcher reflects on preconceptions and insights regarding the situational dynamics in which the researcher is immersed in the production of knowledge.

### **Possible Impact of the Study**

The researcher investigated the phenomenon of identity within the context of family violence and to generate new understanding of adolescents' subjective experience of self within this context. Furthermore, the researcher explored a psycho-educational strategy for the re-construction of identity. This research outcome further contributed to the current dialogue and discourse of re-constructing adolescent identity within a South African context. This also created a platform for empirical knowledge to inform further research on these issues.

The Gestalt therapy approach provided an alternative understanding of human development from a field theory perspective. This theory served to provide a theoretical understanding of the effects of family violence on adolescent identity formation within a multi-cultural South African context. This approach focused on the individual in context, viewing identity as a process that is ever evolving in relation to the environment. This perspective of identity contributed towards existing knowledge of identity development in a diverse racial context. It provided an alternative viewpoint for the confrontation and management of identity formation issues experienced by adolescents. Psycho-educational guidelines and recommendations were developed to assist therapists working with adolescent issues. In the light of the scarcity of service delivery resources for adolescents, such guidelines may make services more accessible to adolescents in need.

### **Thesis Layout**

#### **Section A: Orientation to the Research**

The first section provides an orientation to the study and serves as a general introduction to the study. It includes the following: problem statement, theoretical framework, research methodology, description of the concepts and ethical aspects. The literature review to the overall research study also forms part of this section. The literature review gives an overview of research findings from journal articles, theses and dissertations, books, and webpages related to the research study, and provides baseline knowledge to support the research study.

#### **Section B: Journal Articles**

This section includes three consecutive journal articles. The titles are:

**Article 1**

“Towards Re-Constructing Identity: Adolescent Experiences of Sense of Self in the Context of Family Violence in a Cape Town Community”. Submitted to *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

**Article 2**

“Towards Re-Constructing Identity: A Psycho-Educational Strategy as a Method for Re-Constructing Identity in the Context of Family Violence”. Submitted to *Psychology and Developing Societies*.

**Article3**

“Towards Re-Constructing Identity: Exploring the Process of Identity Formation in the Context of Family Violence”. Submitted to *Psychology and Violence*.

**Section C**

In this section a critical summary of the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations is given.

**Section D**

The addenda pertaining to this study are included in this section on a CD.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval for the research project study was obtained from the North-West University’s Ethics Committee under project: NWU-00060-12-A1. Further permission was obtained from the Western Cape Education Department (see Addendum A) to do research at the

primary research site. The research was conducted at three high schools in Belhar during school hours.

Before the commencement of the research, both participants and their parents were required to provide a signed consent and assent form that informed them of matters of confidentiality and research procedures. The researcher informed the participants of the nature, goals and duration of the research before informed assent was provided (see Addendum A).

Owing to the age requirements of participants for inclusion (15 to 18 years), informed consent was needed from participants' parents in addition to their own (see Addendum A). The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they were uncomfortable within the research process (Strydom, 2011). Permission for the use of audio-visual equipment was obtained from participants. Such permission further underscores the voluntary nature of participation and the absence of remuneration.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by protecting the identity of the participants in the study. This was done by explaining to participants that their names, identifying details and shared information would remain confidential and only the research data would form part of the research (Babbie, 2013). Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by the use of codes for participants' names and surnames. All the interviews and psycho-educational intervention sessions were conducted in the therapy room at the school to maintain privacy. The external transcriber / researcher signed a confidentiality agreement form. All documented research data, audiotapes, and video recordings were filed and stored in a locked filing cabinet at the university. All research data will be stored at the North-West University for a period of five years before being destroyed. The electronic data was filed on the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected, and can only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor.

The ethical boundaries between the roles of researcher and psychologist had to be clear; the researcher did not enter into a therapeutic relationship with any of the participants during the research project. Care was taken to ensure that no harm was done to any of the participants. Participants who presented with emotional difficulties or distress were referred for further support. School and community support structures were used as referral agents.

To ensure accountability to the research community, the outcome of the research study was shared with the participants as well as life-orientation coordinators at the schools. A feedback session was arranged with participants as well as with life orientation teachers. Recommendations and guidelines for psychologists, social workers and counsellors working with adolescents within family violence environments were compiled and will be made available. These recommendations will be made available through journal article publications and be informative to the policy on the White Paper on Families.

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### **Literature Study as Background to the Overall Research Project**

The literature review attempts to provide a clear understanding of the issues surrounding adolescent identity within the context of family violence. The literature review focuses on adolescent identity development, the impact of family violence on identity, and adolescents' re-construction of the self and identity. Adolescent identity development within the context of family violence is embedded within social and cultural underpinnings (Goldblatt, 2003; Schwartz, Mason, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2009; Venn, 2010). It is therefore imperative to contextualise and understand the meaning adolescents ascribe to identity development and family violence within a post-apartheid and democratic society.

In 1994 South Africa was faced with transition as it shifted from apartheid to a democratic system of governance. The abolishment of apartheid led South Africa to a new political dispensation that brought about socio-political changes that impacted all levels of society. Not only the macro, but also the micro levels were affected, with family and individual relations at the core (Burton, 2007; Stevens & Lockhat, 1997). During this metamorphic phase of change and transformation, the first cohort of South African adolescents was "Born Free" into a democratic South Africa (Norris et al., 2008). For many adolescents, born into democracy brought its own developmental challenges. Theorists such as Erikson (1968) and Schwartz, Zamboanga, Mecka, and Richie (2012) agree that shifts within society impact on the intra-psychic, interpersonal and intergroup processes as these constructs are embedded within the socio-historical context of a society. Therefore, it is likely that socio-political shifts within a society such as South Africa will have an impact on adolescent development, in particular identity development (Schwartz et al., 2012; Stevens & Lockhat, 1997; Yoder, 2000).

Currently South African adolescents are haunted by issues of the past, which have an impact on their identity and sense of self. Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses, and Seekings (2010)

support this notion as they refer to adolescent development as being historically and culturally rooted within the context of a post-apartheid society. Their findings indicate that adolescents are confronted with material inequalities such as poverty, race, and class distinction, which impact adolescent development. As these factors continue to define neighbourhoods, adolescent development continues to be affected, resulting in a need for societal integration.

Although, adolescent development is determined by historical racial segregation, not all processes of identity development are the same for South African adolescents (Norris et al., 2008; Yoder, 2000). Adolescent development within a South African context is regarded as different from the prescribed theoretical models and should be understood within the relevant societal context. The Eriksonian theoretical model for understanding adolescent development has been criticised for being overly ethnocentric, masculine, and limited in understanding the experiences of marginalised groups of young people, whether indigenous or not from the dominant language background (Schwartz et al., 2012; Wyn & White, 1997).

Despite the critique of the Eriksonian model of adolescent development, the theoretical and empirical research may prove useful for understanding the development stage of adolescence within the context of South Africa. It does, however, not account for socio-political and cultural influences pertinent to South African context (Bray et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2012; Stevens & Lockhat, 1997; Venn, 2010). The Gestalt approach is used as the theoretical framework for this research. It views adolescent development in context, and therefore takes cognisance of the unique way in which South African adolescents experience this developmental phase.

## Adolescent Development

The term ‘adolescence’ describes the transition stage between childhood and adulthood, therefore between ages 14 to 18 years. Adolescence can be regarded as a symbolic bridge between childhood and adulthood (Dolgin, 2010). The period of adolescence is a developmental stage marked by physical, emotional, intellectual, social and psychological maturing. The main task that adolescents have to master during this phase is to establish a stable identity, by achieving a sense of themselves necessary for their transition from childhood into adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2007; Marcia, 1966).

The transition from one stage to the other is a gradual and uncertain one. Most adolescents go through similar processes, although the time span is not the same for every person. Eventually they become mature adults. Additionally, adolescence is a phase of acquisition of independence, separation from the family, and the establishment of new friendships and sexual relations. It is a period of vital development that largely shapes the ideals of life that later form the adult personal identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). The society in which adolescents are raised therefore has a significant influence on adolescent development, relationships and adjustment. Rapid societal changes influence adolescent development; therefore different groups or cohorts of adolescents attain different characteristics and experiences (Dolgin, 2010; Venn, 2010). It is further argued that adolescents will not face the same environmental demands. Moreover, adolescents will react differently to the various changes they are presented with, depending on the intensity of the problems and difficulties they experience. The manner in which adolescents adapt to their social environment depends on the availability of emotional support from others, such as family, peers, friends, or other social entities. In South Africa the experience of social change includes exposure to globalised ideologies, and influences the social constructions of adolescent development. By adopting the western cultural models of adolescence, which are regarded as the globalised norm, young

people in South Africa have to redefine themselves in terms of these accepted globalised norms (Honwana & De Boeck, 2005; Stevens & Lockhat 1997). Bray et al. (2010) give a summation of what first-generation children and adolescents growing up in a democratic South Africa are experiencing by examining the lives of young people across historically divided communities within the public and private sphere. The results that emerged from this study displayed both diversity and similarity. This is particularly evident in the material inequalities that exist, such as poverty, race, and class distinction that continue to define neighbourhoods. For adolescents and children growing up in South Africa, these factors have impacted on their development.

The identities formed are historically and culturally ingrained within the context of our society (Bray et al., 2010). The Gestalt approach views adolescence as a growth and developmental process that is relational and emergent from the organism-environment field (Polster, 2005; Wheeler, 2000; Yontef, 1993). Adolescent development is therefore holistic and emergent from the field, taking into consideration environmental factors such as socio-political changes within a society that might impact on such development. It therefore presents an appropriate framework for this research study as it considers the impact of contextual factors such as diverse social and political influences on adolescent development and offers a more integrated approach which views development holistically.

### **Adolescent Identity**

According to Rice and Dolgin (2005), Meyer (2000) and Erikson (1968), the process of identity formation involves dramatic change and uncertainty for adolescents. Identity is a construct which refers to the identification with roles, values, beliefs, and lifestyles that mark a person's individuality (Erikson, 1968; Schwartz, 2001). Therefore, identity provides the structure for understanding the sense of self; it provides meaning and direction through commitment, values, goals and personal control. Furthermore, identity enables the recognition

of potential and growth through a sense of future possibilities and alternative choices (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Foster, 2006; Hall, 2009; Heer & Wodak, 2008; Rattansi, 2007; Sonn, 2006).

Erik Erikson's (1902–1994) research work has stimulated over 50 years of social science literature. His work has inspired countless research studies and has become one of the most widely referenced models for describing adolescent identity development (Kroger, 2007; Schwartz, 2001). The primary goal for adolescence, according to the psychosocial stages of development is to develop a coherent and stable identity in which identity confusion vs. identity synthesis constitutes the psychosocial task. The model indicates how important identity development is in facilitating a healthy sense of self and wellbeing (Erikson, 1968). It is further suggested that the better a person's identity structure is developed, the more aware the individual is of his/her strengths and limitations in becoming a successful person. Individuals who struggle to discover who they are have a poorly developed identity and are more likely to experience confusion and distress. These individuals may be struggling to deal with earlier crises discussed in Erikson's psychosocial stages of development: trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012).

Individuals who have resolved their identity issues, in comparison with those who have not, have reported higher levels of psychological wellbeing and emotional stability. Research supports Erikson's view of identity formation as a challenging process and substantial evidence points to a positive correlation between overall psychological adjustment and progress toward identity formation (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Kroger, 2007; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, & Vansteenkiste, 2005; Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999).

Schwartz et al. (2012) reviewed Erikson's psychosocial model as well as Marcia's (1966) identity status model. Erikson viewed identity as a dynamic self-system with interaction between the person and his/her social and cultural context. The identity status model of identity

viewed identity as an internally driven process mainly focusing on the individual person, with little attention given to the external forces that might impact on an individual's identity development (Van Hoof, 1999).

Therefore a limitation exists within these theoretical models regarding the structure of identity development that could influence current identity research. Erikson's research on identity development was mostly done by using clinical case studies and biographies of historical figures, as well as complex psychoanalytic concepts unsuitable for empirical research; therefore the need for a theoretical model for understanding identity development.

Marcia's (1966) identity status model was then formulated from Erikson's writings and has inspired research literature. Identity status research was used primarily to examine individual differences across status categories rather than to investigate identity processes or the association of identity processes with psychosocial and health outcomes.

After much deliberation, Schwartz et al. (2012) proposed an integrated view of identity, that is, the process-oriented approach to personal identity. Their research identified cross-ethnic diversity and cross-cultural comparison as two challenges that had not been addressed in identity development research. Oyserman and Destin (2010); Phillips and Pittman (2003) and Yoder (2000) referred to the challenges faced by immigrants and members of minority groups. These challenges include inadequate educational resources, marginalisation into low socioeconomic and under-resourced communities, and institutional discrimination. Immigrants and minority groups are confronted with additional issues that can impact on their developing a sense of identity. According to Schwartz et al. (2012), there may be additional or unique identity processes at work within specific cultural-historical contexts. This is especially relevant in countries that have experienced political shifts within government or experienced discrimination and marginalisation toward specific ethnic groups, such as South Africa, Brazil, and Peru (Norris et al., 2008; Schwartz et al., 2012). The Gestalt approach captures this

limitation by stating that identity is in a process of constant change within a relational field; identity in context, therefore, is in a constant process of configuration, adapting to the environment and co-creating selves as a way of coping with difficult environmental events (Grobler, 2009; Polster, 2005).

Schwartz, Pantin, Prado, Sullivan, and Szapocznik (2005); Grotevant and Cooper (1985) and Schachter and Ventura (2008) also support this notion that social factors such as the family have an impact on identity development. This refers to the micro-social contexts in which significant others such as parents and family provide feedback that supports adolescents' psychosocial development. It is evident that identity formation is impacted by familial factors and may influence the developmental course of identity. Family relationship patterns that are characterised by both "connectedness" and "individuality" seem to promote identity formation and opportunities for adolescents' exploration of alternative identities (Kamptner, 1988). Security in familial relations may provide the support for meaningful exploration and experimentation, and enhance aspects of adolescents' sociability, while simultaneously enhancing the process of identity formation.

### **Adolescent Identity in South Africa**

As previously argued, psychosocial identity development is impacted by the realities of the social world (Erikson, 1968; Josselson, 1987). The social and political shifts within South African society are likely to significantly influence the ways adolescents explore and experience their psychosocial identities (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997; Yoder, 2000). Within a racially stratified society like South Africa, adolescent identity development will differ among individuals while being determined by the manner in which the apartheid legacy has affected adolescents' racial groupings (Yoder, 2000). The socio-historically influenced systems of

values, norms, and standards of South Africa will be integrated into the identity development of South African adolescents.

For successful identity development, identity processes, such as identity attainment, psychosocial moratorium, identity foreclosure and identity diffusion all contribute to identity development and act as fundamental elements in the process of identity formation (Erikson, 1968, Marcia, 1966). Psychosocial moratorium is seen as a necessary process and pre-condition to identity attainment. It is the process whereby society provides a period of grace for adolescents to experiment and pursue various identities. In a pre- and post-apartheid era characterised by rapid socio-political shifts, the exploration of different identities and roles is not readily available to many adolescents. Opportunities to explore the “who am I” within the changed dispensation are limited. Instead adolescents have adopted the new values and norms of western ideology that appear to be necessary for developing an identity that allows them to cope with their social realities (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997). This process in which self-definition is attained without exploring various possible identities, is known as identity foreclosure (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966).

Marcia (2001) refers to identity foreclosure as taking on an identity too soon, without exploring it. Adolescents simply adopt the identity of a parent, group or the expectations of society, by adopting the values and norms of others and prematurely taking on an identity.

From a Gestalt approach, this process is referred to as introjection, where the individual absorbs values and norms from the environment and integrates them into self without critically evaluating them, thereby resulting in a false sense of self (Woldt & Toman, 2005; Yontef, 1993). The sudden embracing of new values and norms could be a contributing factor to identity confusion, rather than identity integration (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 2001). Identity confusion can further be associated with difficulties related to social adjustment and identity

integration among adolescents; therefore gangsterism, substance abuse, and anti-social behaviour can often result (Ntabazalila, 1997; Thiel, 1997).

The Gestalt approach refers to this as a contact boundary modification, where there is an interruption in contact between the self and environment. This results in an imbalance within the natural flow, causing dissatisfaction of needs within the individual. Individuals will therefore then modify or adapt their contact making patterns to the environment to regain balance, which may be regarded as an unhealthy technique of contact making (Blom, 2006; Clarkson & Cavicchia, 2014, Sills, Lapworth, & Desmond, 2012).

Shifts within the socio-political spheres in South Africa, brought about changes at many levels, including the family. The disintegration of family relations may be the consequence of rapid societal changes. It is argued that the breaking down of family relations has further contributed to an increased emotional insecurity among adolescents and consequently difficulties related to emotional independence during and after adolescence (Letlaka-Rennert, 1990). With family interactions and relationship patterns steadily weakened, many families are left vulnerable and family violence has become a means to settle domestic disputes and resolve conflicts between family members (Burton, 2007; Collins, 2013).

### **Family Violence**

Family violence is often referred to as domestic violence, and includes intimate partner violence and spousal abuse. These terms do however differ in context as domestic violence involves abuse by one person against another within a domestic setting, such as marriage or cohabitation. Intimate partner violence falls within the domestic setting and refers more specifically to violence and abuse of a spouse or partner within an intimate relationship. These terms have common characteristics, and can be abusive behaviours/tactics to obtain power and control over the victim (Chan & Yeung, 2009; Tually, Faulkner, Cutler, & Slater, 2009).

The term ‘family violence’ in this research study encompasses violence that might occur between family members, and includes all forms of violence. This inclusive view of family violence is supported by Chan and Yeung (2009) as it includes not only partners, wives, or de facto partners (common law wives or husbands) who are victims of violence and abuse, but has been extended to include mothers, sisters, and children, as well as members of the extended family.

### **Theoretical Models of Family Violence**

Different psychological theories have attempted to conceptualise what constitutes family violence. These theories all acknowledge the abuse of power and need for control by the abuser and intentionality as common elements (Hyde-Nolan & Juliaio, 2012).

The psychoanalytic theories focus on the internal psychological processes of the individual that create a need for the abusive behaviour. In this approach the origins of aggression and violence come from earliest childhood relations (Fairbairn, 1952). The emotional experiences of individuals are often played out between self and others, and transferred to interpersonal relations. These individuals often have difficulty in maintaining healthy self-esteem, regulating emotional responses, and managing their anxiety. This is often accompanied by a sense of rage or anger and subsequent antisocial behaviour (Bograd, 1999; Zosky, 1999).

The cognitive behaviour theories focus on how abuse and violence are learned and transferred from generation to generation. The social learning theory indicates that individuals learn social behaviour by imitating and modelling other people. Individuals become aggressive towards family members because aggression is learned through observing the behaviour of role models (Bandura, 1977, 1989). This theory also refers to intergenerational transmission of

violence where children who grow up in violent families learn violent behaviours, and repeat those behaviours in future relationships.

The family and systems theory focuses on the interaction between family members and the shared responsibility for events in the family. This theory refers to each individual as being part of the family system and what affects the individual affects the family and vice versa. Family violence affects the whole sub-system; each member's behaviour has an impact on the others, therefore contributing to or maintaining this particular pattern of behaviour. A family system becomes rigid, unable to adapt or maintain balance (Nichols & Schwartz 2004; McBride, 2003). It can become dysfunctional and allow violence to infiltrate as a means to resolve family disputes.

The Gestalt approach views family violence from an existential/humanistic stance. It regards individuals as a totality of mind, body, emotions and spirit, who experience reality in a way unique within the context of their current environment/situation. In the context of the Gestalt framework, the individual is in constant contact with the environment. If there is difficulty within this environmental field, it will impact on gestalt configuration. Healthy functioning individuals are always striving for holism through self-regulation. If their needs are not fulfilled, it will lead to stagnant or fixed gestalt. This could result in a fixated behaviour pattern or attitude, like anxiety, depression or aggressive behaviour (Philippson, 2009). A fixed gestalt can therefore result in a distorted self and further lead to distorted boundaries between self and others. When there is a contact boundary difficulty between self and environment, the individual will experience no growth or self-regulation. As a way to cope with difficult field event, such as family violence, a contact boundary modification will be used to regain self-control and self-regulation. This is not always regarded as a healthy way of engaging, but through projection, which is a contact boundary modification, violence and aggression could be

projected outward. Whatever is experienced inside is therefore projected onto the environment (Nevis, 2000; Philippson, 2009).

### **Family Violence in South Africa**

Crime and violence is widely regarded as one of the main challenges facing South Africa today. As a result of the decrease in political violence, violent crime has increased dramatically within certain communities (Burton, 2007). High levels of violence and crime within the community have infiltrated numerous homes and educational establishments. Many South African communities have come to accept crime and violence as part of their reality as well as a means of resolving conflict within their homes (Burton, 2007; Collins, 2013; Zsuzanna, 2007). Thaler (2011) is of the opinion that family violence is on the increase as collective violence has largely been replaced by interpersonal violence.

According to the Victim of Crimes Survey of 2011, there has been an increase in the reporting of crimes within households; this includes violence within the home (Statistics South Africa, 2012). Research has indicated that marital discord, spouse beating, discontinuity in parenting, physical and sexual abuse, neglect, and alcohol abuse by a parent may be common experiences for South African youth (Africa Check, 2014).

Adolescents exposed to family violence are vulnerable to various emotional and behavioural difficulties and are more than likely to get caught up in a cycle of violence, both as victims and as potential perpetrators of violence (Burton, 2007). Angless and Shefer (1997) concur family violence is a common phenomenon in South Africa and often underestimated; therefore children and adolescents who witness these abuses are hardly the focus of domestic abuse research. Twenty years later the current situation has intensified, Statistics South Africa (2012) indicates that more cases involving violence within the household are reported each year. South African community-based studies have found that 81% of secondary school

students and 93% of adolescents have been involved in family violence situations in the last few years.

### **The Experience of Family Violence on Adolescent Identity Formation**

For many South African adolescents, crime and violence have become part of normal existence. Continued exposure to violence from childhood can put adolescents at a higher risk of exhibiting problems in various developmental areas (Evans, Davis, & DiLillo, 2008; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith, & Jaffee, 2004). Dahlberg and Krug (2002) and Narayan, Englund, Carlson, and Egeland (2014) further refer to the significance of early exposure to inter-parental violence as a pointer to later adult maladjustment. Moreover, they have indicated that an adverse experience of family violence is related to children's and adults' maladjustment and distress symptoms.

Exposure to violence can have an impact on how adolescent identity is constructed (Goldblatt, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2009). The research findings of Levendosky, Huth-Bocks and Semel (2002) and Schiavone (2009) are consistent with the above findings, and indicate that a strong correlation exists between exposure to family violence and lower trust, autonomy, initiative, broader intimacy issues and identity foreclosure in adolescents. Similarly, Thom and Coetzee (2004) suggest that adolescents from unstable or violent families do not have appropriate role models, thus limiting their opportunities for developing a sense of trust, autonomy and initiative. Other researchers like Bourassa (2007), Finkelhor, Ormrod, and Turner (2007), and Idemudia and Makhubela (2011) suggest that adolescents exposed to family violence often encounter difficulties with sex roles and sexual identity. According to Eriksonian theory, trust, autonomy and initiative, as well as intimacy, are essential developmental milestones for coping with environmental demands and developing a sense of identity (Erikson, 1968).

## **Family Violence and Identity Configuration from Gestalt Approach**

The Gestalt approach views the adolescent as a relational emergent phenomenon. Development is seen as a constant process of change within the context of the organism/environment field (Jacobs, 2005). Adolescent development is therefore interconnected with the organism-environment field. The Gestalt approach views self-configuration as a system of contacts. These refer to organisation of experience into clusters of characteristics (Latner, 2000; Polster, 2005). Additionally, Polster (2005) refers to self-configuration as a summation of a large or small cluster of characteristics within the person that guides his/her behaviour and feelings. Through the process of configuration selves are created and with heightened awareness identity could be impacted on.

Adolescents who are exposed to family violence are therefore constantly in a process of change and configuration within the organism/environmental field. Adolescents may find it difficult to construct a healthy self as the constant exposure to family violence may be taken on as introjections and consequentially integrated into the self. Introjections refer to views and perceptions from the family violence environment; these become part of the self without adolescents critically evaluating them. The identity that is formed consists of selves that are constructed in a manner that provides the adolescent with means of coping with a difficult field event (Grobler, 2009).

Many difficult conditions of the field, such as family violence, often impact on the process of self-configuration. This leads to development of false selves that guide adolescents' behaviour and feelings (Polster, 2005). Family violence may predispose adolescents to subsequent behavioural problems (Makhubela, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2005). Therefore acting out and disruptive behaviour at school may be viewed as a way of self-regulating or adjusting to the environment field. This further refers to an adolescent's way of coping and regaining balance (Ginger, 2007; Gouws, 2003; Grobler, 2009; McConville, 2003; Yontef & Fuhr, 2005).

It is apparent that the process of configuration constantly takes place within the context of the organism/environment field and adolescents exposed to a violent family environment are always in the process of change; therefore self and identity processes are always changing and adapting to the environment field. The family context of many adolescents residing in the Belhar community is often characterised by family violence and victimisation; therefore the environment field will impact on the self and identity processes of adolescents.

It is therefore imperative that we consider the communities in which South African adolescents are raised in, as they impact on adolescent development. The ecological and Gestalt approaches both consider systems as important in understanding the individual in context. The Gestalt approach indicates that individuals are always seen in relation to others and to the environment (Jacobs, 2005; Yontef, 1993). In this way it resonates with ecological thinking, in which the world is viewed as existing in a web of relationships, in which change in one part affects the whole (Bronfenbrenner, 1987; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). One important Gestalt concept, which is very relevant to this ecological perspective, is that of field theory. Field theory is helpful in increasing understanding of how all parts of groups and communities contribute hugely to the whole (society) and therefore to an appreciation and respect for cultural diversity and difference. This theory is regarded as relevant and gives a richer understanding of the influence of the different ecological levels on adolescent development in the context of family violence.

## **A Model for Re-constructing Adolescent Identity**

### **Polster's Gestalt Theory on Diversity of Selves**

The process of re-constructing identity is postulated by Polster's (2005) Gestalt theory on diversity of selves. This theory explores the process of identity re-construction through bringing the different selves into consciousness. Through the process of tailoring, the individual becomes aware of the different selves and gains insight through identifying the different selves. By bringing the different selves into awareness, the client can rename and claim them. These selves can be transformed in the process of therapy, where the person becomes aware of the different selves and the different roles they assume in varying situations. Corbin and Strauss (1987) refer to the re-construction of identity as the process of reconstituting and reintegrating identity into a new concept of wholeness by discovering new and unused aspects of the self.

According to Polster (2005), each of the different selves possesses an identity of its own and needs to be coordinated with the other. He further states that the prospect of multiple selves offers the person an opportunity to explore the self by recreating it. Through the redefinition of self, the images of the selves come alive, giving it membership and coherence. Through dialogue between the different selves, the process of re-construction can be facilitated as the client becomes aware and identifies the various selves (Polster, 2005).

Configuration of self is the key process in the re-construction of identity and refers to the reshuffling of the various internal selves while retaining its own identity (Polster, 2005). Tailoring is part of the configuration process and refers to the de-structuring and reshaping of introjects that the selves are constructed from. Through the process of tailoring, the individual develops a positive self-configuration process, by reworking and discarding introjects which are not relevant or meaningful (Polster, 2005). Polster (2005) indicates key elements that are imperative for understanding the configuration process of self.

**Point/Counterpoint relatedness.** The aim of Point/Counterpoint relatedness is to bring about harmony and oneness within the community of different selves. It strives towards creating wholeness within the self and therefore creating synthesis within diversity. In this configuration process awareness of denied selves will come to the fore and will be integrated, forming a whole. This would lead to acceptance and acknowledgement of the previously denied parts of the self and further allow the individual to be free to be his or her true diverse self.

**Configuration.** The configuration process is based on a configurational reflex. The configurational reflex reflects the experience of wholeness and creates clusters of characteristics from introjects that over time develop into selves. These selves are divided between essential selves and member selves. The essential selves take on a more dominant role and are always present, while the member selves only surface in certain situations. The configuration process is embedded within the organism-environment field and difficult conditions of the field often impact on the process of self-configuration, leading to flawed summations of self (Polster, 2005). Re-construction of the flawed selves is therefore necessary. In a therapeutic setting the individual undertakes to re-engage with selves through the deconstruction of the old self and the reconfiguration of the new self (Polster, 2005; Zeig, 2014). By naming and sorting of selves and re-integrating the denied selves into a unified pattern, healthy and flexible contact with the environment can take place. The process of configuration opens the individual up to change, granting him or her the ability to spontaneously interact and make contact with the field.

