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Grieving Artists: Influences of Loss and Bereavement on Visual Artmaking

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Grieving Artists: Influences of Loss and Bereavement on Visual Artmaking

A DISSERTATION

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Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological survey explored how professional artists navigated personal loss experiences that were a result of the death of a loved one. Although artists have worked within themes of death throughout history, most studies on art and bereavement to date have focused on psychological or therapeutically-oriented investigations. Exploring how bereaved artists experience their own art-making through contemporary practices may serve to understand how fine art processes and grief could be interrelated. The guiding questions were explored through semi-structured interviews with eight exhibiting artists. The participants all self-identified regarding age and gender, and ranged in subject matter, media choices, and artistic practices. Each had experienced the loss of at least one significant relationship during their professional career. Kvale's (1996) method of research interviewing and narrative structuring was applied and led to the emergence of six themes including *1) experiencing grief; 2) faith and beauty; 3) merging; 4) storying; 5) exhibiting work; and 6) curative aspects of art* as well as 13 sub-themes. Art-work reflecting the imagery created during each participant's bereavement experiences are also included.

   Keywords: grief, loss, bereavement, creativity, art, artists

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Feelings of profound loss can grip the heart of the bereaved and the consequences

are vast, spanning from feelings of devastation to more resilient responses of

understanding and adaptability. For some, the experienced loss has the potential to

promote a disintegration of the psyche (Gray, 2001) which may warp familiar perceptions

of safety and security about the world. Others may find that grief invites expressive

freedoms and new ways of experiencing their changed relationship with the deceased.

Whatever the focus of the bereaved, their grief stories are capable of illuminating

personal creative capacities that can spark regeneration of meaning about their own lives.

For artists, the process of using their bereavement as a catalyst for art-making may feel

not only necessary, but also impossible to ignore.

Due to the multidimensionality and intersubjectivity of grief experiences

(Hagman, 2016), active engagement with the arts may be an important resource for re-

connecting to the emotional self (Broadbent, 2013). Engagement in creative expression to

process grief may also inspire new developments in personal meaning (Brennan, 2015;

Cornell, 2014; Harter, 2007). Not only can art-making offer a lifeline to soothe emotional

suffering and the sorrow of being left behind, but the products created also have the

potential to act as a symbolic tether to the departed.

The often-unavoidable grief process that exists after the death of a loved one has

been considered by some to be a human experience with which most individuals can cope

due to intrinsic characteristics of resiliency (Bonanno, 2004; Davis, 2008; Newsom et al.,

2016; Ogińska-Bulik, 2015). Also, various authors have identified creativity as an often

buried or forgotten embodied state that is not only distinctive of being human, but also accessible and available at any time (Frantz, 2016; Leatherby & Davidson, 2015; Halprin, 1997). The potential for overlap of innate resilient tendencies with the deep, intrinsic drive to create meaning out of our experiences may be an important combination to consider after a significant loss has occurred.

Perhaps throughout all of history, and specifically reflected in the most recent discovery of the earliest cave language that was found in Indonesia, is the use of art to record life stories (Aubert et al., 2019). Likewise, contemporary artists across many cultures, tend to hold a significant role in communicating universal human experiences. Yet, despite the growing inter-weavings of grief and creativity in the academic literature (e.g. Frantz, 2016; Levine, 1997; Moran, 2010; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010), artists themselves have only recently become subjects of inquiry in research (e.g. Firestone, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 2017; and Stephenson, 2014).

The groundwork for this concentrated inquiry lies in the basic assumption that, like death, creativity is also a universal human experience. Furthermore, our intrinsic links to the arts and imagination are a deeply held attribute (Halprin, 1997) of all human beings. Various theorists have suggested that creative behaviors enhance one's inherent abilities for mood reconstruction (De Petrillo & Winner, 2005), increase resolution of conflicting feelings (Gerity, 2000), and invite restorative explorations (Moon, 2012; Speedlin et al., 2015). Important associations have been identified in the literature between how psychological, emotional, and physical pain may be rendered through the creation of art (Brache-Tabar, 2010; Miller et al., 2016).

Exploring personal loss and the grief that follows can be applied to innumerable and diverse individuals. However, studying professional artists who have lost significant relationships offers a unique view into how grief may impact the creativity and individual expressiveness historically displayed in the art products of the current research participants. The focus of this examination was to understand how visual artists might grapple with their preferred medium and distinctive subject matter while managing symptoms of grief. The inquiry concentrated on whether self-identified artists continued making art (with representative materials, processes, themes, topics, etc.) after their loss experience and if these works were exhibited to the public. Additional questions included whether the works generated after loss were more personal or did they maintain a similar 'feel' as the artists' distinguishing work?

Understanding the lived experiences of exhibiting visual artists and how they specifically managed their grief through art-making, if at all, may provide an additional tier to understanding how art materials and methods may be valuable in bereavement. However, rather than focus on creative techniques that support the therapeutic benefits of art, this inquiry aims to understand the inner workings of the art making process itself. The artists' relationship to the materials, subject matter, and structures of creative action when confronted with a significant personal loss that occurred due to the death of a loved one are the main focus of this exploration.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The following will explore concepts of grief and creativity through the lens of the visual arts which will be reviewed in three distinct sections. The first section will survey characteristics of grief, and expound upon concepts of bereavement to include brief examinations of resiliency and the effects of the changed relationship after death. Section two will include historical contexts of creativity and the visual arts for purposes of meaning-making as well as considerations for creative action as a fundamental human response to loss. Lastly, a historical review of artists will focus on individual and collective creative expression, concluding with an in depth look at contemporary arts practices related to grief and loss and a summary of research involving the visual arts.

Characteristics of Grief

Feelings of loss that follow the death of a significant individual in one's life can cause emotional, psychological, and/or physical suffering. Adverse symptoms of anxiety, guilt, depression, grief, and a longing for the missing loved one range in severity from acute to prolonged distress (Bonanno, 2004; Ogińska-Bulik, 2015). Personal risk factors may increase complications of normative grief, causing the development of more severe symptoms of depression and anxiety, or chronic health conditions (Bonanno, 2004; Jordan & Litz, 2014; Newsom et al., 2016; Petruzzi et al., 2015). Although some individuals may appear to be deeply unaffected by their loss, the varying aspects of grief and the impact of bereavement has the potential to become more complex over time (Bonanno, 2004; Jordan & Litz, 2014). Further, prolonged grief and depression have been found to be strongly linked with the continuation of significant response symptoms still

arising even years after the loss has occurred (Schaal et al., 2014). Various researchers have recognized differences between normal grief responses and the clinical diagnostic criteria of Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) (Schaal et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2018).

For example, He et al., (2014) examined specific risk factors for prolonged grief including comorbidity factors of anxiety and depression. The study surveyed the extent of symptoms in a sampling of populations from across China. Cross-sectional information was surveyed through questionnaires that included a Likert scale for severity of prolonged grief symptoms as well as a collection of statements that were rated by the participants reflecting level of severity for symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress. The participants were 445 adults aged 16 to 79 years ($n_{female} = 349$; $n_{male} = 86$; $M_{age} = 27.6$). Additional variables comprised religious belief, educational background, marital status, family economic status, kinship to the deceased, time since the loss, age of the deceased, and cause of death (such as medical or traumatic as with suicide).

He et al., (2014) utilized (1) the Prolonged Grief Questionnaire-13 (PG-13) to assess the prevalence of PGD symptoms, (2) the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale (SDS) to assess symptoms of depression including cognitive, affective, and somatic indicators, (3) the Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (SAS), and (4) the PTSD Checklist-Civilian Version (PCL-C). Both the PG-13 and SAS versions were translated from the English prior to implementation, and all questionnaires were found to demonstrate good reliability and validity, according to the authors. The PTSD Checklist was further supported for use within the design due to its excellent internal consistency and convergent validity as established by previous studies. The researchers utilized a Pearson

correlation to uncover relationships between the four separate questionnaires and a one-way ANOVA to compare PG-13 scores across variables.

Higher percentages were found for yearning for the deceased (76%), grief symptoms (59%), and trouble accepting the loss (53%) than other measured items (He et al., 2014, p. 350). Eight individuals met diagnostic criteria for PGD, with six of those also exhibiting comorbidity of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms. The age of the bereaved individual $(r = 0.112, p < 0.05)$, how much time had passed since the loss $(r = -0.103, p < 0.05)$, and the age of the deceased $(r = -0.331, p < 0.01)$ were all significant indicators for prolonged grief in those who met PGD criteria. Further indictors for severity of risk for prolonged grief included marital status (higher in divorced/widowed), religious belief (higher in Buddhist faith), education background (higher in high school and post-graduate degrees), kinship to the deceased (higher in individuals who had lost a child), and cause of death (higher in unexpected and traumatic losses). Gender, place of residence, and economic status did not show significant severity for PGD symptoms. A stepwise regression using the higher risk indicators identified child and spousal death to be more influential for acquiring a PGD diagnosis in the population sample.

Overall, this extensive study conducted by He et al., (2014) provided a clear example of comorbidity of grief symptoms specific to the Asian populations it reported. It also supported the need for comprehensive evaluations that may lead to a clinical diagnosis of PGD in order to further facilitate adoption of effective treatment models. However, the authors identified that 58.2% of participants had reflected on the death of a grandparent, which may be viewed as a more accepted death (than the death of a child,

for example). This type of death may have also allowed individuals to be more participatory, skewing results, and limiting more inclusive risk factors that attribute to symptoms of prolonged grief. Lastly, this factor may also account for the low percentage of PGD ($<1\%$) found in the sample.

Bereavement

In contrast to Western concepts of behavioral health, the prevalence of depression and other mood indicators associated with bereavement has caused several researchers to caution against pathologizing symptoms (Collier, 2011; Jordan & Litz, 2014; Lichtenthal et al., 2004; Ogińska-Bulik, 2015; Percy, 2014; van Lil, 2012). Other researchers have cited issues of semantics between diagnostic categories, questioning clinical attitudes and concepts that may overlook the normalcy of grief symptoms specifically because many people, instead, experience positive responses to their grief (Maciejewski et al., 2016; Ogińska-Bulik, 2015). Regardless of the severity of symptoms, Jordan and Litz (2014) focused on fostering an individual's intrinsic tendency for self-restoration as an effective response to bereavement.

After a significant death, an individual might also develop perceptions that the world is more chaotic and unpredictable than previously thought. Or, perhaps, their grief introduces harsh internal criticisms which disturb previous patterns of coping leaving the individual charged with self-doubt and uncertainty (Broadbent, 2013; Coenen, 2018; Percy, 2014). An individual's ability to cope is dependent largely on how they manage change related to their perceptions of the world, life and death, and their own purpose and relational roles (Davis, 2008, p. 310). Therefore, the bereaved may experience change as

influential and transformative. Percy (2014) sought to highlight the health of the grieving individual in this way:

> Implicit in [their] assessment is the notion that grief follows a time line [sic] despite the fact that the grieving process is quite individualized. This understanding is of particular importance to depth psychologists, who view major psychic upheaval, such as that occasioned by the loss of a loved one, to be potentially valuable. (p. 7)

When faced with loss, the potential for personal decline may require that new perspectives be forged. For this, movement into aspects of the soul that hold discomfort (Jung, 1964) provides the opportunity for shifting of these painful experiences toward psychological, spiritual, and emotional growth.

Resilience

Most people can adjust after a personal loss and are able to cope quite well with their bereavement experiences (Bonanno, 2004; Newsom et al., 2016). As such, an individual's natural resilience has been noted to be a significant factor in grief restoration (Jordan & Litz, 2014). Resilience as a process was described by Ogińska-Bulik (2015) and defined with a focus on the individual having the potential to "bounce back from unpleasant life events" (p. 235). This potential was suggested as stemming from effective coping strategies already in place. Personal characteristics of resilience were denoted to be a person's ability to tolerate more difficult emotional turmoil (Ogińska-Bulik, 2015); whereas, Bonanno (2004) assumed resilience to be a common underlying characteristic that implied healthy responses to grief at the onset. Bonanno further suggested that resilience carried "unexpected pathways" (p. 25) which utilized different coping

mechanisms held by the individual. Distinctive to the purposes of the current research topic was Bonanno's suggested pathway of "being committed to finding meaningful purpose in life" (p. 25) for which Neimeyer (2001) proposed the bereaved find a way to share their loss experience or, more specifically, tell their story.

The Changed Relationship

Societal expectations that grief has a clear beginning and end, and that bereavement symptoms should be immediate and brief, have been found to be the norm across cultures (see, for example, Collier, 2011; Miller, 2015; Percy, 2014). Indeed, death is a universal human experience, but grief is more likely to follow individual patterns of coping (Cornell, 2014; Klorer, 2014; Newsom et al., 2016; Schaal et al., 2014; Wadeley, 2000), and the severity of grief symptoms for any individual is complex. Therefore, it may be necessary to associate grief symptoms with personal and cultural characteristics including relational styles of the individual by focusing on family and individual values.

Neimeyer (2006) argued for constructivist examinations regarding how "we are shaped and sustained by our shifting patterns of attachment to people" and how they form meaning within our lives (p. 289). He cautioned about the depth and intricacies of how our attachments challenge our assumptions of the world; therefore, it is important that we first understand how we (co)author our own life stories:

> Like a novel that loses a central character in the middle chapters, the life story disrupted by loss must be reorganized, rewritten, to find a new strand of continuity that bridges the past with the future in an intelligible fashion. (p. 263)

This author's focus on "self-narratives" as an acknowledgment of our relationships to others and how we view ourselves was also suggested to be part of our self-identity

which can change dramatically when lost or misplaced after a death occurs (p. 266).

Similarly, Davis (2008) regarded an individual's ability to manage their changed

relationship as less about replacing the old worldview with a brand new one, but more of

"a gradual morphing" between views held about the world and the self (p. 310).

The death of a loved one and the impact that profound loss can potentially elicit

often requires extended time beyond what early examinations into bereavement had

concluded. However, according to Kessler (2019), the grief cycle, first introduced by

Kübler-Ross in 1969 was never meant to "prescribe" the stages of grief as an orderly,

step-by-step formula, but rather to "describe" different emotions that one might

experience after a death (p. 2). After collaborating with Kübler-Ross to evolve these

stages over the last 50 years, Kessler identified 'finding meaning' as a sixth stage of

grieving. The process coincides with the fifth stage of 'acceptance' and is described in

this way:

> There's nothing easy about this stage. It can be extremely painful, and acceptance
> doesn't mean that we are okay with the loss, or that the grieving process is now
> officially over. However...there's a crucial sixth stage (that) isn't some arbitrary
> or mandatory step, but one that many people intuitively know to take and others
> will find helpful. (p. 1)

Although intense feelings of grief may decrease over a period of time, they are, indeed,

never-ending as much as the changed relationship with the deceased still remains

(Bonanno, et al., 2008; Castle & Phillips, 2003; Kessler, 2019). Strauss (2001) considered

this phenomenon as analogous to "concentric waves of anguish that continue through

time" (para. 2).

Finding meaning has been considered an important factor in lessening grief symptoms (Kessler, 2019). For this, Madison (2013) suggested connecting to the "implicit source" of our own body feelings where our personal "experiencing process" resides (p. 234). This existential model supports empirical knowing and encourages a 'process over product' style of learning (see Eugene Gendlin's work). In particular, creative engagement after loss can create a complex layering of healing responses that are often unidentifiable and may be more akin to Madison's active process. According to Gains (2016), the active process of 'continuity,' first introduced by Freud, was an important, often unconscious, task in bereavement that referenced a maintained sense of connection held between the bereaved and the person they lost.

Several authors considered creative expression as an action that is capable of igniting change by modifying one's vision, worldview, and understandings of the self both individually and in connection to others (Harter, 2007; Percy, 2014). Bernstein (2001) conveyed that any individual reshaping their life after a loss "is, in the profoundest sense, an artist" (section Art: A Cry that Inspires and Heals). Furthermore, Hagman (2010) determined the experience of the self "which includes the experience of self in relationship" to be found not only in the expression of the artist, but also ultimately held within the framework of the art itself (p. 26). Finding meaning, therefore, might best be suited to engagement in artistic and creative practices.

Creativity

According to May (1980), creativity requires that people work with their anxieties and insecurities, and that it is with their sensitivities that they can cultivate meaning from their experiences. May further attested that creative action during bereavement might

bring about regressive representations from the unconscious. However, these results can be influential in providing universal meanings of human experience and our desires to understand suffering (Strauss, 2001). Hagman (2010) presented art's significance as "important to us because it is one of the only means through which we can experience what it means to be human in a form which intensifies and focuses human experience" (p. 23). In support, Aldridge (1996) emphasized "expressive realization" (p. 109), which can be articulated through engagement of the senses, the body, and the lived experience of the individual.

