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Exploring the Usage of Found Objects in Art Therapy for Bereavement:

A Literature Review

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Abstract

Bereavement is a multifaceted, evolving, and intensely individual experience. Moving away from a linear theoretical framework towards a constructivist theoretical model promotes the healing properties of self-narrative while incorporating the story of the loss of a loved one. Most important to bereaved individuals, as indicated by current research on the topics of death, grief, and bereavement are memory keeping, meaning making, and continued bonds with the deceased. These common themes have remained consistent since the Victorian age.

Traditional mourning jewelry represents a form of memorialization and continued bonds with the dead. Alternative forms of art using found objects belonging to the decedent or associated with the deceased via assigned meaning from the bereaved can be used to create mementos designed to serve as memory keeping objects. Art therapy techniques, combined with curated found objects, photography, and digital art can assist individuals to externalize and process emotions related to coping with bereavement. This thesis presents historical and contemporary societal views and clinical approaches regarding bereavement, as well as the role of art therapy within the context of bereavement. Literature on the topic of bereavement will be reviewed.

Keywords: bereavement, art therapy, Victorian era, mourning jewelry, found objects, memory keeping, meaning making, continued bonds, ongoingness

Exploring the Usage of Found Objects in Art Therapy for Bereavement: A Literature Review

Introduction

This thesis presents a literature review on the topic of bereavement and the integration of creative arts in the therapeutic process of bereavement. Grief is an interpersonal emotional reaction to a loss, while mourning is the outward expression of grief through ritual, symbolism, or ceremony. Bereavement encompasses both grief and mourning; it is the state in which an individual feels grief and actively mourns (Canadian Cancer Society, 2019). For the purposes of this thesis, the terms grief, mourning, and bereavement will be defined as such and will pertain to the death of a family member or friend.

Death of a loved one will, eventually, be an event that most individuals experience at least once in their lifetime. Bereavement is a concept experienced in all nations and cultures (Asai et al., 2012). It is a concept and process that is complex in nature on several levels. Although death and grief are a part of the larger social experience, bereavement is essentially an individual and intensely personal experience (Beaumont, 2013). Grief and bereavement experiences may bear strong similarities among different people, and people may find comfort in one another as they share their narratives of loss and bereavement, yet the response to the loss and course of bereavement are quite singular to the individual (Kohut, 2011; Beaumont, 2013).

Mourning is entrenched in human customs, making the need to grieve an essential process in healing after the death of a person who was closely bonded to the survivor. Current studies in the area of bereavement indicate that culture plays a significant role in the grief response, chosen coping strategies, and general attitude towards death displayed by an individual. Asai et al. (2012) discussed how Eastern and Western ideas of the soul of the deceased may differ depending on religious or spiritual beliefs, changing the attitude of the

bereaved. Additionally, differences in culture-related death rituals may impact societal attitudes and individual survivor's attitudes towards death.

Research and critical literature on the topics of death and bereavement have often focused on three common themes: memory keeping, meaning making, and continued bonds with the deceased. In clinical studies that have researched the psychological states of the bereaved, such as Asai et al.'s (2012) study of adults who have lost a spouse to cancer and Hill and Lineweaver's (2016) children's bereavement group study, the participants' self-reported inventories have helped to inform clinical perceptions regarding bereavement. In-depth interview responses given by bereavement research study participants, including the research study by Keen, Murray, and Payne (2013) on the sense of presence of the deceased, the studies by Maple, Edwards, Minichiello, and Plummer (2013) and Price, Jordan, Prior, and Parkes (2011) on parental bereavement, as well as the family case study by Faro (2018) have additionally helped to inform how mental health professionals have chosen to approach therapy with the bereaved. Freud's grief work theory was the main theoretical approach in the early 20th century (Lister, Pushkar, & Connolly, 2008) and limited how clinicians viewed bereavement, and therefore, how clinicians treated grieving clients. However, as research has continued, newer theoretical approaches that focus on personal narrative and the three common research themes have been explored. Some of the theoretical approaches have included Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Constructivist, Dual-Process Model, Gestalt, as well as attachment theories, and theories related to the field of stress and trauma (Beaumont, 2013; Lister, Pushkar, & Connolly, 2008). Current bereavement research associated with the more recent theoretical approaches aligned with art therapy, which created a natural and fluid connection for art therapists to

augment therapeutic treatment for the bereaved (Beaumont, 2013; Lister, Pushkar, & Connolly, 2008).

The historical context of bereavement has also been centralized on the themes of memory keeping, meaning making, and continued bonds with the deceased. The Victorian era saw the rise in popularity of mourning jewelry and social etiquette. Social attitudes regarding death promoted continued bonds with the dead, as exemplified in this passage by a popular author of the Victorian era in England:

Our dead are never dead to us until we have forgotten them: they can be injured by us, they can be wounded; they know all our penitence, all our aching sense that their place is empty, all the kisses we bestow on the smallest relic of their presence. And the aged peasant woman most of all believes that her dead are conscious. (Eliot, 1859, p. 167)

This passage in *Adam Bede* voiced the thoughts and sense of bond of an old widow, Lisbeth, upon the death of her husband, Thias, as she tended to the death rituals.