**Animation.** The self is composed of human experiences and can create fiction from characteristics of the selves (Polster, 2005). Through animation, the individual can use fiction and animation to engage in identifying, naming the different self-parts. In this way, the characteristics of the selves have become animated. This strengthens the sense of self-cohesion (Cooper-White, 2011).

**Dialogue.** Polster (2005) refers to dialogue as a way of engaging with the different selves. Dialogue is used as way of identifying the clusters and naming them as selves, then evoking the stories behind them. By restoring the identity of these multiple selves, the individual can recognise the selves that come to the foreground when they experience difficulties or when contradictory messages, needs, and actions are too difficult to harmonise. Through dialogue the individual can tell his/her life story, identifying weaknesses and discrepancies in the storyline, as well as awakening the selves that are still undiscovered. The selves that are revealed in the stories are mirror reflections of the individual. Through these stories, clients are able to make personal sense of their lives and experiences.

**Accentuation.** This refers to giving prominence to certain selves and by emphasising certain selves accentuation is used as a corrective tool for re-evaluating experiences of the self. Polster (2005) indicates that through accentuating characteristics of certain selves, individuals will be able to choose which selves they intensely identify with.

**Orientation.** Orientation refers to the recognition of certain selves that may serve to increase the therapist's own understanding of the client, thereby providing informed guidance for therapeutic interaction. During the naming of each self, the individual brings the image of selves alive, giving it membership, as well as self-coherence. This process of re-construction serves to demystify the distorted self-images that were created by introjections, as well as mistaken beliefs about one's self.

### **Identity Re-Construction in the Context of Family Violence**

To gain understanding of the process of identity re-construction, the self-construct and its configuration within the context of family violence must be explored. By becoming aware of and identifying the different selves and how the selves configure in the field, by naming the different selves, and by identifying the different roles played, the self can be redefined.

Redefining the self would mean assigning meaning to the different selves. This process of redefinition leads to integration within the process of identity and its re-construction.

Polster (2005) has provided a model of the self that allows for multiplicity by dividing the self into member and essential selves. These selves are formed in relation to the clients' field at various stages within their lives (Grobler, 2009). The organisation of these selves is called the configurational reflex (Polster, 2005), which configures all experiences, forming a unified pattern. These selves configure in response to the environment in which the individual finds him or herself. Individuals are populations of selves that may include various selves, for example, the angry self, the nurturing self, the funny self, the insecure self, the confident self, the student self, and so forth. These internal selves may either exist in harmony or in conflict with one another. If these selves are formed from a foundation of rigid but needed introjects that have not been assimilated, they may be considered false selves. These introjects may have enabled the individual to cope with a traumatic situation, such as family violence, but may cause self-processes and self-experiences to become fragmented (Grobler, 2009). The selves will rely on experiences within the person's past to contribute to the decision on patterning during the configuration process (Grobler, 2009). It is further argued that this patterning in instances of trauma, such as experience of family violence, can take place out of awareness. These events may cause an inability to assimilate experiences of self-formation and lead to the acceptance of rigid introjects based on family violence experience as truths about the self (Grobler, 2009). These introjects may have enabled the individual to cope with a traumatic situation but may cause self-processes and self-experiences to become fragmented, giving rise to a lack of cohesion and a stagnant self which cannot respond adequately to a changing environment (Grobler, 2009). Polster (2005) does not regard introjects as problematic, but sees them as an aid to therapy. Introjects themselves are not harmful; however their acceptance as the truth without full integration could lead to the development of a false self. Through the

process of configuration, many selves are created outside an individual's awareness. By the process of re-configuration of the self, the individual becomes aware of the multiple selves leading to both integration and the ability to experience identity as a true reflection of self (Polster, 2005).

Within the multiplicity model of self, awareness is regarded as the cornerstone in a healthy configuration process. With heightened awareness, clients' can explore introjects about who they are, and this can lead to the integration of self into a healthy, flexible and functioning entity. The primary goal of Gestalt therapeutic intervention is to confront introjects from which these false selves are constructed; this is usually done within a therapeutic context using the tailoring process where reshuffling of introjects takes place in order to achieve a healthy assimilation of self-states (Polster, 2005). It is only when experiences are assimilated that authentic selves are formed and a true identity comes to the fore (Grobler, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

From the literature it has become evident that adolescent identity development within the context of family violence is embedded within social and cultural underpinnings (Goldblatt, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2009; Venn, 2010). It is important to both contextualise and comprehend meanings adolescents ascribe to identity development within the context of family violence. Emphasis needs to be placed on increased recognition of context and variability in human development; therefore a literature of identity development based on a more integrated approach in capturing the diverse social, political and cultural experiences of adolescents is essential. It would, therefore, require of researchers to be mindful of contextual influences on development and how such influences contribute to the unique way in which adolescents experience this developmental phase (Norris et al., 2008; Venn, 2010). Research has further revealed that mental health services in South Africa are poorly resourced for the mental health

needs of adolescents. The implementation of restorative interventions to address adolescents' mental health needs is thus imperative.

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## **Section B:**

### **Article 1**

#### **Towards Re-Constructing Identity: Adolescent Experiences of Sense of Self in the Context of Family Violence in a South African Community**

##### **Abstract**

Collective violence within South African society prior to 1994 has largely been replaced by social violence. Social violence has significantly increased prior 1994 and has permeated to all levels of society. Adolescents who are considered to be the first generation of ‘born frees’, born into freedom post-apartheid 1994, are confronted by violence, particularly family violence. Adolescents who have been exposed to family violence show poor identity development compared with those from non-violent homes. This article is part of a larger research study on identity re-construction, but specifically explores the research question of what the experiences are of adolescents exposed to family violence and identity formation in a Cape Town community in South Africa. Twelve participants were purposively selected for the study and included both male and female adolescents with ages ranging from 15 to 18 years from three secondary schools. The data were obtained through semi-structured individual interviews and thematically analyzed. The research findings suggest that participants’ self-experiences of family violence relate to multiple forms of exposure: experiencing of emotional and psychological difficulties, and playing a dual role within the family violence triad that often brings about polarities within the self. The findings also reflect that participants’ experience of self within the context of family violence relates to different ways of coping and resilience. They further relate to the self-experience of family violence on adolescents’ future in a non-

violent context. Adolescents' self-experience of family violence is complex and impacts on how they perceive themselves and interact with others, as well as how they foresee their future selves in a non-violent setting. Consequently researchers and therapists can become more informed on how to approach identity issues as a process emergent from a relational field and how to facilitate re-constructing an integrated identity.

**Keywords:** adolescence; identity formation; experience of self; family violence and identity re-construction

## **Introduction**

Crime and violence in South Africa are on the increase and have infiltrated many homes, schools and communities, leaving many families most vulnerable. Thaler (2011) indicates that collective violence within South African society prior to 1994 has largely been replaced by violence in the family. Various arguments refer to the change from political violence to violence in the family as a consequence of political change within a post-apartheid state (Burton, 2007; Stevens & Lockhat, 1997; Thaler, 2011). Political shifts within South Africa are frequently associated to an upsurge in crime and violence. Often adolescents who are considered to be the first generation of ‘born frees’, that is, born into freedom post-apartheid 1994, are confronted by violence, particularly family violence (Burton, 2007; Collins, 2013).

Statistics South Africa (2012) indicates more cases involving violence within the household are reported each year. South African community-based studies have found that 81% of secondary school students and 93% of adolescents have been involved in family violence situations (Collings, Penning, & Valjee, 2014). Kaminer, Du Plessis, Hardy, and Benjamin (2013) reported that adolescents’ are often exposed to two or more forms of violence, which includes family violence. Evidently, adolescents who are exposed to family violence within South Africa are vulnerable to developing a wide range of psychological and behavioral symptoms and this vulnerability often results in impaired psychological adjustment and poor mental health (Boynton-Jarrett, Hair, & Zuckerman, 2013; Burton, Leoschut, & Bonora, 2009).

The Gestalt Therapy framework forms the theoretical underpinning of this article and views development and growth as a holistic and relational phenomenon that is constantly changing within the organism/environment. The individual and the environment are shared

wholes and constitute the organism/environment field, and therefore the individual is seen as part of the organism/environment field (Joyce & Sills, 2010; Jacobs, 2005; Yontef, 1993). The ‘field’ in field theory refers to the organism/environment relationship, that is, the total situation of the organism or person in a specific context or environment (Lewin, 1939, 1943). According to the Field Theory approach, the individual is not seen as separate from the field. The immediate relationship and responsiveness with each other, therefore, result an interaction between the individual and field (Joyce & Sills, 2010; Jacobs, 2005; Wheeler, 2000; Woldt & Toman, 2005). From a Gestalt approach, adolescent development thus takes place within the organism/environment field, which includes the family context. Disturbances or disruptions in the organism/environment field could impact on adolescent development. When adolescents are exposed to negative internal or external environmental factors such as family violence, their sense of identity often becomes distorted, which then brings confusion and uncertainty within themselves. Therefore, dysfunctional families often have an impact on adolescent development and adolescents exposed to family violence may find it difficult to complete the necessary developmental tasks (Makhubela, 2012; Makhubela & Debuso, 2013).

Adolescents who are exposed to a violent family environment are always in a process of configuration, that is, a hypothetical construct signifying a coherent pattern of feelings, thoughts and preferred behavioral responses that are formed in response to the environment and are reflective of a dimension of existence within the self (Mearns & Thorne, 2000). The process of configuration is therefore relationally embedded within the environment and has an impact on how development is constructed (Polster, 2005).

Constructing a strong identity is the core developmental task during the transition phase and can be seen as a symbolic bridge between adolescent and adulthood (Arnett, 2010; Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2014; Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Contemporary studies on identity from various perspectives suggest that attaining an identity is regarded as an important developmental task

during adolescence (Arnett, 2010; Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Identity development can be defined as a process of defining of self and refers to the identification with roles, values, beliefs, and lifestyles that mark a person's individuality. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that a healthy sense of self and wellbeing is facilitated (Sica, 2009). A pivotal task for adolescents and young adults is to develop a sense of identity that allows them establish a sense of themselves that integrates their past and present, and connects to an emerging future (Pasupathi & Weeks, 2011).

A coherent sense of identity in adolescence is regarded as an important requirement for paving the way to the emerging future (Côté, 2000; Côté, 2009). A sense of identity provides adolescents with a solid understanding of themselves, including their traits, preferences, thought patterns, strengths, and weaknesses. It helps them to secure, maintain and solidify a sense of relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In acquiring an identity, adolescents become more connected with others and fit better into social niches, therefore adapting to roles and beliefs that are acceptable to others. Identity adaptation is thus related to experiences of secure relatedness and belongingness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). It is important for adolescents to have a sense of their identity, as identity construction may stimulate their understanding of self within different contexts and contribute to satisfying their need for connectedness, autonomy, and competence. Furthermore, a sense of self contributes to their understanding of how they are similar and different from others, and connected through their relationships (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012; Pretty, 2002).

The Gestalt approach refers to a coherent, integrated sense of identity as a relational process of integration and organization constituting personal style and sense of self within the world and further allows for healthy self-regulation and self-control (Fernandes, Cardoso-Zinker, Nogueira, Lazarus, & Ajzenberg, 2006). The concepts of self and identity are crucial in adolescent development. Swann and Bosson (2010) indicate these terms are enmeshed and are

often seen as interconnected concepts. However, for the purpose of this research article, the self and identity are seen as interrelated mental constructs that predict and influence how people think and rationalize themselves and others, their actions, feelings, and their ability to control or regulate themselves (Oyserman, 2007; Oyserman et al., 2012). Similarly, the Gestalt approach views these mental constructs as being embedded within the relational field. These constructs can often become distorted and hindered because of exposure to negative internal or external environmental factors, leading to adolescents experiencing difficulty in constructing a healthy sense of self (Grobler, 2009; Spagnuola Lobb, 2013; Yontef, 1993).

### **Problem Statement**

Environmental demands such as family violence may impact on the manner in which adolescents construct their identity and development (Makhubela, 2012; Schiavone, 2009; Schwartz, Patin, Prado, Sullivan, & Szapocznik, 2008, 2009), and could further function as a precursor of and concomitant to the development of subsequent behavioral problems in adolescents. Research focussing on family violence has revealed that violence among close family members is often more disruptive and harmful, resulting in lasting effects such as identity-related issues in adolescents, compared to exposure to other forms of violence. More specifically inter-parental violence has been identified as more harmful for child and adolescent adjustment and development as it causes more long-term effects and has an impact on later development (Fantuzzo & Fusco, 2007; Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008; Kubeka, 2008; Osofsky, 1998; Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993).

South African studies by Makhubela (2012) and Makhubela and Debuso (2013) suggest that adolescents who have been exposed to family violence show poor identity development compared to those from non-violent homes. Similarly other research findings indicate a significant association between exposure to family violence and lower levels of trust,

autonomy, initiative, broader intimacy issues, and identity foreclosure in adolescents (Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, & Semel, 2002; Schiavone, 2009). Such implications may hinder these adolescents' ability to form interpersonal relationships or attachment bonds compared to peers from non-violent homes. Furthermore, they might also experience difficulty in the process of developing their self-concept and self-control, and relating to others (Swenson & Prelow, 2005). Acquiring an identity is thus important for coping with the demands of the environment and it enables adolescents to recognize their potential, future possibilities, and alternative choices (Heer & Wodak, 2008, Sonn, 2006).

It is also evident from research on family violence and adolescent development that the focus is often on adolescents' harmful experiences of family violence and less focus is placed on the understanding of significant relationships between adolescents' subjective experiences of family violence and adolescent identity (Goldblatt, 2003; Hammack, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2008; Ward, 2007). Research within this area is limited and these authors have expressed a need for further research to be published within this area of interest, aimed at contextualizing adolescent identity and exploring specific meaning adolescents assign to their experience of family interactions (Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses, & Seekings, 2010; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Meca, & Richie, 2012; Venn, 2010).

This article forms part of a larger research study that focuses on the re-construction of identity of adolescents who are exposed to family violence. The aim of this article is to explore adolescents' experience of the self within the context of family violence. Consequently, researchers and therapists can become more informed on how to approach identity issues as a process emergent from a relational field and how to facilitate re-constructing an integrated identity.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Approach**

To address the above aim, a qualitative research approach, which consisted of an instrumental case study design, was followed. The purpose of this case study approach was to provide insight into a particular issue such as adolescence and family violence. The researcher opted for case study approach to explore and describe a specific phenomenon and to gain richer information on adolescents' experiences of self in the context of family violence.

### **Research Procedure**

Participants were identified using a pre-selection questionnaire. The purpose of the pre-selection questionnaire was to identify adolescents who had been exposed to family violence. Participation in the research study was voluntary. The participants were invited to a brief meeting via a life-orientation teacher, where the research objectives were discussed, after which they could decide whether to participate in the research or not. Consent forms were given to all interested participants to complete. As participants were minors, they had to obtain permission to participate from their parents also. Completed consent forms were submitted to the researcher. All participants were invited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' self-experiences of family violence. At no point did the researcher offer psychotherapy. If participants required more support, they had the option of being referred to school psychological services for further assistance. However, no requests were received for psychological counselling.

### **Participants and Sampling**

The participants were selected using purposive sampling (Babbie, 2013). The population group from which the sample was selected comprised adolescents exposed to family violence in a specific neighbourhood in Cape Town. The predetermined criteria for inclusion of participants were: male and female adolescents between 15 to 18 years of age who were exposed to recurring family violence, were able to speak English or Afrikaans, and who did not form part of any therapeutic group at the time of research. Parental consent was a prerequisite. Many of the learners showed willingness to participate in the research study, but only a small sample size of 12 participants agreed to participate, 11 females and 1 male. The reason for the small research sample in the study was due to their fear of being labeled with the stigma of coming from a violent family background, as well as parents not wanting to give consent for fear of legal or social welfare implications. Twelve participants returned permission forms after their parents had provided consent.

Many adolescents in this study reside in Belhar community of Cape Town. Under the Group Areas Act, 41 of 1950, Belhar was established as a suburb for the relocation of disadvantaged communities living in the Cape Peninsula. Many of these relocated communities were forced to move and leave behind a sense of belonging and community which lead to displacement and social disparity (Adhikari, 2005; Erasmus, 2000).

This has contributed to a lack of social cohesion and the identity necessary for the building of a community and it is evident in the underdeveloped commercial facilities and paucity of constructive recreational activities, lack of youth supervision, and prevalence of high gang activity. According to residents, the increase in crime and violence has turned this area into one of the worst crime areas in the Cape Peninsula (Cloete & Van Dongen, 2004). Further evidence of social disparity, crime and violence within the Belhar community emerges from the

behavioural and psychological problems adolescents present with. There are an increasing number of adolescent case referrals from parents and schools presenting with problems ranging from gangsterism, bullying, truancy, and acting-out behaviour, to suicide attempts.

### **Interview Schedule**

The pre-selection questionnaire served the purpose of a screening tool for a specific, purposive sample group exposed to family violence. The pre-selection questionnaire consisted of questions that measured participants' exposure to family violence. Examples of questions were: "Have you experienced family violence, and for how long? Do you feel that family violence has impacted on your identity? Would you like to be part of a research study that can assist you with this? Have you previously been part of individual or group psychotherapy to work on these matters?"

A semi-structured interview schedule was selected as the means of data collection. The semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions that explored adolescents' experience of family violence and collected baseline information on adolescent identity, perception of the self within the context of family violence, coping strategies employed, and adolescents' visions of their future self in the absence of violence. The following questions were asked: What happens to you when you witness family violence? Describe how you feel when family violence takes place at home? Does the family violence affect how you interact with others? Please explain. Do you see yourself as different from others who are not exposed to violence in the family? If so, how are you different? How are you coping with family violence? Who are your support systems at home? Do you think that family violence has changed the way you see yourself, and how do you see your future? Would you like an opportunity to change how the family violence has affected you? If 'yes', what would you like to change?

## **Data Analysis**

The results of semi-structured interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and analyzed until significant and recurring themes were identified. Thematic content analysis was performed, using cross-case analysis, by identifying and coding themes across cases. The researcher was responsible for data analysis and ensured throughout the process of data analysis that no preconceptions and assumptions could bias her interpretations of the adolescent experiences of family violence (Brownell, 2012). This was achieved by means of bracketing any personal biases she might have and not placing any significance on emerging themes in the analysis process, but treating each aspect with equal value, which is consistent with the rule of horizontalization (Merriam, 2009).

The thematic analysis consisted of the analysis of data sets in six phases in terms of which the data was transcribed and analyzed until significant and recurring themes were identified (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

Firstly, familiarization with the data took place through reading and re-reading the existing data from transcripts and making notes on initial ideas. The initial codes were then generated across the entire data set, referring to the overall comprehension and description of adolescents' experience of self in the context of family violence. In the third step, the themes were created and the codes were related to the main theme of adolescents' experience of family violence. Sub-themes under main themes were also drafted. Fourthly, the themes were examined to ensure the data were entirely represented. Differences and similarities between themes were noted. Modification was done if necessary to achieve comprehensive themes. In the fifth step, themes were reviewed and verified in relation to the coded extracts and generating a thematic map of the analysis. Lastly, three main themes with their respective sub-themes were collated through defining and naming them as they represented the areas of adolescents' experience of self within the context of family violence. An external researcher

was used to verify the coding of themes as well as to ensure control for bias. Trustworthiness was also ensured through employing an external researcher as he/she played a crucial role in corroborating the research data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The project was conducted under the ethical clearance of the North-West University: NWU 00060-12-A1. Permission to conduct the empirical research study at three schools in a Cape Town community was requested from the Western Cape Education Department. Informed consent and assent were obtained from both parents and participants. To ensure confidentiality and privacy of participants, the sessions were conducted in rooms provided by the schools. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time without being discriminated against.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Three main categories were identified: the complex experiences of self amid family violence; coping and resilience as experienced by the self amid family violence; and the future effect of family violence on the experience of self. In accordance with the conventions of a thematic content analysis, each theme is introduced and illustrated along with substantiating evidence. Themes are then interpreted in relation to recent research and theory in the field relevant to the emerging theme. Only limited direct quotations are indicated, owing to the length restrictions indicated in the guidelines of the journal.

**Table1: Themes extracted from transcribed data**

| Themes                                                                | Sub-themes                                                                                                                       | Extract examples                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The complex experiences of self amid family violence                  | Self-experience within various relational fields of family violence                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When he [my father] comes home drunk ... he will beat her [my mother]. I will then intervene and there will be a whole fight between us. My angry self comes out because of fights between mom and dad. (P2)</li> </ul>                                                       |
|                                                                       | Self-experience amid multiple forms of family violence                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My sister is using drugs; she will argue and fight with us when she is drugged. She will threaten us with violence. She will go outside and break and damage the windows of the house. (P5)</li> </ul>                                                                        |
|                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self- experience related to emotional, psychological and behavior difficulties</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I feel nothing. I just laugh at them when they fight. I do worry but I'm not sure how to feel. I then just laugh to show I'm ok. I cover up what I feel inside. I want to be sad, but I can't be sad. (P3)</li> </ul>                                                         |
|                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-experience of dual role amid family violence.</li> </ul>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When my mom and dad fight I have to jump in and stop them ... I then have to play the parent role. (P4)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                            |
|                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-experience of polarities amid family violence</li> </ul>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My dad constantly swears at me and my mom ... calls us bad names and treats us badly, and this makes me feel so angry, but I still don't want to lose him, he is my father. (P8)</li> </ul>                                                                                   |
|                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-experience as different from those who are not exposed to family violence</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes I feel less than other peers; I always have to hide the truth about my family from others; I feel so embarrassed about my family. (P10)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                        |
| Coping and resilience as experienced by the self amid family violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The use of various ways of coping with family violence</li> </ul>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I try to forget and put on my earphones to listen to music, just to block out the sound of them fighting. (P6)</li> <li>I'm a cutter; it helps me cope with all these feelings I have, it gives me relief. (P2)</li> </ul>                                                    |
|                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-experience as future self and resiliency amid family violence</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I became a mom. I grew up, and I had to protect my daughter against family violence. I now see myself as a very strong person, [an] individual that can stand on her own two feet. Some violence can break children down, but in my case it made me stronger. (P4)</li> </ul> |
| The effect of family violence experience on the future self           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative impact of family violence on future self</li> </ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would be afraid of them. I don't want to get married if I see this picture of how a marriage looks like, because it makes me doubt about getting married one day. It really has an impact on me. (P4)</li> </ul>                                                            |

## **The complex experiences of self amid family violence**

**Self-experience within the various relational fields of family violence.** Data indicates that participants experience family violence in different relational fields, such as the nuclear family, extended family, and other family relations. Many of the participants indicated that their experiences of family violence have affected the manner in which they perceive and feel about themselves. This is reflected in extracts where participants refer to feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability, owing to their inability to protect themselves. Others indicated feelings of anger, sadness and rebellion that could lead to self-harming behavior. Different relational fields and experiences of the self are evident in the data extracted from the following scenarios:

My uncle touches my breast ... he uses tik [drugs] and I am scared of him. I feel vulnerable and powerless, I can't protect myself. I have a low self-image, [be]cause my uncle wants to touch me, my mother beats me if I tell her. I don't think much of myself. (P1)

When he [my father] comes home drunk ... he will beat her [my mother]. I will then intervene and then there is a whole fight between us. My angry self comes out because of fights between mom and dad. (P2)

Evidently, the constant experience of violence between the self and the family field has an influence on adolescent identity (Goldblatt, 2003; Hammack, 2006; Makhubela, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2005; Ward, 2007). The findings of the aforementioned authors suggest that adolescents exposed to family violence are predisposed to negative identity development compared with adolescents from non-violent homes. These findings are also consistent with the findings of Makhubela and Debuso (2013) and Themistocleous (2008), who indicate a strong correlation between exposure to family violence and lower trust, autonomy, initiative, and intimacy issues, and more specifically, lower identity development. In this research similar trends were found where participants refer to low self-concept, vulnerability, and low trust.

Adolescents exposed to family violence are susceptible to identity foreclosure, which can be defined as identity commitment to others without the personal exploration of self (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966; Murrell, Christoff, & Henning, 2007; Schiavone, 2009). From a Gestalt perspective, constant exposure to a difficult field event such as family violence and trauma leads to difficulty in constructing a healthy sense of self. Adolescents often develop negative self-experiences through internalizing false beliefs adopted from their family violent environment. These internalized false beliefs and fixed patterns of behavior and experiences further contribute to the way in which adolescents configure the self in their current field. This may lead to flawed summations of self that will further guide the behavior and feelings of adolescents (Grobler, 2009; Polster, 2005).

**Self-experience amid multiple forms of family violence.** The data indicates that different forms of violence, such as physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and self-harm were experienced by adolescents. Most participants experienced and witnessed multiple forms of violence, either directed towards the self, by one family member towards another, or towards personal property.

My sister is using drugs; she will argue and fight with us when she is drugged. She will threaten us with violence. She will go outside and break and damage the windows of the house. When my sister performs [acts out] ... I just want to run away – it makes me so angry inside. (P 5)

My mother would come to my grandma's house and threaten to beat us if I don't come home ... once she also threw in [broke] all the windows of the house. (P1)

Research has further indicated that being exposed to multiple forms of violence can be more distressful than being exposed to only one type of violence. The implication of this is that individuals exposed to more than one form of violence will experience more distress because they have fewer or no environments in which they feel safe (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007; Finkelhor, Turner, Hamby, & Ormrod, 2011). The aforementioned researchers also refer to this type of exposure, either through witnessing or direct experience of multiple violent

episodes such as physical and verbal abuse and other types, as poly-victimization, which has long-term effects and could lead to risk of developing complex trauma in later life. It is evident from the findings of this study that participants are exposed to multiple forms of violence continuously and consequently they experience difficulty in experiencing emotional wellbeing.

Through constant contact between the self and its environment through witnessing and experiencing multiple forms of family violence, the adolescent's sense of self is affected. This consequently will lead to difficulty in distinguishing between parts of the self and internalized self-parts (environment) and may lead to identity confusion. These internalized self-parts are called introjection and refer to taking on beliefs and values from the environment field without critically evaluating them (Polster, 2005; Yontef, 1993). Introjections may arouse difficulty in distinguishing between the self and others which evidently leads to a false identity and identity confusion (Erickson, 1968; Polster & Polster, 1999; Yontef, 1993). In the findings, one participant, for example, referred to being "angry inside"; that could signify that the participant could have internalized the anger as a way of coping with exposure to family violence.

### **Self-experience related to emotional, psychological and behavioral difficulties.**

Incontestably, there is a conceivable relationship between adolescents' experience of their sense of self and their emotional, psychological and behavioral difficulties. Such difficulties include anxiety, depression, aggression, poor peer relations and self-harm behavior. This conceivable relationship is witnessed in some of the responses provided by participants as depicted below:

I build up anger towards others, because of what is happening at home. (P4)

My schoolwork is suffering, I cannot concentrate and I'm not doing well in my schoolwork. (P1)

I feel nothing; I just laugh at them when they fight. I do worry but I'm not sure how to feel. I then just laugh to show I'm ok. I cover up what I feel inside. I want to be sad, but I can't be sad. (P3)

I feel angry, because I'm in the middle of this violence. I feel helpless; I don't get any support from my mother. I feel alone and excluded from things, so I don't talk to anyone, I isolate myself. (P7)

From the above extracts it is evident that the participants exposed to family violence are vulnerable to develop psychological and behavioral problems, and violent circumstances largely affect their construction of the self and their identity. Furthermore, Gestalt theorists indicate that individuals raised in environments consumed with violence and abuse, assimilate their experiences into the structure of the self and in turn impact the formation and structure of the self (Crocker, 2009; Fernandes et al., 2006).

Adolescents exposed to family violence often strive towards balance and self-regulation in which they learn less desirable ways to satisfy their need for balance in their life. They may internalize or externalize undesirable behavior such as psychological and behavioral difficulties resembling anxiety, depression and aggressive outbursts as a means to achieve balance and self-regulation. The identity that is formed consists of various selves that are constructed in a manner that provides the adolescent with coping strategies to be employed when encountering a difficult field event (Grobler, 2009; Polster, 2005; Yontef, 1993). Additionally, this can be referred to as creatively adjusting to the environment even if it is regarded as unhealthy contact (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2013).