Visual art, in particular, has been identified as a purposeful healing medicine (Frantz, 2016; Gabora & Kaufman, 2010; Halprin, 1997; McNiff, 1992). Further, Leatherby and Davidson (2015) argued for deeper awareness of an individual's natural embodied state as a creative being, especially due to the multidimensionality of grief experiences. Kouriatis and Brown (2013-2014) referenced limitations of verbalizing feelings; however, they neglected to articulate the range of experiences of human emotions that can play a part in the resolution or transformation of grief using visual art during bereavement. Equally, broadening ideologies and developments in arts research have also suggested that simply viewing and discussing art can increase feelings of aliveness and value by elevating mood and moral, stimulating mental wellness and awareness, and creating a sense of belonging (Flatt et al., 2015; Hagman, 2010; Lamar & Luke, 2016; Livingston et al., 2016). More specifically, Marder (2018) concluded that viewing art products allowed an increased sensitivity and engagement "with fellow beings and the world" (para. 1).

Existing beliefs about bereavement suggest that creative engagement employs one's natural "reservoir of healing" (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010, p. 261) and is part of our "deepest nature" (Hagman, 2010, p. 23). Creativity therefore, offers curative aspects for the bereaved that meet their strongest desires of reconciliation toward wholeness (Coenen, 2018; Hagman, 2010). Lastly, human sensitivities toward imagination as a way to make meaning out of pain and sadness and rage have been exhibited throughout the centuries among all cultures (Foundation for Art & Healing, n.d.; Strauss, 2001).

When creativity is viewed as a tapestry that is woven with threads of imagination and meaning-making, it is easier to recognize its complexities and its abilities to heal (Frantz, 2016). This viewpoint expands understanding of creativity beyond the limited definition of it being a tangible product that "requires both originality and effectiveness" (Runco & Jaeger, 2012, p. 92) in order to be valuable. By engaging with expressive abilities, an individual can develop "resilient creative coping" (Richards, 2010, p. 200) strategies to help deal with personal challenges including grief and loss.

Grief and the Visual Arts

Creative wounding has been found to be a significant threat to how individuals perceive their innate healing abilities (Beghetto & Dilley, 2016; Frantz, 2016). Yet, most research that has been done to date has determined creativity as a significant source for personal restoration and a fundamental component of the grieving process (Brennan, 2015). Current views of art and creativity are expanding from focusing solely on the product to surveying both personal and collective processes. For instance, Allen's (1995) writing highlighted the personal benefits of art making to include self-discovery and supported creative practices as a way to develop internal wisdom including how we know

grief (p. 127). Collective practices were conveyed by Strauss (2001) in direct response to the World Trade Center attacks in the US. This journalist of the *NY Times* compiled an expansive list of critics who were called to reflect on how all art forms allow us an opportunity to grieve together. Among these authors was Bruce Weber who reasoned that grief is less about events of loss than our "primal" emotional responses to it (section Theater: A Rending Scream that Spoke for All). Richard Bernstein also weighed in on the conversation writing that visual art can not only reflect deep emotion, but it can also channel sorrow and help to heal it (section Art: A Cry that Inspires and Heals).

Grief experiences related to artists own health and well-being was explored by Firestone (2013). Through a phenomenological design, the creative practices of 12 professional women artists who were experiencing acute illness (n=10 diagnosed with cancer) was observed. The author highlighted a desire to not only understand participant experiences and ways of coping with their illness, but also what role art may have contributed, if any, to these experiences. Citing the imagery and creative practices shared by the participants, the author concluded that art making could support resiliency, and a personal commitment to visual expression could serve to increase meaning in the lives of the artists.

Categorizing the participants experiences in increments of time (before, during, and after illness), Firestone (2013) uncovered significant findings that occurred after illness including changes in the materials, scale, and methods used by each artist. Additionally, changes were notable in the art forms and imagery. The study suggested that art processes more commonly expressed by the artists before illness had been modified in order to communicate internal shifts experienced during and after illness.

Furthermore, the research suggested art making as a catalyst for psychological healing and as having therapeutic effect although none of the participants were engaged in creative arts therapies at the time of the study.

The most prominent limitation of Firestone's (2013) research lies in the focus only on White, college-educated women whose studio art instruction was based in Western concepts. Most of the participants also had advanced degrees and worked in academic settings supporting a continuation of bias in how artists are identified. Expanding into cultural examinations and broadening the definition of art may also invite a larger framework in which to view death and grief.

Another significant examination of how visual art can support the grief experiences of individuals, was found in Kalaba's (2009) master's thesis. Constructs of memory and meaning making were explored through arts applications. This heuristic research paper focused on the experience of creating an art-based memorial that could serve to honor the author's brother. Moustakas' (1990) six-phased research process was the approach utilized for data collection and analysis. Creative experiential examinations included journaling and drawing followed by intuitive processes which culminated in the making of a doll. Likewise, the metaphor of a door was sparked not only as a place to keep the past, but also a way that allowed the author a point of access back to the living. The full breadth of experiences allowed the art to memorialize the loss and act as a transitional object. This study concluded that the arts could trigger 1) an expansion into the impact of loss as an individual experience, 2) grieving as an extended process rather than arrival at an end point, and 3) a growing invitation to derive meaning from death. Also suggested was the intensity of the process such as the expressed inability to

articulate the depth of personal learning that took shape. Lastly, the author's engagement with autobiographical storying suggested an expansion into literary forms of art as meaningful practices to understanding personal experiences of grief.

Art Therapy.

Various authors have identified creative expression, when used in healthcare, to be beneficial to an individual's treatment (Frantz, 2016; Levine, 1997; Moran, 2010; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). In fact, theoretical approaches of creativity in healthcare have suggested that the arts are an effective tool that can promote overall health after a loss has occured (Finn, 2003; Irwin, 1991; Johnson, 2019; Le Count & Lang, 2000; Lister et al., 2008). Bogan (2019) as well as Williams and Lent (2008) have reflected on the uses of specific art materials; whereas, Bailly (2020) focused on creative rituals for the bereaved in art therapy group treatment. Others have identified creative expression more broadly as an important aspect of treatment for bereavement issues in therapy (Frantz, 2016; Klorer, 2014; Leatherby & Davidson, 2015; Speedlin et al., 2015; Thompson & Neimeyer, 2014). According to Frantz (2016), imagination that is used for the purposes of meaning-making also reinforce our innate abilities to heal ourselves. Therefore, making art and expressing bereavement through creative avenues may decrease feelings of abandonment (Percy, 2014) and restructure internal connections to the emotional self (Broadbent, 2013).

One example of how art materials and methods can contribute to self-healing was found in Arnold's (2019) pilot study. The research was aimed at understanding how grief and bereavement influenced the creative expressions of three professional art therapists. Results suggested that both the grief process and the art making conducted by each

participant was multidimensional, complex, and ongoing. Furthermore, art making and grief appeared to be related through patterns suggested by the six major themes of the study which included *1) balancing personal experiences and professional practice, 2) awareness of time, 3) the loss experience, 4) art making as a way to stabilize relationships, 5) art as an intuitive practice, and 6) creative expression for symbolic memorial to the deceased.*

Underlying this collection of themes were several assumptions that were carried between all three participants (Arnold, 2019). One example was the unique qualities of how specific art materials and creative practices contributed to a physical release of grief symptoms. And, beyond the somatic grappling the art making provided, the art products themselves also became meaningful links that supported an ongoing relationship between the art therapist and their loved one. Perhaps the most significant assumption among all three participants was in the exchange of familiar art tools and techniques for more suitable materials and methods during bereavement. The participants attributed these creative adaptations to personal urges and 'yearnings' which suggested intuitive-based practices (p. 10). According to each participant, art made in relationship to grief displayed nuanced differences in process and meaning from art that was made prior to their loss.

When viewing creativity through the lens of art therapy, we can see a model of engagement that utilizes materials and processes not just for the creation of a product, but more importantly for their expressive qualities. The product, itself, becomes a tangible representation of the emotional world of the artist (Runco & Albert, 2010). Furthermore, this expression of emotionality can assist in conceiving of and developing the future in a

non-threatening way that also fosters meaning, aids in transformative aspects of healing, and provides a felt sense of stability (Moran, 2010). Moon (2004) recognized art making as an action that could reduce symptoms of existential meaninglessness by rediscovering wonder and reviving a felt sense of joy. Further supporting these ideas, Bartal and Ne'eman (1993) considered the expression of one's inner most struggles through art making as an opportunity to increase fulfillment and build a sense of belonging to something greater than the self.

Grief and Writing

Expounding on creative paradigms in grief, Koopman (2015) investigated how texts invited reflection within the reader. For example, how an existing book fragment might affect direct thoughts of the bereaved. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the author postulated that personal experiences would not only invite affective responses to the read texts, but also "empathic distress" (p. 430) could be manifested by simply reading about someone else's suffering (much like the effects of viewing art as described previously). The literature selected for the study focused on grief and depression, and the results suggested that a more emotional tie to the reading existed after the first week, with a few participants showing a deepening reflection on the material. It was further suggested that readings, which provided a more emotional experience, were more likely to lead to reflective responses from the participants.

Walter's (1996) work also suggested the importance of texts and further offered storying as a significant part of the grief experience. Rather than viewing grief as something to complete, the author suggested a sociological model of grief in which survivors construct stories about the deceased with others. It was proposed that this type

of narrative biography could help the bereaved integrate their memories of the lost

relationship. Neimeyer et al. (2014) confirmed this notion by suggesting that mourning is

not only an internal process but must also be viewed as a social one. These authors

identified grief work as social action and reviewed it in the context of a communicative

activity opposing the general view in Western culture that grief is a private and internally

constructed phenomenon.

In an effort to better understand the effects that bereavement had on young

widows, Haase and Johnston (2012) examined personal identity as a critical component

of how women envisioned themselves after the death of a spouse. In spite of the severity

of loss, the authors postulated that the women would benefit from telling their personal

stories as a way to reclaim themselves. In addition, it was thought that sharing the stories

with other widows would assist in their ability to re-envision life without their own

spouses; both of which would assist in making meaning from the loss.

The qualitative research design posed two questions including, 1) "How do young

widows describe their identity before and after the loss of their spouse?" (p. 207) and 2)

"How do young widows cope with the loss of their spouse? (p. 208). The participants (N

= 11) were recruited through an online support group for young widows, and had a mean

age of 33 years old (*range* = 25 to 39 years). Participants reported being widowed for a

mean of 16 months, with an average number of 7.5 years of marriage. Of the 11 women

who met the selection criteria, one identified as Latina with the other 90% being

Caucasian, and all lived across the United States. Interview guides were provided to

participants prior to the face-to-face interviews which were conducted by the main

researcher. Haase reported transparency as a young widow herself in an effort to create a supportive atmosphere for the participants.

The interviews were transcribed and reviewed with relevant researcher self-checking in place. The researcher also engaged in further triangulation by sending the extrapolated themes to the interviewees for review and agreement. Additionally, the author sent personally written poems that had been created in response to a few of the participant transcripts and engaged in email conversations about these poems with the selected participants. The five themes that emerged from the interpretive process included, 1) Expressing Grief and Loss, 2) Navigating Relationships, 3) Reconstructing Worldview and Spirituality, 4) Narrating Self and Identity, and 5) Experiencing Counseling (p. 209).

Results suggested that participants found a significant link between the death of their spouse and development of their identity "…particularly from that of having a coupled identity to being a single person" (Haase & Johnston, 2012, p. 211). Interestingly, emergent from the interview data was the shared belief that creative expression assisted the widows in making meaning from their loss. Types of expression included writing, blogging, quilt making, scrap-booking or the creation of memorials.

Although this study provided relevant qualitative data that met the requirements of a phenomenological research design, several limitations were present. As purported by the authors, this study lacked a multicultural lens in that the data is centered predominantly on the experiences of White, Christian, heterosexual, middle to upper class women (Haase & Johnston, 2012, p. 218). Expanding the participant pool by

posting in community centers and alternative online forums may have contributed to

obtaining a wider demographic grouping.

As a distinctly separate creative opportunity available to the bereaved, stories

shared through verbal or written expression or reading of poetry and literature may also

be viewed as a significant way to not only understand our own experiences, but also to

empathize with others.

Artists in a Historical Context

Despite the growing inter-weavings of grief and creativity in the academic

literature, artists themselves have been largely overlooked as subjects of inquiry in

research concerning bereavement. Yet, the oldest recorded art has been dated

approximately 64,000 years ago and believed to have originated from abstracted forms

used by early Neanderthals (Devlin, 2019). Furthermore, the oldest known 'figurative art'

has been estimated to have been created 44,000 years ago and has been suggested to

depict the first creative recordings of important life events shared through the visual

language or art (Aubert et al., 2019; Wu, 2019). Various artists throughout history have

turned to their art time and again, and especially during times of grief to contend with the

void shaped by the death of their loved ones. Supporting this historical view of art and

sculpture, author and artist Lisa Marder (2018) wrote:

Art has long been a way to channel feelings and bring about emotional healing.

Many artists find a time of stress and grief to be a productive time creatively,

channeling their emotions into powerful images of universal human suffering.

They are able to turn disturbing images of war, starvation, illness, and trauma into

poignant and even beautiful paintings that resonate in the soul for a lifetime.

(para. 1)

Artwork created in 520 BC reflected the human desire to understand suffering through creative channels. As such, Hagman (2010) viewed art making as "not just something the artist does, a pastime or occupation, it is a way of being in the world, and of experiencing their inner and outer life" (p. 30).

One example comes from Curator of European Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Andrea Bayer (Connections, n.d.) who offered an example of how art informed personal experience. When mourning both parents, Bayer turned to the history of art for clarity. In a video blog, Bayer reflected on Bobillet and Mosselman's (1453) *Mourner* and stated, "It was a completely inner experience for me, as if I had been enclosed in one of those great hoods, completely wrapped in my own grief" (Bayer, Connections, n.d.). Not only does this anecdote suggest the potential curative aspects of simply viewing art, but also affirms grief as a universal human experience that spans across time. Pointedly, the inner and outer experience of the 15th century artists who sculpted the work were still relevant centuries later and provided significant information to Bayer about present day experiences of grief. Artists, therefore, are suggested to hold a significant role in communicating the universal human experience of loss (Strauss, 2001).

Various artists across time have focused part or the full body of their work on personal loss experiences. Rembrandt, for instance, for whom "mourning…was a state of mind" depicted intense sadness over the loss of loved ones through his self-portraits (Bernstein, 2001, section Art: A Cry that Inspires and Heals). Painter, Marc Chagall focused much of his grief into his art after the loss of his wife; and Frida Kahlo, whose

losses were numerous (including her parents, several miscarriages, and her own physical

freedoms) personified death in much of her work (Wixom, 2012).

Another widely recognized artist known for his emphasis on death and mourning

was Edvard Munch. Many of his contributions to the art world were considered to be

"distilled into the strongest possible image of grief" (Prideaux, 2005, p. 102). His

paintings frequently dealt with the deaths of his sister and father; however, one of his

most famous works, *The Sick Child*, according to Prideaux (2005), was modeled after a

dying 12-year-old girl Munch happened across while "accompanying his father on

rounds" (p. 102) at the hospital. This image was later identified as the first Expressionist

masterpiece and less formally as the first of his 'soul paintings' (p.100). Consequently,

new interests are developing in how artists express grief and how their creative avenues

may influence or be influenced by personal and cultural realms (Wixom, 2012).

Contemporary Artists

Focusing on bereavement in contemporary visual art practices is the work of

artist, Alyssa Monks (2015). Concepts of the artist's mind (Hagman, 2010), the grief

experience, and changes to not only the aesthetic art product, but also the extreme

changes she observed in her painting process were presented. Monks' work offered visual

representations of the grief experience that was incurred after the loss of her mother. The

artist, who is best known for her large, photorealistic paintings of individuals in water

reflected on unintentional "emergent and transitional" (Hagman, 2010, p. 27) creative

processes. Although still technically proficient, the artist discussed relying more on the

emotional representations of the work stating, "I couldn't be controlling the paint like I

used to. It had to be about implying and suggesting, not explaining and describing" (Ted Talk, 2015).

