

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

A Narrative Inquiry into Primary Caregivers'  
Understanding of their Child's Psychological  
Assessment

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Arts

In

Psychology

At Massey University, Albany, Auckland,  
New Zealand.

Jessica Niemand

2010

## **Abstract**

This study explores the ways in which primary caregivers experience the process of having their child psychologically assessed. The research uses a narrative methodology to explore the accounts of seven participants who have supported their child through a process of psychological assessment. Caregivers were interviewed and their interviews were transcribed and analysed by outlining the sequential order of events and the main themes of each of the participants' narratives. Individual stories were then combined to present the overarching themes that emerged from the study. The main themes include the following: suspected "diagnosis" and own expertise, seeing "inside" the child, bittersweet labels, questions of guilt and blame, the "good parent", the distant professionals, problems with communication, challenging the system, inadequate measures, over-assessed, caregiver as the defender and advocate and the helpful professional. This research contributes to the limited literature on client's perspectives of psychological intervention and is intended to improve clinicians understanding of this area.

*Keywords:* caregivers, assessment process, experience, perspective, child

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisors, Kerry Gibson, Kerry Chamberlain and Bev Haarhoff for their support and encouragement through the writing of this thesis. Their input has been invaluable and I have always appreciated their enthusiasm in the project.

I also wish to thank the participants in my study who took the time to share their stories with me and contribute to my research.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family who have been a constant support and encouragement to me during this year and every year leading up to this point.

# Table of Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
1.	<b>Introduction and Literature Review</b>	1
	Common Psychological Problems Amongst Children	1
	Psychological Assessments from the Clinician's Perspective	3
	Child Assessment in New Zealand	5
	Discourses in which Psychological Assessment is embedded	8
	<i>Eurocentric Discourses relevant to the Psychological Assessment of Children</i>	9
	<i>Discourses around childhood</i>	9
	<i>Discourses around childhood development</i>	10
	<i>Discourses around intellectual functioning</i>	11
	<i>Discourses around appropriate behaviour</i>	12
	<i>Discourses around family relationships</i>	13
	<i>Discourses around children's social relationships</i>	14
	<i>Discourses around emotional development</i>	15
	<i>Laypeople's Potential Views on Psychological Assessment</i>	16
	Aims and Rationale of this Research	17
	Summary	18
2.	<b>Methodology and Method</b>	20
	<b>Theoretical Framework of the Research</b>	20
	<i>Qualitative Research</i>	20
	<i>Social Constructionism</i>	20
	<b>Methodology – Narrative theory</b>	22
	<i>Methodology</i>	22
	<i>What is Narrative?</i>	22
	<i>Narratives in Context</i>	23
	<i>The Functions of Narratives</i>	23
	<i>Characteristics of Narratives</i>	24
	<i>Multiple Interpretations of Narratives</i>	25
	<i>Narrative Research</i>	25
	<i>Narrative Analysis</i>	25
	<i>Issues of Generalisability, Validity and Reliability</i>	26

	<i>Reflexivity</i>	28
	<i>Personal Reflexivity</i>	28
	<i>Ethical Considerations</i>	29
	<b>Method</b>	31
	<i>Participants</i>	31
	<i>Procedure</i>	32
	<i>Interviews</i>	32
	<i>Questions</i>	33
	<i>Critique of Interviews</i>	34
	<i>Transcribing</i>	35
	<i>Data Analysis</i>	36
	<i>Analysis</i>	36
	<b>Summary</b>	37
<b>3.</b>	<b>Participant Narratives</b>	38
	Anne: Gathering Ammunition	38
	Mary: "Total Faith"	42
	Kate: The Pursuit of 'Normality'	44
	Amy: In the Dark	49
	Emma: Guarding the Gates to a Heart	54
	Mark: Action Plans	62
	Jenna: Second Opinions	66
<b>4.</b>	<b>General Themes Analysis</b>	71
	Suspected "Diagnosis" and Own Expertise	71
	Seeing "Inside" the Child	74
	Bittersweet Labels	76
	Questions of Guilt and Blame	81
	The "Good Parent"	84
	The Distant Professional	85
	Problems with Communication	89
	Challenging the System	92
	Inadequate Measures	93
	The Over-Assessed Child	95
	The Caregiver as the Defender and Advocate	97
	The Helpful Professional	100

<b>5.</b>	<b>Discussion and Suggestions for Future Research and Practice</b>	102
	Similar Narrative Groups	102
	General Findings and Implications for Practice	103
	Future Research	110
	Challenge	111
	Conclusion	111
	<b>References</b>	113
	<b>Appendices</b>	128
Appendix A	Information Sheet	128
Appendix B	Participant Consent Form	133
Appendix C	Letter of Invitation	136
Appendix D	Interview Guidelines	137