**Self-experience in a dual role amid family violence.** The experience of duality of self in the context of family violence is also evident in the data extracted. The experience of recurring exposure to family violence has a negative effect on the behavioral and psychological wellbeing of adolescents, but contrary to this argument, family violence may also be experienced as a sense of self-empowerment, where adolescents have to play the mediator or rescuer. This dual role is evident in the following extracts:

If there is violence at home [my uncle and aunt fighting], I try to protect the children by taking them for a walk ... I know how it feels. I don't think it's right for children to see this ... I think of how those children must feel. (P6) When my mom and dad fight I have to jump in and stop them ... I then have to play the parent role. (P 4) I find it easy to intervene when there is a conflict situation. I'm so used to it by now. (P4)

From the extracts it is evident that participants take on a dual role within this family violence triad, which often forces them to take on the mediating and rescuing role in the family. In contrast to this argument, Goldblatt and Eisikovits (2005) conclude that adolescents exposed to violence are able to demonstrate a great sense of empowerment. This sense of empowerment often equips them with skills and enhances their sense of responsibility, competence, and positive self-image in these role reversals. It is further contended that this sense of empowerment might in actual fact be a false perception of self and have negative implications for adolescents. Adolescents' taking on adult roles while still being underdeveloped may prove overwhelming for their current developmental phase (Goldblatt, 2003). Ross (2013) also refers to adolescents from a family violence context being expected at an early age to take on adult responsibilities and subsequently may have developed certain adult-like competencies. However, the danger of this is that during emerging adulthood they often struggle with conflicts within intimate relationships and emotional difficulty within their families.

**Self experiences of polarities amid family violence.** The experience of polarity within self refers to participants' experience of conflict within the self.

My uncle is on drugs and he wants to touch me ... I don't like it, but maybe he also needs help as well. (P1)

In the case of P4:

I hate him for just the things that he did to my mom ... I still have a bit of a grudge, but can't openly express it. So I don't hate the person, just the actions [love vs hate]. I thought maybe my mom was going to be ok ... [with my pregnancy]. But my mom like withdrew herself from me and my dad was the one that was there for me ... I saw the good side of my dad, my dad is the nurturer, like he is both my mom and dad.

The above participant feels torn between loving and hating her father where he portrays both the abuser as well as the nurturer within the family violence triad. She also shows empathy

towards the victim, her mother, coupled with a compulsion to protect her, while simultaneously blaming her for instigating arguments. In the case of Participant 1 and Participant 4, both find the behavior by the perpetrators of family violence abusive and distressing, but at the same time show compassion and understanding for why they might be behaving in that manner. Another participant stated:

My dad constantly swears at me and my mom ... calls us bad names and treats us badly, and this makes me feel so angry, but I still don't want to lose him, he is my father. (P9)

In these extracts it is clear that polarities within the self are experienced. This occurs when two or more selves are stagnant and are unable to be reconciled. In Gestalt theory, polarities are seen as opposites of the same coin, pairs of opposites (polarities). Brownell (2012) refers to polarities as opposite poles, where you identify with one and alienate the other. These opposing poles cause a split within the self, thus maintaining ambivalence and conflict within the self (Brownell, 2012; Stevenson, 2010).

Polster and Polster (1999) indicate that bringing polarities into awareness will allow the opposing poles to “become allies in the common search for a good life, rather than uneasy opponents maintaining the split” (p. 248). Adolescents within the context of family violence will remain in conflict within the self if opposing polarities are maintained. Through awareness of the polarities within the self, adolescents will be exposed to a continuum of choices. According to Stevenson (2010), polarities allow for freedom to move in either direction, thereby either embracing or dissolving the differences within the self.

**Self-experience as different from those who are not exposed to family violence.** Family violence has altered the manner in which these adolescents view themselves as different from adolescents who are not exposed to family violence. Most participants had a perception of

themselves as being different: defensive, secretive, ashamed, suffering from low self-esteem, lacking confidence, and being unable to make friends easily. The following extracts give an overview of this theme:

I'm different from others. I see myself as rude and disrespectful, especially when they say things about me. I don't want to be like this but it is my only defence. (P11)

Yes, I feel less than other peers. I always have to hide the truth about my family from others. I feel so embarrassed about my family. (P10)

Participants indicated that family violence influenced how they saw themselves and this has influenced their interactions with others. In some instances participants used replaced anger in their interactions with others, where they would become angry with others for no reason. Participants often evince avoidance, pretence, and secrecy about family violence at home. Sometimes covering up the shame of family violence and the fear of judgment are common and may lead to isolation, mistrust, not making friends easily, and defensiveness. The following quotation illustrates such behavior:

The violence in the family caused me not to trust anyone; I don't speak to anyone about everything. I keep things to myself. I am being careful about who I speak to ... I just keep it to myself. I do not share what is happening in my family. I don't want to bring friends home because I will get embarrassed. (P10)

Adolescents exposed to family violence will go to great lengths to defend themselves from the family violence they are experiencing and try to conceal family secrets from the outer world. Denzin (1982, 1984) refers to this as being entrapped in a violence and denial cycle, thus not breaking the silence, but rather living within two worlds simultaneously. Adolescents frequently hide their home situation when interacting with friends by keeping both worlds separate. Conversely, maintaining significant relationships with others from outside the family such as friends and nonviolent family is regarded as important as they exemplify role models that signify and represent a sense of normal familial life (Goldblatt, 2003).

From the Gestalt perspective, an individual is not regarded as a separate entity from his or her field; thus all processes, problems and solutions are the result of the interaction between the individual and his/her environment (Wheeler, 2000; Woldt & Toman, 2005; Yontef, 1993; Yontef & Jacobs, 2010). In these extracts it is clear that participants have difficulty in maintaining healthy contact between self and others. By not making healthy contact with others, and by rather living within two worlds simultaneously, but keeping both worlds separate, may cause adolescents to remain stagnant and be unable to strive towards growth and homeostasis.

### **Coping and resilience as experienced by self amid family violence**

**Adolescents use various ways of coping with family violence.** The data clearly indicated that adolescents used various ways of coping with family violence. In the extracts, participants demonstrated both creative ways of coping, together with negative and undesirable ways of coping with family violence. Some participants referred to more creative ways of coping such as song writing, music, rapping, poetry, church groups, sport, and religion, as reflected below.

Rapping ... it is like the beat in the song where it is instrumental, but music calms me down, it really calms me down when I am stressed out. (P2)

I try to forget and put on my earphones to listen to music, just to block out the sound of them fighting. (P6)

When I feel down I write in my journal and [write] poetry. (P5)

According to the Gestalt approach, creative adjustment reflects a “creative balance between changing the environment and adjusting to current conditions” (Yontef & Jacobs, 2010, p. 354). This sentiment is supported by Amendt-Lyon (2001), who recognizes creativity as a human tendency to form and transform familiar elements of experiences. This allows for integration, connection to neglected parts, and gaining new awareness. In this research,

adolescents have found creative ways to cope with family violence and in doing so have discovered new parts of the self to connect with.

Some of the extracts in the research study also refer to negative and undesirable ways of coping. By internalizing and externalizing undesirable behavior, adolescents find ways of coping with family violence. The following extracts refer to negative and undesirable ways of coping, where three of the participants used deflection as a way of coping with difficult emotions. They used cognitive thoughts as a way of escaping painful emotions, by daydreaming, joking or laughing to mask their true feelings.

I feel nothing when my brothers fight. I just laugh at them. I do worry but I'm not sure how to feel. Not sure how to react just laugh to show I'm ok ... I am coping with the uncomfortable feelings. (P3).

Deflection is regarded as an interruption of a contact boundary where participants cut themselves off from the true emotions they are experiencing. Deflection can be accomplished by indirectly expressing a need or by not receiving what is needed (Polster & Polster, 1999); as a way of coping with family violence, he/she projects a false self into the outside world. In two cases participants found a sense of belonging and need for acceptance in peer groups as ways of coping with family violence. Participant 2 joined a Goth subculture group where he found a sense of belonging and acceptance, and where he could 'be' and explore himself.

UGR, it is a group that I belong to ... group had dignity and trust between the friends and stuff. That was an identity I belong to; that group it gave me belonging. (P2)

In the case of Participant 4, she stated:

I've been hanging with friends just to forget about the violence and just don't want to go home. She found a sense of belonging in a peer group that encouraged her to become like them while providing her with a sense of coping with family violence.

Adolescents often regard the home characterized by violence as an unsafe place, while the outside world represents a safe haven for them (Goldblatt, 2003). To get a sense of who they are, they seek out peer groups that provide a sense of belonging and reinforce or reflect their self-identity. Peer groups provide adolescents with validation for their choices and give support during difficult times. Prinstein and Dodge (2008) believe that interaction with peers often shapes the attitudes and behavior of adolescents, while equipping them with social skills on how to effectively deal with stressful life situations. Other researchers differ from this viewpoint and believe that there is a correlation between peer influence and adolescents' behavior, which can lead to antisocial and delinquent behavior (Platje, Jansen et al., 2013, Platje, Vermeiren et al., 2013). However, this research study argues that if the sense of self of the adolescent is already predisposed to biological and social risk factors, he/she will be susceptible to developing antisocial and dysfunctional behavior. Therefore, these adolescents will go in confluence with the environment (peers) and cannot separate what is part of self and what is environment (Jacobs, 2005; Yontef, 1993).

Participants referred to externalizing and internalizing of behavior as ways of coping that are often regarded as undesirable. For example, getting involved in physical fights, smoking and drinking, back chatting, and running away from home are regarded as ways of coping, through externalizing their behavior. Others referred to becoming depressed, feeling sad, anxious, isolated, and self-mutilating themselves as a means of coping through internalizing behavior. This is reflected in the following extracts:

I fight back that's the only way they will take me serious[ly]. I'm not a puppet on a string that they can tramp on. (P1)

I'm a cutter. It helps me cope with all these feelings I have; it gives me relief. (P2)

According to research, coping strategies can take place via externalizing the problem in some cases, while others might internalize the symptoms as a way of coping (Schwartz, 2007;

Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Rodriguez, 2009; Shelton & Harold, 2008). From a Gestalt approach, the externalizing of problems could be explained in terms of contact boundary interruption such as projection. Projection is where disowned aspects of the self are regarded as difficult, offensive or unattractive and projected onto the environment through undesirable behavior. Internalizing behavior is often the cause of anxiety, depression and self-harm. Such behavior originates from the process of introjection where undigested introjections can become fixed gestalts that cause blockages leading to depression or anxiety (Clarkson & Cavicchia, 2014; Joyce & Sills, 2010; Nevis, 2000; Spagnuolo Lobb, 2013).

**Self-experience as future self and resiliency amid family violence.** Participants referred to their lives in the future tense as future adults and how family violence events had impacted on how they envisioned their future. This is evident in the following extracts:

If we move away from here we will be away from the violence. (P10)

I want to finish matric and go study. I don't want to have a boyfriend and get pregnant like my cousins. I want to reach 21 years of age and still be clean (no sex before marriage) and get married. (P9)

I want to complete my school, go and work and take care of my mom, take her away from all of this. (P12)

The participants' experience of violence within the family has shaped how they envision their future without violence. Several familial domains, especially interpersonal relations, were identified as areas they could benefit from in the future. Through the experience of family violence, adolescents may have become more sensitized and this may assist them to avoid possible abusive dating partners and future violent relationships. Buchbinder and Birnbaum (2010) indicate that familiarity with violence could be seen as a resource for coping or identifying risks before the situation worsens and could be a potential benefit for future relations. Findings further suggest that the future self and resiliency are closely linked:

When the baby came, my identity changed, as I became a mom. I grew up, and I had to protect my daughter against family violence. I now see myself as a very strong person, [an] individual that can stand on her own two feet. Some violence can break children down, but in my case it made me stronger. (P4)

A future in a non-violent world is seen as hopeful, providing a sense of freedom to plan towards future goals. According to Becker (1999) and Van Manen (1990), a key component for adolescents to live safely in a nonviolent world is to project themselves into the future as adults; this can give them some hope and contribute to their setting goals for the future.

Resiliency as a result of experiencing violence in the family is considered a benefit that results from rising above adversity. In the extracts, adopting a self that is more positive and resilient is evident and can be linked to aspirations, a hopeful future, and the setting of future goals. Through adopting a future-orientated self, adolescents can accomplish some order and meaning in their lives, a sense of predictability, and an optimistic orientation towards the future (Becker, 1999).

The Gestalt approach further upholds the belief that all people are self-regulating and oriented towards growth and will adjust by conforming to their circumstances by using their own innate resources as well as resources within the field to meet their needs. Polster and Polster (1999) indicate that as individuals become aware of self, they often recognize their needs and desires, and often refer to their future plans. This is reflected in participants' desire for future plans that refer to attainment of education, future career orientation, and family life in a non-violent context. As participants become aware of self, they often become oriented towards growth and development and therefore towards using their own resources to meet their needs and adapt to their circumstances. This could also relate to self-empowerment and resilience as they rise above their adversity.

### **The impact of family violence experience on the future self**

In some cases exposure to current family violence was associated with how adolescents perceived their future self. Future selves are visions of the self in future states; they are possible selves that can orient current choices and behavior. The future self further refers to a sense of potential and an interpretive lens that can guide our feelings and behavior towards the future (Oyserman & James, 2009). One participant doubted his competency to become a non-violent partner in the future. Another participant referred to being afraid of choosing an abusive partner and having doubts about marriage.

My dad abusing my mom actually influenced how I see future relationships. For instance, I would never go into a relationship where my boyfriend abuses me. I would be afraid of them. I don't want to get married if I see this picture of how a marriage looks like, because it makes me doubt about getting married one day. It really has an impact on me. (P4)

The effects of exposure to current family violence can impact the manner in which adolescents from violent families construct and shape their lives. Joest (2003) indicates that familiarity with violence could blind some individuals to early warning signs of domestic violence in the future; however Buchbinder and Birnbaum (2010) disagree. Familiarity may well be a benefit and assist in coping with violence by identifying its risks before it escalates.

### **Limitation of Study and Recommendations**

A major limitation of this study is the small sample size. The research findings are therefore not representative of the general population, and as a result, the findings cannot be generalised to the larger population. Some parents also refused to give their consent, as they feared getting into trouble with the authorities, such as social welfare, thus limiting the sample. The fear of possible of labelling and stigma also contributed to limited sample.

The gender of participants also contributed to the limitations of the study, as most of the participants in the research study were girls, and only one boy participated. This impacted on the outcome of the research as findings represented a distorted view that would make generalisation to a broader population group difficult.

All the participants in the study came from one community, and therefore are from same socioeconomic background and racial group. This would make generalisation to a broader population group difficult.

Conducting the study during school hours further limited the study, as students' attendance was difficult. Research at school during school hours was difficult owing to limited time during recesses. The setting (therapy room or special classroom) was also not conducive to research, since it created the stigma that participants were experiencing emotional difficulties. Another reason for doing research during school hours was to ensure learner safety; however the negative aspect of this was that participants felt exposed by coming to the therapy room or special classroom at the school.

More exploration and research on the perspectives of adolescents in relation to their parents and other family members are recommended. To understand the violent familial dynamic between parent and adolescent within the family violence context, it is recommended that future research explore a broader sample size to ensure the validity and reliability of the research outcomes. With a broader research focus and further exploration, the findings of this study can contribute to a hypothesis for further research in the area of adolescent identity and family violence. The expansion of restorative interventions with adolescents in relation to their parents and other family members within the family violence context is also recommended.

### **Conclusion**

The study offers an understanding of self-experiences of adolescents within the context of family violence. It gives an account of adolescents' experiences of growing up in families characterized by conflict and violence and how such exposure creates a complex experience that can be either a source of potential risk or strength. The study refers to different relational fields and exposure to multiple forms of family-related violence that has an influence on the sense of self. These adolescents' unique experiences emerged in this study as dualities and polarities and often presented as coping strategies that exposed adolescents to the realities of living with the fear of family violence.

Adolescents perceived the dualities and polarities in their lives as self-empowerment that equipped them with skills for the adult world. This, however, robs them of their experience of being young and can influence their adult lives. For example, some adolescents demonstrated maturity and effective coping skills when dealing with family violence, but growing up too fast takes away the experience of childhood and its associated roles.

The study further emphasizes adolescents' capacity to form a coping identity and a positive outlook towards the future, while living with family violence. By projecting themselves into the future, that is, looking at their future plans and setting goals for the future, they accomplish order and meaning, which further provides a sense of predictability in their lives. Participants' orientation towards the future contributes to their hope of safe living in a non-violent world. Adolescents play a dual role within this family violence context and this often helps them to survive in various contexts and to adjust to changing situations. Such adjustment further assists adolescents to be adaptable and resourceful in various situations

### **Contribution to Future Research**

The study may potentially contribute to the understanding of the subjective experiences of adolescents regarding their sense of self in the context of family violence, and could be a useful reference for future researchers. This research study refers to gaps within the research literature on identity development and the need to explore it from a relational perspective.

Understanding family violence from the subjective point of view of the adolescent will inform research of the needs of adolescents in this context. This approach also moves away from the trauma and pathology model that focuses mainly on the effects of family violence on adolescents. It refers rather to the reciprocal relationship between the adolescent and family violence. This study raises awareness for exploring therapeutic and educational intervention programs for adolescents exposed to family violence, with emphasis on both dualities and polarities as it play a role in coping with family violence and will therefore inform future interventions programs.

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## Article 2

### **A psycho-educational strategy as method for re-constructing adolescent identity within the context of family violence**

#### **Abstract**

Restorative intervention with adolescents from a context of family violence is a much-needed resource, in view of the limited access to mental health services in South Africa. This article explores a psycho-educational strategy, using a visual creative medium as a method for re-constructing identity within the context of family violence. A psycho-educational strategy was applied with 12 adolescent participants over five sessions with the intention to bring about awareness of different selves, identify and name the selves, and become aware of the configuration of identity that could lead to a re-constructed identity. The data were thematically and visually analysed. The findings of the study revealed that through the psycho-educational strategy, adolescents' heightened awareness led to healthier contact making with the self and therefore facilitated a healthier configuration process of self. In becoming aware of the configuration process of identity, adolescents could identify and name the selves that emerged in the family violence context. The psycho-educational strategy therefore allowed adolescents to reconstruct identity, through redefining the meanings they attached to the selves. Through this process, adolescents became more self-empowered and resilient to change and redefine who they were within this family violence triad, and had more control in how they foresaw their future.

*Keywords:* Family violence, adolescent identity, re-constructing identity, psycho-educational strategy

## **Introduction**

Research has indicated that mental health interventions for adolescents are limited. They are limited in terms of resources that are not readily available or accessible. Mental health needs of young people often go unattended owing to minimal focus on prevention, promotion and lack of services (Du Plessis, Kaminer, Hardy, & Benjamin, 2015; Flisher et al., 2012; Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). In addition, research on the types of therapeutic interventions as well as their efficacy with traumatised children and adolescents needs further investigation (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010).

It is evident from the above findings that intervention guidelines on the appropriateness of existing mental health services are limited; therefore restorative interventions have been recognised as a necessary resource to address this need in South Africa. The main purpose of this study is to explore a restorative intervention strategy with adolescents who have been exposed to family violence. The mental health intervention implemented in this study is in the format of a psycho-educational strategy and it comprises a therapeutic and developmental skills component. This approach is regarded as a more holistic and competence-based approach, where health, collaboration, coping, and empowerment are promoted (Dixon, 1999; Marsh, 1992). This modality differs from the more traditional psychotherapeutic approaches that focus mainly on pathology, illness, and dysfunction (Montoya, Colom, & Ferrin, 2011). A restorative psycho-educational strategy should be based on mental health models that subscribe to the idea that health and illness are neither absolute nor universal, but rather socially and culturally constructed (Venn, 2010). It is further proposed that mental health intervention models for the South African context should include an expressive component as well as a narrative component in which the ‘ongoing self’ or ‘self in context’ is emphasised (Leibowitz-Levy, 2005). This strategy also makes use of visual

creative methods as a way of expressing identity in the context of family violence. The psycho-educational strategy fits well into the Gestalt approach, which is used as framework for this article.

The Gestalt therapy framework views development and growth as a process of constant change within the organism/environment field (Yontef, 1993). It is understood from this argument that the individual is not seen in isolation, but the environment and the person are in a continuous relatedness with each other (Jacobs, 2005; Joyce & Sills, 2010; Levin & Levine, 2012).

Adolescents who are exposed to an environment of family violence are always in a process of change and growth; therefore such exposure allows for different selves to be configured as a response to the environment and impacts on how identity is constructed (Polster, 2005). The construction of the self and identity within the context of family violence is therefore a result of the configuration of different selves. This is regarded as a way of coping and creatively adjusting to a difficult environment (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2013).

### **Identity Development and Family Violence**

Adolescence is defined as a phase of acquisition of independence, separation from the family and the establishment of new friendships and sexual relations. Identity formation is a vital development process during adolescence and refers to the identification with roles, values, beliefs, and lifestyles that mark a person's individuality, and is thus necessary to facilitate a healthy sense of self and wellbeing (Arnett, 2010; Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2014; Marcia, 1966). Research further suggests that successful identity development will help the individual to be more aware of his or her strengths and limitations in becoming a successful person. Those who have difficulty with identity development will struggle to discover who they are and are more prone to be confused and distressed (Erikson, 1968; Kroger & Marcia, 2011).

Identity development derived from the school of Gestalt refers to development as a process of continuous change and growth; it is embedded within the organism/environment field and is not separate from the context in which it develops (Jacobs, 2005; Joyce & Sills, 2010). Identity is regarded as a process of integration and organisation, and constitutes a continuous process of creative adjustment within this organism/environment field. According to Fernandes, Cardoso-Zinker, Nogueira, Lazarus, & Ajzenberg, (2006), identity represents the individual's personal style and individual sense of self in the world.

Family plays an important role in adolescent development, and with a high prevalence of family violence many adolescents are exposed to developing behavioural and emotional difficulties that further impact on their development (Goldblatt, 2003; Makhubela, 2012; Schwartz, Patin, Prado, Sullivan, & Szapocznik, 2005). Adolescent development takes place within the organism-environment field, which refers to the context where the individual (adolescent) is part of the environment (family violence), and together they form the organism/environment field and have a reciprocal relationship (Jacobs, 2005; Yontef, 1993).

Evidently any disturbance or disruption in the organism/environment field, such as family violence, could impact on adolescent development (Makhubela & Debuso, 2013; Schwartz, Mason, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2008; Schwartz, Mason, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2009) and hamper healthy integrated identity (Grobler, 2009; Goldblatt, 2003). Such implications may hinder these adolescents' ability to form interpersonal relationships/attachment bonds compared with those of peers from non-violent homes. Furthermore, adolescents may have challenges relating to issues of autonomy, identity, and intimacy, and experience difficulty with self-concept development, self-control, and relating to others (Bourassa, 2007; Makhubela, 2012; Makhubela & Debuso, 2013; Swenson & Prelow, 2005).

Considering the argument presented above, it is evident that family violence is regarded as a field condition that has an influence on the process of identity formation within the context of family violence. Adolescents exposed to this environment often take on beliefs, attitudes and values from others without incorporating them and making them part of the self. These are referred to as introjects and are rigid beliefs that often lead to fragmentation of the self (Grobler, 2009; Polster, 2005; Yontef, 1993).

### **Re-Construction of Identity**

Corbin and Strauss (1987) conceptualise re-construction of identity as the process of reconstitution and reintegration of identity into a new concept of wholeness and discovering new and unused aspects of self. Moreover, this concept of re-construction of identity is also captured by Kerr, Crowe, and Oades (2013), who refer to re-constructing identity as the process of narrating, reframing, retelling, re-storying, re-authoring, questioning, and reformulating. This provides narrators with the opportunity to make their voices and opinions heard, articulate trauma and loss, demystify their experiences, and refocus on the positives of their experience (Brown & Kandirikirira, 2007).

Polster's (2005) theory of population of selves refers to the process of identity re-construction of which the tailoring process forms the basis. The tailoring process refers to the de-structuring and reshaping of introjects, which refer to all the ideas, beliefs and attitudes absorbed from the external environment without their being integrated as part of the self. A positive configuration process emerges from the tailoring process. Through identifying the different selves, how they configure in the field, naming the different selves and by identifying the different roles they play, the selves can be redefined. Redefining the selves would mean assigning different meanings to the various selves (Polster, 2005).

This process of redefinition will lead to integration, which for the purpose of this article is defined as re-construction of identity. The process of re-configuration of the self allows for adolescents to become aware of and identify the multiple selves that were configured. Through this process of reconfiguration they are reframing, retelling, re-storying, re-authoring, questioning, and reformulating the story, which allows them the opportunity to make their voices and opinions heard and articulate trauma and loss (Brown & Kandirikirira, 2007). This reconfiguration process further allows for integration and identity to be experienced as a true reflection of the self (Brown & Kandirikirira, 2007; Kerr et al., 2013; Polster, 2005).

### **The Current Study**

The overall aim of the psycho-educational strategy is to allow participants to gain insight into the self by making contact with the self and defining the self within the context of family violence. It promotes emotional expressions through focusing on the different roles and emotions the selves elicit in the context of family violence. It further allows participants to facilitate their taking ownership of emotions as well as making contact with unacceptable parts of selves, to empower and self-nurture, and to gain skills to integrate unacceptable selves by redefining the meanings they attached to the different selves, leading to an integrated identity.

The article explores the phenomenon of violence (more specifically family violence), and the relation to identity development of adolescents. It is clear from the literature that there has been an increased presence of violence in many families and it can be assumed that family violence can be seen as predisposing adolescents to developing identity issues and subsequent behavioural difficulties (Bourassa, 2007; Makhubela, 2012; Shiavone, 2009; Swenson & Prelow, 2005).

It is evident that a more holistic approach needs to be undertaken when exploring mental health issues of adolescents; therefore restorative mental health interventions with adolescents are a greatly needed resource within South Africa (Du Plessis, Kaminer, Hardy, & Benjamin, 2015; Flisher et al., 2012; Kaminer & Eagle, 2010; Leibowitz-Levy, 2005). This recommendation has been the main rationale for this article, with its aim to explore and describe a psycho-educational strategy, by using a visual creative medium as a method for re-constructing identity of adolescents exposed to family violence. This article forms part of a larger research study that focuses on the re-construction of identity of adolescents who are exposed to family violence.

### **Psycho-educational intervention**

The psycho-educational strategy was used as a tool to facilitate change in the identity formation process. The psycho-educational strategy followed the proposed guidelines of Blom (2006) and Schoeman, and Van der Merwe (1996) that refer to Gestalt models which focus on contact making and awareness, emotional expression, empowerment, and self-nurturing as part of the therapeutic process. The central goal of the psycho-educational strategy was to focus on meaning making in respect of violent traumatic events that adolescents experience, to emphasise positive and adaptive views about the self in the present, and to refer to hope for the future. This could further enhance resilience and empowerment of self and identity within the context of family violence.

The psycho-educational strategy was implemented over a five-week span. One session per week was implemented according to different phases as described by Blom (2006) and Schoeman, and Van der Merwe (1996). The researcher is a qualified psychologist and is credible and competent to implement the psycho-educational strategy in the research study. The

researcher maintained strong boundaries between her being a researcher and her role as psychologist as a way to ensure trustworthiness of results.

The researcher explored the different selves of participants that emerged during family violence. Through open-ended questions, the participants were instructed to identify and name the different selves; explore the different emotions and roles of the selves in the context of family violence; and explore the relationship between the different selves to bring about harmony. Empowering, resilience and nurturing of the self within the context of family violence were explored. Redefinition of the meaning of different selves within the family violence context was done and the participants shared their views of their ‘future selves’ and future goals.

In the initial phase, participants were introduced to making contact with self through sensory stimulation. These activities were done over one session (60 min). The participants were encouraged to become aware of the self. The activities focused on experience and discovery of the self through contact making by introducing them to clay as a medium. Working with clay as a medium involves a primal mode of expression and communication through tactile contact (Henley, 2002) with our senses and effects awareness. The use of clay as a therapeutic medium is found to be significant as it stimulates the senses and opens the pathways to contact; with heightened awareness, emotional expression can take place (Oaklander, 1997; Sherwood, 2004).