Sanstrom (2012) also took a more individualized viewpoint, but extended the idea that artists can support universal applications of grief through personal emotive expression. A widened view of contemporary art through the work of five international artists was explored with exhibited work that included both public installations and private documentations of loss experiences from Sophie Calle and Christian Boltanski (both French), Callum Morton (Australian), Gordon Matter-Clark (American), and South American Dori Salcedo. All types of loss were considered significant, and the author suggested that visual representations of grief experienced from distinctive life events (such as divorce or the death of a loved one) can be communicated and perceived effectively through the arts. Choice of materials and size of space also mattered in that their selections were considered to publicly invite the viewer into explorations of collective certainty, or to increase awareness of personal perceptions regarding death.

More broadly, Sanstrom (2012) highlighted the personal losses incurred by these five artists as prompting their emotive expressions of grief and how the universal applications of loss were investigated through their work. The author also drew upon personal experiences of divorce in an effort to explain loss as a major component of trauma in our contemporary society. Through this doctoral work, Sanstrom unveiled personal studio research using 'the house' as a metaphor for the experienced loss. Visual art was offered as a meaninful way for humanity to not only grieve, but also to experience the inevitable shift that occurs when we are confronted with any type of personal loss and at any stage during bereavement.

Rituals of Mourning and Community Engagment.

Growing links between the arts and healing have led contemporary artists to explore methods of restorative practices through community-based art projects for the bereaved. One distinct way that present-day artists contribute to collective expressions of grief is through installation pieces and collaborative projects staged as memorials to the dead (Castle & Phillips, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 2017; Klorer, 2014; van Lil, 2012). These ceremonial contributions often utilize sacred objects or items of personal, social, or political meaning. For example, O'Connor-Foott (2015), deeply wounded by the loss of her daughter Laura who, at 32-weeks, died in utero, wrote in *The Irish Times* about her experiences regarding her participation in *The Amulet Project*. The exhibit, in collaboration with Irish artist, Marie Brett, aimed at offering a way for grieving parents to "acknowledge their loss through creative collaboration" (para. 15). O'Connor-Foott (2015) further wrote, "Through the process of considering an amulet and the challenges that came with that, I have reflected more on the place we allow Laura in our lives" (para. 16).

Grief rituals for healing and transformation were also explored by Castle and Phillips (2003) who regarded the use of symbolic activity (such as wakes) and objects (such as photographs of the deceased) in their research. The authors provided an explanation of grief rituals as activities that could assist with honoring the deceased and were most often performed after a funeral or years after the death had occurred. Rituals were perceived to allow the bereaved individual to feel a sense of connection to others as well as maintaining a connection to the deceased.

The researchers enlisted fifty participants (19 men, 28 women, and 3 who did not indicate gender) with the largest age range from 40 to 59 years (64%). Additionally, 46% identified as 'spiritual' but did not identify with any major religion. Participants were provided with the Bereavement Activities Questionnaire (BAQ) which used a Likert scale of 'very unhelpful' to 'extremely helpful' and attempted to answer the following hypotheses: (1) that adjustment to bereavement can be facilitated through appropriate postfuneral rituals, (2) that certain aspects are particularly important if the ritual is to be successful, and (3) that the performance of grief rituals can have significant benefits for the participant. Each of 22 ritual activities and 23 aspects of those rituals were scored and averaged to classify a system of ranking from least to most helpful in dealing with symptoms of grief.

Results suggested support for the first hypothesis with 98% of respondents ranking the list of activities as 'moderately helpful' with the highest ranking activity being ceremonial tribute to the deceased. With regard to the second hypothesis, 78% of respondents found the rituals to be 'very helpful' particularly if they felt safe and the activity was personally meaningful. The final hypothesis was tested using a Likert scale of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' with 76% of respondents agreeing to positive effects of the rituals they performed in response to their grief experiences. Lastly, 72% of respondents suggested future ritual activities and 94% agreed they would recommend grief rituals to others.

Interestingly, the lowest scoring elements were visiting the place where the bereaved's loved one died (2.91/5), having less intense feelings about the death of my loved one (3.88/5), and developed a greater sense of optimism (3.61/5); however, these

items were only suggested in the results to be slightly relevant. These vague omissions

are noteworthy because they suggest a link to prolonged grief and the possibility of

lingering grief symptoms (such as depression) over time.

Unfortunately, these researchers provided significantly biased representations of

their findings. Idealistically, characteristics of diversity and broader demographics would

have elicited a more comprehensive research design. And, although the researchers

identified several religious affiliations of the participants, a culturally diverse test

instrument may have provided a more substantial list of ritual activities and objects that

are important to bereavement practices across populations and faiths.

The restorative practices of creativey were explored by Kirkpatrick (2017)

through doctoral research. Using contemporary practices of art making, auto-

ethnographic writing, and participatory grief rituals, the study supposed that creativity

would afford a space for questioning the grief experience through interactions with the art

product, without the common expectations of finding answers or resolution. An approach

based in phenomenology was utilized in order to confront the social stigmas around

discussing death. This methodology also invited the reader to be part of developing a new

dialogue toward understanding grief and bereavement. In particular, the researcher

examined "grief and loss through ceremony and creativity as praxis rather than as

therapy" (p. 43). Using personal accounts of grief that were suggested to be rooted within

cultural frameworks offered movement between the specific and the collaborative

elements of the art. For this, the author applied personal art making responses (created

after the loss of a partner) as well as examined the works of eight contemporary artists.

Each artist was chosen for their various media explorations and collective responses to experiences of mourning.

Added to the art examinations were semi-structured interviews that were conducted with seven Northern European artists who were predominantly female and all of whom were White (Kirkpatrick, 2017). The participants were established by the researcher through three avenues including individuals who were 1) self-selected by approaching the researcher after a professional presentation, 2) researcher-identified due to working with themes of grief and loss in their own work, and 3) researcher-selected from published text or from having an accessible online presence. 'Ceremony and creativity' became the foundations on which the author postulated that artists could illuminate grief and loss experiences for others. Main topics generated and surveyed through the interviews included: 1) Conversation (which was examined between the artistic collaborations and interactions with self, in collaboration, and with audiences); 2) Time (as the lapse between loss and development of creative processes); 3) Writing and Making the Loss Differently; 4) Use of Repetition (through the art making process which was highlighted as a meditative action); 5) Placing Grief in a Specific Place and Transformation through Metaphor; 6) Effects and Affects of Making Work; and 7) Effects and Affects of Audience Response (which included the power of witnessing self and others).

Although Kirkpatrick (2017) attempted to expand data collection and analysis through an arts-based research design, the focus on White, Northern European participants suggested hierarchical structures and may inadvertently have limited the breadth of the study's potential. However, in sharp contrast to more commonly produced

quantitative research studies that follow equational paradigms (see, for example, Djelantik et al., 2017; Hasson-Ohayon et al., 2017; Schaal et al., 2014), Kirkpatrick's thesis offers a refreshing examination of everyday life events through research methods that are non-linear and that focus on women artists, who are often overlooked in the professional art world. This further provided a foundation for the strengths inherent in the work through which "practice has equal importance and validity to theoretical knowledge" (Kirkpatrick, 2017, p. 15). The inclusion of rich, descriptive creative and verbal depictions of personal loss experiences by renowned contemporary artists, local professional artists known by the author, and Kirkpatrick's (2017) own processes were additional strengths of the dissertation.

Lastly, art historian, van Lil (2012), whose research focus has been on contemporary and modern art, reviewed four existing artists and their work which drew from more traditional rituals of mourning. The author considered how Dario Robleto, Emily Prince, Marina Abramović, and Emily Jacir had reawakened old practices in the use of traditional art materials and ceremonies for observations associated with the bereaved. According to the author, the US-based art exhibitions provided a necessary experience to viewers living in contemporary Western societies where death has become institutionalized. The artists were suggested to be visionaries who had reinvented lost rituals of mourning specifically associated to wars which remain in our social fabric. Collectively, the artists in van Lil's review invited a resurgence of grief as a genre in the visual arts, and represented an overall need for a re-examination into Western concepts of grief and bereavement. The artists work stemmed not only from personal necessity, but also invited viewers to experience their own empathy and related feelings.

In some ways, professional artists are viewed as public figures who are able to show the general population how to feel about a vast collection of life events. Furthermore, the artists reviewed by the authors highlighted in this section invite an expansion of creative expressiveness through all societies as a way to develop a more universal relationship to the arts.

Grief, Art, and Sales

Of further significance to this literature review was a quantitative, historical study instituted by Graddy and Lieberman (2017). These authors attempted to understand whether creativity that was influenced by bereavement would increase or decrease sales for 48 well-known artists. The collection of artists chosen for the study were first examined by Galenson and Weinberg (2000, 2001) who reviewed auction records of famous American and French painters to explore the relationship between the age of the artists and the value of their paintings. Additional datasets included the death dates of the French artists' family members and friends which were compiled through review of the Grove Dictionary of Art (a scholarly encyclopedia of art) and the Benezit Dictionary of Artists (a resource listing art sales and artists' biographies) online materials which were accessed and cross-referenced by the authors through the subscription-based website Oxford Art Online ("About," n.d., para. 1). The American artists' family and friends' death dates were established using websites and library biographies with relevance determined by the authors. A secondary collection of dates was accessed online using sources of genealogy bringing the total number of death dates uncovered to 118 between all artists in the dataset.

Auction data from paintings sold between 1972 and 2014 presented over 12,000 paintings by 33 French Impressionist painters (including Chagall, Degas, Monet, Matisse, Miro, Picasso, and van Gogh) and 15 modern American Abstract Expressionist painters (including de Kooning, Kline, Neel, Pollack, and Rothko). A significant finding of the Graddy and Lieberman (2017) study was the decrease by approximately 50% in the value of paintings that were created during the year that followed the death of the artist's friend or relative. According to the researchers, these artists experienced less creativity during the year following the death of a loved one than at any other time in their careers. As such, paintings created during bereavement were less likely to sell at auction and were less likely to be included in museum collections (p. 8-9).

Because the entire Graddy and Lieberman (2017) study was linked to Western psychological parameters, a major limitation was the lack of social examinations on the impact of death and creativity across cultures. For example, how grief is perceived of or experienced within different cultures may have provided a significant variable that was not included. A second limitation was the overwhelming inclusion of only White, male painters who were creating during a period of time in art history when women and diversified artists were under-represented groups in the existing hierarchical structures of the patriarchal Fine Arts movements.

Conclusion

Neither grief nor creativity are linear experiences for the bereaved. Grief, in particular, is multilayered and can range in expression from natural emotional discomfort to more debilitating psychological and physical ailments that can become more severe over time (Bonanno, 2004; Jordan & Litz, 2014; Newsom et al., 2016; Ogińska-Bulik,

2015; Petruzzi et al., 2015; Schaal et al., 2014). The lost relationship, although changed, may still continue years or a lifetime after the death of a significant loved one (Bonanno, et al., 2008; Kessler, 2019; Castle & Phillips, 2003). One way to find meaning after loss is to depend on one's implicit knowledge and resiliency which may lead to an increased understanding of the self and one's worldview (Bonanno, 2004; Hagman, 2010; Harter, 2007; Kessler, 2019; Madison, 2013; Ogińska-Bulik, 2015; Percy, 2014). Through engagement with creative processes, it is suggested that bereaved individuals are afforded an opportunity to not only re-imagine their loss, but also to develop a new relationship with the deceased (Kirkpatrick, 2017; Percy, 2014; Haase & Johnston, 2012).

Although grief and bereavement have been prominent themes in the visual arts for centuries, artists have only recently been recognized in the research literature (Firestone, 2013; Graddy & Lieberman, 2017; Marder, 2018; Prideaux, 2005; Sanstrom, 2012; Stephenson, 2014; van Lil, 2012; Wixom, 2012). Furthermore, bereavement practices have become an unfamiliar experience in Westernized cultures leading to the decline of ritual and ceremony in societies where loss and individualism are maintained (Neimeyer, et al., 2014; van Lil, 2012). The various examinations of historical and present-day artists who express the pain and distress of grief in their artwork was suggested to allow others to connect viscerally to their own bereavement (van Lil, 2012). From the more traditional approaches such as painting and sculpture to large, contemporary installations, creative work evoked in artists and purveyors alike a complex layering of ways to cope with loss by experiencing their inner and outer worlds simultaneously (Hagman, 2010; O'Neill, 2011; van Lil, 2012).

Because most individuals long to have their stories shared, the research summarized in this literature review suggested creative activity to be an important process to engage resilient functioning (Bonanno, 2004; Jordan & Litz, 2014; Neimeyer, 2001). The healing aspects of art in all its forms bear witness to grief work as a restorative and communicative activity. Various contemporary artists have reawakened to old practices in the use of traditional art materials and grief ceremonies (Castle & Phillips, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 2017; van Lil, 2012). These ideologies invite opposition to more general views that grief is a private and internally constructed phenomenon. Therefore, an invitation to increase resiliency practices that include personal creative expression or experiencing the art expressions of others is sought.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD
Purpose of the Study

The research aimed to understand the lived experiences of exhibiting visual artists who had experienced a significant loss. Participants were self-identified professional artists who had exhibited any number of their two-dimensional, three-dimensional, or installation products to the public within the last five years, and who had engaged in visual art making after experiencing a personal loss from the death of a loved one. The focus of this phenomenological research was to understand the attitudes, feelings, and expressions of the artists and how each managed their grief, if at all, through the art making process.

Research Design

This research builds on a qualitative pilot study that explored how creative engagement could assist in navigating personal loss experiences of three professional art therapists (Arnold, 2019). The results of that study suggested both the grief process and the art making conducted by each art therapist was multidimensional, complex, and ongoing. Two assumptions of the pilot study which propelled the current research included how art making was used as a way to maintain a meaningful link with those who had died, and how each participant of the pilot study depicted a shift from familiar art tools and techniques to more suitable materials and methods that were used specifically during bereavement. Therefore, the present study explored the main question: How have exhibiting artists navigated personal grief experiences through their visual art practices? And a secondary question: Did grief influence the visual art practices historically held by the artist?

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board at Lesley University for this study, the researcher applied a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of bereaved artists who had experienced a significant loss due to the death of a loved one. This method highlighted each participant's personal and emotive perceptions of grief and allowed for the application of constructivist principles to include researcher bias of the phenomenon being studied (Polkinghorne, 1992). Three data sets were collected including 1) demographic data that was obtained using a self-report, 2) individual interviews, and 3) photographic images of artwork created by the artists after their loss experiences. This qualitative approach met the descriptive components of phenomenological research through the collection of embodied events as they related to the perceptions people carry of the world and how they know themselves and others within it (Moustakas, 1994).

Participant Selection

Interviewees were recruited using snowball and convenience sampling. In order to obtain a diverse group of working artists, an internet search using key terms including *artists of color*, *queeer artists*, and *diverse artists* was used. The search yielded various art museums, non-profit arts organizations, cultural organizations, and independent gallery and community arts spaces. Flyers (Appendix A) were attached to introductory emails (Appendix B) and sent to five of the identified arts organizations across the U.S. including one in Seattle, WA; one in Chicago, IL; two in Boston, MA; and one in Portland, ME. Additional recruitment was conducted by email distribution of flyers and invitations using the researcher's personal network of artists, as well as through word-of-mouth from personal and professional contacts.

Inclusion criteria required participants to (a) be at least 18 years of age, (b) be a self-identified artist who had exhibited their work in a public or private forum in the last five years, (c) have experienced a personal loss due to the death of a loved one during their professional career, (d) have engaged in art making after the loss, and (e) express interest in participating in a 30-60 minute interview to share their experiences and artwork. A total of eight (*N*=8) participants were selected and lived in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Louisiana in the United States, and Istanbul, Turkey. Several of them knew each other due to my request that any potential participants forward the participation flyer to any artists they knew who might also be interested. For instance, by sending the flyer to professional colleagues, I received two participants from Istanbul and one from Louisiana. The individual from Louisiana forwarded the flyer and encouraged an artist friend of hers to contact me. And after reaching out to an artist friend living in Pennsylvania, I was reminded of a mutual friend with whom I'd lost touch, but who also became a participant for the study.

Procedure

Potential participant names and contact information were obtained during initial communications. Of the thirteen respondents, five were omitted from the study. One experienced their loss less than two months prior to the start of the study, one had never exhibited their artwork in a public or private forum, one didn't follow through after initial contact was made, and two never made formal contact after stating interest through my personal and professional connections.