As social attitudes and customs have evolved over the centuries, so has the outward expression of mourning. However, bereavement is still an essential factor in healing. This thesis will explore the usage of found objects as a form of art therapy, as informed by current theoretical approaches to mental health counseling for the bereaved, the importance of the three central themes of research on the topic of bereavement, and modern applications of mourning jewelry and bereavement art. The purpose of this thesis is to synthesize historical and modern perceptions of bereavement, including any cultural differences that could impact perceptions of bereavement, through societal and clinical lenses. The reviewed literature will also discuss how the creation of art using found objects could help bereaved individuals to express mourning and

cope with their loss. The goal of this thesis is to combine an understanding of bereavement and the usage of found object art to promote healing in bereaved individuals. Art therapists will be able to apply this knowledge to better understand and serve clients within the fields of bereavement and art therapy by facilitating external expressions of grief via the creation of found object art.

Literature Review

Bereavement

Bereavement refers to the state of loss after the death of a loved one; it is the state during which internal grief and outward mourning occur. Bereavement is not limited by age, as both adults and children can be bereaved. Bereaved adults and children experience several of the same emotions, such as sorrow and yearning, and both populations desire to understand life's new circumstances after the death of a loved one. However, cognitive abilities contribute to how a death may be processed. Adults are able to think abstractly and tend to use euphemisms to discuss death, while children are concrete thinkers who require more direct language to understand the permanence of death (Faro, 2018). Further, children may process grief through play, as this is appropriate to their developmental levels in social skills, emotional abilities, and cognitive abilities (2018).

Bereaved Adults

Bereavement in adulthood may be caused by the loss of a spouse or life partner, a parent, a sibling, other close family members, a child, or a close friend. The relationship between the survivor and the deceased may impact how the bereaved adult reacts to the death. A bereaved parent may seek to find meaning in the death of the child and/- or the cause of death. The desire to find meaning may spur the parent to become an activist in, for example, cancer research or

suicide prevention (Maple, Edwards, Minichiello, &Plummer, 2013; Price, Jordan, Prior, & Parkes, 2011). The role of activist could help the bereaved individual to form a new sense of identity. Adults who experience bereavement due to the loss of a parent or spouse may also feel the need to understand and create a new self-identity in order to effectively cope with the loss (Asai et al, 2012; Kohut, 2011).

When it comes to bereaved adults, Asai et al. (2012) studied the psychological characteristics and the coping strategies of bereaved adults in Japan who had lost a spouse to cancer. The researchers studied the correlations between the psychological characteristics of the participants and their preferred coping strategies. From a pool of eligible candidates sourced from a database of deceased cancer patients at the National Cancer Center Hospital East, 821 individuals answered questionnaires through the mail in 2009. This pool was comprised of 242 men and 753 women. The first questionnaire had three sections: bereaved spouses' characteristics, general health, and coping strategies after bereavement. Section 1 used a 5-point Likert scale to rate answers to the question, "How often have you experienced the following emotions or thoughts associated with bereavement in the past few weeks?" Section 2 used a validated Japanese version of GHQ-28 to score mental health status. Section 3 used a 5-point Likert scale to rate answers to the question, "How often have you utilized the following coping strategies in stressful situations related to your bereavement from the time of spousal death to date?" The second questionnaire used the validated Japanese version of Coping Inventory of Stressful Situations to rate how often three coping factors were used. The current study found that the more time that had passed since the date of death, a higher score for acceptance/future-oriented feelings and a significantly lower score for anxiety/depression/anger and yearning were reported. Younger participants scored higher on scales for anxiety/depression/anger and lower

on scales for acceptance/future-oriented feelings. The coping factors of distraction, continuing bonds, and social sharing/reconstruction had correlations to anxiety/depression/anger, yearning, and acceptance/future-oriented feelings which varied across age, length of bereavement, and gender of participants. Lastly the authors identified that Japanese culture and mourning customs may have impacted results, especially those associated with yearning.

In addition to spousal bereavement, another population of bereaved adults are parents who have had a child die. Price et al. (2011) studied how parents who cared for a child with a life-limiting illness experience bereavement. Using a hospital and hospice database in one area of the UK, 16 families that had experienced bereavement in the past six to 24 months were selected to participate. The ages of the deceased children ranged from two months to 16 years old. One interviewer used a digital recording device to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews at the homes of all nine fathers and 16 mothers who participated. To elicit common themes in the collected information, an interpretive approach was used by the researchers. These themes were piloting, providing, protecting, and preserving, all of which fall under the larger umbrella of actively doing something in order to maintain the semblance of normal family life and well-being in addition to taking on a proactive role in the care of the ailing child. The need to actively engage in these activities were important during the child's illness and after the child's death. According to the authors, differences in the sociocultural background of the families, ailments, and age of the deceased did not affect the common themes resulting from the parents' reports.