Contact making is identified as a prerequisite for awareness and strengthening of the self. Contact making was achieved by introducing participants to the medium of clay, which stimulates sensory awareness and emotional expression (Blom, 2006; Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996). Sensory awareness activities included smelling and touching the clay to stimulate emotional expression. Participants became more aware of different emotions and

experiences as they could relate different emotions to events they had experienced. In one case scenario the participant did not feel comfortable working with clay, and paint was used as an alternative to bring about emotional expression.

In the second phase the participants identified and named the various selves by creating a clay projection of the self. Clay was again used as a means to stimulate emotional expression. As part of this strategy the colour of the clay was used to further stimulate emotional expression. Participants were exposed to an unstructured environment, and through open-ended questions, were invited to express their experience of family violence and self-configuration visually. Open-ended questions formed part of the strategy and allowed for the acquisition of a deeper understanding from participants. Each participant was asked to create a unique product of the self within the context of family violence through questions and unstructured stimuli.

Participants reacted by expressing their experiences, feelings or meanings in subjective ways. Furthermore, the questions allowed for a better exploration and understanding of participants' creation of self and provided them with the opportunity to respond openly and to explore significant aspects in their lives without restrictions (Roos, 2012). Some of the instructions were: make a projection of self within the context of family violence; and identify and name the different selves that emerge during family violence. This processes enabled participants to both define the self and own the projection of the self.

The third phase refers to participants' emotional expressions of the self, which focus on the different roles and emotions the selves elicit, and how the different selves can either work together in harmony or discord. In this phase the participants could engage in dialogue with different selves. The participants were guided by open-ended questions to engage with different selves. Through dialogue between the different selves, participants could address unresolved issues through owning of emotions and making contact with unacceptable parts of selves, as well as giving a voice to the different selves. The final phase was one of empowerment and

self-nurture. Participants were encouraged to identify positive selves that they could engage with as a way of coping and selves they wished to engage with less. Participants were further encouraged to integrate unacceptable selves by redefining the meanings attached to them and to engage more with positive selves for empowerment and self- nurturing.

### **Methodology**

The researcher employed a qualitative approach that consisted of an instrumental case study design, allowing for a richer and in-depth exploration of the research aim.

### **Research Procedure**

Participants were identified using a pre-selection questionnaire. The pre-selection questionnaire consisted of questions aimed at identifying learners at school who had been exposed to family violence. Example of questions asked were: Have you experienced family violence and for how long? Do you feel that family violence has impacted on your identity? Have you previously been part of individual or group psychotherapy to work on these matters? Would you like to be part of a research study that can assist you with this? The learners made contact with the life-orientation teachers at school and were invited to an initial meeting. The research objectives were discussed at a meeting with the learners, after which they could decide whether to participate in the research or not. Consent forms were given to participants and to their parents to be signed and returned.

The participants were invited to the sessions with the intention of establishing how they could explore and understand the self within the context of family violence by means of a psycho-educational strategy. During the sessions they had to explore and understand the self, gain insight, and acquire skills to empower themselves within the context of family violence. Participants were referred to external support services if they required more therapeutic

support. Psychotherapy was available from school psychological services; however no psychological support was requested by participants.

### **Sampling**

The population group included adolescents from a Western Cape community who were exposed to family violence. Purposeful sampling (Babbie, 2010) was used and focused on adolescents who met the predetermined criteria for inclusion (Patton, 1990; Suri, 2011). The inclusion criteria for respondents were: age group 15 to 18 years; male and female participants; English and Afrikaans speakers from three high schools in a specific community in the Cape Town area; exposure to recurrent family violence; and not being part of any individual therapy or therapeutic group at that time of research.

Twelve adolescents returned permission forms after their parents had given consent. The group consisted of 11 girls (ranging between 15 to 18 years) and one boy (17 years). Some of the participants came from either nuclear or single-parent families. In two cases, participants were in foster care. Others lived with extended families such as grandparents or aunts and uncles. All the participants were from the same socio-economic and race group.

The participants indicated exposure to different types of violence, ranging from physical abuse to self-harm attempts. Most participants indicated that they were directly involved in family violence, while only four indicated that they had witnessed family violence but had never been involved. Perpetrators were all family members abusing other family members, usually ranging from the mother, father, brother, to aunt or uncle. Victims were often the mother, children and grandparents. None of the participants had received professional help; a few had received support from life orientation teachers, extended family members, and their peer groups. One participant was referred to social services for further support.

## **Data Collection**

Observation of the visual creative materials and the use of a video recorder were used as supportive methods of data collection for the psycho-educational strategy as to explore the issues related to identity in the context of family violence. Through observation the researcher gathered data by watching the behaviour of participants and how they engaged with the visual creative material and related it to their experience of self in context of family violence. Open-ended questions further allowed for the interaction with the visual creative materials, participants could therefore engage with material and express their self-experiences of family violence. The video camera was used to capture these visual interactions and was used as data. The video camera is recognised as a data-collection tool and has been used to verify observational data and to add depth by providing data that cannot be reliably obtained through observation (Caldwell & Atwal, 2005; Demuth & Mey, 2013).

## **Data Analysis**

The verbal transcriptions of the answers to the open-ended questions in the strategy were coded and thematically analysed according to the guidelines of Braun and Clark (2013). The researcher further reviewed, coded and analysed all audio-visual recordings of the sessions of the participants' self-creations to acquaint herself with the presented data. Retrospective analysis was conducted by means of audio-visual data that gave greater depth to the data and increased the quality and complexity of the data (Caldwell & Atwal, 2005; Demuth & Mey, 2013). Categorisation of the data was developed further after viewing the tapes. The researcher adopted an 'open-minded' and unbiased stance, allowing the data to influence the research outcomes. Additionally the visual data was used to confirm and verify the verbal transcriptions of

the research. According to Roos (2012) and Roos and Ferreira (2008), visual representations often reflect the conscious meanings that participants project about a particular phenomenon.

The researcher analysed the visual creations of self by observing specific objects participants made and how the objects were related to the research question. The audio-visual data was analysed and thematically linked to the analysed transcribed data (Silverman, 2010). A comparison between visual data and transcribed data was done to ensure congruency and to identify any discrepancies between the two. The visual data was used to confirm and complement the transcribed data, ensuring its trustworthiness, validity and reliability. This data could further be used to verify and confirm observational data and verbal transcriptions obtained, thereby increasing the richness and trustworthiness of the data (Bowman, 1994; Caldwell & Atwal, 2005).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The project was conducted under the ethical clearance of the North-West University: NWU 00060-12-A1. Permission to conduct the empirical research study at three schools in Belhar, Cape Town, was requested from the Western Cape Education Department. Informed consent and assent was obtained from both parents and participants. To ensure confidentiality and the privacy of participants, the sessions were conducted in therapy rooms provided by the schools. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any stage without being discriminated against. The researcher provided participants and life-orientation teachers with contact details of referral agents in the community that could assist if emotional difficulties should arise. However, no such needs were expressed.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The results and interpretation of the thematic analysis and visual analysis are reported in this section. A number of themes featured prominently across the transcripts. Three main themes were identified, namely, awareness of self, empowering of self, and re-constructing of self within the context of family violence. Each of the main categories consists of various sub-themes. In accordance with the reporting conventions of a thematic content analysis, each theme is introduced and illustrated with quotations from the data and then interpreted in relation to recent research in the field as well as theory relevant to the emerging theme.

### **Awareness of Self**

**Identifying and naming of different selves.** In this research study, the participants had to use clay to stimulate emotional expression. Some of the quotations were:

This feels so nice. I love playing with clay, it reminds me of when I was little and carefree. It smells like biscuits, so nice, it reminds me of my grandma's house ... it was so homely. (P7)

Additionally participants used the clay as part of their awareness process as they made representations of the self with clay. The self was explored by identifying and naming of the different selves, also by bringing unknown selves into awareness. The visual data revealed that making the creation of self was unique to each participant's process. Some would take time to make the projection, choosing the colour of the clay with much consideration. Others would go through the projection process quickly. However, all participants were able to identify, name and describe different selves. Participants often used wording such as 'parts or sides of self' to refer to the different selves in their creative projections. Some of the selves that were named were:

The smiley face here is my happy part, here is the jokey part and the jokey part is not always real. (P3)

This is my angry side, it is a red face. The angry self and sad self come out when there are problems between my mom and my real dad and my stepdad. (P8)

This one is my perfectionist side and this one is the funny and jokey side and here is my sad side. (P5).

The comforting part, is the part where I tell myself I want to become more the comforting one to others. (P6)

Awareness provides the foundation for a healthy configuration process of participants with heightened awareness levels. Participants could make contact with parts of the self and examine how the environmental field had configured the self. Polster (2005) similarly describes this as the configurational reflex during which the selves configure in response to the environment in which individuals find themselves. During this process of configuration individuals can re-configure the selves by identifying, naming and sorting the selves (Polster, 2005).

The concept of re-constructing of the self is based on the following: participants' ability to become aware and through the process of configuration, identify, name and sort the disparate parts of self into a unified pattern, which may lead to a more healthy and flexible contact with the environment. Gestalt therapy views the process of awareness as essential for healthier contact making with the environment. Healthy contact making with the environment can then enable the self to configure in such a way to initiate a healthier and more flexible contact (Blom, 2006; Grobler, 2009; Polster, 2005).

Some participants assigned meaning to the colour of the clay of that particular identified self as illustrated below. The excerpts below refer to associations between a specific self and a specific colour:

I would say most of the time I'm happy and I'm funny and everything in my life is bright. So that is why I chose yellow ... as well as the green one. I'm outgoing, I love nature, I like feeling free and being myself. (P4).

I chose the red for anger. The white is for the peace in my life. I don't like any distractions, I don't like for any horrible things to happen to me in my life. That's why I chose the white ... all of that together constitutes myself. (P4).

Weideman (2012) suggests the use of or preference for specific colours is reflective of the emotional state of the child and could reveal how he/she relates to the self. Research has been conducted on colour, as well as on the psychological effect it has on an individual. Sale and Betti (2008, p.167) contend 'our language is filled with references, analogies, metaphors, descriptions, and allusions to color'. Colour has a direct and immediate effect on us – on the emotional, intellectual, psychological, and even physiological level. It arouses associations and memories that often evoke physical responses, such as anger, excitement, sadness, peacefulness and joy. Colours may influence emotions in particular ways and owing to the learnt association of colours with objects, individuals continue to relate colour to physical sensations (Lauer & Pentak, 2008; Zettl, 2011). For example, yellow is associated with the sun or sunlight and emotions of happiness. Red and orange are associated with fire and the emotion of anger. In the research the participants used different colours when they referred to their different selves and the accompanying emotions.

**Identifying dominant and less dominant selves in family violence.** Participants identified and named their dominant or essential selves, selves present all the time, as well as their less dominant selves that only emerged in certain situations, the so-called member selves.

I'm happy and I'm funny and everything in my life is bright ... the yellow is [the] dominant one it is there most of the time. The peaceful part is strongest ... which one is always there? [laughs] ... the peaceful side will always come in and help me out. (P4) My aggressive and sad side is still very strong. (P2) The red I chose for anger it is not really who I am, it just comes out, when someone makes me angry. The angry side and the revenge side only come out in certain situations. (P5)

Polster's theory regarding the self refers to 'raw experiences transformed into clusters of characteristics which over time may develop into selves' (Polster, 2005, p. 9). These selves then are divided into dominant selves and less dominant selves. He refers to the more dominant selves as the essential selves that are always present, while the less dominant, also known as the member selves, emerge during certain situations. It is significant that many of the participants referred to one or two essential selves and multiple member selves that emerged as a result of coping with family violence. Moreover, with heightened awareness, some participants became aware of more than one less-dominant self that could be redefined as an essential self, because of its dominant presence. In many cases the realisation and awareness of a member self's dominance can lead to redefining process of self.

### **Different emotions and roles the selves play in the context of family violence.**

Participants were required to bring into awareness the different emotions and roles the selves play in the context of family violence. Participants not only identified and named the different selves in their projections, but also described the emotions and roles the selves play in the context of family violence. Colour was again used in describing the emotions that the selves represent and the role they play in working together or against other selves.

#### ***Emotions***

The red part [referring to projection] obviously would come out because I would feel angry if I see violence or anything that is happening in our house. I feel depressed – more sad and disappointed ... because of the things that are happening ... I don't know how to deal with it or I can't confront that specific person so then I will feel depressed. (P4)

The sadness side is here, I keep everything inside, this is when I am sad and I am hurt because my mom will either beat me or verbally abuse me, so [I] keep things inside and this causes the sadness. I made the sad part black because it refers to all the bad things in my life. (P1)

My withdrawal or isolating side goes with anger as well. I first get angry, sad, then I will withdraw. (P5)

### ***Roles***

The masking side of me is a hiding away and pretending and a coping mechanism. The avoidance side of me is protecting myself from others. (P3)

There are parts of me that let me not give up; it gives [*sic*] me motivation to keep on, to survive. I will call it [the] surviving part of myself. These are the sides that help me to forget about the violence at home. I call it my breakaway sides, where I can forget about what is happening at home. This side also helps me to cope. (P1)

I also have an encouraging side. When I'm in trouble or experience family violence this part is always consoling me not to fight but to endure and cope. This also refers to my survival skills. I also have a side to pretend that everything is ok. (P1)

Polster's theory refers to the striving of selves to be harmonious, to reach a sense of wholeness and integration, which can be described as hearing all these voices simultaneously. Evidently emotions and roles played by the various selves in the study were not consistently harmonious and it could be argued that adolescents exposed to family violence will have difficulty in configuring holistic and harmonious selves. Grobler (2009) refers to field conditions that can have an impact on the self-configuration process and that may lead to flawed summations of the self that guide the adolescent's behaviour. The construction of the self and identity within the context of family violence is thus complicated. This can result in the configuration of different selves (not in harmony with one another) as a way of creatively adjusting to a difficult environment (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2013).

Polster further argues that there is no 'real' self that is hidden or masked by surface experiences, but all of the different selves will strive for ascendancy or the upper hand (Polster, 2005). It is imperative that adolescents exposed to family violence be aware of the different selves within them, as well as the opposing emotions and roles they can play within the family violence context, as this awareness will assist with their integration process. According to Blom (2006) there should be a merging between the opposing poles; in contrast Polster (2005)

believes that if each polarity is kept, synthesis can be created within diversity. This allows for flexible movement between the two poles, as each situation requires. By acknowledging and giving a voice to the previously denied part of the self, more freedom in the creation of self and meaning can take place (Polster, 2005; Stevenson, 2010).

**Identifying the different selves to bring about harmony.** In this sub-theme, participants identified the selves they wanted to change or use less when encountering a violent family situation. Additionally, participants referred to selves that were not in harmony with other selves and needed to be used less. In the data extracts it is clear that participants identified selves that they could use in conjunction with the selves that were prevalent within the context of family violence. By combining the different selves to work as a team, participants could increase and improve harmony within the self. Effective coping and control of the selves could subsequently surface in the context of family violence.

Some of my sides work together in a way because when I'm angry I would like to bring peace into that to calm me. (P4)

Instead of just lashing out in an anger [*sic*] rage, my peaceful part/self is the one that will help me to stay calm. I will sit down and think about what to say or do. (P4)

The happy side and my friendly side work together as a team against the angry side, fearful side and my sad side, which are my negative sides. (P8)

My happy side helps me to cope with my sadness and my anger. (P1)

In the research, participants referred to different selves working together as a team, as well as against one another, which caused a split within the person. Polster and other Gestalt therapists refer to this as the Topdog/Underdog split (Polster, 2005; Yontef, 1993). The Topdog always represents the more positive and acceptable aspect of the self, whereas the Underdog reflects the rejected aspect of the self that is often to be seen as the negative self (Philippson, 2009). The psycho-educational strategy allowed for dialogue between the opposing

aspects of the person. The previously disparate aspects of a person are acknowledged and called into dialogue with other aspects of self, identifying and energising disparate aspects. This process brings the opposing selves into harmony with one another and allows for adjusting and appreciating diversity within themselves (Polster, 2005). Adolescents exposed to family violence are often confronted with opposing selves and through heightened awareness of the diversity of selves and their various roles they can redefine their meaning and role in their lives.

### **Empowering of Self and Future Self**

The second theme refers to empowerment of self within the context of family violence. The strategy enabled participants to reflect on the selves that are empowering within the context of violence and their contribution to coping. Participants identified their empowering selves and through heightened awareness of the different selves, came to understand the role they played in coping with family violence.

I am a very strong person, [an] individual that can stand on her own two feet ... some violence can break children down, but in my case it made me stronger. (P4)

I have to let my real self come out. I cannot let the sadness take over my life. The friendly side and happy side have to increase and I have to trust myself to be a better person. (P5)

I will fight back if I need to. I won't allow them to walk over me, no more. (P3)

I want to finish school, go study further and go work. I won't let this get me down. (P8)

According to Cooper-White (2011), by naming and understanding the nature of the different selves, the sense of self becomes more self-cohesive and less fragmented. Referring to and identifying certain selves as 'the angry or the sad self' helps the individual to see that it is not the entire self that is angry or sad, but only member selves that emerge when confronted with family violence. Such insight increases the individual's awareness of the role of certain selves, and with heightened awareness, participants further reduced their powerlessness by having an increased control over their lives (Lord & Hutchison 1997; Rappaport, 1987).

The subtheme of empowering the self was also related to resilience, future elements of the self, and setting of future goals. In the extracts below, the positive selves and resilient selves of adolescents are evident and can be related to hopeful futures and setting of goals.

I want it to be different. I don't want to be scared anymore, I want to be free and not pretend any more. I want to break the silence and stand up for myself. (P10)

When I was younger I was very quiet, but now I understand what is happening and I raise my voice. I say what I want but I am just standing up for myself. (P3).

I want to finish school, go study further and go work. I won't let this get me down. (P8)

Resilience is a key component within the empowerment process. Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000) refer to resiliency as 'a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant diversity' (p. 543). Through awareness of the empowering selves, a process of resilience and a positive adaptation to the context of family violence can be better facilitated. The empowerment of self in the context of family violence is also related to a future-oriented representation of the self. Participants' reference to hopeful futures and the setting of future goals indicate a sense of predictability and an optimistic orientation towards the future that should enable them to establish some sense of order and assign meaning to their lives (Becker, 1999; Seginer, 2008, 2009; Van Manen, 1990). Their reference to their futures and setting of future goals can also be related to possible selves or future selves. Markus and Nurius (1986) define possible selves as 'self-knowledge [that] pertains to how individuals think about their potential and about their future'; that is, 'selves that we would very much like to become', 'selves we could become', and 'selves we are afraid of becoming' (p. 954). Possible future selves play a role in the identity formation process and are most likely to influence behaviour; they have been termed 'self-regulatory possible selves'. These selves therefore influence current behaviour, and prescribe plans of action for future-oriented representations of the self (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004).

## Re-construction of Self

The third theme refers to redefining of self within the context of family violence. The strategy enabled participants to redefine the meaning of the different selves by examining the beliefs and values regulating the selves and exploring whether they still held relevance in their lives.

**Redefining the meaning of different selves in a family violence context.** Participants had to examine the meaning they assigned to the different selves and how it influenced their behaviour within a context of family violence. It is also essential to examine how these selves developed and the relevance of introjects from which they were configured. As they became aware of the different roles the selves played and how the selves combined to bring about harmony or disharmony, they could deliberate whether they continued to be relevant within their lives. Becoming aware of the different roles and emotions the different selves elicited, the participants could redefine the roles and their meanings, by either increasing or decreasing the impact of the different selves. Doing so could contribute to coping better with family violence.

To bring peace to the anger, I would sit myself down and think rationally about what is happening and what should happen. I will speak to myself and tell myself this is what I should do to make the situation better ... The two sides [do] work together. If I'm angry, I'm not going to think, I'm going to speak, so then I will say the wrong things. So if I keep quiet and you keep it in, I feel sad and depressed. (P4)

I would say the creative side needs to increase, the masking side needs to decrease, as well as the Gothic side, in order to get the unity and to be whole. Like fighting with others as well – my sad part also needs to decrease. Also angry side and sad side need to decrease. My angry side is very strong and the aggression – it's coming out inappropriately. (P2)

I want to reduce my anger side and then my sadness and crying will stop too. Understanding my anger side better will help reduce my sadness and lead to better coping within the family violence setup. (P5)

Awareness forms the foundation of a healthy configuration process; therefore the goal would be to heighten the awareness as part of the re-construction process. Through

awareness, participants became cognisant of opposing selves and the different roles they played within the conflict situations. It is important that the opposing selves get a voice and are not discarded because of what they represent. Certain selves will configure as a way to creatively adjust and facilitate coping with a difficult environment (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2013).

It is imperative that participants examine introjects regulating the selves and explore whether these introjects still hold relevance in their lives. Tailoring, according to Polster (2005), is a necessary process that needs to happen in order to achieve re-construction. For a healthy assimilation of self, the introject system in the integration process has to be examined. Introjects on which self-experiences are built are examined, then re-structured and reshaped through the reworking of the selves that are not in harmony with others. The faulty meanings on which introjects are based can be reframed through the process of tailoring; participants can then re-configure both their negative selves and explore their multiple self-possibilities. Re-construction of self then takes place as a result of the tailoring process where the reshuffling of the various internal selves takes place, each retaining its own identity and allowing for a healthy, flexible and functioning entity which can be regarded as an integrated self (Polster, 2005).

In summary the psycho-educational strategy played a facilitating role in the re-constructing of identity in the context of family violence. The psycho-educational strategy contributed to change process of identity. Participants became aware of the self, identified the different selves, reorganised and reintegrated the different selves into a whole, and rediscovered new and unused aspects of the self. Through the process of tailoring the different parts of the self, the sense of self became more self-cohesive, allowing the individual greater empowerment. Through identifying empowering selves, participants became less powerless and more in control of their lives. Furthermore, the empowerment of the self allowed for further awareness and acceptance of the opposing selves. Through the process of empowerment of self,

future and possible selves surfaced. Possible selves allow individuals to think about their potential and about their future. The intervention further contributed to self-regulatory behaviour and has the potential to influence current behaviour, and prescribe plans of action for future-oriented representation of the self (Oyserman et al., 2004). The future self-orientation provided a sense of predictability and a glimmer of optimism and hope for the future.

### **Limitations of the Study**

It is also important to refer to the limitations of this study as a way of alerting other researchers to possible pitfalls within this research area. This research study firstly was based on a small, purposeful sample of adolescents from a community in Cape Town. All the participants in the study came from one community, and therefore are from same socioeconomic background and racial group. The research is not representative of the general population, and as a result, the findings cannot be generalised to the larger population. A large number of prospective participants showed interest in participating in the research; however some parents did not give their permission and did not sign the consent forms for learners' participation, thus limiting the sample.

The gender of participants also contributed to the limitations of the study, as most of the participants in the research study were girls, and only one boy participated. This impacted on the outcome of the research as findings represented a distorted view that would make generalisation to a broader population group difficult. Getting male participants to participate in this study was difficult, and could be ascribed to their not feeling comfortable with the research area, with possible fears of labelling and stigma.

Despite the fact that privacy and confidentiality were discussed prior to the study, some participants felt compromised and did not feel comfortable taking part in the study, knowing that their parents would be aware of their participation. Some participants did not want their

parents to know about their participation in the study. Some parents also refused to give their consent, as they feared getting into trouble with the authorities, such as social welfare.

Conducting the study during school hours further limited the study, as students' attendance was difficult. Research at school during school hours was difficult owing to limited time during recesses. The setting (therapy room or special classroom) was also not conducive to research, since it created the stigma that participants were experiencing emotional difficulties. Another reason for doing research during school hours was to ensure learner safety; however the negative aspect of this was that participants felt exposed by coming to the therapy room or special classroom at the school.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study set out to implement a psycho-educational strategy as a method to facilitate the re-construction of identity of adolescents within the context of family violence. Given the limited mental health services provided for adolescents, therapeutic interventions with adolescents are a much-needed resource in South Africa. The rationale for a psycho-educational strategy was developed because of the dire need for restorative and capacity-building intervention strategies with adolescents exposed to family violence in a specific community. The psycho-educational strategy allowed adolescents to reconstruct identity, through redefining the meanings they attached to the selves. Through this process, adolescents became more self-empowered and resilient to change and redefine who they were within this family violence triad, and had more control in how they foresaw their future.

### **Contribution to Field of Research**

The findings of the present study can open several different avenues for future research. It is evident that little research on self-concept and identity formation exists in South Africa on family violence among the black, coloured, and Indian population groups.

The findings of the study may potentially contribute to an understanding of the experiences of adolescents regarding their sense of self and to how researchers view the impact of family violence on identity development. The experience of self within the context of family violence in South Africa can be regarded as unique because of the country's history, and this element therefore might have played a role in how family violence and identity are constructed.

The findings of the study revealed that through the psycho-educational strategy, adolescents' heightened awareness led to healthier contact-making with the self and therefore facilitated a healthier configuration process of self. In becoming aware of the configuration process of identity, adolescents could identify and name the selves that emerged in the family violence context. The findings could further contribute to hypotheses for further research in the area of adolescent identity and family violence, and inform restorative intervention strategies that could facilitate the process of re-construction of identity.

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### Article 3

#### **Towards Re-Constructing Identity: Exploring the Process of Identity Formation**

##### **Abstract**

##### Objective

The objective of this article explains the process of identity formation of adolescents who are exposed to family violence in a Cape Town community of South Africa. The article explored and described the process of identity formation facilitated by psycho–educational strategy and how it contributes to identity re- construction.

##### Method

A mixed-methods approach was used in the primary study. A psycho-educational strategy was implemented as the intervention and a pre-test–post-test scale (Adolescent Self-Concept Scale) was used to assess for change in identity. Twelve participants were purposively selected for the study. The sample consisted of 11 females and 1 male included both male, ages ranging from 15 to 18 years from three secondary schools.

##### Results

The research results of the psycho-educational strategy were thematically analyzed and a statistical procedure was used to measure for significant change within the pre-test–post–test outcomes. The research findings of adolescents’ exposure to psycho-educational intervention and Adolescent Self Concept Scale suggest a significant change in the identity formation process in terms of how adolescents perceive themselves and their interaction with others within the context of family violence.

## Conclusion

Findings show that after the intervention process participants were more positive and resilient, with better coping skills and greater optimism for the future. The findings of this article have potentially contributed to future research as the research focused on alternative restorative intervention techniques that facilitate the identity re-construction process. The implications of these findings are that adolescents exposed to family violence can re-define the meanings they attach to family violence and further facilitate identity re-construction.

*Keywords:* Adolescence, identity formation, re-constructed identity, family violence, psycho-education

## Introduction

Research suggests that certain familial and social factors may influence identity development. Furthermore, security in familial relations may provide meaningful support for exploration and experimentation, enhancing those aspects of adolescents' sociability that may favor the process of identity formation (Erikson, 1968; Goldblatt, 2003; Schiavone, 2009; Schwartz, Patin, Prado, Sullivan, & Szapocznik, 2005; Schwartz, Mason, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2008, 2009).

For many adolescents, family relations do not always provide support for meaningful exploration and experimentation and may hinder the identity-formation process. One factor that may hinder the identity formation process within the family environment is family violence. Exposure to family violence is generally accepted as a precursor to adolescents' identity issues and subsequent behavior problems (Makhubela, 2012; Makhubela & Debuso, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2005; Schwartz et al., 2008, 2009). These adolescents are more likely to engage in crime, violence and antisocial behavior and may consequently lead to later adult maladjustment (Narayan, Englund, Carlson, & Egeland, 2014; Vézina, Hébert, Poulin, Lavoie, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2015). The research focuses on how adolescent identity can be re-constructed in the context of family violence. The objective of this article is to describe how the psycho-educational strategy facilitates the identity formation process and contributes to identity re-construction.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Gestalt therapy framework forms the theoretical orientation of this study. Gestalt therapy refers to development and growth as emergent from relational processes. The individual is considered to be an integral part of the environment, thus creating the organism/environment field. In the organism/environment field, the individual and environment are shared wholes engaging in relation to each other (Jacobs, 2005). Development is therefore constantly changing within the organism/environment field and impacting on the other (Jacobs, 2005; Joyce & Sills, 2010; Polster, 2005; Yontef, 1993).