Once identified, those interested in participanting received an email inviting them to complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) for further consideration which

also included information on the type of loss experienced. Those who met all criteria and who agreed to participate received an invitation email (Appendix D) which included attachments of 1) an informed consent form (Appendix E), and 2) a consent to use and/or display art form (Appendix F). The art consent included a choice as to whether or not the participant preferred to remain anonymous, and two of the final eight participants chose this option.

After I received the completed consent forms, a separate meeting date and time was established for each interview at the convenience of the participants. Two participants were interviewed in their art studios, one was interviewed in their home, and interviews for the other five were conducted over Skype due to distance. To provide a measure of self-checking, each transcription was sent to participants for review. Half of the participants sent requests for edits while the other four did not respond.

Data Collection

Demographic information was obtained using a form (Appendix C) that allowed for the artists to self-identify regarding age, gender, and cultural background and to limit the researcher's use of dominant narratives (Hadley, 2013). Kvale's (1996) approach to narrative interviewing was applied to complete eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews that lasted between 25-70 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded using an iPhone 6s Plus, which was secured through researcher fingerprint and personal number code. The interview contained six open-ended questions (Appendix G) and began with participants sharing their professional identity as an artist and their views on grief in order for the researcher to develop a foundation for understanding the professional and cultural identity of each individual. Participants were further invited to discuss their personal loss

experience, how grief may have influenced their art making (if at all), and to present any artwork that was made during their bereavement. Lastly, each artist was offered an opportunity to include any closing thoughts or additional information that was important to their individual lived experience in order to cultivate "emergent properties" of the conversations (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 151).

Although only two participants chose to remain anonymous, all interview data have been coded with pseudonyms and any signatures on the photographed artwork have been obscured in order to maintain a level of confidentiality in this account. Participant pseudonyms, self-reported demographics, and broad terms distinguishing artistic processes and loss experiences are listed in Table 1.

Artwork

Visual art products that were created by each artist during their bereavement and prior to the date of the interview were either recorded digitally using an iPhone 6s Plus or images and videos were sent by the participant through email to the researcher. Several artist participants provided professional websites and other social media platforms (i.e. Facebook and Instagram) where digital photographs of their work were easily accessible and approved for download to use in this dissertation. Additionally, a few of the artists shared exhibition catalogues, retrospective books, or gallery postcards from previous art shows that included artwork created during their grief experiences. At least three art

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Age range	Gender	Media	Subject Matter	Most Recent Exhibit/Show	Loss type	Time since loss
Ellen	55-60	Female	Oil Paint	Landscape	Leverett Crafts and Arts	Four Deaths	Father (7 months) Aunt (4 years) Mother (5 years) Friend (6 years)
Alma	50-55	Female	Watercolor	Figurative	Somerville Manning	Father	17 years
Marc	70-75	Male	Pastel	Still Life	The National Gallery	Seven Deaths	Brother-in-law (3 months) Sister (6 months) Nephew (8 years) Mother (11 years) Father-in-law (17 years) Stepfather (21 years) Grandfather (26 years)
Ed	35-40	Male	Mixed Media	Non-objective "Innerness"	Gallery in Arnavutköy	Uncle (suicide)	4 years
Carrie	40-45	Female	Mixed Media	Figurative and Landscape	Private Studio (Istanbul)	Father	8 years
Anita	65-70	Female	Oil Paint	Representational	Taos Artist Workshop (NM)	Parents	Father (5 years) Mother (7 years)
Paula	75-80	Female	Oil Paint	Landscape	Visual Arts Club of Sun City	Husband	3 years
Charlotte	65-70	Female	Printmaking	Representational and Abstract	Arsenal Center for the Arts	Husband	8 years

products from each participant were highlighted and discussed during the interview process.

Ellen experienced four losses over a six year period including a close friend, a special aunt, and her mother. Described as the "most important" loss, her father died seven months prior to the interview, and was considered the most significant loss. After working as a graphic designer and focusing on raising her children for 15 years, Ellen returned to painting, rented a studio space and now works predominantly in acrylic paint on black canvas with landscapes and nature as the main subjects of her work.

Now in her mid-50's, Alma experienced the death of her father approximately 17 years ago. Even after this period of time, she identified him as a continuing inspiration in her artwork. She described her work as originating from feminist and art historian paradigms. Her figurative watercolor paintings portray historical women and incorporate mythology, nature, and personal biography.

From numerous losses throughout his career, Marc realized the deaths he experienced had directly set in motion five distinct pieces of art for him. Throughout the past 26 years, he recollected the passing of his grandfather, stepfather, father-in-law, mother, and nephew. His most recent losses included his sister and brother-in-law who passed within the six months prior to the interview. One way he tended to these losses was to include their names or initials as markings on the stone surfaces of his chalk pastel still life drawings.

Although Ed professed not to have experienced any losses that would impact his life in any negative way, he described the suicide of his uncle as "very dark." Now in his mid-30's, he doesn't believe he's had much grief throughout his life, but found the

experience with his uncle prompted the memory of his brother's suicide attempt in 1997. His artwork stems from what he described as an "innerness" through which he creates paintings and performance art.

Carrie's father died in 2011 from lung disease which she identified as a common diagnosis after being exposed to certain chemicals in the area where he worked. The influence of her father over almost 40 years of her life invited art and creativity as part of their relationship. His loss was a great challenge for her since he was an important figure to her. She described herself as a naïve artist who uses expressiveness as her main style of art-making. She used this style which incorporated bright colors and the use of thick brush strokes in her paintings that were made after her father's death. Currently, though, she has moved back to focus on her her more typical figurative sculptures.

A retired middle and high school art teacher, Anita lost her mother and father within two years of each other. She described using her art making as a catalyst for expressing the emotions that developed from her grief. Her Catholic upbringing first exposed her to the arts, and religion has been a consistent topic in her artwork since then. The oil paintings she created after their deaths were described as memorials to honor each of her parents.

Paula had been a practicing artist for close to 45 years before her husband unexpectedly passed away. Just three weeks after the onset of acute heart symptoms, and after 54 years of marriage, she had to remove him from life support. She described her art-making as an important part of her life and now, a necessary part of her grieving process. Mostly working in oil paint, Paula has created a large collection of landscapes, but has recently begun developing her skills in portraiture as well.

Bereavement was the main topic for Charlotte's solo show after the loss of her husband. Her work focused on the two and a half years of cancer treatments he experienced and her subsequent feelings of absence after he passed. Her main medium has been printmaking which includes drypoint, etching, photography, and photopolymer (a photo that is manipulated through computer programming to create a transparency that can be worked into an etching plate). She explained that her connection to the printmaking medium continues to develop as she discovers new ways to handle the materials.

Data Analysis

Conversations were documented using a third party professional who received recordings of each interview and created a transcription. From experiences during the pilot study, coding and organizing statements by hand proved to be more beneficial than using computer-assisted analysis. Additionally, Blair (2015) reinforced manual coding for its practicality, embodied appeal, and allowance for visual recall of particular quotations. Therefore, a manual approach to coding was applied to the transcriptions using techniques of condensation, categorization, narrative structuring, and interpretation as outlined by Kvale's (1996) method for qualitative data analysis.

Various structures were implemented in order to limit bias and understand the meaning of the interview texts from the perspective of the text. The first part of the process included listening to each recorded interview while reading along with its transcript. Two recordings were no longer accessible due to errors in file management and could only be reviewed through reading the interview text on its own. A secondary reading was conducted to identify (and mark-up using highlighter) any pertinent quotes

presented in the texts. The overall goal: to identify long statements that reflected the

participants' key concepts and related to the research topic. These statements were then

compressed into a few words in order to begin to identify themes and relevant ideas.

As outlined in Kvale's (1996) narrative structuring process, each review of the

texts attempted to capture the essence of the participants' meanings regarding their

interview statements. Although manual coding fit well into the structures of the pilot

study, it became a daunting task for the eight participant transcriptions in this research

model. Mainly, this was due to the varied meanings in language that were used by the

participants who lived in cultures and carried belief systems unfamiliar to this researcher.

Therefore, an organic and emergent data visualization process was implemented in

tandem with the text analysis that included drawing out the meaning units and arranging

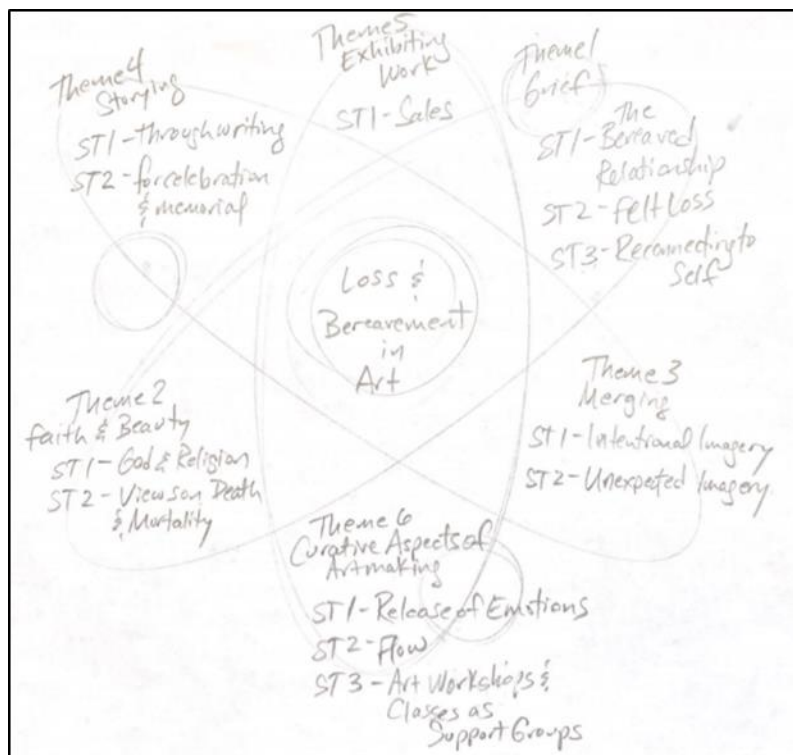them into visual representations. In an effort to "maintain the quality and trustworthiness

Figure 1

of the analysis" (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 11). Each iteration of text analysis was paired with a

drawing process until a final form was established (the seventh rendering is shown in

Figure 1 above).

From the drawing, it became evident that each theme had a partner theme that was

complementary to it. Interestingly, these paired themes visually resembled the common

image of an atom with "loss and bereavement in art" at the center representing the core

(or nucleus) of the research that linked all the themes together. This structure became the

basis for the six themes and 13 subthemes that were excavated from the participants

statements.

Researcher Bias

My own mother died in August, 2015 after turning 64 in June of that same year.

She endured approximately 18-months in treatment for a lung cancer diagnosis which

eventually metastasized into her brain; requiring surgery to relieve the built up pressure.

The weeks leading up to her death involved many falls which signified a quick and

severe decline of her physical abilities. Although she lived with me and my family and

was cared for through Hospice, I was her only child and I carried the bulk of the care

responsibilities. Ultimately she was moved to a nursing home for more consistent care

and passed away less than a week after her admission day.

For the purposes of reflexivity, several endeavors to bracket these personal

experiences of grief were carried out. I took detailed notes and kept a writing journal

during the process of initiating and completing the interviews. Additionally, and as part

of the self-checking process included under data collection, individual transcriptions were

sent to each participant for review. In order to limit bias that may have contributed to

preconceived notions related to the transcriptions and artwork collected, I also held bi-weekly and as needed supervision with my dissertation Chair.

It is important to note that my dissertation Chair had also experienced the loss of her 94-year-old mother, also on hospice, in September of the same year as my own loss. Although the supervisory relationship did not begin until approximately two years later, the recency of both of these losses are important to consider as potential bias in this research inquiry.

Ethical Considerations

A third party professional was obtained to transcribe audio from the interview and participants were informed verbally during the interview as well as in the informed consent (see Appendix E) of unintentional disclosure related to this type of service. Participants were also provided with their own interview transcriptions and follow up emails were used for clarification and verification of transcription edits and demographic data if there was any confusion on my part.

Additionally, during the interview process, each participant was requested to share at least three photographed creative expressions made prior to the interview and during their personal loss experience (see Appendix F for Release of Artwork form). Participants were informed of unintentional disclosure (verbally during the interview and within the informed consent) due to the limited anonymity of art since their work may be familiar to or searchable by the public.

Participants were provided with a list of grief support services within the informed consent form and were also encouraged to maintain contact as needed should any other thoughts or contributions to the study become available. Follow-up emails were

sent once the interviews and transcription reviews were compelted in an effort to provide

a closing to the research process. Participants were also informed that additional

supportive services would be made available upon request.

Chapter 4

RESULTS
Introduction

Six themes were uncovered amongst the interview transcriptions bridging art-making and grief which included: *experiencing grief; faith and beauty; merging; storying; exhibiting work; and curative aspects of art making.* Ryan and Bernard (2003) determined that subthemes are best established through "degrees of strength" that may be presented when comparing expressions in themes (p. 91). Therefore, 13 subthemes emerged through analysis of the transcriptions (See Table 2 below). The objective of reporting on these themes and subthemes is to provide a thick, descriptive narrative of the experience of the participant artists and how their grief may or may not have influenced their typical art-making practices.

Table 2

Theme	Subtheme(s)
Experiencing Grief	a. the bereaved relationship b. felt loss c. reconnecting to self
Faith and Beauty	a. God and religion b. views on death and mortality
Merging	a. intentional imagery b. unexpected imagery
Storying	a. through writing b. for celebration and memorial
Exhibiting Work	a. sales
Curative Aspects of Artmaking	a. release of emotions b. flow c. art workshops and classes as support groups

Theme 1: Experiencing Grief

Conceptualizations of grief were presented among all eight participants. Relevant to the participants' collective answers was that some had experienced loss that was

anticipated, while others had completely unexpected encounters regarding their loved

one's death. For instance, the sudden and irreparable changes to her husband's physical

health left Paula a widow within three weeks of the onset of his medical condition. She

described his death as so sudden that it "caught me off guard" and expressed her grief in

this way:

> When you love deeply, you're going to grieve deeply. I just don't know if there's
>
> such a thing as healing. I think it's more called coping. It's too painful to live with
>
> grief. It's more than I can deal with. You just have to plow through it…there's no
>
> way around the pain.

Conversely, although Ed also experienced a sudden and unexpected death after

the suicide of his uncle, he didn't regard this loss as being someone who had a major

impact on his life. He concluded that his views on grief felt very "unorthodox" to him.

However, Ed did suppose the experience of grief to be different depending on whether

"it's a chosen death or a natural" one.

Having lost both of her parents, Ellen described her grief differently for each of

them. For instance, the illness and passing of her mother was "unexpected and upsetting,"

whereas she felt her father had "a beautiful death." She remembered how she believed

her mother to be "in great pain" and that she wasn't ready to die. But, with her father, she

reflected:

> I feel sad for myself whenever I think of him not being here, but then whenever I
>
> think a little further, I feel kind of more relief and joy than grief.

For Anita, grief was described as not only "a paralyzing emotion" but also an

emotion (like all others) that needs to be shared. Connecting to what it means to share

themselves, both Carrie and Marc articulated how they used their art as an important expression of their individual grief. In particular, Carrie discussed that after the loss of her father, and "for a long time after his death" her art focused mainly on him and the family. In particular, Carrie's piece titled, "Fading Away, Fading Memory, Fading Memories" (Figure 2) was a direct result of "the nature of the painting process" which then became a representation of trying to remember someone. She described, "They don't go away exactly, but they fade away." Her words alluded to the idea of still being able to sense the lost loved one all around, "but you don't remember crystal clear."

Figure 2

Similarly, Marc discussed how grief continues to be a significant undercurrent in his still life pastels and a definite part of his artistic experience. He described "specific moments of loss" affecting his work in a direct way.

Overall, this opening theme gave the participants opportunity to not only examine their perceptions of grief as a construct, but also offered an invitation for them to engage

in conversation about their art-making as it related to their loss experience. Various responses to grief were shared including emotional pain, sadness, and joy sometimes affecting how the bereaved engaged in their respective creative practices.

Subtheme: The Bereaved Relationship

Out of the eight participants, four reflected on how at least one of their losses had been the most important person in their lives. Although Ellen focused on the most recent death of her father during the interview, she touched briefly on the bereaved relationship she also carried of her "special Auntie." She described this individual as "one of my closest friends—a mental comrade," and found that although she had tried to make art after her death, she "couldn't get anything towards what I wanted."

