

# The farthest reaches

Frances Williams  
Sharon Sibanda

## Abstract

This paper draws on the responses of two psychoanalytically trained psychotherapists during the course of their work with children in South African community clinics and hospitals. The authors describe some of the impacts on their minds and bodies of both physical and psychic holes in child patients who had been raped or severely neglected. Drawing primarily on their countertransference, their responses suggest that projective mechanisms were often deployed as defences against both the patients' and psychotherapists' pain. The particularly aggressive nature of these projections into other parts of their minds, into their bodies and into outside bodies, such as the healthcare system in which they were working, is the central focus of the paper. The authors propose that the violent nature of their responses involved not only their own inability to hold in mind the holes in their patients and how they were made, but also that they received the empty rage of both aggressed and aggressor. As a linking metaphor the authors draw on the psychological and astrophysical term 'black hole'. Whilst the main focus is the authors' responses to their work with particular patients in particular settings, parts of this paper mirror the ever-present role that race plays in violently defining South Africans' interpersonal relations, making its mark and shaping extra-psychic and intra-psychic dynamics.