According to Polster (2005), the process of configuration and reconfiguration of the self is relationally embedded within this field. Configuration refers to a coherent pattern of feelings, thoughts and preferred behavioral responses that are formed in response to the environment (Mearns & Thorne, 2000). Adolescents exposed to a family violence environment are therefore always in a process of configuration. Such exposure allows for different selves to be configured as a way of adapting to a difficult environment. The construction of the self and identity within the context of family violence is therefore complicated and results in the configuration of different selves as a way of creatively adjusting to a difficult environment (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2013). This approach explores identity formation holistically within the organism/environmental field and further informs intervention strategies with adolescents who are exposed to family violence.

### **Exploring Identity Formation within a Context of Family Violence**

During adolescence, the attainment of an identity is regarded as a major developmental task (Erikson, 1968). Erikson refers to identity as a developmental task that needs to be attained before moving on to the next phase in the psychosocial stage model. Adolescents have to develop a coherent and stable identity in which identity confusion vs. identity synthesis has to be resolved.

From a more contextual perspective, identity can be defined as the unique characteristics which belong to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group. Identity is thus best understood as being both relational and contextual. Identity therefore assists individuals to see themselves as separate from others and provides them with role identification, values, beliefs and some sense of individuality (Arnett, 2010; Erikson, 1968; Schwartz, 2001). A sociological view of identity can be described as a sense of continuity, uniqueness from others, and sense of affiliation to others, and refers to the traits, characteristics, roles, social relations, and social group memberships that define an individual (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). The Gestalt approach views identity from a humanistic and existential theoretical stance, and is the proposed view of identity within this research. The Gestalt approach views the self and identity as a growth process and refers to it as a process rather than a fixed entity (Polkinghorne, 1991; Polster, 2005; Yontef, 1993). The Gestalt approach of self and identity is regarded as a process model where the self is in constant flux, therefore constantly changing within the organism/environment field. The self emerges as an ongoing process and functions at the organism/environment field (Blom, 2009; Jacobs, 2005; Philippon, 2009; Polster, 2005).

From the conceptualization of self and identity it is clear that the two are interconnected, as both are relational and contextual; therefore changes within the self would influence identity. The self, which is a mental construct, plays a facilitating role in the identity formation process and is referred to as consistent beliefs, ideas and self-knowledge that people hold about themselves across different situations and contexts (Oyserman et al., 2012). From the above conception it is apparent that the self, self-concept and identity are mental constructs that provide the basis for process-identity formation during adolescent development. These constructs are shaped by the context in which they develop and consequently, influence actions and behavior (Oyserman et al., 2012; Swann & Bosson, 2010). Polster (2005) concurs that by

exploration of the self, insight into the identity process may be provided. By exploring these mental constructs during adolescent identity formation, identity re-construction can be understood and conceptualized better. This is especially true for adolescents in the process of identity attainment as the current context is a reality in which the self and identity are shaped and impacts on the manner in which their identities develop.

As previously stated, family violence hinders the process of identity formation. The influence of family violence on adolescent identity has been supported by studies conducted in South Africa that found that family violence negatively influenced adolescents' psychosocial wellbeing (Idemudia & Makhubela, 2011; Makama, 2003; Makhubela, 2012; Makhubela & Debuso, 2013). These studies suggest that adolescents exposed to family violence compared with those from non-violent homes have experienced lower identity development. These findings are consistent with previous empirical studies (Schiavone, 2009, Schwartz et al., 2008, 2009) that indicated a strong relationship between exposure to family violence and identity issues that could contribute to identity foreclosure in adolescents.

Since family violence impacts on the development of identity, restorative interventions with adolescents in South Africa exposed to family violence are required. A psycho-educational intervention strategy was applied in the larger, primary study as response to address the identity needs of adolescents exposed to family violence. The intervention strategy followed the Gestalt therapy framework as illustrated by Blom (2006) and Schoeman and Van der Merwe (1996). This intervention integrates psychotherapeutic and educational components to provide a holistic psycho-educational impact with a holistic and competence-based approach. (Montoya, Colom, & Ferrin, 2011). However, the focus of this article is on how the psycho-educational strategy facilitates identity formation process and contributes to identity re-construction. Change is therefore facilitated by the implementation of psycho-educational strategy, where aspects of the self are explored and insights are gained.

### **The Psycho-educational Strategy**

The psycho-educational strategy consisted of a therapeutic and developmental skills component and followed the guidelines of Blom's (2006) and Schoeman and Van der Merwe's (1996) Gestalt models, which focus on contact making and awareness, emotional expression, and empowerment and self-nurturing (Blom, 2006; Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996). The components of the strategy facilitated the process of identity re-construction within the context of family violence.

The psycho-educational strategy consisted of different phases. Initially, participants were encouraged to become aware of the self by making contact with the self. The activities focused on experience and discovery of the self via contact making by introducing them to a clay medium. The use of clay as a therapeutic medium was viewed as significant as it played a role in the sensory awareness of participants, which stimulated emotional expression (Blom, 2006; Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996). Contact making as first phase was seen as a prerequisite for awareness and strengthening of the self. In the second phase participants made a clay projection of the self as means of identifying and naming self-parts. This process led to defining the self and owning the projection of the self. The third phase referred to participants' emotional expressions of the self within the context of family violence, focusing on the different roles and emotions the selves elicited. Dialogue between the different selves provided insight on how the different selves could either work together in harmony or dissonance. Projecting and owning of emotions and making contact with unacceptable parts of selves formed part of the re-construction process. The last phase was empowerment and self-nurture, as well as the acquisition of skills to integrate the unacceptable selves by redefining the meanings they attached to the different selves.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Approach and Design**

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a holistic understanding of the problem. The mixed method approach allows for the collection of both types of data of a single phenomenon. In addition, it allows for a comparison of various research findings, highlighting similarities and differences to produce validated research findings (Ivankova, Creswell, & Clark, 2007). The method used for this article was primarily qualitative in nature and the quantitative data is embedded within qualitative methodology.

In qualitative section the psycho-educational strategy extracted qualitative data from participants. The open-ended questions and observations of the visual creative medium that participants used provided qualitative data. The Adolescent Self-Concept Scale (ASCS) was used as a one- group pre-test–post-test design to extract quantitative data from participants. The quantitative data, a one- group pre-test–post-test design was included to determine whether the intervention had a significant effect and as well as ensuring validity and utility of results for future study.

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), it is valid to apply an embedded design if there are not sufficient resources to equally emphasize both qualitative and quantitative data. Owing to the sensitive nature of the research, the researcher found it difficult to recruit enough respondents for the research study. The researcher therefore included a qualitative part to provide more substance and richness to the study.

## Research Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the North-West University: NWU 00060-12-A1. The Western Cape Education Department in South Africa granted permission to conduct the empirical research study at three schools in Cape Town. A group of 12 adolescents voluntarily participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. The research objectives were discussed with potential participants, after which they could decide whether to participate in the research or not. Participants who indicated an interest in the research made contact with life-orientation teachers at their schools. Of the adolescents identified, only 12 adolescents agreed and gave consent to participate in the research study. Written permission was obtained from both parents and participants. The remaining adolescents who did not consent to be part of the study were advised to consult with the social workers and school psychologists appointed to the specific schools should they require support.

The participants were invited to complete a pre-test ASCS to establish their experience of themselves regarding their identity. Thereafter, participants were introduced to a psycho-educational strategy that intended to bring about awareness of identity in the field of family violence and to facilitate the process of possible identity re-construction which focused on contact making with self, identifying and naming different selves, awareness of configuration of identity in the context of family violence, and diversity of self that could lead to a re-constructed identity. The psycho-educational strategy was implemented over five contact sessions with each participant. As part of this strategy, a visual creative technique using clay was used to explore identity. Lastly, a post-test ASCS was conducted after the psycho-educational strategy with participants to verify whether observable change within identity constructs had taken place.

### **Description of population, sampling and sampling method**

Data was collected at the appointed primary research sites – three secondary schools within a community situated in a suburb of Cape Town, South Africa. A non-probability, purposive type of sampling method was used to collect data on adolescent identity within the context of family violence. The criteria for inclusion of participants were as follows: age group 15 to 18 years; male and female participants; English and Afrikaans speakers from the primary research sites; exposure to recurring family violence; and not part of any therapeutic group or individual therapy during the time of the study. Twelve participants were purposively selected based on inclusion criteria and their interest in participation in the study.

### **The Measuring Instrument**

The ASCS (Vrey & Venter, 1983) was used to measure participants' experiences of self-concept and changes within identity constructs after the intervention phase. The ASCS was used for the purpose of this research as it is multidimensional and consists of six variables to measure self-concept constructs. This instrument further measures various ecological domains or life contexts pertaining to self-concept. Vrey and Venter (1983) developed this instrument and conducted in-depth research on the self and self-concept. This instrument was based on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. The ASCS was conceptualized, designed and standardized so that it would be more suited to the South African context. The ASCS assessed for overall self-concept constructs. The six dimensions of ASCS, inclusive of identity, acceptance and behavior facts, are measured by a 100-item manually-scored scale. Participants had to respond on a 9-point Likert scale with a range of 1–3 = low self-concept, 4–6 = medium self-concept and 7–9 = high self-concept. The overall self-concept score ranged between

negative and positive continuum, referring to participants' identity, acceptance and behavior state.

The instrument has been tested against different adolescent South African population groups and included age groups of 12 to 18 years, male and female participants, and English and Afrikaans language speakers. The ASCS was successfully used in previous South African studies (De Beer, 2008; Sievwright, 2006; Theron, 2006) and is regarded as a reliable tool. It attains a reliability coefficient of 0.90 for all the different subscales (Vrey & Venter, 1983). The validity of the instrument is highly significant at both 0.01 and 0.05 levels (Vrey & Venter, 1983).

### **Data Collection**

The primary researcher was responsible for the collection of all data to ensure that observations and perceptions of findings were reliable; however both qualitative and quantitative findings were verified by independent researchers. The primary researcher was responsible for the review of literature and control of data. The ASCS was the first form of data collection and measured behavior before and eight weeks after the psycho-education strategy was conducted within one group. The ASCS used as a pre-test–post-test assessment tool allowed for the measuring of self-concept and identity formation over a period of time. The supportive data collection tools used throughout the psycho-educational strategy comprised observations and a video recorder. The video recorder was used to verify and confirm observational data and verbal transcriptions obtained, increasing the richness, validity and reliability of data that would have been unobtainable through live observations alone (Caldwell & Atwal, 2005).

## Data Analysis

The quantitative results were statistically analyzed by means of a dependent *t* test to measure for significant difference between pre-test and post-test assessment results. The criterion used to determine statistical significance is  $p \leq .05$ . The results were further analyzed for effect size through the Cohen's *d*- test that measured for the strength of the relationship between the two (Cohen, 1988). An independent researcher from the Child and Family Studies program at the University of the Western Cape assisted with the verification of the quantitative results.

The verbal transcriptions of the answers to the open-ended questions in the strategy were coded and thematically analysed according to the guidelines of Braun and Clark (2013). The themes were created and the codes were related to the main theme of adolescents' experience of family violence. Sub-themes under main themes were also drafted. Further the themes were examined to ensure the data were entirely represented. Differences and similarities between themes were noted. Modification was done if necessary to achieve comprehensive themes. In the fifth step, themes were reviewed and verified in relation to the coded extracts and generating a thematic map of the analysis. Lastly, main themes with their respective sub-themes were collated through defining and naming them as they represented the areas of adolescents' experience of self within the context of family violence.

The researcher viewed all video recordings of sessions of the psycho-educational strategy to familiarize herself with the data. During the study, the primary researcher visually analyzed the visual creations of the participants. According to Roos (2012), visual representations reflect the conscious meaning that participants' project about a particular phenomenon. The researcher analyzed the visual creations by observing what specific objects the participants had made, the relationship between the objects, the identification and naming of

the objects, the relational context, and the family violence environment in which the objects were placed. All of these objects and associated factors were considered in relation to the research question. The themes generated by visual analysis of the representations were linked with themes identified in the thematic analysis (Roos, 2008; Theron. 2006). The researcher compared visual analysis data and transcribed content data to evaluate for any similarities or discrepancies between the two. The visual data was used to confirm and complement the content data, ensuring the trustworthiness of the research data.

An independent researcher at the North-West University, was appointed to additionally analyze the qualitative data. An independent researcher from Child and Family Studies at the University of the Western Cape also assisted with verification of the quantitative results. Both external researchers have expertise in qualitative and quantitative research. This process was implemented to control for bias and to assist in establishing the trustworthiness of the research data. The established patterns of data from the ASCS as well as from the psycho-educational strategy outcomes were critically reviewed, correlated with the literature and presented as a discussion.

### **Findings**

The findings of the ASCS and psycho-educational strategy are reported in this section. The study made use of a mixed-methods approach as both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The mixed-methods approach allowed for the collection of both types of data of a single phenomenon. Consequently the psycho-educational strategy generated qualitative data from participants and the ASCS was used as a one-group, pre-test–post-test design to generate quantitative data from participants.

## Quantitative Findings

### Findings of the Pre-and-Post Test for the Adolescent Self-Concept Scale (ASCS).

The results of the *t*-test suggest that there was a significant difference of [ $t = (11) = 2.24$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ] between the pre- and post-test assessments. Individual sub-scales were subsequently analyzed to measure significant difference between the pre- and post-test variables of the different subscales (see Table below).

### Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1: Overall Self-concept scores (Pre-Post Test)**

|                        |    |             |             |
|------------------------|----|-------------|-------------|
| Overall Self-concept   | 12 | 3.67 (1.67) | 4.75 (1.91) |
| Cohen's <i>d</i> score | 12 | 1.3         | 2.9         |

**Table 2: T-test Scores of Overall ASCS (Pre-Post Test)**

|                                         | T     | Df | Sig   |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|----|-------|
| Overall Self-concept<br>Pre – Post test | -2.24 | 11 | .047* |

**\* $p \leq 0.05$**

**Table 3:  
T-test scores of Subscales**

| Subscales of ASCS                       |       |    |       |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|----|-------|
| Physical self                           | -.38  | 11 | .713  |
| Personal self                           | 4.84  | 11 | .001* |
| Self in relation to family              | -2.53 | 11 | .028* |
| Self in relation to social<br>community | -2.12 | 11 | .057  |
| Self in relation to morals              | -.48  | 11 | .643  |
| <b>*<math>p \leq 0.05</math></b>        |       |    |       |

The results in Table 1 refer to the outcome of the ASCS that measured for change in self-concept constructs over a period of time. Adolescents showed a substantial increase from a mean score ( $M=3.67$ ,  $SD=1.67$ ) to ( $M=4.75$ ,  $SD=1.91$ ) between pre- and post-test respectively. This difference was highly significant [ $t(11) = 2.24, p \leq 0.05$ , Cohen's  $d=1.3$ ].

The results further suggest that a statistical significant difference between the pre- and post-test for ASCS's subscales of the personal self [ $t(11) = -4.84, p \leq .001$ , Cohen's  $d=2.9$ ] and family self [ $t(11) = -2.53, p \leq 0.05$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.5$ ] was found. The Cohen's  $d$ -effect size is of large magnitude, indicating a strong effect between variables as indicated by Cohen (1988).

### **Qualitative Findings**

In this section the findings of the qualitative data obtained from the psycho-educational strategy are reported. Themes referring to change in identity formation were extracted from the thematic analysis of the psycho-educational strategy. Main themes extrapolated and identified in the process of change from different phases of the psycho-educational strategy were awareness and contact with self, empowering of self, and re-constructing of self within the context of family violence. Awareness and contact with self is where participants were encouraged to become aware of the self by making contact with the self through the medium of clay. In this theme, sub-themes of self-discovery; self-expression were explored. Participants could identify self and also show emotional expression regarding self in the context of family violence. The empowering of self as theme refers to participants' reflection on the selves that were empowering within the context of violence and the selves that were not strong. The theme of empowering the self was also linked to resilience and future elements of the self. The last theme refers to re-construction of the self, which refers to participants examining the meaning they place on the different selves and its influence on their behavior within the context of

family violence. Participants could examine how these selves developed and reflect on the relevance of the beliefs and values they were configured from.

**Table 1: Phases of Psycho-Educational Strategy**

| Phases of strategy                                                       | Verbal excerpts                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Phase 1                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Themes extracted</b><br><b>Awareness of and contact with the self</b> | <p>This feels so nice; I love playing, it reminds me of when I was little and carefree.</p> <p>It smells like biscuits, so nice; it reminds me of my grandma's house ... it was homely.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Phase 2                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Themes extracted</b><br><b>Self-discovery</b>                         | <p>The smiley face here is my happy part, here is the jokey part and the jokey part is not always real.</p> <p>This is my angry side; it is a red face. The angry self and sad self come out when there is [sic] problems between my mom and my real dad and my stepdad. (P8)</p> <p>This one is my perfectionist side and this one is the funny and jokey side and here is my sad side.</p> <p>The red part (referring to projection) obviously would come out because I would feel angry if I see violence or anything that is happening in our house.</p> <p>I feel depressed more sad and disappointed ... because of the things that are happening ... I don't know how to deal with it or I can't confront that specific person so then I will feel depressed.</p> <p>The sadness side is here, I keep everything inside, this is when I am sad and I am hurt because my mom will either beat me or verbally abuse me, so [I] keep things inside and this causes the sadness. I made the sad part black because it refers to all the bad things in my life.</p> |
| Phase 3                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Themes extracted</b><br><b>Self-expression</b>                        | <p>My withdrawal or isolating side goes with anger as well; I first get angry, sad, then I will withdraw.</p> <p>The masking side of me is a hiding away and pretending and a coping mechanism. The avoidance side of me is protecting myself from others.</p> <p>There are parts of me that let me not give up; it [sic] gives me</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

motivation to keep on, to survive. I will call it [*the*] surviving part of myself ... These are the sides that help me to forget about the violence at home. I call it my breakaway sides, where I can forget about what is happening at home. This side also helps me to cope.

Some of my sides work together in a way because when I'm angry I would like to bring peace into that to calm me.

Instead of just lashing out in an angry rage, my peaceful part/self is the one that will help me to stay calm, I will sit down and think about what to say or do.

The happy side and my friendly side work together as a team against the angry side, fearful side and my sad side, which are my negative sides.

My happy side helps me to cope with my sadness and my anger.

There are parts of me that let me not give up; they give me motivation to keep on, to survive. I will call it [*the*] surviving part of myself.

These are the sides that help me to forget about the violence at home. I call [*them*] my breakaway sides, where I can forget about what is happening at home. This side also helps me to cope.

#### Phase 4

##### **Themes extracted** **Empowering of self** **and self- nurturing**

I have to let my real self come out. I cannot let the sadness take over my life. The friendly side and happy side have to increase and I have to trust myself to be a better person.

I am a very strong person, [*an*] individual that can stand on her own two feet, needs no one to help ... some violence can break children down, but in my case it made me stronger.

I want it to be different, I don't want to be scared anymore, I want to be free and not pretend any more. I want to break the silence and stand up for myself.

When I was younger I was very quiet, but now I understand what is happening and I raise my voice. I say what I want but I am just standing up for myself.

I will fight back if I need to. I won't allow them to walk over me, no more.

I want to finish school, go study further and go work. I won't let this get me down.

#### Phase 5

##### **Themes extracted** **Re-construction of** **self**

To bring peace to the anger, I would sit myself down and think rationally about what is happening and what should happen.

The two sides it does [*sic*] work together. If I'm angry I'm not going to think I'm going to speak, so then I will say the wrong things. So if I keep quiet and you keep it in I feel sad and depressed.

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I would say the creative side needs to increase, the masking side needs to decrease as well as the Gothic side in order to get the unity and to be whole, like fighting with others as well as my sad part also needs to decrease. Also angry side and sad side needs to decrease ... My angry side is very strong and the aggression it's coming out ... inappropriately.

I know the angry side would have been perfect but it is irrational, but actually I think my peaceful side will help in control of myself.

I want to reduce my anger side and then my sadness and crying will stop too. Understanding my anger side better will help reduce my sadness and lead to better coping within the family violence set up.

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### **Discussion**

The aim of this article is to explore change within the identity formation process of adolescents exposed to family violence and understanding how the meaning adolescents ascribe to family violence contributes to identity formation and identity re-construction. Both quantitative and qualitative data contributed to an understanding of how the meaning that adolescents ascribe to family violence contributes to identity formation.

To gain a deeper understanding of this process, an integrated discussion of psycho-educational strategy themes and ASCS scale results are as follow.

#### **Awareness and Making Contact with the Self**

The initial phase of the strategy refers to participants' becoming aware of the self, through engaging with the medium of clay. A main theme highlighted in this phase was awareness and making contact with the self to stimulate emotional expression. Through making contact with the self, participants become more sensuously aware through the smell and feel of clay. In some cases the sensory awareness referred to the smell and feel of clay that elicited earlier childhood memories e.g. "I love playing with clay; it reminds me of when I was little and carefree. It smells like biscuits, so nice; it reminds me of my grandma's house ... it was so

homely.” (P 7) This contact making is thus seen as a prerequisite for awareness and strengthening of the self (Blom, 2006; Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996). Through the process of contact making and awareness, participants made contact with different parts of self, through identifying and naming them, which contributed to the process of change in identity formation.

The qualitative data show similar result. The findings for the pre-test ASCS suggest that the participants fell within the low overall self-concept range. The low self-concept, according to Vrey and Venter (1983), refers to a low score on the self-concept scale. According to the norm scores of the ASCS for 15 to 18-year-olds, these scores could imply that a poor perception of the self may have impacted on the identity process of adolescents exposed to family violence. The findings further show an increase from a low to medium self-concept of participants as indicated by the pre-test-post-test results. The ASCS assessment may also point towards an increase in awareness and strengthening of the self. This may be further indicated by the increase in personal self as elicited by the post-test ASCS results as it refers to one’s psychological condition and awareness.

In the second phase the participants had to make clay projections of the self, exploring the self through identifying and naming the different selves, therefore defining the self as well as identifying with the projection. Sub-themes that emerged are ***discovery of different selves, discovery of dominant and less dominant selves; different emotions and roles of selves in the context of family violence; and the relationship between the different selves in restoring harmony***. These sub-themes are discussed below.

**Discovery of different selves.** The self was explored by identifying and naming the different selves and by bringing unknown selves into awareness. Re-construction of the self in this research is based on each participant’s ability to go through the process of configuration,

identify, name and sort the disparate parts of self into a unified pattern. The following extracts refer to identifying and naming of the different selves which link to identity:

The smiley face here is my happy part; here is the jokey part and the jokey part is not always real. (P3)  
 This is my angry side; it is a red face. The angry self and sad self come out when there is [sic] problems between my mom and my real dad and my stepdad. (P7)  
 This one is my perfectionist side and this one is the funny and jokey side and here is my sad side. (P10)

The recent awareness of various selves brought about by the psycho-educational strategy could have contributed to change in perception of self. Participants could identify, name and sort the disparate parts of self into a unified pattern. According to Polster (2005), this process can lead to healthier and more flexible contact. Similarly the ASCS indicated an increase in overall self-concept and on the Personal- self dimension. This change within the qualitative findings is reflected by participants being able to make effective contact with different parts of the self. According to Vrey and Venter (1983), a significant result in respect of the personal-self dimension refers to the relations with one's psychological condition; this could reflect that participants have progressed towards seeing themselves as adequate and equal to others. Furthermore, a shift from a low towards a medium self-concept indicates a progress in perception of self, participants can therefore maintain self-control, solve personal problems and make effective decisions.

**Discovering dominant and less dominant selves.** Apart from the different selves identified, the participants additionally identified the selves that are dominant and present most of the time as well as the selves that only emerged during certain situations. Polster (2005) refers to the more dominant selves as the essential selves that are always present, while the member selves emerge during certain situations.

The red I chose for anger. It is not really who I am, it just comes out, when someone make me angry. The angry side and the revenge side is [sic] strong and helps [sic] in certain situations. (P5)

The yellow is [the] dominant one; it is there most of the time. The peaceful part is strongest ... which is always there [laughs] ... the peaceful side will always come in and help me out. (P4)

I made the sad part black because it refers to all the bad things in my life. (P1)

In the context of the research study, many participants could identify and name various essential selves and member selves. Along with further awareness, participants discovered more than one member self that could be redefined as an essential self because of its dominant presence. In many cases the realization and awareness of a member self's dominance can lead to a redefining process of self. The heightened awareness and discovery of dominant selves could also be reflected in the significant shift on the overall self-concept and Personal-self dimension of ASCS, which indicates that participants have progressed towards seeing themselves as adequate and equal to others. Furthermore, they can maintain self-control, solve personal problems and make effective decisions. Participants also showed significant shift towards Family- self dimension of ASCS, and progression towards identifying and interacting with family and relatives, being accepted by them contributed to self-acceptance.

The third phase refers to participants' emotional expressions of the self, focusing on the different roles and emotions the selves elicit, as well as how the different selves can work together in harmony or not. Contact making with unacceptable parts of selves is highlighted here in this sub-theme.

#### **Discovery of emotions and different roles of selves in the context of family violence.**

Participants identified and named the different selves in their projections of self, but also described the emotions of the different selves and the roles the selves play in the context of family violence. Through dialogue between different selves, acknowledgment of and giving a voice to the previously denied selves occurred.

I would feel angry if I see violence or anything that is happening in our house. I feel depressed, more sad and disappointed ... because of the things that are happening. (P4)

I am hurt because my mom will either beat me or verbally abuse me, so I keep things inside and this causes the sadness . (P1)

My withdrawal or isolating side goes with anger as well. I first get angry, sad then I will withdraw. (P5)

There are parts of me that let me not give up; it [sic] gives me motivation to keep on, to survive. I will call it [the] surviving part of myself. I can for get about what is happening at home. This side also helps me to cope. (P1)

The findings indicated that in some cases these emotions and roles played out by the different selves were not in harmony with one another. The adolescent exposed to family violence may become aware of these opposing poles and emotions and the role they play within a family violence context (Goldblatt, 2003). Such insight may assist with their integration process. Polster (2005), Polster and Polster (1999), and Stevenson (2010) refer to creating synthesis within diversity, and also to the ability to flexibly move between the two opposing poles, as important in the integration process. By acknowledging and giving a voice to the previously denied part of the self, the individual will have freedom in the creation of self and meaning (Polster, 2005). Becoming aware of the opposing selves and emotions, and the role these play within the context of family violence, may have largely assisted the integration process of identity.

The pre-test–post-test findings of ASCS brought about insight and assistance within the integration process, through the significant shifts on Personal self and Family self dimensions. This indicates that there has been some change in adolescents’ perceptions of themselves and interaction with others within the context of family violence.

### **Exploring the relationship between the different selves in restoring harmony.**

Participants identified the selves they wanted to change or use less when encountering family

violence. The participants also referred to selves that were not in harmony with other selves and needed to be used less. By combining the different selves, greater harmony is restored within the self, and greater coping with and control of the selves that seem to surface when present within a family violence context.

My peaceful part/self is the one that will help me to stay calm. I will sit down and think about what to say or do. (P4)

The happy side and my friendly side work together as a team against the angry side, fearful side and my sad side, which are my negative sides. (P8)

I also have an encouraging side, when I in trouble or experience family violence this part is always consoling me not to fight but to endure and cope, this also refer to my survival skills. (P 1)

Findings refer to different selves working together as a team and in some cases against one another. By exploring the relationship between the different selves, participants could identify which selves are helpful in conflict situations and which emerged as a result of the conflict. Polster refers to the Topdog/Underdog split which takes place within the person (Polster, 2005; Yontef, 1993). Participants also became aware of which selves worked together as a team and which selves they did not need. Through animation and dialogue, which are part of the psycho-educational strategy, the opposing aspects of the person could be brought into harmony (Hoffman, Warren, Stewart, & Meek, 2009). Adolescents exposed to family violence are often confronted with opposing selves, and through this awareness of the diversity of selves and their various roles, they can redefine their meaning and role in their lives.

Similarly these findings are also confirmed by the post-test ASCS results which reported a shift in the Personal -self and the Family-self dimensions, which reflects how participants progressed towards seeing themselves as adequate, equal to others, effective in decision making, solving personal problems, and maintaining self-control.

## **Empowerment and Self-Nurturing**

Empowerment, self-nurturing and the acquisition of skills of integration of unacceptable selves by redefining their meanings are explained in this phase. Empowerment of self is explored within the context of family violence. Findings indicate that participants were able to reflect on the selves that were resilient in the context of violence and the selves that were not strong. By naming the different selves and understanding their roles in coping with family violence, participants became more empowered to use the stronger selves to take control within the context of family violence. The qualitative results of the psycho-educational strategy are further supported by the quantitative results which show an increase in personal self dimension as indicated by ASCS. The increase on personal self dimension also refers to increase in awareness of self that indicate better decision making, solving personal problems, and maintaining self-control. The theme of empowering the self was also linked to resilience and future elements of the self, as indicated below.