Alma echoed this feeling in that she and her father had similar personalities which made them have "a strong connection" because they were so much alike. However, she was able to incorporate his essence into her work quite purposefully. One artwork she reflected on during the interview, titled, "Judith and Flora" (Figure 3) was one of two easel paintings[1] she was working on the year after her father died. She remarked that finishing the image was a challenge in that the background remained a basic black, but "needed something."

Alma's signature work blends autobiography with the historical women painters she portrays. In this image, she is portrayed as the Dutch painter, Judith Leyster. However, in order to feel settled about the painting's composition, Alma added the

---

1. Easel paintings in this case refers to something produced for sale or exhibiting to the public.

element of an "Apostle spoon" which were also popular during the time period and which added an indirect reference to her father. The red ribbon significant to the bloodline that they share.

Figure 3

Equally, Carrie's father "was an important figure" in her life. She struggled with still needing him, but not being able to ask him questions anymore and understood that it had taken her several years after his death to truly understand her feelings about their relationship. Attempts to understand the bereaved relationship were also experienced by Charlotte who acknowledged having "tons of loss growing up," and viewed these events as what "defined who I am in lots of ways." She characterized her husband as "probably my biggest art champion," and made it a point that she was able to be by his side when he passed. She shared several printmaking images she had created after his death and

recognized that she had "said goodbye to him" through these art products which were created prior to and after his death.

However, she shared that her mother's death didn't feel as real because she didn't have the same opportunity to witness her passing. She realized, "It's like it's not really real to me that she's gone." One example she shared was soon after having a new grandson, she realized she couldn't call her mom to share in this experience. Charlotte stated:

> I was with my husband when he died and I was with my dad when he died.
>
> Helped both of them through the passing. I was not with my mother, and ever
>
> since this little boy's been born, I keep going to call her…If you're not there it's
>
> really hard to make it real.

Further, Charlotte found it "interesting" that she held intentions of "doing all this work around (her parents') deaths," and wished to go back to finish those ideas. The key point for her seemed that she needed to have witnessed death in order to be more accepting of any loss.

These four participants reflected on how the individual with whom they most connected in life also could not be easily forgotten. This seemed to highlight that, through death, part of how they understood themselves was also lost.

Subtheme: Felt Loss

A significant part of the grieving process was the deep sense of loss that was felt by several participants. Each artist that shared their loss through emotional and physical terms often referenced these feelings to be at an extreme degree. Alma described how she

experienced the year after her father died as, "I was basically mourning, really, really sad and depressed."

In the same way, Carrie indicated how much her own father's death was "a huge void in my life," and Paula felt like "such a mess." She recounted feeling "frail and weakened" by her husband's death. Also, Ellen described feeling "nauseaus" each time she thought about her mother's illness and her "unexpected" death. Added to three other losses over a six year span, she felt that "everything was heavier" and similar to feeling like she was "under a wet blanket" for years (particularly after the loss of her mother).

The unexpected death of Marc's mother also led to "extremely powerful" feelings of loss. This experience was spoken about as the impetus for "Breach" (Figure 4) which he described as "One of the darkest images I've made." He acknowledged this image as

Figure 4

one that was deeply connected to how he was experiencing her loss. Marc also identified more recent losses that caused him to experience sudden "plunge(s) into melancholy with no apparent provocation." He described feelings of "depression" and that the death of his sister was unexpected and the most difficult among the losses he's experienced thus far in his family.

Opposing emotions of resentment and indifference were also identified by the participants. For instance, Anita recognized feeling "extremely angry" and "furious" as she recalled the death of her mother during the interview. Describing herself as an "empath," Anita remembered the conundrum her mother communicated before she died in her arms:

> She knew she was dying. I would find her sitting in the chair just in thought and
>
> she goes, 'what's it all about?' And so she dies, and she keeps looking at me…

In contrast, Ed's recollection of his uncle's suicide was less extreme. Instead he expressed a more objective opinion about this kind of outcome as "a very tough way to go. It's not natural process. It's something very dark."

These examples confirm that the bereaved relationship does not hold true to one pattern of experience for all participants. Instead, a multitude of perspectives are possible and include a range of emotions for each individual.

Subtheme: Reconnecting to Self

The physical sense that loss brings can sometimes also lead to a disengagement with the self that manifests in emotional and/or physical ways. However, a couple of the participants introduced concepts of 'rebuilding' and 'reclaiming' after the felt loss of their bereaved relationship was realized. Quite poignantly, Charlotte realized about her

husband's death, "I don't have to be dead anymore. I don't have to define myself by this."

Paula was in a place of limbo and felt her life was "more chaotic" after the death of her husband. She recognized the joy she had always held was "suddenly gone," and was desperate to find it again. Remembering how she attempted to rebuild her joy, she reconnected to her art to find the joy she didn't even realize she'd lost. Art-making was especially relevant in her search to re-envision herself. She further described:

> I have to go with the living, I cannot live with the dead. You can't live with pain indefinitely, you know? It's too painful. So the art takes away pain. (Joy) is at the end of my paintbrush.

Paula described the first painting (Figure 5) she created in a class she attended just a couple of months after her husband's death. While attempting to paint a picture of "the California coastline" from a low quality newspaper clipping as reference, she stated, "I

Figure 5

couldn't really even do anything. I was just so upset." However, after sharing her grief with the class instructor, she was finally able to appreciate her imaginative abilities to create what she felt was "a masterpiece."

For each of the widows highlighted in this section, the loss of their husbands seemed to develop a sense of self-loss as if part of each of them died along with their spouse. Although each disconnected from their own feelings of aliveness, ultimately they were also able to find their way back to themselves through art-making.

Theme 2: Faith and Beauty

Several participants noted strong connections to their spiritual beliefs as well as to their use of objects from the natural world in their artwork. Although not an exhaustive list, a few examples of nature used in their collective imagery included seed pods, trees, ripened fruit, vines, oceans, plants, human cells, and insects. Alma expressed her love of nature and stated that her work was "rooted in the natural world" because of her tendency to include flowers or butterflies in many of her pieces.

In general, art was "about beauty" for Ellen and something that bound her to nature. She named "plant life and flowers" as the main focus in many of her oil paintings. In fact, during the interview, we sat in front of a wall being used as an easel where three canvases were in progress with poppies as the subject matter (see Figure 6 for an example of one of the finished products). The concept of spirituality surfaced for Ellen as well while she talked about the feeling of "emotional bliss" she often experienced whenever she was in her studio. She referred to this space as "a spiritual center" where she can "be completely free and exposed" without life's distractions.

Figure 6

Charlotte also described an important link to her spiritual belifs when she discovered that her own creativity was returning after the loss of her husband. For this, she discussed being in a trance state where "I just kept making the infinity symbol." Making art, she felt, was "underutilized" and the experience of moving her arm as a way to reference infinity and balance seemed to hold deep meaning for her as she felt led toward understanding her art and her grief.

Indicative of the combination of faith and beauty is The Golden Mean—a mathematical ratio used in geometry, architecture, and art. It is represented by the Greek letter 'Phi' and has been used for hundreds of years by artists in order to create aesthetically pleasing work (beauty). Quite often it denotes our human connection to the Devine (faith). This information is included here since two of the participants referenced this concept when talking about their images. In particular, Anita referenced her use of "the golden mean concept of eternity" in the sunflower image she created after her

mother passed away and in the background of the pipe image she created after her father's death. Marc regarded this ratio as an important way of structuring all of his images and described its use as "part of my visual thinking" since learning about it.

Common topics often found in art such as nature, spirituality, the Golden Ratio, and religion were discussed by six of the eight participants. Threads of faith and beauty began in this main theme and weaved through the following subthemes.

Subtheme: God and Religion

Some of the most common topics used and discussed in art are that of God and religion. In fact, Ed commented on this construct by sharing his beliefs that artists only focus on certain subject matter, one of them being religion. Although some participants mentioned "God" and "Goddess" interchangeably, and others concentrated on Christian or Jewish faiths, Ed described the more esoteric practices of Theta Healing. This was described as a meditative practice that seeks to change brain patterns using one's natural intuition toward a better understand of how an individual's overall health is affected by their emotional energies.

Alternatively, Anita commented that her passion for art "stemmed from growing up Catholic" and particularly because of the art and stained glass windows that were in the church. Figure 7 is a detail of the painting she completed after feeling so much resentment about her mother's death. Although the image doesn't reflect anger in its use of color or subject matter, Anita shared that the work, instead, came after feeling "so angry" about the pain of death. In this image, she wrote in shorthand on the canvas in an

effort to compromise and alleviate these visceral feelings:

> I said, 'look, I'll forgive you, if you forgive me.' How do you come to terms with
>
> God? It didn't make sense that there was all this pain.

Figure 7

Continuing to create visual representations of her grief, Anita also painted a second

image that related to the loss of her mother (Figure 8). This painting was described as a

rendition of the Pantocrator; meaning "Almighty" (a specific depiction of Christ typically

found in Christian iconography). This was an image Anita both admired and feared as a

child that was painted on the ceiling of the Byzantine Cathedral she frequented with her

family. She mentioned, "I burned this painting that had taken me years. But it was kind of like a cleansing."

Figure 8

Inferences to Christianity were also displayed in Alma's interview and the paintings she created after her father's death. For instance, the theme of rebirth through the addition of butterflies in her work was noted as having "a religious connotation" simultaneously referencing "the resurrection" and symbolizing her father. In fact, Alma listed religion as a main theme throughout her previous series of paintings as well as the more recently completed series of nuns. Alma and Ellen both remarked on their connection to nature and the incorporation of natural elements in their artwork. However, Ellen delineated her

connection to nature as more of a spiritual association to dogma rather than to any particular religion. Instead, she described moving through the world and witnessing "a sunset or a tree or some flowers" or a particularly beautiful landscape or how a natural element might be lit up by the sun—"that's what feels to me like God or religion."

Devotion to a more non-denominational conviction was also represented by Paula who felt she was "pushed toward the art because of my faith," but didn't identify belonging to any particular religious sect. She identified painting as the source of her joy and her "path to God." Her desire to make art was something that she couldn't live without and she detailed a feeling of divine intervention with art-making shortly after her husband passed away. For example, during the art class she was taking a few months after her husband died, she described painting with "all emotion," and sensing that "a hand was guiding me." In this way, although Paula was pleased with the final product of her work, this example of painting also led her to feel she was being guided "toward healing."

Perceptions of God are often associated with concepts of an afterlife. During the interviews, Paula and Carrie both described painting their representations of a "heaven" For Paula, figure 9 was described as a sunset she came across while driving around in an effort to cheer herself up. The landscape she viewed was believed to be "a gift from God" and an attempt by her husband to "show me a bit of heaven." The painting was a visual rendering of that moment and an effort to capture and remember the beauty she saw and felt that day.

Figure 9

For Carrie; however, her painting titled, "Journey of My Father to Heaven" (Figure 10) was more conceptual and denoted "spirals" as pathways regarding her father's ascension into heaven. Like Paula, the making of this image and the final product provided Carrie with an emotional link to her lost loved one. It was identified as the first painting after her father's death and "the starting point" for the spiral element that became an important part of her future paintings about her father.

Lastly, Marc explored his beliefs about an afterlife and how darkness and light inform his pastels. He described the darkness in his work as "the life that happened before we were born…and the darkness we go into" after death. Although, he stated his belief in an afterlife as "a continuing," he also realized this belief doesn't necessarily "fit with any descriptions of heaven that I've heard even in the Episcopal Church" of which he is a member.

God and religion have been common subjects in art for centuries. The examples listed in this subtheme demonstrate the individuality of each artist's perceptions not only

of their beliefs, but also how they depicted those beliefs in their artwork. For instance, some artists chose subjects for their compositions that distinctly represented elements of their religion, while others worked in metaphor using more conceptual elements.

Figure 10

Subtheme: Views on Death and Mortality

This subtheme of faith and beauty is captured by the participants in regards to how they view death either in general or through their own mortality. Ed's theory on death was described as "a change of planes" and "a shift at shape." Conversely, Marc emphasized being "stuck" in this life and it's "constantly ending." He further contemplated how he often thinks about death, but that he thinks about his own mortality even more.

Referring to his work titled, "Mi Sol Fa" (Figure 11) which was being developed during the last months of his mother's life, Marc explained that the image wasn't initially

about her. However, as he incorporated initials of family and friends who had died over the last several years, his mother's initial became the "most prominent." Although he pointed out that the relationship he held with his mother in life was not as strong as he would have liked, he realized in this image that her initials also became "part of the cropped phrase: Amor Vincit Omnas (love conquers all)."

Figure 11

Much like how Paula's and Carrie's paintings provided a continual connection to their

bereaved relationships in the previous subtheme, by adding names and initials into his

own artwork, Marc recognized he could still hold these important people in his life.

Pointing to the many references in her art, Alma realized she'd always been

fascinated by death. She suggested the art-making was her way of dealing with her

curiosity as well as her fears surrounding death and that her artwork was her way of

"working through" the uncertainties of life. One example in her collection was a piece

titled, "Freeing the Frida in Me" (Figure 12) which she equated to her interests in death

and mortality which, for her, paralleled Frida Kahlo's obsession with death. Kahlo's

losses and physical pain became the impetus for this particular painting so she could

"deal with" the death of her father as well as her own mortality and future lifeline. She

described:

At the top it says, 'On the Day of the Dead I am the painter Frida Kahlo'…So I

just thought that, you know, I needed to deal with (death) somehow in the

painting. So she's actually holding a large candied skull that has 'Frida' on it.

Additionally, Alma's work had in the past been equated to Kahlo's in her use of

symbolism and theme. Therefore, in this piece, the addition of a mourning dove,

butterflies, flowers and ribbon were purposely meant to reflect similar symbolism that

"Frida would do." Equally, Kahlo often included what she was thinking about into her

paintings by adding images to her forehead. Mirroring this, Alma included a "Frida

pupa" to represent a wish for a second child. She concluded:

I chose Frida because of this comparison that people kept making…but I think I

also chose her to paint at this particular time because my dad had just died.
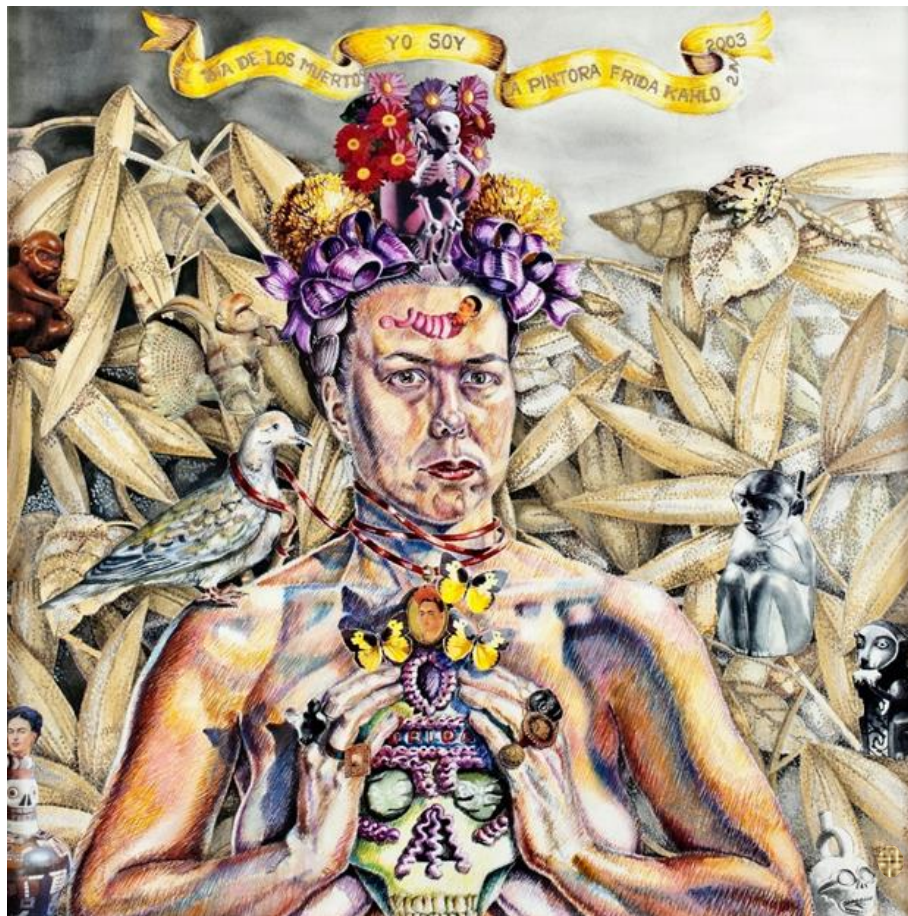
Figure 12

Death and mortality remained common themes found in the participant's artwork and interview conversations. Charlotte portrayed a sense of death in a series of etchings (see Figures 13 and 14) she completed after her husband's death. Like Alma, the visual elements held metaphor that couldn't be easily determined. She reflected:

> They were… rooms, but something was obscure. There was like a hospital bed and knitting left undone. Or a kitchen with a broken glass in it. It was just like… how life kind of comes to an end.