Bereaved Children

According to research by Stern, Malkin, and Densen (2010), as cited by Hill and Lineweaver (2016), 11% of children under the age of 20 in the United States will have had a

parent die; 16% of children in this age group will have had a sibling die. The magnitude of this familial loss on a child can impact the child's "feelings of sadness, loneliness, anxiety, and guilt" (p. 91) as well as the child's behavior, including aggression and social withdrawal (Hill & Lineweaver, 2016). Faro's (2018) case study and findings indicated that children desire to have their grief acknowledged and validated through participation in death rituals such as attendance at the funeral, active participation in the funeral service, as well as participation in activities post-funeral such as visitation to the gravesite.

Hill and Lineweaver (2016) studied the change in mood for bereaved children after participating in 20 minutes of individual or group creative art and non-creative tasks. All participants, aged six-13 years, were already enrolled in grief support groups at Brooke's Place bereavement center in Indiana. The median age of participants was nine years old, 57% had a father who had died, 64% were white, and the average time of bereavement was 19 months. Four different regularly scheduled groups were instructed to make individual art or work collaboratively to create a happy person using oil pastels, watercolors, and canvas, or to complete a jigsaw puzzle individually or in a group. Prior to and post-activity, individuals filled out a modified Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-C). Research showed individual art making significantly lowered negative affect but had no change in positive affect. Significant changes in affect were not detected in group work. However, a slight rise in positive affect during individual puzzle solving was noted. The authors identified that a more structured art therapy task might yield more significant results.

The manner in which children experience bereavement can be impacted by their cognitive abilities, specifically by the child's comprehension of death (Faro, 2018). Children's bereavement can also be impacted by their involvement in the funeral and rituals surrounding the

death of the loved one (Faro, 2018). Participation in the death rituals “can help children in a three-fold manner: as a means of acknowledging the death, as a way to honor the life of the deceased, and as a means of comfort and support” (p.5).

In the Netherlands, Faro (2018) conducted a qualitative study in which Western death rituals of children who have had a parent die were examined. The researcher studied how particular rituals promoted links between past and present as well as the continued bonds between child and parent. Faro’s research consisted of a case study of one Dutch family comprised of three children who were aged six, nine, and twelve years old at the time of the parent’s death, where the mother was the surviving parent and the father the deceased parent. Faro (2018) interviewed the family in 2017, eight years after the father’s sudden death in 2009. One of the focal points of Faro’s research became the photograph album created for the children by the mother and maternal grandmother following the sudden death of the father. The photographs, taken by an official funeral photographer, documented each child’s involvement in the funeral rituals. Each photograph also included a written description, penned by the mother and grandmother, of the depicted events. The primary reason for taking and compiling these photographs was to operate as a mnemonic object for the children as they became older. The creation of this particular mnemonic object was meant to help the children recall their participatory experiences in the mourning rituals preceding, during, and after the funeral. These were experiences that the mother and researcher anticipated would become muddled due to the cognitive abilities of children regarding the understanding of death overall as well as the passage of time (Faro, 2018).

At the conclusion of the case study, Faro (2018) was able to make a correlation between the researcher’s perceived potential value of the mnemonic object photograph album and existing

research in the field of bereavement regarding funerary photography as a means of continuing bonds with the deceased. Eight years after the death of the father in the case study family, the children had not referred to the album prior to the researcher's interview. The researcher noted that the children in this family may not have needed to rely on the mnemonic photograph album due to consistent family rituals and the existence of other transitional objects, such as regular visits to the father's gravesite, wearing favorite articles of clothing that belonged to the deceased, and daily conversations in which the parent was mentioned. However, the middle child of the family disclosed to the researcher that viewing the photographs during the interview had enabled a path for forgotten memories to return (Faro, 2018). Additionally, the photographs "not only provided a bridge between past and present, but also (re)constructed this past" (p. 13). Faro surmised that this bridge has potential to assist a bereaved child to continue to build bonds with the deceased parent (2018).

Bereavement in Social and Cultural Contexts

The Victorian era (1837 – 1901) spurred strict social customs as well as an entire industry of mourning accoutrements, especially for women (Bairsto, 2011; Bedikian, 2008; Wallace, Thomas, Anderson, & Olivier, 2018). For a minimum of two years, rigid, dull black dresses matched with veils that hid the face, capes, bonnets, crepe trimming, gloves, stockings, and fans were the required dress of a widow (Bedikian, 2008; Bairsto, 2011). The costume gave immediate visual cues to society that the wearer was in a state of bereavement. Men also had accoutrements, such as armbands, to show status of bereavement. However, it was to a much lesser degree, as men's societal mourning restrictions were not set to a specific duration, as women's were (Bedikian, 2008).

The Victorian era in history also became a time when mourning jewelry emerged as a commonplace showing of bereavement in England. After an initial mourning period lasting one year and one day, women were allowed to add only mourning jewelry to their ensembles (Bedikian, 2008). Dull jewelry made from jet or onyx was typical. Additionally, intensely singular and personal objects such as bone fragment, teeth, and hair, were used to create embellished pieces of mourning jewelry. In Europe, the first examples of hair incorporated into a piece of mourning jewelry emerged in the Fourteenth century but did not reach the height of popularity until the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries (Oliver, 2010). Most often, the teeth or hair of a departed loved one were incorporated into lockets, pendants, signet rings, or brooches (Bairsto, 2011).