I will first discuss it in my head before I can say it out loud and it helped me to cope. (P4)

I rather just listen instead of speaking my mind, maybe just keeping some words back and just keep it to myself it could help. Maybe just withdraw myself from the argument, maybe not to get involved but to keep myself from becoming involved. (P4)

I have to let my real self come out. I cannot let the sadness take over my life. (P5)

The friendly side and happy side have to increase and I have to trust myself to be a better person. (P7)

Moreover, by referring to certain selves, by naming them and giving them an identity, it helps the participants to recognize the role the different selves play when they are confronted with family violence. Participants could further identify which of the selves provided them with healthy coping. With such awareness, individuals experience more control and feelings of empowerment in the context of family violence. Identifying the resilient self and the future selves gave participants a sense of self-empowerment as well as hopefulness towards the future. This sense of empowerment is also evident in the quantitative results of ASCS as the

dimensions show increase in better decision making, solving personal problems, and maintaining self-control which is implicit element to sense of empowerment.

Furthermore the empowering of the self allows for further awareness that would often lead to acceptance of the opposing selves. Such acceptance of opposing selves and increased self-control are depicted by the significant increase in personal self after participants had gained insight regarding their selves and their various roles through the use of the psycho-educational strategy. In the following extracts, reference is made to future orientation and resilience, which can be linked to more hopeful futures and setting of future goals.

I want it to be different, I don't want to be scared anymore, I want to be free and not pretend any more. I want to break the silence and stand up for myself. (P10)

When I was younger I was very quiet, but now I understand what is happening and I raise my voice. I say what I want but I am just standing up for myself. (P3)

I am a very strong person, [an] individual that can stand on her own two feet ... some violence can break children down, but in my case it made me stronger. (P4)

I will fight back if I need to. I won't allow them to walk over me, no more. (P3)

I want to finish school, go study further and go work. I won't let this get me down. (P5)

Through an awareness of the empowering selves, the process of resilience is facilitated and positive adaptation to a violent family context can take place. The empowerment of self in the context of family violence is also related to a future-oriented representation of the self. Participants' reference to a hopeful future and the setting of future goals allows for a sense of predictability and an optimistic orientation towards the future (Becker, 1999; Seginer, 2008, 2009; Van Manen, 1990). Reference to the future and the setting of goals is related to possible selves or future selves that refer to how individuals think about their potential and about their future.

## Re-Construction of Self

**Redefining the meaning of different selves in family violence context.** The theme focuses on the redefining of self and refers to participants examining the meanings they place on the different selves and their influence on their behavior within the context of family violence. Additionally this phase represents the last step towards change in the process of identity formation. Examining how these selves developed and reflecting on the relevance of the beliefs and values they were configured from are necessary steps in redefining identity. As participants became aware of the different roles the selves play and how they were configured, they could decide whether these selves still held relevance in their lives. By becoming aware of the different roles and emotions the different selves elicited, the participants could redefine the roles and their meanings, by either increasing or decreasing the impact of the different selves. This could contribute to strengthening their coping mechanisms when they were confronted with family violence.

I would say the creative side needs to increase, the masking side needs to decrease as well as the Gothic side in order to get the unity and to be whole ... like fighting with others etc., as well as my sad part also needs to decrease. Also angry side and sad side needs to decrease ... My angry side is very strong and the aggression it's coming out ... inappropriately. (P2)

I know the angry side would have been perfect but it is irrational, but actually I think my peaceful side will help in control of myself. (P4)

I want to reduce my anger side and then my sadness and crying will stop too. Understanding my anger side better will help reduce my sadness and lead to better coping within the family violence setup. (P10)

Such coping mechanisms are further indicated by the increase in Family-self dimension of the ASCS and therefore allows for progressed towards interacting with family and family acceptance within the context of family violence.

Awareness is the foundation of a healthy configuration process; therefore the goal would be to heighten the awareness as part of the re-construction process. Through examining the introjects from which the participants' selves are constructed, beliefs and values on which

the selves are based can be evaluated. The meaning the participants attach to them can also be examined. This is illustrated through the psycho-educational strategy, where clusters of experiences are named, animated and placed into dialogue with one another through the process of tailoring. Through engaging in dialogue between the different selves, participants could decide whether the meaning these selves hold were still relevant in their lives. In this process participants could also redefine the meanings these selves held and in so doing re-construct the meaning of the selves.

Tailoring, according to Polster (2005), is a process that needs to happen to achieve re-construction. For a healthy assimilation of self, the introject system, that is, beliefs and values on which the selves are based, has to be examined. The self- experiences that are based on a faulty introject system are then re-structured and re-shaped through the reworking of the selves that do not fit into harmony with others. The faulty meaning on which introjects are based are also reframed through the process of tailoring, where participants can then re-configure both their negative selves and explore their multiple self-possibilities. Re-construction of self then takes place as a result of the tailoring process where the reshuffling of the various internal selves takes place, each retaining its own identity and allowing for a healthy, flexible and functioning entity which can be regarded as an integrated self (Polster, 2005). Corbin and Strauss (1987) therefore refer to the re-construction of identity as the process of re-constitution and re-integration of identity into a new concept of wholeness and discovering new and unused aspects of self.

The qualitative findings were found to be in most cases consistent with the quantitative findings. Different themes extracted from the thematic analysis refer to change in identity formation constructs and positively correlates with quantitative results of the ASCS. In the light of this significant statistical difference within the Personal-self and Family-self dimensions of ASCS, it is evident that there has been a change, either at the level of identity, acceptance of

behavior within the self. The findings on the ASCS refer to changes in identity formation on the level of Personal self and Family self, indicating change in adolescents' perceptions of themselves and their interactions with others within the context of family violence. It is however important to note that changes on these dimensions could have been brought about by the intervention strategy; however external factors could also have contributed to some of the changes.

### **Summary of Findings**

Qualitative and quantitative findings refer to the process of re-construction of the self in the context of family violence. The findings of the qualitative method refer to themes extracted from the theme analysis that refer to participants' becoming aware of and identifying the multiple selves that were configured in the context of family violence. Through the tailoring process, awareness of the different selves took place; the awareness selves were identified, named and brought into contact with one another. Various emotions and roles of the different selves emerged during the expressive phase. By examining the premise from which these selves were developed, participants could change the meanings they had attached to the different selves, view themselves more positively, and increase their feelings of empowerment and resilience within the context of family violence. Through this process of re-configuration they were able to become more integrated and experience their identity as a true reflection of self (Polster, 2005). Polster's theory of population of selves refers to the exploration of the self and thus forms a basis for this research study. It was therefore used as a premise to gain greater insight into the process of identity.

The findings of the ASCS pre-test–post-test assessments show an increase in the overall self-concept dimension after exposure to psycho-educational intervention. The results further show significant changes on the sub-test dimensions of the Personal-self and the Family-self dimension. The overall findings on the ASCS suggest changes in self-concept and

identity formation related to Personal and Family self, and could be indicative of change in adolescents' perceptions of themselves and interaction with others (family) in the context of family violence. The significant changes on these two dimensions could refer to the psychological condition of the participants and reflect that participants have progressed towards seeing themselves as adequate and equal to others and maintaining a sense of self-control. This dimension also refers to effective problem solving as well as effective decision-making skills. Changes in the self, in relation towards the family dimension, reflected on participants' progress towards identifying and interacting with family and relatives and being accepted by them (Vrey & Venter, 1983). The items measuring the levels of identity, acceptance and behavior within the Personal-self and Family-self dimensions indicate higher scores in the post-assessment findings of the ASCS and could, therefore, indicate that change took place on the level of identity, acceptance and behavior of adolescents exposed to family violence.

In conclusion, both qualitative and quantitative methods indicate change within the identity-formation process. The significant changes on the Personal-self and Family-self dimensions of ASCS show consistency with themes of the psycho-educational strategy.

### **Limitation of the Study**

- The sample used in the study was relatively small in its representation of adolescents and family violence and is therefore not generalisable to the South African adolescent population. The small sample size can be attributed to the fear of stigma and prejudice from other school learners. It also became apparent that some parents were not comfortable with their children's participation in the study, as they feared social welfare and legal repercussions.
- Another consideration is the ability and willingness of participants to provide honest self-reports on assessment scales. Evidence suggests that self-reports are not objective, as they

are influenced by participants' unconscious defense mechanisms or conscious efforts to present themselves in a socially desirable light.

- Participants might fear that their test results could be made available to their educators, parents or guardians, thus causing them to be apprehensive and to produce biased answers. The pre- and post-test scales used in this study were self-reports and, therefore, may have influenced the reliability of the results. Clear consensus has not been reached regarding race and gender, as they are perceived differently across societies. Race and gender have different connotations, histories and relationships that could have an effect on individual's roles which are components of the self-concept and identity.

### **Recommendations**

It is evident that little research exists in South Africa on family violence among black, colored, and Indian population groups and how it influences self-concept and identity. Further research would be valuable in identifying and understanding the prevalence, similarities and differences among these groups. The majority of current literature findings originate from American and European sources. While these findings are relevant to the current study, they should be used with caution, as they might not be valid or generalizable within a South African context.

- The findings of the present study can open several different avenues for future research. For example, to obtain a more accurate account of the impact of family violence on identity, future research might consider including participants' parents' reports and siblings' reports of family violence within the home to compare with participants' reports. Future research should also consider the effects of race, gender, and age of participants exposed to family violence and how these demographics influence identity, as well a control group that could ensure generalizability.

- Finally, an additional requirement would be for more recent, valid, reliable and appropriate self-concept and identity measurement scales to be used on samples in future research.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the study may potentially contribute to the understanding of the experiences of adolescents regarding their sense of self within the context of family violence in South Africa. The findings of this research show that both qualitative and quantitative methods indicate change within the identity formation process. The significant changes on pre-test–post-test assessment of ASCS show consistency with themes extracted from psycho-educational strategy. In this research, change has come about through redefining of the self by redefining the experience of family violence. This redefining of the self took place through the discovery of different selves, by attaching new meaning to different selves, and by exploring roles and emotions, self-empowerment, resilience, and setting of future goals. This research has further contributed to hypotheses for further research in the area of adolescent identity and family violence. It has also contributed to restorative intervention strategies that could facilitate the process of re-construction of identity.

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### **Section C: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions**

This chapter provides a brief summary overview of the main findings and conclusions of this research study. This overview consists of a summarised critical review of existing literature, an outline of the preceding journal articles included in this thesis, and a brief account of the research findings and conclusions. The final outcomes of the aim and objectives of the study are evaluated, synthesised and used for substantiating the research questions and hypothesis posed within the study. Limitations of the study are explicitly identified and recommendations for future research providing guidelines for therapists working with adolescents exposed to family violence are noted.

#### **Summary Overview of the Research Study**

##### **Literature Review Findings and Conclusions**

A comprehensive review of literature was conducted to establish a clear understanding of the research phenomena. Various academic sources of information were consulted to gain an in-depth understanding of the development of adolescent identity within the context of family violence, namely, published books and journal articles, unpublished theses and dissertations, and credible internet sources.

From existing literature it appears that adolescent identity and family violence are well-researched areas within the discipline of psychology. However, such research has not been noted without its associated limitations, as there is a paucity of research on understanding adolescents' subjective experiences of family violence (Goldblatt, 2003; Hammack, 2006; Schwartz, Pantin, Prado, Sullivan, & Szapocznik, 2005; Ward, 2007). There needs to be further emphasis on increased recognition of context and variability in human development; therefore there is a need for literature with a greater emphasis on identity development, and based on a

more integrated approach in capturing diverse social, political and cultural experiences (Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses, & Seekings, 2010; Stevens & Lockhat, 1997; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Meca, & Richie, 2012; Venn, 2010).

Socio-political shifts within a society such as South Africa also perpetuate violence at all levels of society, and adolescent development, in particular identity development, has been affected by crime and family violence. It would, therefore, require of researchers to be mindful of contextual influences on development and how such influences contribute to the unique way in which adolescents experience this developmental phase (Norris et al., 2008; Venn, 2010). Research further depicted that mental health services in South Africa are poorly resourced with minimal focus on the mental health needs of adolescents (Flisher et al., 2012; Lund, Boyce, Flisher, Kafaar, & Dawes, 2009; Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). Consequently, restorative interventions addressing adolescents' mental health needs need to be urgently addressed. The psycho-educational strategy undertaken within this research study was identified as an approach for addressing adolescent mental health needs within the context of family violence.

From the literature review it is apparent that the Gestalt theory of the self within a family violence context is a limited research focus area; therefore literature on the Gestalt theory of self was taken from within the field of Gestalt therapy and supplemented with other fields of study, such as ecological theory, as both examine context and systems in which development takes place. The literature on family violence and adolescent identity is both extensive and current; however it has limitations, since there is little research data available on identity as subjective experience and its re-construction process. It is evident that most research studies focus on the risk factors of family violence and adolescent development, while intervention approaches are mostly designed from a trauma model perspective and adapted to the South African context.

In conclusion, it is clear that that external factors such as family violence influence adolescent development and a need exists for restorative intervention strategies.

### **Empirical Research Findings and Conclusions**

The central theoretical argument was formulated from the literature review and states that through exploring the experience of the self in the context of family violence, a heightened awareness of self will occur, facilitating the re-construction of self and identity within the context of family violence. The argument further posited that should adolescent identity formation be therapeutically (psycho-educationally) addressed within the context of family violence, the identity of adolescents could be re-constructed. An exploration of the meanings adolescents ascribe to family violence could facilitate the process of identity re-construction.

### **Testing the Central Theoretical Argument**

#### **General Aim of the Research Study**

The aim of this study was to explore and describe how adolescent identity in the context of family violence can be re-constructed.

#### **Objectives of the Research Study**

The above-mentioned aim was reached by achieving the following objectives:

**Objective 1: Explore and describe the subjective experiences of adolescents regarding their sense of self within the context of family violence.** This objective was reached in Article 1 by means of a semi-structured interview to explore the subjective self-experiences of adolescents exposed to family violence. The findings suggest participants' self-experiences of family violence relate to multiple forms of exposure to emotional and

psychological difficulties. Adolescents' self-experience of family violence is complex and impacts on how they perceive themselves and interact with others, as well as how they foresee their future selves in a non-violent setting. The final aim of the empirical work was to provide a description, composition and analysis of the collected data. The data were therefore coded and themes were generated. These themes were further incorporated into guidelines and recommendations for therapists working in the field of adolescence and family violence. Consequently researchers and therapists can become more informed on how to approach identity issues as a process emergent from a relational field and how to facilitate an integrated identity.

**Objective 2: Explore and describe the experience of how a psycho-educational strategy may be used as method to facilitate the process of identity re-construction.** This objective was reached in Article 2 by means of a psycho-educational strategy consisting of various phases that facilitated the process of identity re-construction. Each phase consisted of visual creative activities guided by open-ended questions. This process allowed participants to engage with self through a creative medium. Data generated and themes extracted signified adolescents' experiences of the process of identity re-construction within the context of family violence. The findings further revealed that adolescents could redefine the meanings they attached to their selves as facilitated by the psycho- educational strategy. The implication of this is that through the process of re-construction, adolescents became more self-empowered and resilient to change, redefine their position and status in this family violence triad, and have more control of how they foresee their future. It should be noted that in South Africa multiple risk factors need to be taken into account. It is for this reason that the researcher selected the Gestalt approach as the basis for the intervention process, as South Africa has some unique field factors such as overcrowding, lack of supervision, and poverty. Gestalt therapy with its

process view of self-development and relational field influence on this process provides a comprehensive contribution to this intervention. This approach made the psycho-educational intervention more accessible and adaptable to various contexts, and therapists therefore can use it as a standalone therapy or in combination with other therapeutic approaches.

**Objective 3: Explore, describe and explain the process of identity formation of adolescents from a Cape Town community and how it contributes to re-defining their identity.** This objective was reached in Article 3 by means of a psycho-educational intervention and pre-test–post-test assessment that generated data on the process of identity formation, the meaning adolescents give to family violence and how it contributes to the process of identity re-construction within the context of family violence. The findings indicate that adolescents’ exposure to a psycho-educational strategy reveals a significant change in the identity formation process in terms of how adolescents perceive themselves and their interaction with others within the context of family violence. Owing to a small sample size, a quantitative measure, the Adolescent Self-Concept Scale was added to supplement the psycho-educational intervention and allowed for more trustworthiness of the results. Similar results as on psycho-educational intervention were reflected on the Personal-Self Scale and Family Scale of the Adolescent Self-Concept Scale. The implications of these findings are that adolescents exposed to family violence have a change in perception of themselves and others in the family violence context. Giving different meanings to their experience of family violence could facilitate a change in adolescents’ perceptions of self, and therefore in how they see themselves in this context. This then could contribute to their identity’s being re-constructed. In the light of limited mental health services for adolescents, this approach could be used as a restorative tool to facilitate development within the family violence context in South Africa.

Based on the attainment of the three objectives as set out in this study, sufficient confirmation exists to prove the central theoretical argument of this thesis. An integrated discussion on the methodology, data gathering and data analysis will now be presented in support of the final conclusion of the study.

## **Methodology**

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for the purpose of this study, combining both qualitative and quantitative data, and providing a holistic understanding of the manner in which adolescent identity within the context of family violence can be re-constructed. The research data of this study was primarily qualitative in nature and the quantitative data was embedded within the qualitative methodology. Semi-structured interviews generated data on the self-experiences of adolescents exposed to family violence and formed the basis for Article 1. The psycho-educational strategy generated qualitative data on participants' experience via a psycho-educational strategy for identity re-construction as reflected in Article 2, while the Adolescent Self-Concept Scale (ASCS) was used as a one-group pre-test–post-test design to generate quantitative data from participants before and after intervention as reflected in Article 3. The mixed-methods approach proved to be successful as it allowed for data to be collected concurrently and gave a rich account of participants' self-experiences in the context of family violence. These findings further contributed to the development of intervention strategies that facilitated the process of identity re-construction of adolescents. The outcome of this process was captured into guidelines for therapists working within an adolescent development context.

## **Research Procedure**

A group of 12 adolescents participated in the final study. After giving consent they were invited to participate in the research by being part of the pre-test ASCS which measured

their identity constructs before the implementation of the psycho-educational intervention strategy. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to measure information on adolescent identity, perception of self within the context of family violence, experiences of family violence, coping strategies, and their view of their future self without violence (see Addendum B). Participants were not always available owing to absenteeism from school, and alternative appointments had to be arranged to accommodate all. Participants had to complete both measures before they could proceed onto the intervention phase. The psycho-educational strategy was conducted over five weeks and provided data on adolescents' awareness of identity within the context of family violence, identifying and naming the different selves, awareness of the configuration of identity within the context of family violence, and the exploration of the various selves constituting their identity (see Addendum B). A post-test ASCS conducted after the psycho-educational intervention with participants provided information on observed changes that had taken place within identity constructs of Personal-Self and Family-Self that indicated changes in perception of self and change in interaction towards others within the family (see Addendum E ). The research methodology led to a successful data-collection process that informed the research articles written for this research study.

### **Sampling**

This research study utilised a non-probability, purposive sampling method. The sample was taken from a homogeneous population. The pre-determined criteria used for inclusion of participants referred to male and female adolescents between 15 and 18 years of age who were exposed to recurring family violence, able to speak both English and Afrikaans, and did not form part of any therapeutic group at the time of research. Twelve adolescents who had experienced continuous family violence over a period of time returned permission forms after their parents had provided consent and were included in this research study. The group

consisted of 11 females (ranging between 15 and 18 years) and 1 male (17 years). Only one boy participated. This could be due to other male learners not feeling comfortable in talking about family violence or it could be that they had come to accept family violence as a normal occurrence in the family.

Many learners showed interest in the research study, but owing to the inclusion criteria they did not qualify. Some indicated interest, but did not get parental consent to participate in the study. Many indicated fear of legal or social welfare repercussions as the perpetrators in many instances are the breadwinners. Many of these families are caught up in the cycle of violence and do not want to break the silence, thereby perpetuating intergenerational violence. The sample was small and therefore findings cannot be generalised to a large population group; however results could be useful for future research.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection methods allowed for the gathering and identification of new emerging information regarding adolescent identity within the context of family violence. The primary researcher was responsible for the collection of data to ensure reliable observations and perceptions of data. Data collection was completed by the researcher's conducting pre- and post-test assessments and semi-structured interviews. Observation and the use of a video-recorder were used as methods of data collection for the psycho-educational strategy. These methods provided rich and complementary data.

The visual creative medium was in the form of clay and was used to facilitate sensory awareness within participants. In one case scenario the participant did not feel comfortable working with clay, and paint was used as an alternative. Participants' contact processes are therefore important when working within Gestalt modality and the therapist should adapt this process where needed to accommodate the participants' needs. The ASCS was used as a pre-test and post-test measure and was adapted to the South African context (Vrey & Venter, 1983).

The researcher felt that although the measure was old, it was still effective in measuring self-concept and identity. Other self-concept assessment scales were considered, but had not been adapted to the South African context. This measure is a valuable tool, but an updated version of this tool would contribute to research. The data generated from the data-collection methods was adequate as it informed the research study and was used to ensure the trustworthiness, validity and reliability of the research outcome.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data generated from semi-structured interviews referred to themes related to self-experience of family violence. Through the visual creative medium and open-ended questions within the psycho-educational strategy themes were generated that were reflective of participants' process of identity re-construction. These themes were thematically and visually analysed. Themes were extracted, coded and categorised, forming the basis of the findings. The pre- and post-assessment scale, ASCS, provided the quantitative data that were manually scored; results were compared with and verified against existing norm scores. The quantitative results were further statistically analysed, using a *t*-test and Cohen's *d* test to measure significant changes and the strength of effect within the different items of these scales (see Addendum B). The Cohen's *d* test was included in the study as the sample size was small and it complemented and supported the *t*-test results and found a significant measure of effect. An external researcher was employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis.

### **Empirical Findings and Conclusions: Articles**

The conclusions of this research study were based on the three foregoing manuscripts and the interpretation of findings drawn from the mixed-methods approach of this study. The research design and method of this study were identified as appropriate, and the aim and

objectives were adequately addressed. The different methods of data collection were complementary and ensured the validity and reliability of the data extracted.

The main conclusions of the study are briefly presented below as findings and recommendations emanating from the manuscripts: Exploring adolescent experiences of sense of self in the context of family violence in a Cape Town community (Article 1); A psycho-educational strategy as a method for re-constructing identity in the context of family violence (Article 2) and Exploring the process of identity formation in the context of family violence (Article 3).

### **Main Conclusions: Article 1**

The objective of this section of the study was to explore the self-experience of adolescents in a context of family violence. This article gives an account of adolescents' own experiences of growing up within an environment marked by family violence. It refers to the self in the context of family violence as being a complex experience that is both a source of potential risk and strength. The findings from this research concluded that different relational fields and the exposure to multiple forms of family violence have a significant influence on an adolescent's sense of self. The impact of multiple exposures to violence may consequently lead to difficulty in distinguishing between parts of self and internalised parts from the environment, leading to identity confusion. (Yontef, 1993) refers to this as difficulty in differentiating between what is part of self and what is part of the environment, where the boundaries between self and others are often distorted, leading to confusion and fragmentation within the self. Witnessing and experiencing multiple forms of family violence have an effect on self and identity as these events become normalised and internalised as parts of self.

The self-experiences of adolescents are often related to emotional, psychological and behaviour difficulties. It is clear from the findings that adolescents exposed to family violence

are vulnerable to developing psychological and behavioural difficulties. Exposure to family violence may lead to internalising or externalising undesirable behaviour and is often expressed as a psychological and behavioural difficulty such as anxiety, depression, and aggressive behaviour. This expression may be regarded as a way to self-regulate and find balance.

The findings further refer to adolescents' unique experiences of dualities and polarities, often presented as coping strategies. Adolescents' perceive dualities and polarities in their lives as empowering as they equip them with skills for the adult world while simultaneously eradicating their experiences of being a youth. These research findings are supported by existing research findings (Goldblatt, 2003).

The study findings refer to adolescents' capacity to form a coping identity by creatively adjusting to difficulties within the environment. Adolescents found creative ways of coping with family violence and in doing so discovered new parts of self to connect with, as well as further resilience within the self. Findings further refer to adolescents' positive orientation towards the future, amid the presence of family violence. A positive outlook towards the future allows adolescents to envision their lives without violence by projecting themselves into the future. This assists adolescents to find order, meaning and a sense of predictability in their lives. Adolescents often play a dual role within the context of family violence, allowing them to survive in various contexts and helping them adjust to changing situations. This further equips them to be more adaptable and resourceful in a variety of contexts (Becker, 1999; Van Manen, 1990).

Current findings on family violence and adolescent development suggest that future research needs to explore a broader sample to ensure the validity and reliability of research outcomes. The findings of this study cannot be generalised to a broader population, but have raised awareness about the exploration of the self, and how this plays a role in coping with family violence. The study may potentially have contributed to future research as it moved

away from the trauma and pathology model and focused on the reciprocal relationship between the adolescent and family violence triad that possibly could provide them with coping alternatives. Research studies often put emphasis on risk factors and negative consequences of family violence and neglect to explore indicators that can facilitate healthy functioning within the family violence context. Therefore the findings significantly inform therapeutic and educational intervention programmes focused on adolescents exposed to family violence.

### **Main Conclusions: Article 2**

The objective of this part of the study was to explore the implementation of a psycho-educational strategy as a method to facilitate the process of identity re-construction of adolescents in the context of family violence.

Findings indicate that through the process of a psycho-educational strategy, participants became aware of the self, identified the different selves, reorganised and reintegrated the different selves into a whole, and rediscovered unused aspects of the self. Through the process of tailoring, which forms the grounds for the process of re-construction, participants became aware of how the self configures in the field of family violence.

Participants referred to selves that were not in harmony or that had previously been unknown or denied. These selves were acknowledged and called into dialogue with one another. Through the identification and energising of denied aspects of the self, the process of re-construction took place.

The process of tailoring allowed for the union of self-parts, leading to a more cohesive sense of self. Individuals are more insightful of the roles of specific selves present in the context of family violence. With an increase in awareness regarding the various selves and their roles in the context of family violence, adolescents achieved a heightened sense of empowerment. Furthermore, the empowerment of the self within the violent context allowed

for further awareness, leading to their acceptance of opposing selves. Additionally, such insight allowed participants to attain a sense of control and self-acceptance of the opposing selves. Findings indicated that with heightened awareness, participants could examine the meaning that some of the selves held for them. Through changing the meaning of the selves, re-construction of self could take place. This study can contribute to future research as it explored an alternative restorative intervention in the form of a psycho-educational strategy to facilitate identity re-construction. In the light of limited mental health services for adolescents, this psycho-educational strategy is adaptable and accessible to therapists who assist with adolescent issues. This approach can be implemented on its own and in addition to therapy.

### **Main Conclusions: Article 3**

The researcher explored how the meaning that adolescents attached to family violence contributed to change of self in the context of family violence.

The research study looked at this process through implementing a psycho-educational strategy. A before-and-after-intervention assessment was conducted using the Adolescent Self-Concept Scale (ASCS) that assesses for change in the self-concept and identity of adolescents. In this research discussion the findings of the qualitative data refer to themes that reflect change and re-construction of self. According to this research study, the process of tailoring allowed for healthy re-configuration of the self. Tailoring is the cornerstone of a healthy re-configuration process, where different selves are reshuffled and reshaped into an integrated whole that constitutes a sense of self. The qualitative findings showed that exposure to the psycho-educational strategy led to the awareness and identification of different selves and the exploration of the role and emotions that surfaced in the context of family violence. The findings refer to the empowering of the self, a future-goal directed self, and the re-construction

of self through redefining the meaning of different selves in the context of family violence. Through this process adolescents became more integrated and experienced their true identity.