Figure 13   Figure 14

The basic context of this subtheme highlights not only the theories on death that were held by the artists, but also the frequency of symbolism and the theme of death and mortality in their artwork. Each of the artists whose work was influenced profoundly by the personal losses they endured also introduced common themes of life and death of which all of humanity are a part. This offered their viewers an invitation to consider their own viewpoints, uncertainties, and losses surrounding the concept of dying.

Theme 3: Merging

This theme focuses on the amalgamation of subconscious and conscious information that arose in the artwork overlapping with the participants' lived experiences. Hindsight and personal understanding were identified by Carrie through her being able to look back at her sketches which were made with little to no planning. She believed these drawings held deeper understandings once she brought them into her conscious thinking.

Alma termed this movement between subconscious delivery and conscious reflection as 'merging' which referenced an overlap of these constructs. For example, she identified her unconscious connection to certain figures and the objects she selected for her work. She explained how this connection then informed her autobiographic imagery further:

> So there's this merging (and) that's just me trying to understand what the subject
>
> was maybe going through at a particular time in their life and then probably
>
> cathartically helping me understand what I'm going through.

For Alma, a sense of hindsight was illuminated as she concluded, "I wasn't able to really say that or see that until afterwards." Fundamentally, the experience of feeling and understanding seemed to lead both Carrie and Alma to a richer, more conscious understanding of themselves.

Where Alma's and Carrie's experiences blended their subject matter and life circumstances almost equally as they moved back-and-forth between them, Ed identified his subconscious as being at the forefront of his art-making. He defined his art process as a "type of channeling" that included "experimental technique(s)." Figures 15 and 16 are a part of his "Decalcomania Series" which stems from surrealist art and involves paint that is pressed between two surfaces.

Figure 15   Figure 16

Although the more intuitive practice of art-making described by Ed could be viewed as less intentional, it can also be said to yield gratifying conscious results.

Lastly, and from a more theoretical basis, Marc accounted for "a felt sense" that is merged with "evaluative judgement" in the work that he both produces and views. The felt sense was described as not only his first response in art-making, but one that is also continuous; eventually allowing movement into the external realm of language and informative of how he evaluates work on its aesthetic level.

Each of these participants reflected in this theme referred to a merging of subconscious material through connecting, understanding, listening, or sensing that eventually led to a conscious art product. The inner realm of feelings, systems of hindsight, and each participant's external creativity were viewed as overlapping events that manifested in their respective creative products.

Subtheme: Intentional Imagery

A few of the participants reflected on a preplanned way of art-making that was directly linked to their experiences of loss. Often, these images were referred to as something "I set out to do," or "the grief affected the work…directly" in which symbolism was the most commonly utilized principle. For instance, Alma created "conscious reference(s)" to her dad through her inclusion of certain elements in her work. Butterflies, for example, were about the continuation of "life and rebirth," red ribbon represented the family "blood line," vines denoted "the connectors" that linked her to her father, and metaphorically, the symbol of her son equated to his being a light source in their lives as a family.

Particular symbols and imagery were created by Carrie as well. She explained "so many artwork about my father." These "sentimental" images focused on his life's wishes—such as his love for the sea and photography. They included rowboats,

lighthouses, spirals, and cameras. She recalled him often saying he would have done

many of the activities she portrayed in her images of him if he were in better health.

Perhaps the symbol that defined him the most was:

>A huge tree with a swing. This mostly represents my father; supporting, trustable
>
>figure. So it's like I can carry you, I can give you joy. It's kind of like that.

>Direct symbolism could also be found in the imagery of Anita who used the

sunflower as a representation of her mother; whereas, "When Dad died, he was a

professor, (so) his symbol was his pipe" (see Figure 17). Additional symbols of sweet

potatoes referenced the research her father did of several varieties of vegetables

developed during his professional work.

Figure 17

Intentional imagery was also described by Charlotte in a printmaking series she completed after her husband died from lung cancer. The images below incorporated representational objects of cancer cells and normal cells in a symbolic way rather than metaphorically. Because her husband was a public defender she titled them "Guilty" (Figure 18) and "Not Guilty (Figure 19) and commented that her work often contained a "little whimsy."
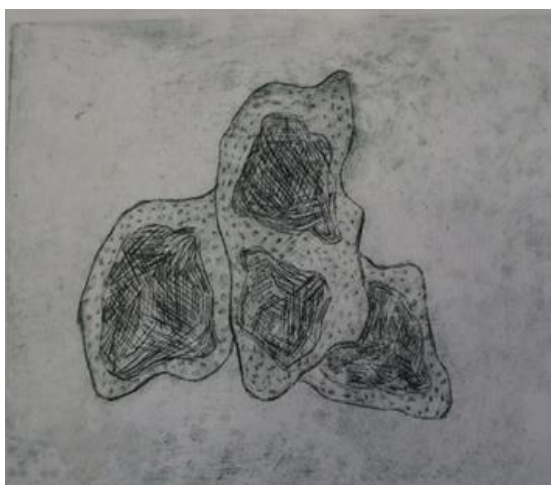
Figure 18
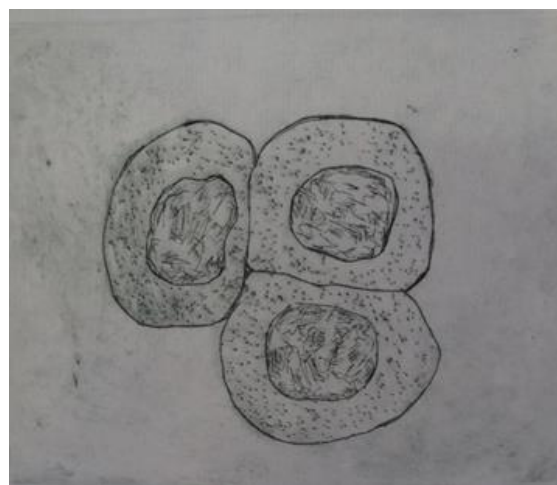
Figure 19

Whether literal or metaphoric, each of the artists included in this subtheme used objects in their imagery as representations of their lost loved one or of their experiences and perceptions of them. A continuum of intentional art-making was formed in which one end signified the impossibility of capturing the bereaved and the other end allowed for free flowing symbolic context.

Subtheme: Unexpected Imagery

If intentional imagery is one side of the coin, then unexpected imagery is the other. Quite often, the participants who described unplanned imagery also identified changes in their art either in the observable content or how their images were organized. For instance, after her father died of lung issues, Carrie's art "shifted in different ways"

in that they focused more on the wishes her dad carried in life and the talents he held

rather than her typical imagery of strong women. Her work also differed in media

selection in that she often used painting rather than sculptural materials to create the

images that focused on her father.

Although Alma often used herself as a model in her paintings, most of her figures

were described as not being associated to her in any way. However, she realized a change

in this process after painting an image of herself that also included a figure of her father

soon after his death. She interpreted the addition of her personal identity in the image as

"it wasn't intentional, but now it seems so obvious." Consistent with the main theme,

Alma reflected on these experiences of hindsight which provided an opportunity for her

to more fully understand how she was dealing with the loss of her father and what that

meant to character.

A series created by Ellen further represents this subtheme. After poppies became

a central theme in her paintings just several months after her father passed away (see

Figure 20 for an example), it only recently made sense to her that these images were a

direct link to calling her father 'Poppy.' She shared:

> And I went and painted like a whole wall of poppies. I didn't even think about it
>
> until I thought about talking to you. So that's a little interesting. They're not out
>
> of context with the fact that I've been painting flowers and botanical subjects,
>
> but…this is more than I usually ever paint of one subject.

Figure 20

Perhaps the most poignant example linked to this subtheme; however, are Marc's descriptions of how his work shifted in multiple ways over time. He explained that historically his chalk pastels have been autobiographical both "indirectly metaphorically (and) how specific moments of loss" more directly affected his work. Indirect imagery included the incorporation of initials onto the stone surfaces portrayed in his drawings. And directly through the grief he experienced; for example, with his mother's death and the image titled, "Breach" (as examined in the subtheme of felt loss). Furthermore, Marc recognized that some of his work shifted and formed through "an additive process."

One example of this was with an image titled, "Stele" (Figure 21) which he identified as the first time he created work in this long format. He described feeling unclear that the image was about his father-in-law at all although the idea for it came directly from his funeral. He explained:

> Almost immediately thereafter, the image for the work 'Stele' came up into my mind. This tall thin thing. Totally different format from anything I'd ever done before.

Marc further described how the image, as it was forming, wasn't clear that it would be about his father-in-law or any related sense of loss he was feeling about him. However, after working on the image and allowing this additive process to "take over," the image was able to fully emerge as was his understanding of it.

A more recent unexpected change to his artwork occurred for Marc after both his sister and brother-in-law died within a few months of one another. Of particular note was his feeling "a little worry" about how these new losses might affect his work. In particular, he noted another visible change to the format of his work that had been occurring over
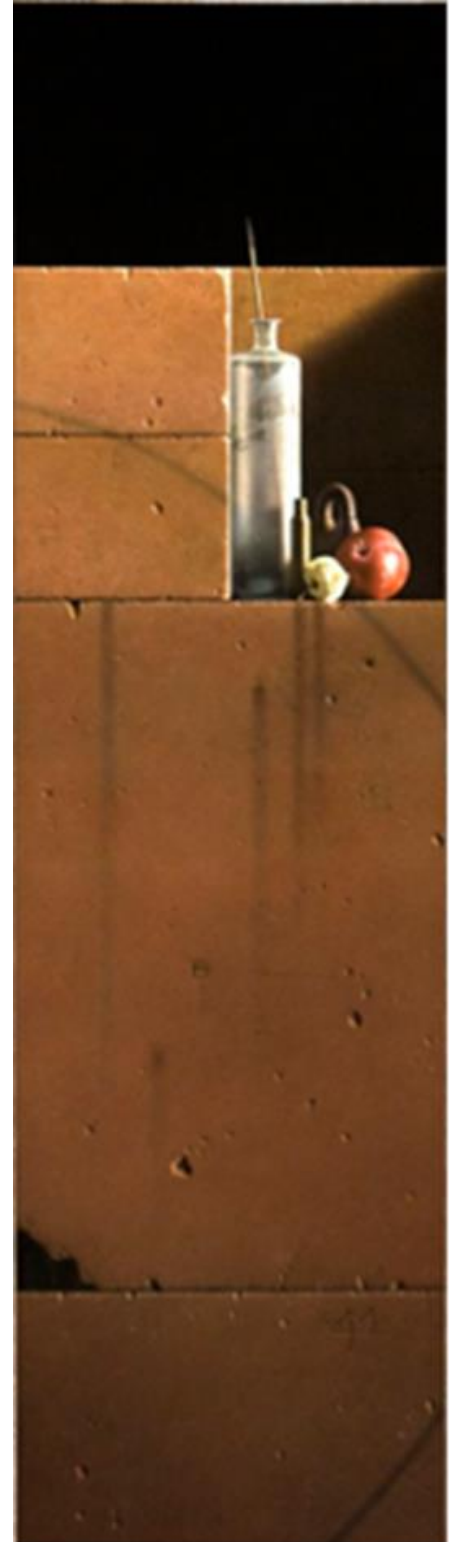

Figure 21

the last six months since their passing. He characterized "two very small pieces" that were beginning to develop in his journal including "a different structure for each (and) different meanings for me, too." He regarded that any meanings in his work take time to understand, but that the smaller sizes were again atypical of his standard formatting for art products.

Overall, the artwork of the participants covered in this subtheme reflected on how specific moments of grief shifted the ways their art-making was experienced. These influences on process and product raise considerations of how emotions might sometimes direct creativity as well as the importance of hindsight to find clarity when sought.

Theme 4: Storying

Art-making included how the art products were viewed as forums for how the artists told their stories. Many of the participants described either purposefully using their art to share a particular story or depicting imagery that offers the viewer an opportunity to tell their own. Often times, more personal stories were represented in the artwork, and sometimes the artwork reflected stories heard on the news. For instance, Anita typically used her art to portray environmental events such as the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill that harmed wildlife. This carried through in the paintings created after the loss of her parents. She described her paintings as a way to "develop a composition…a story."

Carrie's story-making more closely aligned with how the viewer engaged with her artwork. Particularly, although she labeled her general style of paintings and sculptures as "women's stories," she discussed some of her work (as previously seen in Figure 10) being difficult to understand by some due to their sentimentality. Furthermore, she

viewed that work without sentimental appeal allowed viewers to put their own feelings into her images allowing them to "rewrite the story" to suit their own experiences.

For Charlotte, her experience with storying was twofold. Although she found it difficult while experiencing her own grief to "listen to other people's stories," the art allowed her to get personal and tell her story in a creative way. She also reflected her hope that "it would resonate with other people." For example, the art created after her husband died was formed into "a solo show about cancer, loss, grief, and the beginning of recovery" and resembled the telling of her personal story. Her parents died a few years
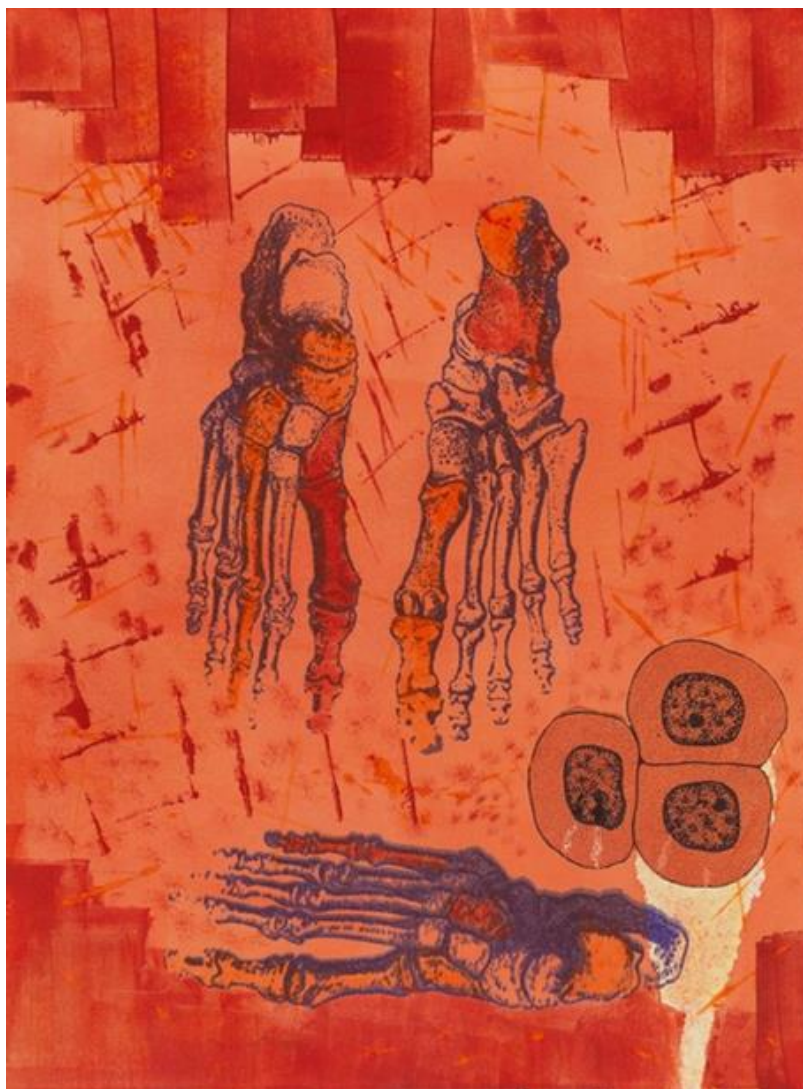

Figure 22

later and she considered creating similar work regarding their deaths and "stories." A final relevant link to storying, was Charlotte's use of particular mediums that allowed her stories to unfold through layering of materials and artistic processes. Figure 22 is an image from her solo show that used this layering process, and was described as, "you might not even see the layers, but they inform what's going on."