Social and political changes, namely World War I and the women's suffrage movement, had an effect on the outward costuming of mourning and bereavement. British women wore purple armbands during the war to exhibit the mourning of a husband, father, or brother who had been killed. Altogether, the constrictive and social rules of women's mourning rituals expressed through clothing, which had been at the height of popularity in the Victorian era, had ended by the 1930's (Bedikian, 2008). The shifts in societal attitudes and lifestyles, according to Bedikian (2008), had an immense impact on how individuals grieved. "Expression of grief in private gradually replaced the social one. Outward signs of grief and loneliness are less rigorously expected from the bereaved" (p.49).

Culture has an impact on bereavement in terms of how the death is viewed by the survivor (Asai, et al., 2012). In Western culture, as stated by Maple, Edwards, Minichiello, and Plummer (2013), parents who experience the death of a child may find the death far more unexpected due to the belief that parents should outlive their offspring. The research by Maple

et al. highlighted that after a death, survivors required the need to make sense of the loss in tandem with forming a new self-identity. A parent who has lost a daughter or son is forced to adjust his or her perceptions of past, present, and future based on their new circumstances brought on by the death (Maple et al.).

Cultural attitudes and views regarding death influence the self-reported psychological effects of mourning, as researched and discussed by Asai et al. (2012). The authors acknowledged that the sense of yearning already had ancient cultural ties within Japanese culture and poetry, and therefore was not perceived by the Japanese as separation anxiety. Rather, the ingrained Japanese customs of honoring the dead through family altar offerings, visits to gravesites, and the spiritual belief that the spirit of the deceased is eternal (Asai et al., 2012) contribute to continuing bonds between the living and the dead. However, when Asai et al., compared their research findings to customs of another Eastern culture, the Chinese, there were discrepancies among the impact of the usage of coping skills on the psychological state of the bereaved. The authors hypothesized this could be due to cultural differences, much like cultural differences between the East and the West.

Bereavement Theoretical Approaches

Freud's grief work hypothesis was the main theoretical framework from which mental health professionals treated clients in the early 20th century. Freud's grief work hypothesis was rooted in the idea that all bonds attaching the living to the deceased should end in order for the bereaved to return to a state that is deemed normal (Lister, Pushkar, & Connolly, 2008). Once the physical bond is no longer present, the emotional bond should also end. Freud also hypothesized that grief related to the loss of an individual should occur in the timeframe of three to twelve weeks in total. In this given timeframe, the bereaved would do the necessary work of

coming to terms with the death through acceptance and understanding of his or her new reality. In addition to this period of time, the bereaved would enter a mourning phase for a further one to two years. The mourning period is when the emotional bond, according to Freud's theory, would dissipate entirely, thus allowing the bereaved to move on and return to a state of normal (Lister, Pushkar, & Connolly, 2008). A return to normal would indicate the process was complete.

In the past thirty years, according to Lister, Pushkar, and Connolly (2008), mental health professionals have moved away from implementing Freud's linear stages of grief framework. Instead, current research in the field supports a constructivist model for bereavement. A constructivist model engages and acknowledges the bereaved person's need to continue the bond with the deceased (Maple, Edwards, Minichiello, & Plummer, 2013). In particular, the Meaning Reconstruction model is in opposition to Freud's theory, due to its basis in the perception that bereavement is an ongoing process that can never be fully completed (Lister, Pushkar, & Connolly, 2008). An individual's personal narrative is used in order to help them find a meaning within, one which they can use to build a new identity in the face of the death of a loved one (2008). It is the personal meaning making that assists the bereaved to make sense of their evolving identity in relationship to the deceased.

Remembering the Deceased

Locks of hair, during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, were considered one of the most intimate of gifts that could be exchanged between the living. A lock of hair was a symbol of one's romantic bond or of familial love and friendship between the giver and the recipient (Oliver, 2010). The lock was an everlasting representation, one that would physically remain unchanged once snipped (Holm, 2004), unlike the blooms of flower bouquets which would wilt and die. Moreover, a lock of hair was unique to the giver. As a piece of the physical

body, it symbolized the person from whom it had been snipped (Holm, 2004). Therefore, etiquette and social mores had to be taken into careful consideration when locks were gifted to a living person. Upon death, the hair of a beloved one could be cut into keepsake locks meant to give the recipient a method to remember the deceased.

Furthermore, in being steeped in a culture that engaged very openly with mortality, people found intricate ways to continue their relationships with the deceased and used objects such as mourning jewelry and memento mori to “sense-make” in relation to their bereavement and their own mortality. (Wallace, Thomas, Anderson, & Olivier, 2018, p. 97)

In addition to the objects directly taken from the physical body of the deceased, other objects have held symbolic meaning throughout the centuries. Pearls, for example, were used in mourning art and jewelry during the Eighteenth century to represent the tears that had been wept by the wearer (Holm, 2004).