The quantitative data of the ASCS supports the qualitative findings as it referred to changes within the self-concept constructs. The ASCS post-test showed a significant change within the overall self-concept of participants. Participants scored within the medium self-concept range of the ASCS, indicating progress in their perception of self within the context of family violence. The results of the sub-test dimensions of the ASCS also indicated that the Personal Self and The Family Self dimensions had significantly changed. This reflected participants' progress towards viewing themselves as adequate and equal to others. Participants become aware of their ability to maintain self-control, their problem-solving skills, and their ability to make effective decisions. Findings reflected participants' progress towards identifying and interacting with family and relatives and being accepted by them (Vrey & Venter, 1983). In light of these significant changes within the Personal Self and Family Self dimension of the ASCS, it was evident that change had occurred, either at the level of identity and acceptance or in terms of behaviour within the self and identity processes of adolescents exposed to family violence. The findings of the ASCS confirmed changes in identity previously reported in the intervention phase of the psycho-educational strategy regarding adolescents' perceptions of themselves and their interaction with others in the context of family violence. The findings of this article have potentially contributed to future research as the research focused on alternative restorative intervention techniques that facilitate the identity reconstruction process. The implications of these findings are that adolescents exposed to family violence can re-define the meaning they attach to family violence. They can ascribe different meanings to the experience of family violence, change how they see themselves in this context, and therefore contribute to identity reconstruction.

## **Considerations and Recommendations**

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

As part of the study it is important to refer to recommendations for future research as a way of alerting other researchers to possible pitfalls within this research area.

- In order to retrieve a more accurate account of the impact of family violence on adolescent identity, future research might consider including participants' parents and siblings' accounts of family violence within the home. Such adequately controlled comparison groups allow for more reliable and valid findings.
- Future research should account for the effects of demographic variables of sample groups such as race, gender and age of participants exposed to family violence and how such demographic variables influence their identity.
- More research on the perspectives of adolescents in relation to their parents and other family members is recommended as it can inform future research.
- The expansion of restorative interventions with adolescents in relation to their parents and other family members within the family violence context is also recommended.
- Psycho-educational interventions are more accessible as they allow for therapist, counsellors and social workers to use this medium as a stand-alone intervention or in addition to therapeutic intervention.
- Lastly, more recent, valid, reliable self-concept and identity measurement scales need to be administered on samples in future research.

## **Guidelines for Therapists, Social Workers and Counsellors Working with Adolescent Identity in the Context of Family Violence**

Using a Gestalt therapy approach provides a foundation for the development of a set of guidelines for doing therapy with adolescents from violent family backgrounds. With the above-mentioned considerations in mind, the researcher recommends the following:

- All social workers, counsellors and therapists working within the field of family violence and identity should work from the premise that two entities are interconnected within the organism/environment field. Working within the field of family violence and identity, social workers, counsellors and therapists need to equip themselves with knowledge regarding family violence and its impact on identity.
- From a Gestalt point of view, identity is not static, but always in a process of change, and always striving towards integration. Therefore interventions employed have to consider that the self is relational within that field and field events, such as family violence, play a vital role in self-development.
- The process of awareness of self-experiences within the context of family violence is regarded as an important element within the change process and will therefore further inform participants about self and identity reconstruction. The self is a process and is therefore open to change and reconstruction.
- Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of the diversity of selves, as postulated by Polster (2005) is important for therapists, as it is potentially a valuable avenue for healing if implemented within a psycho-educational strategy. This intervention comprises psycho-educational components, is accessible, and can be used in addition to other therapeutic modalities.

### **Guidelines for the psycho-educational process**

The relationship and process of self-awareness is pivotal in the Gestalt approach. The therapist therefore needs to establish an I–thou relationship. Enhancing the self- awareness process will allow for healthy contact making with the environment.

- The use of a creative medium, for example, clay, etc., can facilitate and enhance the sensory awareness process. When working with clients, clay is often used for the portrayal of self-projection. The use of clay has been found to be beneficial in the healing process as it is the medium through which the individual might express thoughts and feelings, both verbally and non-verbally.
- It is important that therapists be cognisant of the sensory awareness processes of clients, as some clients might find it difficult to engage with certain creative media. Some creative media might not be conducive to sensory awareness and may hamper emotional expression. Alternative creative media can be used to elicit sensory awareness and facilitate emotional expression.
- The use of colour in the psycho-educational intervention also impacts on the emotional expression of the client as it stimulates sensory contact that will facilitate emotional expression. Colour was associated with emotional experiences and allowed participants to explore the different associations it brought to the foreground as well as different emotions.
- Implementation of the psycho-educational intervention stretched over four phases of contact making and awareness of self: discovery of self, emotional expression, empowerment, and self-nurture formed the basis of this intervention, as adapted from the Gestalt models of Blom (2006) and Schoeman and Van der Merwe (1996). The tailoring

process as popularised by Polster (2005) forms the core of the identity reconstruction process and is included within the four phases of the psycho-educational intervention.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The present study is certainly not without limitations. One of the more obvious limitations is the small sample size used to represent adolescents and family violence. The small sample size can be ascribed to the sensitivity of the research topic (family violence), the fear of stigma, and of being labelled by other learners. Although the data provided an in-depth understanding of the experience of exposure to family violence and adolescent self-processes, the research findings are therefore not representative of the general population.

Some ethical limitations have influenced the study. All the participants were minors; therefore the researcher was obligated to gain consent to participate in the study from both adolescents and their parents. Gaining consent from both parents and adolescents limited the sample population. Some prospective participants felt compromised and did not feel comfortable taking part in the study, knowing that their parents might have knowledge of their participation. From the research it became apparent that some parents were loath to give permission for children to participate because of fear of social welfare intervention and possible legal implications. The generalisability of results is questionable, owing to the small sample size that is not representative of the South African population.

Another limitation is that the gender of participants in the study was not equally distributed – more girls than boys participated in the study. Male participants exposed to family violence reported that they did not feel comfortable to share their self-experiences of family violence.

Conducting research at schools during school hours posed another limitation for this study. It was challenging for participants to leave classes to attend sessions. Conducting the

research in the therapy room or the special classroom created the stigmatising belief that participants were experiencing emotional difficulties. Another reason for doing research during school hours was to ensure the safety of participants; however this might have left participants feeling exposed and fearful of being stigmatised by their peers. To ensure that this was not the case, appointments were scheduled ahead of time and participants were informed of the venue timeously.

It is evident that little research exploring the self-experience of family violence among black, coloured and Indian population groups and the manner in which such violence influences self-concept and identity exists in South Africa. Further research would be valuable in identifying and understanding the prevalence, similarities and differences among these groups. The majority of current literature findings originate from North American and European sources. While these findings are relevant to the current study, they should be used with caution to prevent applying these studies as if they have been validated in the same manner or are generalisable within a South African context.

Another consideration is participants' ability and willingness to provide honest self-reports on assessment scales. Evidence suggests that self-reports are not objectively answered as socially desirable bias can influence participants' unconscious or conscious efforts to present themselves in a socially desirable light.

Participants might also fear that their test results will be made available to their educators, parents or guardians, causing them to be apprehensive and to produce biased answers. The pre- and post-test scales used in this study were self-reports and may have influenced the reliability of the results. A clear consensus has not been reached regarding race and gender, as they are perceived differently across societies. Race and gender have different connotations, histories and relationships to one another and these could affect an individual's roles, which are components of the self-concept and identity.

### **Contribution and Implications of Research**

The research study findings may possibly contribute to future research as the research examined adolescent identity within the context of family violence from a more relational approach. The research study has generated results that confirm that the self-configuration of the adolescent identity is a result of a complex interaction between field factors, individual factors and the relational dynamics between individuals and their environment. This study advocates for a more field-orientated and relational approach to self-development of adolescents within the context of family violence, as it is seen as a dynamic process and not as a static and fixed entity. In addition the research advocates for the expansion of the growing field of Gestalt therapy and its application to various populations and settings.

Many research studies have emphasised risk factors and negative consequences of family violence, but often have neglected to explore indicators of healthy functioning within the family violence context that can contribute to coping. It is therefore necessary to explore and understand that protective factors such as self-awareness, self-empowerment and resilience can act as a buffer and protect against adolescents becoming victims of violence. This research attempted to explore how heightened awareness can contribute to healthy contact with the environment and facilitate identity re-construction. By means of greater awareness, and by becoming self-empowered and resilient, the individual can prevent becoming a victim of violence (Sabina & Banyard, 2015).

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## **Section D: Addenda**

The addenda of this research study is in CD format

**Addendum A:** Copies of consent letters, Letters of correspondence

**Addendum B and B1:** Examples of Pre- selection Questionnaire, Semi structured interview,  
Adolescent Self Concept Scale

**Addendum C:** Example of Transcriptions

**Addendum D and D1:** Example of Visual analysis and audio video clips on self projections

**Addendum E:** Theme analysis, Statistical analysis

**Addendum F:** Guidelines for Therapist, Social workers and Counselors working with  
adolescent identity in context of family violence

**Addendum G:** Journal and authors guidelines

**Addendum H:** Conference Presentation- Poster presented at International Conference, June 2015, Paris, France

## SECTION D

### ADDENDUM A



## LETTERS REQUESTING PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Navrae  
Enquiries **Dr A.T Wyngaard**  
IMibuzo  
Telefoon  
Telephone **021 467 9272**  
IFoni  
Faks  
Fax **(021) 425-7445**  
IFeksi  
Verwysing  
Reference **20100825-0053**  
ISalathiso

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**Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement**

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**Western Cape Education Department**

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**ISEbe leMfundo leNtshona Koloni**

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Ms Charlene Petersen  
12 Heide Road  
Belhar  
7493

**Dear Ms Charlene Petersen**

### **RESEARCH PROPOSAL: RE-CONSTRUCTING ADOLESCENT IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE WITHIN THE BELHAR COMMUNITY OF CAPE TOWN**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
6. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
7. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
8. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
9. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
10. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:  
**The Director: Research Services**  
**Western Cape Education Department**  
**Private Bag X9114**

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MELD ASSEBLIEF VERWYSINGSNOMMERS IN ALLE KORRESPONDENSIE / PLEASE QUOTE REFERENCE NUMBERS IN ALL CORRESPONDENCE /  
NCEDA UBHALE IINOMBOLO ZESALATHISO KUYO YONKE IMBALELWANO

GRAND CENTRAL TOWERS, LAER-PARLEMENTSTRAAT, PRIVAATSAK X9114, KAAPSTAD 8000  
GRAND CENTRAL TOWERS, LOWER PARLIAMENT STREET, PRIVATE BAG X9114, CAPE TOWN 8000

WEB: <http://wced.wcape.gov.za>

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VEILIGE SKOLE/SAFE SCHOOLS ☎ 0800 45 46 47



**CHARLENE PETERSEN**

**BA, HDE, HONS. MPsy (UWC)**

**PSYCHOLOGIST**

7 Petrusa Street, Consultation Room 1, Bellville, 7535

Mobile: 0822006919

**The Principal and Life orientation teacher**

**Dear sir / madam**

**Re: Request for assistance in conducting research at the four Secondary Schools in the Belhar area. (Possible date for research data collection: June 2012)**

I hereby wish to request assistance with a research study endorsed by the WCED, identifying adolescents from grade 9-12 who have been exposed to family violence and what impact it has on their identity and behavior. I am a registered doctoral student at the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies and my research focus is on adolescent identity and family violence in the Belhar area. Your school has been selected as one of the sample groups. With your permission I hope to administer a 45min questionnaire to 50 learners (ages 15-18). I will select some learners who comply with the selection criteria, which I will conduct the intervention outside of school hours. Once the learners have been identified, they will be given an opportunity to be part of a project whereby they could work through some of the difficult behavior they experience due to exposure to family violence as well as looking at healthy ways of coping with family violence.

As educational psychologist confidentiality will be ensured, I will administer the questionnaire to learners and will do follow up interviews with the learners who comply with the selection criteria. Enclosed please find endorsement letter from WCED.

Your assistance will be highly appreciated.

Yours Sincerely

Ms CA Petersen

Contact details: 021: 959 6513/ 0822006919

Petersenc@cput.ac.za

## **CONSENT FORMS**

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Charlene Petersen, Phd. student in Psychology department from the North-West University. The results of the study will be discussed in a dissertation.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

To investigate re-constructing adolescent identity in the context of family violence within the Belhar community of Cape Town

### **PROCEDURES**

The research study will be conducted at the three high schools in the Belhar area. The research study will be in the format of a case study that will require, pre and posttest questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with each participant and psycho-educational sessions that will consists of five sessions. I hereby wish to inform you of the following aspects of the research study that will be conducted at your school during school hours:

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following:

- You will be involved in a semi structured interviews where you will discuss your views regarding your experiences of family violence;
- Your will be involved in psycho –educational sessions where you will explore your identity in the context of family violence, as well as reconstruct your identity through the use of creative visual materials;
- Your identity will not be revealed and participation is voluntary;
- The semi-structured interviews will be more or less one hour, and the psycho-education sessions will be 60 min over 5 weeks

## **2. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There is no risk involved for you. No names, addresses or identifying details will be revealed. The researcher will explain the nature and reason for the research. Participation is voluntary.

## **3. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

There will be no payment for participation.

## **4. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of codes, for example numbers will be used to indicate participants. No identifying details like names and addresses will be revealed.

All semi-structured interviews and psycho-educational sessions will be video-taped. This information will only be handled by the researcher and will be processed in the dissertation without identifying any participants.

## **5. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to partake, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with, and still remain in this study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. If you feel uncomfortable in the psycho-education sessions you are welcome to withdraw from the study.

I hereby consent voluntary to participate in this study

---

Name of subject/participant

For further inquiries, please contact Charlene Petersen at 021- 9596513 (office hours)



**Charlene Petersen**  
**Educational Psychologist**

**Prof Herman Grobler**  
**Study Supervisor**

## CONSENT FORMS FOR PARENTS

Dear Parent / Guardian

**Ms Charlene Petersen**, the researcher wish to request permission for your child to participate in this research study. The research study will be conducted at the three high schools in the Belhar area. The research study will be in the format of a case study that will require, Pre and Posttest questionnaires, semi-structured interviews that will take up to one hour with each participant and psycho-educational sessions that will consists of five sessions. I hereby wish to inform you of the following aspects of the research study that will be conducted at your child's school:

- The research will be conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the PHD Degree in psychology at North- West University.
- The overall purpose of this study is to look at how adolescent identity formation in family violence context can be addressed therapeutically.
- The outcome of the research will be used to make recommendations to therapist dealing with adolescents in therapy.
- To obtain accurate information about the research topic, pretest-posttest questionnaires, semi-structured interviews as well as psycho-educational sessions will be conducted with your child if you grant permission.
- To assure accurate data analysis the researcher will use the following methods during interviews and psycho- educational sessions: Note taking and audio and video recording of the interview and psycho- education sessions.
- To protect your child's identity a pseudonym (false name) will be used to ensure anonymity in the final report. If at any point I need to record the therapy sessions on video tape the focus will not be on the face of the child.
- The benefit of this study is that your child will be provided with an opportunity to be part of psycho-educational sessions, to explore issues regarding identity and how family violence impact on how they see themselves. It may further help your child to adapt more positively to their current situation at home.
- A possible disadvantage could be that in sessions dealing with issues surrounding family violence could trigger traumatic events. This issue will be dealt with sensitively and within a safe environment if it arises in sessions .
- Participation in the study is voluntary and the participant may withdraw at any time during the study. All information obtained during the study will be handled with confidentiality and none of the information will be made public.

- All research information that has been collected will be stored away, locked up in filing cabinet. After the research has been completed the research data will be discarded of.
- All issues arising during the research will be handled as ethical and confidential as possible.

For further inquiries, please contact Charlene Petersen at 021- 9596513 (office hours)

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'C. Petersen'.

**Charlene Petersen**  
**Educational Psychologist**

**Prof Herman Grobler**  
**Study Supervisor**

## CONSENT FORM FOR VIDEO RECORDING

Dear parent/ guardian

I am a Doctoral Degree student in psychology at North - West University. A requirement of this degree is to submit video recordings of research work with research participants. This is for research purposes. My supervisor and my examiners will be the only people with access to these videos. They will be kept confidential and only used for the above mentioned purposes.

If you agree to these conditions, could you please complete the section below.

Thank you

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_

I,.....give permission that these video recordings may be used for educational purposes.

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_

### Letter of confidentiality

I .....agree that all information obtained during the study will be handled with confidentiality and none of the information will be made public.

.....

Name of transcriber

**ADDENDUM B****Pre- selection Questionnaire****Instructions:**

*The questionnaire consists of a few questions, could you please fill out each question to the best of your ability. All of the information you provide will be treated with complete confidentiality and it will not be possible for anyone to identify the information you have given to the researcher. The information will only be used as part of the research project.*

**Biographical Information****Name****Surname**

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

**Age****15-16****17-18**

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

**Gender:****Male****Female**

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

**School:**

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

**Grade:**

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

**Language****English / Afrikaans**

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

**Do you live in the Belhar area?****Yes****No**

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

**Have you been exposed to family violence?****How often do you encounter family violence at home?**

**Have you been affected by family violence?  
Explain how**

**Have you suffered any emotional breakdown as a result of the family violence  
and have you received any psychological help as a result of the family violence?**

**Would you like to participate in a research study that explores identity reconstruction of  
adolescents in the context of family violence in the Belhar Community ?**

***Thank you for your cooperation***

## Semi Structure Interview questions

The following themes will be addressed in the semi structured interview with adolescents at the four schools

- **Biographical details**  
Name, age, gender, grade, school, area of residence
- **Background history**  
Family background: Parents / caregiver, history of family violence  
School background: school progress/ failure.
- **Behavior problems:**  
Bullying, fighting at home/school, truancy, problems with parents or caregivers at home.
- **Psychological problems:** Emotions that you experience due to family violence: sadness, anger, anxiety and fear, withdrawn
- **History of family violence**  
How long have you been exposed to family violence?  
Is family violence a continued occurrence in the family?  
What happens when there is family violence? Who are involved in this?
- **Identity within context of family violence**  
How do you see yourself?  
Do you see yourself as different from others who are not exposed to violence in the family?  
How do you feel when you witness the family violence? How do you handle conflict and how do you cope with it?  
Do you often wonder whether you will use violence to solve problems ?  
How they see their future within the context of violence?  
Who are your support systems?

## Semi-structured interview schedule

### **Instructions:**

*The questionnaire consists of a few questions, could you please fill out each question to the best of your ability. All of the information you provide will be treated with complete confidentiality and it will not be possible for anyone to identify the information you have given to the researcher. The information will only be used as part of the research project.*

### **Biographical Information**

**Name**

**Surname**

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

**Age**

|              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| <b>15-16</b> | <b>17-18</b> |
|              |              |

**Gender:**

|             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> |
|-------------|---------------|

**School:**

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

**Grade:**

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

**Language**

**English / Afrikaans**

**Do you live in the Belhar area?**

|            |           |
|------------|-----------|
| <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |
|------------|-----------|

**Background Information**

1. Have you ever experience or witness violence (one family member is hurting another either physically or emotionally in your family?

2. If yes, explain what happens?

|     |    |
|-----|----|
| Yes | No |
|-----|----|

3. How often does it happen? Does family violence happen most of the time, only sometimes or very seldom?

4. What happens to you when you witness the family violence?

5. Describe how you feel when family violence takes place at home?

6. Does the family violence affect how you interact with others? Please explain:

7. Do you see yourself as different from others who are not exposed to violence in the family? If so how are you different?

8. How are you coping with family violence? Who are your support systems at home?

9. Do you think that family violence has changed the way you see yourself and how do you see your future?

11. Would you like an opportunity to change how the family violence has affected you? If yes what would you like to change?

## Psycho- Educational Intervention

### Phases of Psycho-educational strategy

#### Phase1

|                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b><i>Awareness of and contact with the self (90 mins)</i></b></p> | <p>Introductions, Building of rapport and relationship, Establish the process of the participants, observe their contact making process. This phase is also referred as the sensory phase according to Gestalt model.</p> <p>The raising of awareness through making contact with self through sensory stimulation. The activities focused on awareness and discovery of the self through contact-making. Opened ended questions guided the the participants in making of an open projection. The use of clay as a therapeutic medium is found to be significant as it stimulate the senses and it open the pathways to contact and with heighten awareness, participants become aware of their emotions and emotional expression can take place.</p> <p>The activities include smelling, touching the clay and making of open projection linking it to certain sensations and emotions. Participants became more aware of different emotions and experiences as they could relate different emotions to events they have experienced. As part of this strategy, colour of the clay was used as medium to stimulate sensory contact that will facilitate emotional expression. Colour was associated emotional experiences and allowed participants to explore the different associations it brought to the foreground as well as different emotions.</p> |
|                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

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| <b>Phase 2</b>                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b><i>Self- discovery (90min)</i></b> | <p>This phase is also known as the self- exploration phase.</p> <p>Participants were instructed to make a clay projection of self. The researcher (via lecturette) demonstrated how the self can configure into other selves. Demonstrating the dominant selves and less dominant selves we have within. Participants were instructed to identify and name the various selves by creating clay projection of the self. They made the various selves that surface in the context of family violence. The use of clay and colour of clay was again used as means to stimulate sensory awareness and emotional expression.</p> <p>Open-ended questions formed part of the strategy and allowed for the acquisition of a deeper understanding from participants. Through open-ended questions, participants were invited to visually express their experience of family violence and self-configuration. Each participant was asked to create a unique product of the self within the context of family violence and through questions and unstructured stimuli they became aware of their experiences, emotions or meaning of self projection in subjective ways. Furthermore the questions allowed for a better exploration and understanding of participants' creation of self and provided them with the opportunity to respond openly and to explore significant aspects in their lives without restrictions (Roos, 2012). Open ended questions used in this phase: <i>Make a projection of selve identify and name the different selves, which selves surface in the context of family violence: what emotions and experiences can you relate to different selves?</i></p> |
| <b>Phase 3</b>                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b><i>Self -expression</i></b>        | <p>This phase refers to participants' emotional expressions of the self, also known as the self- expressive phase. This phase draws on the different roles and emotions the selves elicit, and how the different selves can either work together</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

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|                                                                                                             | <p>in harmony or discord. In this phase the participants could engage in dialogue with different selves. The participants were guided by open- ended questions to engage with different selves. Through dialogue between the different selves participants could address unresolved issues either through projecting and owning of emotions and making contact with unacceptable parts of selves as well as giving a voice to the different selves. Participants reflect on the relevance of the different selves. The participants are further encouraged to reconcile the differences between selves and allow for dialogue between polarities within the selves. This processes enabled participants to identify with the different selves, define the different selves and own the projection of the self- therefore relating to it. Participants could explore parts of the self that are similar to the self- projection and take ownership of it.</p> |
| <p><b>Phase 4</b></p> <p><i>Empowering of self/ self nurturing</i></p> <p><i>Reconstruction of self</i></p> | <p>The final phase is one of empowerment and self-nurture. Participants were encouraged to explore new ideas and identify positive selves. They can redefine the meaning of different selves as well as evaluate the relevance of it. They are more empowered to nurture certain selves and choose which selves to engage with less.</p> <p>Participants were further encouraged to integrate unacceptable selves by redefining the meaning attached it. This phase also looks at new discoveries about self, how to use new found aspects of selves in coping with family violence. This phase facilitate the reconstruction of self as it helps participants to integrate different selves.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

**Addendum D1**

**Visual projection:** shape, colour and distance between different selves depict how participants perceived different selves in context of family violence



**Visual Projection** Participant projects a name that reflects different selves, different shape and colour reflects his perception of self in context of family violence



**Visual Projection** Participant moving shuffling and moving selves around, referring to the role and emotions the different selves elicit in the context of family violence



Visual projection Participant used shapes to depict her different selves, expressing emotions and roles of different selves. Heart shape refer to love and happiness, sun refer to sunshine, brightness and good times



**Visual projection** participant identified the different selves as well the selves that elicits negative emotions. The colour black portray negativity and distance between them refer to possible alienated self.

**F**

## **Guidelines for Therapist, Social workers and Counselors working with adolescent identity in context of family violence**

### **Guidelines and suggestions for therapist**

Using a Gestalt Therapy approach provides a foundation for the development of a set of guidelines for doing therapy with adolescents from family violence background. With the above-mentioned considerations in mind, the researcher recommends the following:

For all social workers, counselors and therapists working within the field of family violence and identity should work from the premise that two entities are interconnected within the organism /environment field. Working within the field of family violence and identity social workers, counselors and therapists need to equip themselves with knowledge regarding family violence and the impact on identity.

From a Gestalt point of view identity is not static, but always in a process of change, therefore always striving towards integration. Therefore interventions employed have to consider that the self is relational within that field and the field events such as family violence play a vital role in self-development.

The process of awareness of self- experiences within the context of family violence is regarded as important element within the change process and will therefore further inform participants about self and identity reconstruction. The self is a process and therefore open to change and reconstruction.

Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of the diversity of selves, as postulated by Polster, (2006) it is potentially a valuable avenue for healing if implemented within psycho-educational strategy. This intervention consists of psycho-educational components and is accessible and can be used in addition to other therapeutic modalities.

### **Guidelines for psycho-educational process**

The relationship and process of self- awareness is pivotal in Gestalt approach- Therapist therefore need to establish I-thou relation. Enhancing self- awareness will further the process of contact making with the environment.

The use of a creative medium, for example clay etc. can facilitate and enhance the sensory awareness process. When working with clients clay are often used for making of self projections etc. The use of clay is often found beneficial in the healing process as it is the medium through which the individual might express thoughts and feelings, both verbally and non-verbally.

It is important that therapist be aware of sensory awareness process of the clients, as some clients might find it difficult. Some creative mediums might not be conducive to sensory awareness and may hamper emotional expression. Alternative creative mediums can be used to bring about sensory awareness and facilitate emotional expression.

The use of colour in the psycho- educational intervention also impacts on the emotional expression of the client as it also stimulates sensory contact that will facilitate emotional expression. Colour was associated emotional experiences and allowed participants to explore the different associations it brought to the foreground as well as different emotions.

Implementing of the psycho-therapeutic intervention stretched over 4 phases of contact making and awareness of self; discovery of self; emotional expression and empowerment and self-nurture form the basis of this intervention as adapted from Blom and Schoeman Gestalt model. The tailoring process as popularized by Polster (2006) forms the core of the identity reconstruction process and included within the 4 phases of the psycho-educational intervention.

## Phases for Psycho -Therapeutic strategy

### Phase1

|                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| <p><b><i>Awareness of and contact with the self (90 mins)</i></b></p> | <p>Introductions, Building of rapport and relationship, Establish the process of the participants, observe their contact making process. This phase is also referred as the sensory phase according to Gestalt model .</p> <p>The raising of awareness through making contact with self through sensory stimulation. The activities focused on awareness and discovery of the self through contact-making. Opened ended questions guided the participants in making of an open projection. The use of clay as a therapeutic medium is found to be significant as it stimulate the senses and it open the pathways to contact and with heighten awareness, participants become aware of their emotions and emotional expression can take place.</p> <p>The activities include smelling, touching the clay and making of open projection linking it to certain sensations and emotions. Participants became more aware of different emotions and experiences as they could relate different emotions to events they have experienced. As part of this strategy, colour of the clay was used as medium to stimulate sensory contact that will facilitate emotional expression. Colour was associated emotional experiences and allowed participants to explore the different associations it brought to the foreground as well as different emotions.</p> |
|                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

## Phase 2

|                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| <b><i>Self- discovery (90min)</i></b> | <p>This phase is also known as the self- exploration phase.</p> <p>Participants were instructed to make a clay projection of self. The researcher (lecturette) demonstrated how the self can configure into other selves. Demonstrating the dominant selves and less dominant selves we have within. Participants were instructed to identify and name the various selves by creating clay projection of the self. They made the various selves that surface in the context of family violence. The use of clay and colour of clay was again used as means to stimulate sensory awareness and emotional expression.</p> <p>Open-ended questions formed part of the strategy and allowed for the acquisition of a deeper understanding from participants. Through open-ended questions, participants were invited to visually express their experience of family violence and self-configuration. Each participant was asked to create a unique product of the self within the context of family violence and through questions and unstructured stimuli they became aware of their experiences, emotions or meaning of self- projection in subjective ways. Furthermore the questions allowed for a better exploration and understanding of participants' creation of self and provided them with the opportunity to respond openly and to explore significant aspects in their lives without restrictions (Roos, 2012).</p> <p>Open ended questions used in this phase: <i>Make a projection of self; identify and name the different selves, which selves surface in the context of family violence: what emotions and experiences can you relate to different selves?</i></p> |
| <b>Phase 3</b>                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b><i>Self -expression</i></b>        | <p>This phase refers to participants' emotional expressions of the self, also known as the self- expressive phase. This phase draws on the different roles and emotions the selves elicit, and how the different selves can either work together</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

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|                                                                                                             | <p>in harmony or discord. In this phase the participants could engage in dialogue with different selves. The participants were guided by open- ended questions to engage with different selves. Through dialogue between the different selves participants could address unresolved issues either through projecting and owning of emotions and making contact with unacceptable parts of selves as well as giving a voice to the different selves. Participants reflect on the relevance of the different selves. The participants are further encouraged to reconcile the differences between selves and allow for dialogue between polarities within the selves. This processes enabled participants to identify with the different selves, define the different selves and own the projection of the self- therefore relating to it. Participants could explore parts of the self that are similar to the self- projection and take ownership of it.</p> |
| <p><b>Phase 4</b></p> <p><i>Empowering of self/ self-nurturing</i></p> <p><i>Reconstruction of self</i></p> | <p>The final phase is one of empowerment and self-nurture. Participants were encouraged to explore new ideas and identify positive selves. They can redefine the meaning of different selves as well as evaluate the relevance of it. They are more empowered to nurture certain selves and choose which selves to engage with less.</p> <p>Participants were further encouraged to integrate unacceptable selves by redefining the meaning attached it. This phase also looks at new discoveries about self, how to use new found aspects of selves in coping with family violence. This phase facilitate the reconstruction of self as it helps participants to integrate different selves.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

## **ADDENDUM H**

### **Article 1**

“Towards Re-Constructing Identity: Adolescent Experiences of Sense of Self in the Context of Family Violence in a Cape Town Community”. Submitted to *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

### **Article 2**

“Towards Re-Constructing Identity: A Psycho-Educational Strategy as a Method for Re-Constructing Identity in the Context of Family Violence”. Submitted to *Psychology and Developing Societies*.