Storying about their experiences was a strong subject for three of the eight participants and offered each a distinct way to connect to others through their creativity. They perceived this connection to be a meaningful way to express their grief, be understood, or to allow their art to be a catalyst for others to express or understand themselves.

Subtheme: Through Writing

Storying also meant sharing their thoughts in written form whether that meant embedded within the artwork or in some form of journaling or writing poetry. For this, Anita used "shorthand" in both of the images she created after the death of each of her parents. For her father, she incorporated shorthand writing into the artwork (as previously seen in Figure 17) of "a paper that he had given at" a convention when she was a child. And, for the sunflower image (see Figure 7 previously reviewed) she created for her mother, she utilized this same writing style to add a dialogue surrounding her faith.

Frequently, writing was used in place of talking about grief which became too overwhelming at times. Charlotte described "a long time of just feeling," and moved to writing after sensing that her friends "didn't get it on a certain level." Along with her printmaking media, she also wrote poetry. Other examples of this subtheme included journaling and writing essays which were described as another form of art by Paula.

Along with writing several essays that were posted to her Facebook account and shared

with friends, she also completed a chronological journal about her car trips, visits with

friends and family, and paintings she developed in the few years after her husband's

death. Likewise, Marc considered that with his journaling he had the opportunities to

understand and challenge himself in different ways. He described:

My journal work certainly is something that is at the growing edge of my little

life. (Crying and) finding the words; finding the right words, the words that really

hit the heart. That's what really tends to pull me forward.

Common styles of writing included poetry, journaling, and essays under this

subtheme. Additionally, preserving their thoughts on social media platforms or directly

onto the artwork became important aspects of healing identified by several of the

participants.

Subtheme: For Celebration and Memorial

Participants determined that some of the art that was made in reference to their

bereaved loved one was often created for celebratory or memorial purposes. Ideas of

remembering "important" and "wonderful" people, or "loving little memories" that could

replace the overwhelming feelings of grief were expressed. Artwork was termed as

"memoire pieces" or "celebratory" and were hung within homes, given away, or

exhibited.

A natural overlap of both celebratory and memorial material was identified by

Alma in her companion pieces "Judith and Flora" (as seen in Figure 3) and "Freeing the

Frida in Me" (as seen in Figure 12). She shared a more "deliberate" process representing

the "somber side of death" in Figure 3; whereas, although accidental, Figure 12 depicted

a "celebratory way of seeing" death. Overall, both paintings "kind of morphed into what I call memorials or mourning pieces basically to my dad." Another one of her images, the "John Window" (Figure 23) carried these two concepts simultaneously. It not only acted as a celebratory tribute to her father, but also memorialized him in name and imagery.

Figure 23

Holding onto artwork (as opposed to selling the pieces) and hanging them around their studios, homes, or gallery walls was part of these artists memorializing their relationships with their lost loved ones. Perhaps this helped to keep the departed as close to physical form as possible.

Theme 5: Exhibiting Work

An interesting theme that surfaced in the transcriptions included how the study's participants viewed their art products in regard to their patrons. Under this theme, the artists revealed a desire that their art products were also interesting to others and "contributed" something to the world. For instance, Carrie identified some the work she created that related to her father as images "not everybody could understand" including the purveyors of the galleries to which she had applied. Eventually, she chose to use her own art studio as a public space to show this more personal and "sentimental" work. She concluded that "people don't like sentimental (art). They just want to see happy stuff."

Similarly, while recounting preparations for the solo show that focused on the illness and death of her husband, Charlotte identified "painful prints" that she chose not to include in the entirety of the show because "people would be too offended by them." They were further described as "edgy" and not imagery everyone could understand.

Following these two artists' perspectives, Marc's "pretty strict standards for art-making" established for him a sense of responsibility with his art products. He described the importance of making sure his work can become "a part of somebody else's life and not just to satisfy me." He considered the possibilities of his work becoming too personal or too dark which might deter people from responding to it.

Although grief was a catalyst for the artists featured in this theme, exhibiting their work in various venues from national museums to independent galleries and to in-studio shows were an important driving force for the kind of images that were not just created, but also put on display for others to view.

Subtheme: Sales

Exhibiting to audiences and the idea of making art for others to view included a relevant subtheme of selling the artwork. Several artists commented on certain images that either went unpurchased or were too personal to even attempt to sell. As in the previous subtheme, Carrie had experienced how differently patrons and gallery owners responded to her artwork dependent on its subject matter or how she used the materials. She speculated that art that was emotionally "too connected" to her was not always something others wanted to buy. Conversely, there were paintings that she wouldn't even consider putting up for sale in the first place. One image in particular, "Journey of My Father to Heaven" (as reviewed previously in Figure 10) was identified as an image that

Figure 24

many people were interested in purchasing; however, Carrie considered this image to be a piece that "belongs to me." She reflected on it as being the first of many she created after her father passed and determined about it: "I can't sell." On the contrary, "Golden Voyage" (Figure 24) was considered easy to part with and ready to sell. For, although the image had a similar compositional structure and meaning, it didn't hold the same emotional value for her. Interestingly, Carrie found that a painting that was considered to be more "sentimental" was one exception that contradicted her overall experiences.

While Alma considered most of her paintings to be work meant for exhibiting and selling, one particular painting challenged this notion. Figure 25 was an image that she pulled out during the interview that had been stored along the wall of her studio and, because of this, hadn't been viewed for several years. She shared that it was made while she was feeling:

Sad that my dad's not here anymore. But, he is with me because there's a lot of him in me and he is…a guiding force. He's on my shoulder, so he's with me.

Figure 25

When asked whether she had exhibited this image in the past, Alma replied, "I'm really not sure I could have sold it." The personal nature of the overall image and the symbolism included seemed to hold tender feelings that needed to remain in her care.

Keeping art or gifting work was an important feature of this subtheme. For instance, Paula gifted Figure 4 (reviewed previously) because it held such deep emotional connection to her experiences with grief. She described wanting "someone to have it who would appreciate it beyond what a normal patron would." Instead of keeping it, the painting was given to a friend who was instrumental in helping her get through a period of intense sadness immediately after her husband's death.

Although light has been the focus throughout much of his work, Marc realized that his manipulation of the chalk pastel medium had been "unexpectedly dark." However, he listed two pieces that he considered dark in both palette and subject matter that eventually sold. Echoing the hard to sell "happy" art identified by Carrie, Marc also acknowledged that people are more inclined to buy art that is "pretty" or more pleasing to look at. As such, he noted that "Breach" (as reviewed previously in Figure 4) was one of the darkest images he had ever created and that it did not sell after being displayed in a solo show in New York. Marc held memories of going to the National Gallery of Art with his dad when he was 10 "which is why I'm an artist." To him it seemed more fitting that the piece, instead, be gifted to the Gallery in memory of his parents after they both passed away and as a way to thank them.

Emotionality of the images seemed to dictate whether the artwork was displayed, put up for sale, or purchased. Each artist represented in this subtheme experienced that art which held personal and emotional underpinnings was often less sought out by patrons.

Others were so connected to these more personal expressions that selling the work wasn't even an option worth pursuing. It is unclear whether the art that didn't sell was something that created discomfort in the viewers or if it just didn't hold the same universal applications as other art typically represented by the particpants.

Theme 6: Curative Aspects of Artmaking

Several participants conveyed how their art processes and products held healing aspects, particularly if the work related to grief emotions. Carrie considered her art as "a way to recover." And Ellen believed just having art in the world offered "some balance." Furthering this notion, Anita viewed art as part of human DNA; something that connects us together and "enriches our humanity." While considering how art can assist with loss and grief and other "emotional issues," she underscored her belief that emotions are triggered through the events we experience. She confirmed her sense of pain in life, but believed that art provides a "means to deal with" living.

Being an artist was considered by Paula to be "a state of mind." She shared her beliefs that art-making can be more about an important direction one takes in their lives rather than worrying about what is produced. After realizing that "all emotion" went into the first painting she made after her husband's death, she echoed how "art takes away pain" and commented that painting, in particular, helped her to feel "good."

For artists like Charlotte, "art was essential" to her working with the emotions related to the cancer diagnosis and subsequent death of her husband. Ed, meanwhile, took a more philosophical approach in his art-making. Figure 26 reflects a more physical process that he described as "a compressed piece of scraped oil paint" that was part of an exhibit centered on "dialogues with the inner self." Although the imagery itself is more

abstract, it is still reflective of restorative benefits through art-making in both it's physical

appearance and the perceived movement and energy it probably took to create it.

Figure 26

Furthermore, although it was important for Marc that his "work not merely be

therapy" he identified therapeutic value as one of the meanings he holds about his art

processes. He sees his work as something "I have to do" and postulated that art is

something that represents the person making the art "at least in metaphor." He considered

art-making as a way to make one's self "solidly present in the world." He concluded:

> Perhaps all art-making does pull us forward into our own futures. Out of the hard
>
> places and into the easier places. Out of the darkness, into the light.

One final link associated with making art was having the opportunity to talk about

it. Both Paula and Ellen shared aspects of being able to describe how it felt to make the

art as well as find clarity through conversation. For instance, Paula reflected on the

interview conversation as helping her review and "make sense of" the last few years

which have felt very painful to her. Understanding her experience better was said to have

brought her comfort. Ellen echoed these sentiments and realized "it does feel good to just talk about it, and how it feels" to do the art.

Overall, this group of participants reflected on the benefits of art for their own health and well-being. They considered art-making as a tool and an innate necessity. Not only was the process and use of materials prominently reflected in this main theme, but talking about the work was also particularly helpful in the participants examinations. This is reflective of the art therapy process in which art-making and sharing the work are significant elements for understanding the self.

Subtheme: Release of Emotions

Overlapping with the main theme was a sense of relieving emotional strain through art-making. This was identified in various ways by the participants including the idea that "art deflects the pain." Art was described as an expression, a release, and cathartic. The impulse to create was also palpable in how several of the participants stated, "I just had to make it" referencing specific images made shortly after their loss occurred.

For instance, Alma described needing to make an image quickly in order to capture "what needed to be done." Figure 27 demonstrates a relevant example of how she was able to capture her immediate emotion in real time. This piece remained unfinished for over 11 years and was only uncovered for the first time during the interview. Still in its charcoal stage, Alma considered that maybe her emotions were "too raw" when she began the piece so finishing it at this point would be too difficult. She stated:

Maybe what I needed to do was already done. It's like a moment in time or something.

She also described the piece as a "time capsule" and anticipated having to get back into the "mindset" she was in when the canvas was started, would be too painful. Doing this would also mean having to re-experience what she was going through emotionally at that particular time. Instead, in its simplicity, the image seemed to have its own story to share and it felt more important for her to leave it alone. After returning it to the place in her studio where it had been for so many years, she decided to "just leave it" since it also still carried relevance for her.

Figure 27

Art-making for the purposes of releasing emotions also uncovered curative aspects in the immediacy of the action. Deeply felt emotions could find their expression to the benefit of the artist's visceral responses to their grief.

Subtheme: Flow

Whether through their use of art materials, the visual features of the art-making, or the time spent in their studios, almost all of the participants in this study reflected on aspects of being in a state of flow while creating. Confirming his "unorthodox" contemporary style, flow seemed to be the unique way Ed created most of his work. Figure 28 provides a relevant example of his process which he described as coming from:

Inside me and it's leading me to so many places. It just comes very naturally for me. Sometimes the brush makes the rhythm, and I'm lost in it. Then I open my eyes again, and there's a painting.

Figure 28

This sense of rhythm invited a playful element to art-making and developed a composition with color and movement that afforded the artist an opportunity to lose himself to the process.

The playful aspects of art-making are not only reflected in the flow state, but also resonated with both Charlotte and Ellen. Each identified needing to go to the studio to play with color as a way to open up to a more organic processes of creating. Sometimes just mixing a pallet of colors allowed Ellen the opportunity to lose track of time and let go of family responsibilities, worries, or grief. Figure 29 depicts this sense of play and flow shared by Ellen which she considered "very blissful" and:

> Very out of the mind and in the body, in the current, in the creative. It's just being in some kind of creative flow and I think it's the best thing in the world.

Figure 29

Four other artists represented language reflecting a sense of flow including Marc, who explained that he doesn't fully understand what each image represents until it is complete. What he was certain of; however, was how "powerful" the process of art-making was for him and how interesting his work became within this unknown state. It

was similar for Alma in that imagery and references to her father "just creeps up every once in a while" during times she feels pleasantly lost in her art-making process.

Lastly, both Carrie's and Paula's reflections seem to be manifested directly from the literature on the flow state (first introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1975) including phrases such as "I lose myself" and feeling "mentally" transported elsewhere. From not hearing what is going on to forgetting the surroundings they're in, these two participants identified this natural healing element of creativity as occurring through their art making. Paula concluded a sense of "relief" when painting and being transported out of her kitchen into the landscape space she often paints.

Flow is considered to have curative aspects in that it offers individuals an opportunity to heal by being completely absorbed in their creative processes. Almost all of the participants in this study related their experiences with art-making as representative of losing their conscious ties to their immediate surrounding and awareness of time. What filled the void was the joy of artistic expression that they also considered to be healing and beneficial to their overall well-being.

Subtheme: Art Workshops and Classes as Support Groups

One last curative aspect realized by the participants was through art workshops and classes that develop specific art techniques. What was most remarkable was that both Charlotte and Paula commented that they were uninterested in going to any support groups in order to deal with their grief. However, Paula commented, "You can't make it without people."

For Charlotte, workshops offered her a way to organize her art-making without the requirements of verbal sharing. Although she'd avoided therapy or support groups, workshops were helpful because:

> I'm just sort of there… and it's just sort of structured in a way that I can't
>
> structure myself.

Of the same opinion was Paula who shared an adverse experience going to a support group. She had ticked all the boxes off a list she made of what might help her get through her grieving. When discussing how her friends encouraged her to try a particular support group, she recalled going to the local health clinic where the room felt "cavernous," the layout of the group members "cold," and the content that was shared was repetitious. She regarded her time in this session as something she would not return to because:

> It was just one big sob-fest from one person to another, and I don't know what
>
> was going on with that therapist, but I felt like he was promoting them not to
>
> move forward. And they were just stirring around like a pile of slop.

Instead, Paula found support by taking art classes with a teacher who guided her professional, artistic development. "I was desperate," she considered when remembering why she took the class just a few short months after her husband died. However, she also stated "I was stunned," about the positive and curative aspects of she had experienced. She concluded, "I thought, I've got to continue this."

The prominent experience of these two artists shows an importance for people to connect and feel connected as they deal with universal issues of grief. Perhaps more than verbal processing, or sitting and talking about their feelings, these two participants experienced the sole act of art-making as curative.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Most individuals who experience profound personal loss can grapple effectively with their grief responses (Bonanno, 2004; Jordan & Litz, 2014; Newsom et al., 2016; Ogińska-Bulik, 2015). Among them are the professional artists in this study who were effectively able to invite personal awareness and understanding of their changed relationship with the deceased through their own Fine Art processes. The participant artwork and interview responses explored in this dissertation hold significant results that fuse the act of mourning a significant personal loss with visual art practices by which one can hardly exist without the other.

Conflicting discourses in the bereavement literature continue to be examined (Collier, 2011; He et al., 2014; Miller, 2015; Percy, 2014). Particularly, expectations of bereavement practices across cultures compared to how individuals actually grieve has been found to be in opposition among researchers (Bonanno, et al., 2008; Castle & Phillips, 2003; Kessler, 2019; Schaal et al., 2014). For instance, Miller (2015) found common expectations among research participants that bereavement should occur only immediately after the death and symptoms of grief should only be temporary. Yet, many of the participants in this study continued to experience significant feelings of loss even years after the death of their loved one. A relevant example of this was Paula, who persistently considered why she continued to hold such deep pain and sadness even though her husband had died three years prior to the study. Like grief, the bereaved relationship does not conform to any assumptions held by the prevailing culture of the individual (Cornell, 2014; Klorer, 2014; Newsom et al., 2016; Schaal et al., 2014;

Wadeley, 2000). Instead, as Hagman (2016) suggested, a multitude of perspectives are possible. This was no different in the results of the present study.