In modern times, mourning jewelry is still available for customizable purchase. This is a service often offered by funeral parlours. During funeral preparation, traditional locks of hair may be snipped from the corpse and then placed into a locket by the funeral practitioners. For individuals and families who have chosen cremation, cremated ashes can be sealed into a pendant. Traditional funeral practitioners are not the only vendors offering to create mourning jewelry. In Europe in 2005, at an expo in Paris named *The Salon Professionnel International de l'Art Funeraire*, Hockey and Woodthorpe (2006) reported on how current attitudes towards societal viewpoints of the funeral experience and mourning have evolved. Artists and jewelers were among the over 300 vendors exhibiting at the trade fair. Artists encased human ashes into resin sculptures, which were meant to be displayed prominently in the home for the bereaved and

any guests to admire. Jewelers were quite literally creating a new form of mourning jewelry, perhaps inspired by the Victorian era. Human ashes were compressed into diamonds that jewelers were then able to place into any jewelry setting (2006).

Keen, Murray, and Payne (2013) used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to study bereaved individuals' meaning-making connected to feeling the presence of a deceased person via a sensory experience. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight white females in the UK, who were an average age of 51 years old, who had lost a person close to them within the past three years and who, while awake, felt the presence of this person via the sense of sight, sound, smell, or touch at least once. Deceased individuals were husbands, fathers, and an uncle. Participants were allowed to cite more than one person with whom they had experienced a presence. From a pool of individuals who contacted the authors via a university advertisement, word of mouth, hospice services, and an online bereavement support group, participants were screened and selected. Individual interviews consisting of open-ended questions were conducted in person (with the exception of two by telephone) at home (with the exception of one at hospice) for 50 minutes to two hours. Four themes emerged from this study; the first was a meaningful connection of the sensory experience as specific and exclusive to the deceased and their relationship. The second was a connection to spirituality, belief in an afterlife, belief in the circle of life, and prior sense-of-presence experiences. The third theme was an emotional shift, usually from fright to comfort by the sense-of-presence. Lastly, participants were concerned about how others would view, validate, or invalidate their experiences, worrying they would be perceived as mentally ill.

Art in Meaning Making

Meaning making is steeped in self-identity. The creation of personal narratives in tandem with the ability to share these narratives allows individuals to make sense of their current circumstances and relation to society. This is evidenced by the arts-based research studies conducted by Kay (2013) and Klorer (2014).

In 2013, art therapist and author Kay conducted an arts based research method she referred to as bead collage. The author created her own prayer bead in a previous workshop, where she personally experienced her emotions and memories connect, literally and metaphorically, through stringing found objects and beads together. With this experience in mind, Kay (2013) continued her own 2008 study of art teachers' pedagogy, student artwork, and the relation to art therapy, by modifying it to include art making in the interview process. Kay (2013) used phenomenology and arts-based research with two female art teachers. One of the teachers was employed in an urban school setting and the other in a substance abuse treatment center; both had students aged 13-19 with diverse backgrounds. Participants were interviewed separately in their classrooms at the beginning, middle, and end of the research period, which lasted one school semester. Interviews covered the teachers' personal backgrounds, world views, professional experiences, and community connections. Based on responses to questions as the bead collages were created, the author concluded that participants were able to cognitively and emotionally connect metaphorically to the found objects, assigning a meaning to each. The order in which objects physically connected were also assigned a meaning by the participants. In the process of bead collaging the participants engaged in verbal explanations of their non-verbal self-expression, leading the researcher to conclude that layered and deeper meaning-making was occurring through self-reflection in contrast to cognitive responses from traditional verbal

interviews. The collages were viewed as a holistic piece of visual data and were combined with the researcher's observations as a method for data collection and analysis.

At the Missouri History Museum library, a found art project highlighting the topic of identity and meaning making within the local community was exhibited for two months. Author Klorer (2014) created six found art sculptures using reproduced historic letters and objects from prominent buildings in her Missouri community and from personal family archives. The art was meant to serve as education, social awareness, and an inspiration for museum patrons to research their family histories in connection to the community. As a response, four public workshops in three separate communities took place, in which 270 total participants of diverse backgrounds created their own found art sculptures, with the goal of strengthening personal and community bonds. At each workshop, participants were taught basic collage skills, and were then provided cigar boxes, decorative embellishments, and reproduction local historical documents to augment items from their personal family archives. Each cigar box sculpture served as a stimulus to share conversation about the art and about personal narratives. Images from participant artwork at previous workshops were displayed during the subsequent workshops, further uniting all participants. The researcher noticed universal themes of immigration, loss, growth, family ancestry and history, and personal accomplishments. Thus, the researcher concluded that participants had gained a new sense of personal and social awareness in connection with one another, community, and local history through the process of collage making with found objects.

Art Therapy for Bereavement

The field of bereavement is an area of specialization chosen by art therapists that ranks within the top ten chosen areas of specialization, according to research by the American Art Therapy Association (2007) as cited by Lister, Pushkar, and Connolly (2008). Existing research

in the fields of clinical therapy and bereavement have indicated that the incorporation of art activities can enhance the therapeutic benefits of group therapy and/- or individual therapy. The prior research in these fields concluded that art therapy was particularly beneficial to clients of all ages who had experienced a form of trauma or significant loss in their lifetime (Hill & Lineweaver, 2016). Based on the research, it can be hypothesized that art therapy would be directly beneficial to the field of bereavement therapy. Additionally, bereavement support groups that offered solace and comfort for group members (Kohut, 2011) have evidenced that the integration of art therapy interventions deepened healing and understanding for each individual group member. The creative process and subsequent presentation of the art work in the support group allowed members to verbally and visually tell their stories, which was essential to healing for the bereaved group members (Kohut, 2011; Lister, Pushkar, & Connolly, 2008; Beaumont, 2013).