### **Article 3**

“Towards Re-Constructing Identity: Exploring the Process of Identity Formation in the Context of Family Violence”. Submitted to *Psychology and Violence*.

## **International Conference Presentation**

### **Poster Title**

#### **A psycho-education strategy as a method for reconstructing identity in the context of family violence in South Africa**

Charlene A. Petersen<sup>1</sup>, Herman B. Grobler<sup>2</sup>, Karel F.H. Botha<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>H. B. Grobler is with the North-West University, Potchefstroom campus, Private Bag X6001, 2522, South Africa. (phone: 0027-18-2991745; fax: 0027-18-1730; e-mail: 23376600@nwu.ac.za),

<sup>3</sup>K.F.H. Botha is with the North-West University, Potchefstroom campus, Private Bag X6001, 2522, South Africa. (phone: 0027-18-299172; 0027-18-2991730; e-mail: Karel.Botha@nwu.ac.za).



## **ANNEXURE A**

### **ADOLESCENT SELF-CONCEPT SCALE**

#### **INSTRUCTIONS**

Each item in this questionnaire consists of contrasting descriptions of two people, 1 and 2. Read both descriptions in each item and compare yourself with each one. Then decide which of the two resembles you the most. On the right hand side of each item are two numbers, 1 and 2. If you are more like 1, draw a cross over 1 on the right hand side of the page. If you are more like 2, draw a cross over the 2 on the right hand side of the page. Perhaps you may not be exactly like either, but you must decide which of the two best describes you. In each item draw a cross over either 1 or 2. Do not mark both in the same item.

Follow the same procedure for each item. There is no time limit, but work quickly and answer every item.

Note:

1 and 2 do not represent the same persons in each item. Therefore your answer to one item should not influence your answer to another.

Please enter the following personal details:

NAME: .....

SEX: .....

DATE OF BIRTH:.....

MARK 1 WITH A CROSS IF YOUR ARE MORE LIKE 1  
MARK 2 WITH A CROSS IF YOUR ARE MORE LIKE 2

1. 1 is usually in perfect health ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

  
2 is seldom completely well .....
2. 1 easily loses all self-control ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

  
2 usually remains very calm .....
3. 1 is generally proud of his family ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

  
2 is often ashamed of his family .....
4. 1 is usually unpopular; his company is seldom sought after ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

  
2 is usually popular; his company is generally sought after .....
5. 1 rebukes people who use coarse language ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

  
2 never has the courage to rebuke people .....
6. 1 would rather win than lose a competition ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

  
2 is indifferent to the results of a competition .....
7. 1 considers himself attractive ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

  
2 considers himself unattractive .....
8. 1 always feels inferior in company ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

  
2 never feels inferior in company .....
9. 1 often feels guilty about the ease with which he tells a lie ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

  
2 is not aware that he ever tells a lie .....
10. 1 is usually too self-conscious to offer help to other people ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

  
2 is always helpful and enjoys it .....

11. 1 changes his behaviour if he becomes convinced that he is wrong  
2 often continues with behaviour even though he knows it to  
be wrong ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
12. 1 often postpones to the next day what should be done today  
2 never postpones work to another day ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
13. 1 likes to be well-dressed and neat in all circumstances  
2 dislikes always being neat ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
14. 1 is often peevish and moody for long periods  
2 seldom if ever in a bad mood ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
15. 1 usually looks forward to family gatherings  
2 does not like family gatherings ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
16. 1 wishes that others would show interest in him more often  
2 is satisfied with the attention he gets ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
17. 1 usually takes the side of the majority  
2 usually decide for himself what is right and stands by this decision  
even though he stands alone ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
18. 1 sometimes drives through a stop street without stopping  
2 never drives through a stop street without stopping ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
19. 1 is usually aware of pain somewhere in his body  
2 is seldom aware of any pain ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
20. 1 is completely satisfied with himself  
2 is not satisfied with himself ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
21. 1 is usually suspicious of his family's conversations and conduct  
2 is never suspicious of his relatives ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

22. 1 is someone who makes friends very easily  
2 does not usually make friends easily ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
23. 1 often does things which cause him to feel ashamed afterwards  
2 seldom does things which cause him to feel ashamed  
afterwards ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
24. 1 sometimes feels like swearing when things go wrong  
2 never becomes so upset when things go wrong ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
25. 1 is usually untidy  
2 is seldom really untidy ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
26. 1 is as friendly to other people as he would like to be  
2 is not as friendly to everyone as he would like to be ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
27. 1 is very sensitive to what his family says about him  
2 does not easily feel hurt by what his family says about him ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
28. 1 usually gets on very well with other people  
2 's relationships are easily disturbed by trivialities ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
29. 1 sometimes uses questionable methods in order to be ahead  
2 never considers using questionable methods ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
30. 1 is inclined to gossip too much  
2 never gossips ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
31. 1 is usually aware of feeling unwell  
2 seldom feels unwell ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
32. 1 knows that he can usually solve his problems  
2 is always afraid that he will not be able to solve his problems ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

33. 1 often feels unhappy because he has so little love for his family  
2 is satisfied that he loves his family ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
34. 1 always sees other people's good points  
2 seldom sees other people's good points ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
35. 1 often feels unhappy because his life does not measure up to the  
high standards which others set for him  
2 seldom cares what others expect of him ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
36. 1 someone who often enjoys a shady joke  
2 never laughs at shady jokes ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
37. 1 feels that his weight is correct  
2 often feels worried about his weight ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
38. 1 often experiences despair because he does not keeps to his principles  
2 never experiences despair because he does not keep  
to his principles ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
39. 1 would never be unfair to his family  
2 is not particularly scrupulous about being fair to his family ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
40. 1 always finds it difficult to forgive someone who has accused  
him falsely  
2 readily forgives others ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
41. 1 does not like everyone that he knows  
2 likes everyone he knows ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
42. 1 is satisfied with his appearance  
2 does not feel happy about his appearance ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

43. 1 is always envious of traits of character which he perceives in others  
2 is never envious of character traits which he perceives in others ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
44. 1 is someone with little love for his fellowman  
2 will often do himself down in order to favour others ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
45. 1 always feels self-conscious in the company of strangers  
2 seldom feels self-conscious in the company of strangers..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
46. 1 's behaviour is always irreproachable and honorable in all circumstances  
2 worries about his behaviour which often leaves much to be desired..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
47. 1 takes little interest in the doings of other people  
2 takes an intense interest in the actions and conversations of other people ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
48. 1 feels perfectly happy about his height  
2 is often self-conscious about his weight ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
49. 1 can never persevere with a task until it is finished  
2 perseveres to the end with every task he undertakes..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
50. 1 always treats his parents very well  
2 often neglects his parents ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
51. 1 finds it very difficult to enter into a conversation with strangers  
2 talks to strangers with the greatest of ease ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
52. 1 will always return change when he is given too much  
2 does not trouble to return change when it is too much ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

53. 1 often feels that he is angry with the whole world  
2 rarely feels irritable or sulky ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
54. 1 feels dissatisfied with certain aspects of his physical appearance  
and would change them if he could  
2 is satisfied with his physical appearance just as it is ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
55. 1 can usually hold his own in any situation  
2 finds it difficult to hold his own in all situations ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
56. 1 usually ignores the wishes of his parents  
2 always considers the wishes of his parents ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
57. 1 is very religious  
2 is not very religious ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
58. 1 feels that other find it difficult to make friends with him  
2 is sure that others make friends easily with him ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
59. 1 feels dissatisfied because he is often unwell  
2 is satisfied with the state of his health ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
60. 1 does not become annoyed when he is rebuked  
2 cannot tolerate rebuke ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
61. 1 sometimes has serious quarrels with members of his family  
2 never has serious quarrels with members of his family ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
62. 1 is always friendly  
2 is not always friendly ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
63. 1 's family seldom ask his opinion  
2 's family consults him about most of their affairs ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

64. 1 longs for more attention from the opposite sex  
2 is satisfied with the attention he gets from the opposite sex..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
65. 1 usually performs well  
2 often performs badly..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
66. 1 's family criticize him often  
2 seldom offends in the eyes of his family..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
67. 1 is sometimes irritable when he is unwell  
2 is never irritable when he is unwell..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
68. 1 is particularly popular amongst friends of his own sex  
2 is not very popular amongst friends of his own sex..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
69. 1 thinks that his family does not love him  
2 is completely sure of his family's love..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
70. 1 likes to care for his body to the best of his ability  
2 often feels guilty because he neglects his body..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
71. 1 often acts without first considering the consequences of his  
deeds  
2 carefully considers the consequences before he takes action..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
72. 1 is particularly popular with the opposite sex  
is not very popular with the opposite sex..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
73. 1 feels that his family is suspicious of everything he does  
2 is sure that he is trusted by his family in everything..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

74. 1 occasionally thinks about improper things which cannot be discussed  
2 never thinks about improper things..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
75. 1 enjoys exacting work  
2 prefers routine work..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
76. 1 easily changes his opinions; he never disagrees  
2 firmly adheres to his convictions..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
77. 1 has relatives who will support him in any way situation  
2 does not have relatives on whom he can rely in any situation..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
78. 1 is calm and composed in almost any circumstances  
2 can never defend his viewpoint in a clam and composed manner..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
79. 1 often gets cross when he is thwarted  
2 seldom gets cross when he is thwarted ..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
80. 1 feels very energetic most of the time  
2 feels tired and lethargic most of the time..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
81. 1 is a member of a very happy family  
2 's family is not very happy..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
82. 1 does not feel inferior to his friends  
2 feels inferior to his friends and acquaintances in many ways..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
83. 1 usually finds it very difficult to reach a discussion  
2 considers the available information and usually decides quickly..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

84. 1 is usually cheerful irrespective of circumstances  
2 is only cheerful when things go well..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
85. 1 feels that he is highly respected by his family  
2 thinks that he is unimportant in the eyes of his family..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
86. 1 often regards himself as a bad person  
2 regards himself as a good person..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
87. 1 is a good mixer and usually enlivens the company  
2 often wishes that he could be more sociable..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
88. 1 feels guilty because he seldom goes to church  
2 finds his church attendance satisfactory..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
89. 1 takes an interest in his family and visits them often  
2 does not take much interest in his family..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
90. 1 is always very polite to strangers  
2 often finds himself lacking in courtesy..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
91. 1 is very clumsy and awkward in certain situations  
2 seldom suffers from clumsiness and awkwardness..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
92. 1 is satisfied that he faithfully observes the virtue of honesty,  
integrity, loyalty, truthfulness, etc.  
2 often feels guilty because he neglects these virtues..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
93. 1 is almost never reserved or self-conscious  
2 is usually reserved and self-conscious with strangers and  
particularly with people in authority..... 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

94. 1 is very nervous when he has to appear before a group of people  
2 almost never suffers from nervousness.....

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
95. 1 is someone who does not feel particularly guilty if he is compelled to tell a small lie  
2 is someone who never tells a lie.....

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
96. 1 's religion offers him considerable inspiration, comfort and hope  
2 constantly worries about his religion.....

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
97. 1 is easily worried  
2 seldom suffers anxiety.....

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
98. 1 often feels guilty about his frequent irresponsible behaviour  
2 is satisfied that he fulfils his responsibilities.....

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
99. 1 usually understands the members of his family very well  
2 frequently misunderstands his family.....

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
100. 1 is someone who sacrifices much to help the underprivileged  
2 is hardly aware of the poor, cripples, blind people etc. and ignores rather than helps them.....

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|

## ANNEXURE B

### GROUP OF ITEMS FOUND AT EACH DIMENSION OF THE SELF-CONCEPT TEST

| Subtests with subsections                              | Items according to numbers in the self-concept inventory |    |     |    |    |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|----|----|----|
| <b>A. Physical self</b>                                |                                                          |    |     |    |    |    |
| 1. Identity                                            | 1                                                        | 7  | 13  | 19 | 25 | 31 |
| 2. Acceptance                                          | 37                                                       | 42 | 48  | 54 | 59 | 64 |
| 3. Behaviour                                           | 70                                                       | 75 | 80  | 91 | 94 | 97 |
| <b>B. Personal self</b>                                |                                                          |    |     |    |    |    |
| 1. Identity                                            | 84                                                       | 78 | 82  | 2  | 8  | 14 |
| 2. Acceptance                                          | 20                                                       | 26 | 32  | 38 | 43 | 49 |
| 3. Behaviour                                           | 55                                                       | 60 | 65  | 71 | 76 | 83 |
| <b>C. The self in relation to family and relatives</b> |                                                          |    |     |    |    |    |
| 1. Identity                                            | 77                                                       | 81 | 85  | 63 | 69 | 73 |
| 2. Acceptance                                          | 3                                                        | 99 | 15  | 21 | 27 | 33 |
| 3. Behaviour                                           | 39                                                       | 89 | 50  | 56 | 61 | 66 |
| <b>D. The self in relation to the social community</b> |                                                          |    |     |    |    |    |
| 1. Identity                                            | 62                                                       | 68 | 72  | 47 | 53 | 58 |
| 2. Acceptance                                          | 87                                                       | 90 | 93  | 4  | 10 | 16 |
| 3. Behaviour                                           | 22                                                       | 28 | 34  | 40 | 45 | 51 |
| <b>E. The self in relation to values</b>               |                                                          |    |     |    |    |    |
| 1. Identity                                            | 46                                                       | 52 | 57  | 86 | 44 | 95 |
| 2. Acceptance                                          | 92                                                       | 96 | 100 | 88 | 98 | 9  |
| 3. Behaviour                                           | 5                                                        | 11 | 17  | 23 | 29 | 35 |
| <b>F. Self-criticism</b>                               | 79                                                       | 74 | 67  | 41 | 36 | 30 |
|                                                        | 24                                                       | 6  | 12  | 18 |    |    |

**NORMS****ANNEXURE C**

| Raw Score | Cumulative Frequency | Cumulative Percentage | Stanine | Level   |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------|---------|
| 37        | 1                    | 0.4                   | 1       | Low     |
| 40        | 2                    | 0.8                   | 1       |         |
| 44        | 3                    | 1.2                   | 1       |         |
| 46        | 4                    | 1.6                   | 1       |         |
| 47        | 6                    | 2.4                   | 1       |         |
| 49        | 7                    | 2.8                   | 1       |         |
| 50        | 10                   | 4.0                   | 1       |         |
| 51        | 14                   | 5.6                   | 2       |         |
| 52        | 16                   | 6.4                   | 2       |         |
| 53        | 18                   | 7.2                   | 2       |         |
| 54        | 19                   | 7.6                   | 2       |         |
| 55        | 22                   | 8.8                   | 2       |         |
| 56        | 30                   | 12.0                  | 3       |         |
| 57        | 37                   | 14.7                  | 3       |         |
| 58        | 39                   | 15.5                  | 3       |         |
| 59        | 46                   | 18.3                  | 3       |         |
| 60        | 52                   | 20.7                  | 3       |         |
| 61        | 58                   | 23.1                  | 3       |         |
| 62        | 63                   | 25.1                  | 4       | Average |
| 63        | 74                   | 29.5                  | 4       |         |
| 64        | 82                   | 32.7                  | 4       |         |
| 65        | 92                   | 36.7                  | 4       |         |
| 66        | 107                  | 42.6                  | 5       |         |
| 67        | 120                  | 47.8                  | 5       |         |
| 68        | 138                  | 55.0                  | 5       |         |
| 69        | 148                  | 59.0                  | 5       |         |
| 70        | 154                  | 61.4                  | 6       |         |
| 71        | 170                  | 67.7                  | 6       |         |
| 72        | 178                  | 70.9                  | 6       |         |
| 73        | 190                  | 75.7                  | 6       |         |
| 74        | 197                  | 78.5                  | 7       | High    |
| 75        | 209                  | 83.3                  | 7       |         |
| 76        | 218                  | 86.9                  | 7       |         |
| 77        | 224                  | 89.2                  | 7       |         |
| 78        | 232                  | 92.4                  | 8       |         |
| 79        | 234                  | 93.2                  | 8       |         |
| 80        | 235                  | 93.6                  | 8       |         |
| 81        | 241                  | 96.0                  | 8       |         |
| 82        | 244                  | 97.2                  | 9       |         |
| 83        | 247                  | 98.4                  | 9       |         |
| 84        | 248                  | 98.8                  | 9       |         |
| 85        | 249                  | 99.2                  | 9       |         |
| 86        | 250                  | 99.6                  | 9       |         |
| 87        | 251                  | 100.0                 | 9       |         |
|           |                      |                       |         |         |

# Poster Title

## A psycho-education strategy as a method for reconstructing identity in the context of family violence

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### Introduction

This article explores a restorative intervention with adolescents from a family violence context, which is a much needed resource given the limited access to mental health services in South Africa.

Moving away from interventions based on the biomedical model the focus of this article specifically falls on a psycho-education strategy, using a visual creative medium as a method for reconstructing identity in the context of family violence.

Twelve participants were purposively selected for the study and included both male and female adolescents with ages ranging from 15 to 18 years from three secondary schools in a community known for family violence.

Five sessions were conducted with the intention to bring about awareness of different selves, identifying and naming the selves, and becoming aware of the configuration of identity that could lead to a redefined identity.

### Problem statement and Challenges

The phenomenon of violence and more specific family violence is a reality for many South African's they use violence as an acceptable means of resolving conflicts (Burton, 2008; Collins, 2013). More than 20% of adolescents reported that they had witnessed aggressive disputes between members of their family and that one in five adolescents have witnessed or experienced violence in their home (CJCP, 2006).

In at least two South African community studies, 81% of secondary school students (Collings, Penning, Valjee 2014) and 93% of younger adolescents (Kaminer, du Plessis, Hardy, & Benjamin, 2013a) reported exposure to two or more different forms of violence which includes family violence. The high prevalence of family violence has an impact on family life and could leave many adolescents vulnerable. The findings of South African studies by

Makhubela (2012); Makhubela and Debuso, (2013) also suggest that adolescents' exposed to family violence show lower identity development compared to those from non-violent homes. Furthermore, adolescents might also experience difficulty in the process of developing their self-concept and self-control, and relating to others (Swenson & Prelow, 2005).

Research has indicated that mental health interventions with adolescents are limited and the mental health needs of young people often go unattended because of the minimal focus on prevention, promotion and the lack in services (Du Plessis, Kamier, Hardy & Benjamin, 2015; Flisher, Dawes, Kafaar, Lund, Sorsdahl & Seedat, 2012, Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). In addition other interventions such as therapeutic services are not readily available or accessible (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010).

The psycho-education strategy that was proposed for this study is regarded as a more holistic and competence-based approach, where health, collaboration, coping, and empowerment are promoted (Dixon, 1999; Marsh, 1993). The Gestalt Therapy framework forms the theoretical orientation of this study and views development and growth as holistic and as a relational phenomenon that is constantly changing within the organism/environment field. The individual is not seen in isolation, but as part of the organism/environment field (Joyce & Sills, 2010; Jacobs, 2005; MacKewn, 1997; Yontef, 1993). This psycho education strategy explores how identity is formed in the context of family violence environment and how different selves are constructed and reconstructed. This psycho- education strategy is based on the process of Tailoring ( Polster, 2006) and Gestald models of Blom(2006) and Schoeman,1996).

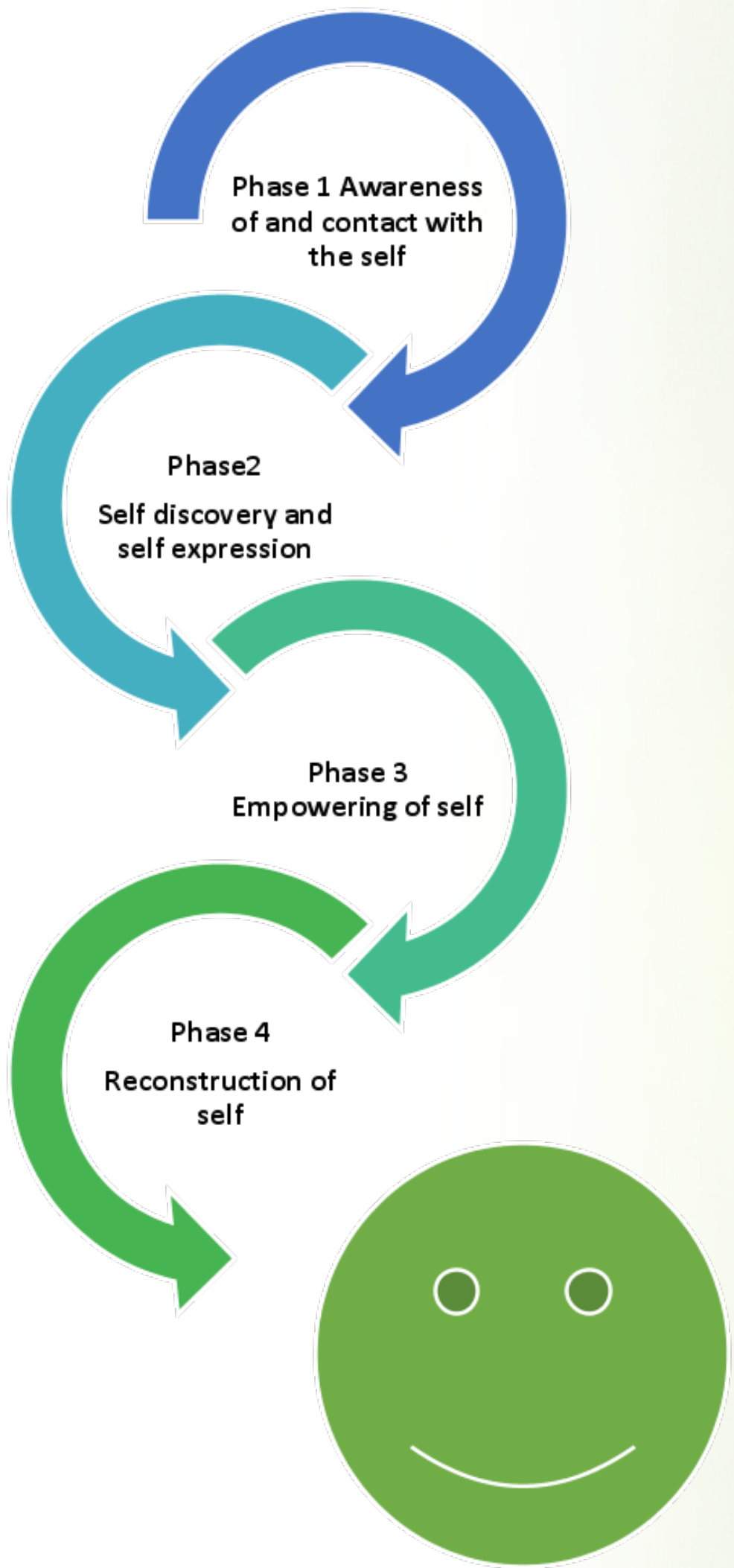
### Methods

Psycho- education strategy as method for reconstruction

The overall aim of this strategy allows participants to gain insight of the self: by making contact with self and defin-

ing the self in the context of family violence; to promote emotional expressions through focusing on the different roles and emotions the selves elicit in the context of family violence. It further allows participants to facilitate owning of emotions as well as making contact with unacceptable parts of selves; to empower and self-nurture, and to gain skills to integrate unacceptable selves by redefining the meaning they attached the different selves leading to an integrated identity. The reconstruction of identity refers to the process of reconstitution and reintegration of identity into a new concept of wholeness and discovering new and unused aspects of self (Corbin & Strauss, 1987).

Diagram



### Process of Reconstruction

Phase 1: Awareness and Contact with self

Becoming aware of self through process of contact using of clay medium. The sensory awareness of participants was

heightened which stimulated emotional expression. Contact-making is seen as a prerequisite for awareness and strengthening of the self.

#### Phase 2: Self Discovery and Emotional expression

Discovery of different selves in context of family violence, through identifying and naming the different selves through making a self projection. Working with the clay representations participants were able to express emotions relating to the selves in context of family violence, focusing on the different roles and emotions the selves elicited and how the different selves could either work together

#### Phase3 Empowering and self-nurture

Empowerment and self-nurturing, as well as the acquiring of skills to integrate the unacceptable selves by redefining the meaning they attached to the different selves. Through the awareness of the empowering selves, stronger selves were identified and resiliency, positive adaptation to family violent context can be better facilitated. The empowerment of self in the context of family violence are also related to a future-oriented representation of the self. Participants 'reference to hopeful future and setting of futuristic goals allow for a sense of predictability and an optimistic orientation towards the future and it will able them to accomplish some order and assign meaning in their lives

#### Phase 4: Reconstruction of self

The strategy enabled participants' to redefine the meaning of the different selves examining the beliefs and values regulating the selves and explore whether it still hold relevance in their lives. Redefining the self would mean assigning different meaning to the various selves. This phase further examined the meaning they assign to the different selves and how it influenced their behaviour in family violence context. The process of re-configuration of the self, allow for adolescents to become aware of and identify the multiple selves that were configured. As the participants became aware of the different roles the selves played and how they combined to bring about harmony or disharmony they could deliberate whether it continued to be relevant within their lives. Reconstruction of self then takes place as a result of the tailoring process where the reshuffling of the various internal selves takes place, each retaining its own identity and allowing for a healthy, flexible and functioning entity which can be regarded as an integrated self (Polster, 2005).

## Findings

- Through heightened awareness participants could make contact with different selves and look at how the environmental field have configured the selves.
- Participants could identify their dominant selves who were present all the time and their less dominant selves who only emerged in certain situations.
- Participants identified selves that they could use in conjunction with the selves that were prevalent in the context of family violence.
- Participants not only identified and named the different selves in their projections, but also described the emotions and roles the selves play in the context of family violence.
- By combing the different selves they were able to bring about more harmony within self, coping more effectively within the family violence context.
- By naming the different selves and understanding the role it plays in coping with family violence participants became more empowered.
- Becoming aware of the different roles and emotions the different selves elicit, the participants could redefine the roles and the meaning of it, by either increasing or decreasing the impact that the different selves had and by doing so it contributed to better coping with family violence.
- Reconstruction of self then took place as a result of a tailoring process where the reshuffling of the various internal selves occurred, each retaining its own identity and allowing for a healthy, flexible and functioning entity which can be regarded as an integrated self

## Conclusions

The psycho-education strategy played a facilitating role in the reconstructing of identity in the context of family violence where participants became aware of the self. Furthermore, the different selves were identified, reorganised and reintegrated into a whole, where new and unused aspects of the self were rediscovered.

Through the process of tailoring the different self-parts, the sense of self became more self-cohesive and allowed the individual to become aware of the role of certain selves and with more awareness, comes more empowerment.

The empowerment of the self, allowed for further awareness which would often lead to acceptance of the opposing selves.

Through identifying and naming the future self and resilient self the participants were able to accomplish some order and meaning in their lives. It provided them with a sense

of predictability and an optimistic and hopefulness towards the future.

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