Implications for Art Therapy in Bereavement

Bereavement therapy through the lens of the Meaning Reconstruction model lends itself to utilizing art therapy techniques. Personal narratives, often expressed in a written format of prose or poetry, could easily become a springboard for further therapeutic work using visual media (Beaumont, 2013). Beaumont gave several examples of methods in which art therapy have been integrated with narrative therapy: through body mapping sensations felt while sharing personal narrative, creating visual storyboards of biographical events, and the sharing of significant photographs related to the deceased and specific memories, as well as by creating works of art that represent a positive memory of the departed loved one (2013). Adding visuals alongside narratives reinforces the personal meaning making and reconstruction of the bereaved individual's current sense of bond to the deceased and current societal relations.

Lister, Pushkar, and Connolly (2008) stressed that art therapists should be cognizant that bereaved individuals are not always fixated on the depressive aspects of the loss of someone loved. Often, the bereaved feel the need to celebrate the jubilant memories and emotions still associated through the ongoing bond with the deceased. Using photographs of happy occasions to create a scrapbook is suggested as an art therapy technique in these instances (Lister, Pushkar, & Connolly, 2008). The authors also indicated that anniversary dates associated with the one who died could become powerful opportunities for emotional processing through art therapy. They suggest making “memorial pieces” (p. 248) incorporating clothing of the deceased, photographs, and/- or painting. Poignantly, it is further recommended by the authors that small symbolic mementos or “tokens” (p. 248) be created during art therapy. These mementos could be symbolic representations or items directly owned by the deceased. Pocket or purse-sized objects could enable the bereaved to feel a physical and emotional connection in any moment deemed necessary by the individual (2008).

Arts-Based Research in Art Therapy for Bereavement

Creating containment art as a means to understand and process one’s own grief allows the bereaved individual to transition their emotions into the art piece. Kaufman (1996), an art therapist, explored her own personal arts-based research process of meaning making through box art after the death of her five-year-old son from AIDS. Kaufman employed a heuristic research model due to her knowledge of the manner in which this approach would heighten her overall experience. A heuristic approach “stresses personal significance, connectedness, intuition, and tacit understanding” (p. 238) while allowing for a sense of “total immersion in the process” (p. 238).

To begin her personal arts-based research study, Kaufman (1996) created a framed box with two separate sections: an entirely enclosed glass portion on top with an open section on the bottom. As described by Kaufman, the bottom was semi-enclosed with thin fabric lining three sides of the box, allowing a partial view through the fabric. The glass compartment contained a carefully curated combination of soft lighting, soft mesh fabric, flower petals, and glimmering glass and plastic gems. In the lower open space, Kaufman placed a figure of a human body crafted from twigs and plaster. Within the human figure, Kaufman created open cavities with one cavity deliberately designated for the chest. In the chest cavity, a heart-shaped box containing her son's ashes, which represent "feelings and memory" (p. 242) was carefully placed. Kaufman described the intensely intimate process of sifting through the ashes and placing them within a container that was personally symbolic, as a method of "cherishing" (p. 244) the physical ashes as well as their symbolic representation of memories and emotions. Kaufman's arts-based study allowed her to identify the incorporation of the ashes into her sculpture as "gruesome and beautiful" (p. 244). Critical analysis suggests that the addition of the ashes not only promoted, but heightened, Kaufman's personal understanding of her grief and assisted her to begin to make meaning out of the painful loss of her son.

Art Therapy in Bereavement Support Groups

Using found objects in art therapy for bereavement assists individuals to promote memory keeping after the loss of a loved one. In an art therapy bereavement support group in Cleveland, Ohio, Kohut (2011) and a co-facilitator ran a four-week long scrapbooking project for grieving adults and their family members. Participants were invited to join the group by Kohut through association with local hospice services as well as via a general invitation to the local community. For two hours each session, participants used provided square or heart-shaped

scrapbooks, supplemental decorative materials, and most poignantly, found objects personal to each participant. The objects varied from personal photographs, diary pages written by a deceased friend, a sugar packet from a honeymoon, event ticket stubs, military service mementos, and handprints from a deceased newborn (Kohut, 2011).

Each object inherently contained meaning and memory specific to the participants who brought it and included it in their scrapbook. For instance, the sugar packet a widow incorporated into her scrapbook was a mnemonic object that sparked memories of an important event and the conversations, emotions, and moments spent with her husband at that particular point in time. The selection of this memento and placement in the scrapbook highlighted the fact that the artist did not view it as an ordinary sugar packet but as an object of meaning and remembrance. The scrapbook “showed a broad scope of mementos making her memory book a very personal documentation of the loving relationship she had shared with her spouse” (Kohut, 2011, p. 127). The scrapbook allowed the widow to share and preserve her narrative of her relationship with her husband through the curation and organization of personal found objects. Through a survey three months post-group termination, participants in this art therapy bereavement support group reported that they referred to their memory scrapbooks frequently, even daily, and placed them in personally important locations for easy access (Kohut, 2011). One participant who had lost a friend via suicide commented that the memorialization of her loved one through the scrapbook activity, “brings our loved ones back to life” (p. 129). This comment highlights the importance of keeping the bond and memory intact.

Found Objects in Art Therapy for Bereavement

Utilizing found objects to create a continued bond need not exist only in tangible object form. Technology offers a digital space where found objects can be curated, altered, and

compiled, much like a digital version of scrapbooking. This contemporary method encapsulates the found objects within a digitally contained space, much like a physical box or memory book, which requires deliberate opening in order to view the contents. Designers Wallace, Thomas, Anderson, and Olivier (2018) explored this digital space through the creation of digitized lockets inspired by Victorian mourning jewelry lockets.

The digital enables a multitude of images to be held in one locket, which could signify a sense of control over content and could bring comfort for a wearer and possibly a closer connection to multiple facets of the deceased. (Wallace et al., 2018, p. 98)

The authors compared this control to a traditional locket that must be physically opened by the wearer to view a printed photograph or lock of hair contained within the mourning jewelry.

Wallace, Thomas, Anderson, and Olivier (2018) made a series of digital lockets each employing a different human-computer interaction. The human-computer interactions ranged from allowing the wearer to select digital photos to scroll through at will, an allowance of only one digital photo to be viewed per day, a digital photo to be captured by an attached camera which would then be deleted permanently upon the capture of a new digital image from the camera, a digital photo that may only be viewed a total of two times before being permanently deleted from the locket, and a locket that features individual photos of the deceased and the bereaved and then combines them to interlock both people in each other's past in new ways. Wallace et al., posited that the bereaved individual who wore the limited-view styles of digital locket would be more invested in the meaning of the item itself, rather than the viewing or "consumption" (p. 102) of the image. "More than the viewing, the significant act was the knowing that the contents were within" (p. 101).

In their discussion of contemporary digital design's contribution to the approach of the topic of bereavement and mortality, Wallace, Thomas, Anderson, and Olivier (2018) focused on the concept of ongoingness. Ongoingness, as defined by the authors, is a process of continuing bonds between the bereaved and deceased, but in a way that does not dwell in the past. Instead, ongoingness refers to the relationship's forward growth through "active and dynamic continuation" (p. 103). To illustrate this concept, the authors presented an artistic series of photographs in which a bereaved artist digitally altered existing found object photography to process the death of her mother. Over a period of ten years, artist Moira Ricci used the digital space to incorporate her contemporary self as an adult into photographs taken throughout her mother's life, from young girl to older woman. Each newly created image intertwined meaning-making and ongoingness for Ricci. The artist's intention, as described by Wallace et al., was to create imagined conversations with her mother about the impending accident that would end her life. The photographic found objects, combined with Ricci's artistic alteration, curated over a span of ten years demonstrates the personal social interaction of ongoingness as well as the importance of meaning-making through the art. The original photographs on their own held importance to the artist, as they were family photos of a loved one who had died. However, the addition of the personal meaning-making imbued into each new image created a greater sense of continued bond. The authors articulate this phenomenon as

The potential for bereavement to be seen as a continuing process of negotiation and meaning making— something fluid that changes as feelings for the deceased periodically lessen or intensify over time. What this framing gives us is an invitation to see grief and bereavement not primarily as a loss, over which we have very little control, but as a space

in which to actively sense-make and to build ways to have an ongoing and active relationship with the deceased. (Wallace et al., 2018, p. 104)

Clarifying Literature Through Personal Art Making

To obtain a better understanding of how the usage of found objects in art can promote memory making, continued bonds, and meaning making, the author of this thesis undertook an arts-based personal project. The author identified as a bereaved individual following the death of a close family member. Inspired by Victorian era mourning jewelry, the author decided to create a resin-cast pendant using a lock of hair and a pearl bead. These objects were chosen from a collection of numerous objects that represented the deceased, objects from the funeral, and supplemental objects such as beads. Chosen through careful consideration, the lock of hair and the pearl bead took on important meanings. Although the pearl bead was a supplemental material object and had no direct connection to the deceased family member, the author assigned a specific meaning to the object, therefore imbuing it with meaning. The meaning was drawn directly from Victorian era motifs where the pearl symbolized the tears shed over the loss of the loved one (Holm, 2004).

In the process of creating this personal piece of mourning jewelry, the author felt a powerful sense of bond with the deceased. Holding the lock of hair, smoothing it, and purposefully placing it into the casting mould to encircle the pearl bead created a tangible connection as well as an emotional connection. It was reminiscent of the process Kaufman (1996) described of sifting through her son's ashes and placing them into a sculpted container with intent and the process of assigning meanings to specific beads in the bead collages (Kay, 2013). The mould acted as a temporary container until the resin could fully cure. Once cured,

the clear resin became the protective encapsulating container, similar to the crystal facets that covered locks of hair in Victorian mourning locket and rings.

The finished piece (Figure 1), overall, gave the author a specific memento dedicated to the beloved family member who had died. The memory of family-bestowed gifts of jewelry while the person was alive was combined with the mourning memento. Using the lock of hair gave a sense of direct connection, being able to see the loved one, if only in part, and the sense of still being in that person's physical presence was a comfort. The symbolic meaning of the pearl bead spoke to the despair felt at the time of death and the continued sadness of the bereaved. Personal mourning jewelry is also something that could be worn, if chosen, or displayed in a place of meaning to the owner, similar to the way the participants in the scrapbooking bereavement support group (Kohut, 2011) displayed their memory books.

The ambiguous structure of revealed function and hidden story is condensed in the jewelry because it exposes the value of the object and connects it to the intimate sphere of the body. So the wearer of remembrance jewelry presents herself as a participant in a hidden intimate network, from which other viewers are excluded. Mourning jewels are exhibited secrets. (Holm, 2004, p.140)



Figure 1 Mourning jewelry with lock of hair and pearl bead in resin

Discussion

In the literature review of this thesis, a core theme of memory and memorialization runs throughout. “To forget would be the very worst loss of all, for memory is all we have left” (Kaufman, 1996, p. 243). The physical bonds existent in relationships during life are permanently severed once an individual has died. However, current research on the topic of bereavement has identified that the survivors in these relationships desired the ability to hold on to the emotional and spiritual bonds, beyond the physical bond, in order to still feel the connection to the decedent. The goal of the survivor was not to eliminate entirely the emotional

connection as a means towards healing in the grief process; it was the exact opposite – to keep it alive in some manner (Maple et al., 2013). This is also the philosophy in many Eastern cultures, as Asai, et. al. (2012) discussed in research regarding survivors in Japan who had lost a spouse to cancer. The Eastern customs that promoted continued spiritual and emotional bonding with the deceased potentially impacted the participants' self-reported feelings of yearning, depression, anxiety, anger, and acceptance.

Bereavement is a complex, individual, and continuous experience, one which can shift in intensity. It is difficult to separate the importance of meaning making, memory keeping, and continued bonds within bereavement. Each of the three aspects are closely inter-related, making it difficult to discern where one begins and another ends. It is the fluidity of which Wallace, Thomas, Anderson, and Olivier (2018) articulated regarding ongoingness and the needs of the bereaved in any given moment. From the reviewed literature, it can be posited that memory keeping and meaning making lead to continued bonds and ongoingness. Ongoingness and a continued bond would not be possible without keeping a loved one's memory alive. Without meaning making, there would be no invested purpose in keeping the memory or connected bond.

In modern times, meaning making, preservation of memory, and continued bonding with the dead can be achieved through the implementation of art therapy for bereavement by using found objects that once belonged to the deceased. This may include traditional elements such as locks of hair or more recent trends such as cremated ashes. Found objects that are representative of the person who died, but not necessarily owned by the decedent, are also relevant to the creation of meaning making. Assigned meaning to these objects by the bereaved is equally important based on the individual's intention. For example, flower petals from the funeral service can be embedded in resin along with photographs. A Barbie high heel shoe, scrap of

fabric, loose leaf tobacco, dried pasta, handwritten words on paper, beads in a favorite color, board game tiles or pieces, etc., may all be representational found objects that hold meaning and remembrance for the survivor. Infinite combinations of intensely personal and individualized found objects are possible.

Collecting these found objects and preserving them in a physical or digital container automatically gives the objects a sense of meaning and importance. The objects have been chosen not at random, but specially curated and set aside for the purpose of preserving a memory. The act of curation denotes the objects as being special and important to someone (Kauffman, 1996). “Art-making and container-making are ways to ‘embalm’ memory, to keep memory from decomposing like the corpse” (p. 243). The artwork acts as an internal and external form of expression of bereavement.

More arts-based research in the three common themes of bereavement is recommended, as current research appears to be limited. Written narratives in expressive arts therapies are much more prevalent than arts-based techniques (Beaumont, 2013). Art therapists could use the written narrative as a starting point, as Beaumont (2013) suggested and continue the expressive arts therapeutic grief work using visual media. Art therapy for the creation of carry-able memento objects, (Lister, Pushkar, & Connolly, 2008) would make an interesting area for further arts-based research.

Found object art would not restrict the expressive visual or verbal narratives; therefore, the usage would be appropriate for survivors regardless of how the loved one died. Further arts-based research incorporating found objects for specific populations, such as a scrapbooking group for adults who have lost a family member to suicide, a spouse to cancer, or a child to

chronic illness might yield more data regarding how personal narratives are reconstructed through art therapy using a constructive lens.

Lastly, arts-based research on the topic of child bereavement is limited. The study outcomes from Hill and Lineweaver (2016) and Faro (2018) indicate that participation in structured art activities as well as participation in death rituals are equally important for bereaved children and bereaved adults. It is recommended that more research using art therapy for bereaved children be conducted.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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