Whether their experiences with loss were anticipated or unexpected encounters, most of the participants in this study noted emotional pain as a symptom of their grieving process (Bonanno, 2004; Ogińska-Bulik, 2015). Feelings of sadness, depression, anger, resentment, and overall melencholy were prominent as were physical responses of weakness, frailty, and nausea. As suggested in the literature, the strong emotional connections, mental allies, and those who assisted and guided the participants' growth were viewed as figures who helped define how the artists experienced themselves (Davis, 2008; Kessler, 2019; Neimeyer, 2006). Carrie, for example, described her father as an important figure in her life and expressed how impactful he was through his support of her. It was notable in this study that, through the death of their most cherished relationship, a large part of how the participants understood themselves was also lost (Bonanno, et al., 2008; Castle & Phillips, 2003; Kessler, 2019). For Carrie, this meant she could no longer be supported by the person she trusted the most.

This, however, did not mean the bereaved erased their loved ones from their lives after the death occurred. It also did not mean those who were left behind merely picked up to begin a new life devoid of the connections they had held in life with the now departed. In fact, several participants in this study found the opposite to be true. As Davis (2008) suggested, the old and new perspectives about the world and understandings of the self could develop into an entirely new identity for the bereaved. As such, varying degrees of rebuilding, reclaiming, and reconnecting to themselves after their loss was also a relevant finding among the research participants that mirrored the act of meaning-

making found in the literature (Haase & Johnston, 2012; Harter, 2007; Kessler, 2019; Percy, 2014). This was apparent in how Carrie was able to identify new perspectives in the relationship she held with her father. Through the paintings she created of trees and swings, these symbolic representations allowed her to re-imagine their continued bond through metaphor.

Explorations that used their respective art materials and their continuous engagement with familiar art processes after loss allowed the artists in this study an opportunity to tap into their own resiliency and creative coping (Bonanno, 2004; Davis, 2008; Newsom et al., 2016; Ogińska-Bulik, 2015) not only to find meaning after their loss experience, but also to re-engage with the living. Curative aspects of art making were observed by the participants including finding balance and joy, releasing emotional tension and physical pain, and being pulled from the hard places to make sense out of their grief experiences (Frantz, 2016; Gabora & Kaufman, 2010; Halprin, 1997; Marder, 2018; McNiff, 1992). Participants found benefit not only in their separate experiences, but also communally. A broad sense of belonging and aliveness as well as increased personal value (Coenen, 2018; Flatt et al., 2015; Hagman, 2010; Lamar & Luke, 2016; Livingston et al., 2016) was suggested among the participants who verbally shared their grief experiences with others (including during the interview process) as well as those who enrolled in art classes and workshops, those who gifted their work, and those who exhibited in galleries, museums, or alternative venues.

Several of this study's participants also experienced a significant pull toward art making as a way to deal with grief responses that highlighted their own mortality. Although conversations on death and dying largely remain taboo subjects in Western

paradigms (van Lil, 2012), these artists continued to defy the status quo through their intentional use of symbolism included in their creative expressions (Marder, 2018; Strauss, 2001; Wixom, 2012). Interestingly, whether their images were meant as a memorial to their loved one or in celebration of them (Haase & Johnston, 2012; Kalaba, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2017; Klorer, 2014; van Lil, 2012; Castle & Phillips, 2003), many of the participants experienced emergent properties as part of their unexpected imagery. For instance, although the recent suicide of Ed's uncle met inclusion criteria for the study, he focused briefly on his brother's attempted suicide during the interview process. Ed expressed that the thought of losing his brother in this way brought up strong emotions and prompted him to infer that his experience with grief would be much different if that suicide had been successful. His experimental artmaking was considered by him as coming directly from the unconscious by which the experience with his uncle may have actually played a bigger part in his artmaking than he initially realized. And Alma's captivation with death and her use of religious symbolism was believed to guide her toward self-understanding through a merging of unconscious material and hindsight that promoted emotional catharsis.

Modifications in art materials and processes (Firestone, 2013; Monks, 2015) were also recognized by several of the participant artists and a relevant finding of this research study. For Marc, it meant changes to the format of his work both in size and shape. These changes were identified as part of an additive process relevant to his understanding of the image that was created and parallel to the loss he had experienced. Carrie's departure from her typical sculptural materials and focus on women as her subject matter to more sentimental paintings that held symbolic representations of her father was also

remarkable. And, although more subtle, Ellen's sustained focus on poppy flowers as her main subject matter and for longer than any other subject she had painted was noted to be an important shift in her art making after the death of her father. Perhaps more akin to a complimentary process, rather than a change in materials or methods, was the addition of writing that occurred for half the artists. Creative writing through essays, poetry, journaling, and marking the images with names and shorthand symbols was of significance in how participants expressed their experiences and felt understood by others (Haase & Johnston, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2017; Koopman, 2015; Neimeyer, 2006; Walter, 1996).

A final significant finding of this study related to how the participant artists perceived of and discussed selling art work that was made during their bereavement. According to the study conducted by (Graddy & Lieberman (2017), the value of paintings created by a collection of famous artists decreased by approximately 50% with a hypothetical decrease in creativity if those paintings originated in the first year of the artists' bereavement. Consistent with the Graddy and Lieberman study, Marc experienced an inability to sell what he defined as "one of the darkest images" he had ever created which was also directly tied to his mother's death. Ultimately, the piece was accepted by the National Gallery as a gift in memory of his parents, but was not an image that sold during a solo show in a New York gallery. In opposition to this was Carrie's experience of creating a deeply sentimental painting about her father's journey to heaven. Contrary to Marc's development, Carrie's painting became highly sought after by those who viewed it. However, this piece was not listed for sale due to its personal value to the artist.

Several other artists explored their art through the lens of sentimental versus sellable work. For instance, Alma identified the more formal 'easel paintings' of the *John Window* (which memorialized her father in name) and *Judith and Flora* (which included specific symbolism about her father); both of which were exhibited and for sale. In comparison, the two images she experienced as useful for relieving internal tension created by her grief remained leaning against her studio wall. They were considered more personal and not something she thought she could have sold, but it was unclear whether she meant whether she would have tried or if the pieces were just too important to part with at all. Likewise, Paula gifted a significant image that was the first she created after her husband's death, because she wanted a friend to have it who would appreciate it more than if she had just sold it to someone unfamiliar. Lastly, although Charlotte created an entire art show about the loss of her husband, she purposefully neglected to include imagery that felt too painful or could offend viewers.

Limitations

This study met the expectations of a phenomenological research design, however, several inherent limitations do exist. Purposive sampling was employed with the goal of obtaining a group of professional artists who varied in race, age, gender, class, ethnicity and cultural background, personal abilities, choice of art media and processes, and their personal loss experiences. Although methods such as broad online searches and 'cold emailing' were employed to obtain a diverse group of professional artists, none of the artists in this study were of color, all were cisgender and able-bodied, and the majority were middle to older-aged and middle to upper class.

It is arguable that some cultural diversity was present related to the geographical locations of the participants. Additionally, the personal loss experience of one participant

was due to suicide, whereas, the other deaths were the result of illness. And, participants identified as male or female and ranged in age from early 30's to late 70's. Due to the topic of loss as stated in the research questions, the age range seemed relevant in that younger individuals are probably less likely to experience a significant loss and may also not be established as professional artists until later in life. These slight distinctions along with the moderate range of art media provided some variations in the overall results of the study, although not as wide-ranging and diverse a group as was anticipated.

Because some of the participants knew me personally, there may have been unknown bias that influenced the interview narratives. For example, I have known Marc since the early 1990's and he is aware that I am an art therapist. Combined with his own history of therapeutic work, Marc considered during our conversation, although unprompted, whether he believed art had healing properties or not. My own assumptions as to whether loss influenced the artwork or not can also be identified in the research questions.

It is also significant to note that one participant should be considered as an outlier of this study. Although Ed volunteered for the study and had experienced the loss of his uncle, he consistently claimed indifference and often avoided talking about the suicide during the interview. Not only did he comment that he didn't think artists would use grief as a prompt for art making, but he repeatedly claimed his uncle's death did not have any significant effect on him. However, he suggested that losing his brother to suicide would have been devastating. This implies an important limitation in the inclusion criteria in that proximity of the lost relationship may have needed to be more clearly defined.

Another impactful limitation was that I also experienced the loss of my mother just over four years prior to conducting the study. Although it was an anticipated death due to her cancer diagnosis, my mother was quite young at 64. Unlike the participants in this study, the year after my mother passed, I was unable to make art and I still struggle with this today. My own experiences and departure from typical creative actions may have not only influenced the type of questions that were asked in the interview, but also may have influenced unidentifiable bias within the findings. Conversely, this experience of loss and my subsequent grief may also have helped in terms of understanding the experiences of the participants and allowed for empathic knowing. Participants knowledge of the researcher's experience may have also increased trustworthiness during the interview process.

Contributions of the Study

The results of this research suggest that creative practices may be effective and influential in bereavement. This project demonstrated how the eight participant artists were able to effectively modify their historically held creative practices for the purposes of meaning-making after their losses. Intuitive explorations and the artists' relationship with their selected media may have further contributed to developments of personal understanding and how they experienced art as an application for healing. Loss was broadly viewed as a new and unfamiliar experience that required adaptation and a reclaiming of the lost relationship. The emotional responses that remained were anticipated to become life-long processes of bereavement and believed to continue to influence future creative practices. This notion challenges a broad spectrum of assumptions that grieving is an action one moves through and completes. Art making

holds significant potential through its universal applications for bereavement practices in healthcare. Specifically, this research invites us to expand current understandings of how art processes might benefit those who are actively grieving as well as those whose losses are not as recent. The findings from this exploration can be considered to have far-reaching impacts in therapeutic fields such as art therapy, related expressive arts therapies, and counseling.

Recommendations for Further Research

The prevalence of Western concepts of bereavement in the academic literature support an overall need to re-examine grief through a widened perspective. Therefore, future research into the influences between grief and artistic expression is necessary. One important consideration is to expand current participant demographics to include diverse ethnic and cultural characteristics. Another is to examine a fuller range of loss types that distinguish the closeness of the relationship and how grief is both experienced and managed over time.

Western culture tends to view grief as a private and internally constructed phenomenon. A comparative study that focuses on the grief practices of other cultures and religions may provide significant information into how different individuals externalize their grief. Similarly, explorations that underscore community-based experiences of art making or collective healing rituals is suggested.

The professional artists in this study introduced intuitive applications of art making that linked unconscious material, symbolism, and use of metaphor with traditional Fine Arts practices. In order to explore subconscious expressions in both art processes and products of more classically trained artists, further inquiry into the perceived physical and emotional aspects of creativity specific to bereavement responses

might be an important topic to pursue. A second tier would be the development of a

research design that measures the similarities and differences between art that is made for

public consumption versus art that has more personal applications.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPATION FLYER

Are you an ARTIST who
has experienced a personal loss
due to the *death of loved one*?

If you are 18 years or older, this study might be of interest to you.

Study for Grieving Artists

I'm looking for adult artists 18 years
or older who have lost a loved one;
in order to understand your
experiences as a visual artist.

Are you eligible?
* Must be 18 years or older
* Self-identified artist
* Has exhibited work in a public or private forum in the last 5 years
* Have experienced a personal loss during your professional career

Participants will be asked to:
Take part in an interview; Share experiences of bereavement; Share artwork

If you are interested in being considered for this
study*, please contact:

Rebecca Arnold at rarnold4@lesley.edu

Lesley
UNIVERSITY
Expressive Therapies Division
*Approved by Lesley University's
Internal Review Board (IRB)

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT SEARCH EMAIL

Dear   ,

My name is Rebecca Arnold and I am a PhD candidate at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. **I am currently recruiting participants for my dissertation research study, entitled:** *Grieving Artists: Influences of Loss and Bereavement on Visual Art-making."*

This study will explore how professional artists might navigate personal loss experiences that are a result of the death of a loved one. If you know of any self-identified artists in your organization or community who have experienced this type of loss, who have continued to create visual art, and who may have an interest in participating in this study, please ask them to contact me. Additionally, please feel free to forward this email and **flyer attachment** which includes parameters for eligibility.

After completing a pre-screening questionnaire to determine eligibility, artists who are selected to participate in the study will receive an invitation email detailing the study, a "Research Informed Consent," and a "Consent to Use and/or Display Art." It is requested that artists will participate in an interview that will take no more than 90 minutes, and share artwork made after their loss. Interviews will be audio recorded for research purposes and all personal information will be kept confidential. The study has been approved by the Lesley University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Any artist who is interested in participating or who has further questions about this study may contact me at: (xxx) xxx-xxxx; rarnold4@lesley.edu

Thank you,
Rebecca

Rebecca Arnold, MA, ATR-BC
Doctoral Candidate
PhD in Expressive Therapies
Lesley University
29 Everett Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Lesley
UNIVERSITY

29 Everett St., Cambridge, MA 02138

Title of the Project: "GRIEVING ARTISTS: INFLUENCES OF LOSS AND

BEREAVEMENT ON VISUAL ARTMAKING"

Participant:

Demographic information:

a.   What is your age/age range?

b.   What is your preference for race/ethnicity/cultural background?

c.   What is your preference for gender identity?

d.   How much time has passed since your loss?

e.   What type of loss was it?

f.   Have you ever exhibited your artwork? Please explain.

g.   Any other identifying information you'd like to share?

APPENDIX D

INVITATION EMAIL/LETTER

Lesley
UNIVERSITY
29 Everett St., Cambridge, MA 02138

Appendix B

Invitation Email/Letter

Dear (NAME),

You are invited to participate in a research study titled, "Grieving Artists: Influences of Loss and Bereavement on Visual Artmaking." The research will be conducted by Rebecca Arnold, MA, ATR-BC, a doctoral candidate in the PhD in Expressive Therapies program at Lesley University under the supervision of Michele Forinash, Division Director, Expressive Therapies.

The study involves a researcher conducted, semi-structured interview during which time you will be asked for basic demographic information, and your experiences both as an artist and as someone who has experienced the loss of a loved one. Additionally, you will be asked to share up to three pieces of artwork made after your loss. It is estimated that it will take no more than 90 minutes for the interview. The interview will meet your schedule and preference for face-to-face or online (i.e. Skype, Zoom, etc). Your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research study, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized. There is no monetary compensation to participate in this research. All information collected will be kept confidential and used for scholarly purposes only and all data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. Additional information is detailed in the attached CONSENT TO USE AND/OR DISPLAY ART and RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT forms.

This research has been reviewed according to Lesley University's IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. If you have any questions prior to scheduling an interview, please contact Rebecca Arnold, doctoral student in the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences, Lesley University, 29 Everett Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. You may also contact Dr. Michele Forinash, Faculty Advisor, at 617.349.8166.

Sincere regards,
Rebecca

Rebecca Arnold
Expressive Arts Therapy doctoral candidate
Lesley University

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT

Lesley
UNIVERSITY

Research Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research project titled "GRIEVING ARTISTS: INFLUENCES OF LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT ON VISUAL ARTMAKING." The intent of this research study is to learn how artmaking may serve as a way to navigate personal loss experiences of professional artists. The researcher is doctoral candidate, Rebecca Arnold; the faculty principal investigator supervising the research is Dr. Michele Forinash.

Your participation will involve being interviewed one time in a space that is convenient to you or on Skype or Zoom (or other online platform agreeable to you) with questions asked by me, the researcher from Lesley University. The interview will occur on a date and time that meets your schedule and will last no more than 90 minutes. During this time, an audio recording and/or video recording of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. Notes may also be taken by me if needed. You will be asked for demographic information and semi-structured questions about your grief experience and your art. You will also be asked to provide up to three pieces of original artwork that you created after your loss occurred; in photographic form. Photographs of your artwork may be taken during the interview or can be emailed to me prior to or after this experience.

Your only interactions will be with me during the interview process. No personal identifying material will be included in any presentations or written material, and you will have the choice whether or not you'd like to be identified or remain anonymous. If you choose to remain anonymous, the data collected will be coded with a pseudonym and your identity will never be revealed by me. Artwork used in print and/or presentations will not show any identifying information (such as your signature). I will be the only one who has access to the data collected, which will be safeguarded by password protection and kept in a secure and undisclosed location for five years, upon which time it will be thoroughly destroyed. A third party professional may be used to transcribe audio from the interview, and due to the nature of searchable artwork online, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. It is important that you completely understand the possibility of unintentional disclosure before agreeing to participate.

In addition
- Former knowledge about grief and bereavement or loss experiences are not necessary.
- You are free to choose not to participate in the research and to discontinue your participation in the research at any time.
- If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.
- There is no monetary compensation to participate in this research.
- Identifying details will be kept confidential and used for scholarly purposes only. Unless otherwise expressed by you, data collected will be coded with a pseudonym and your identity will never be revealed by me. Only I will have access to the data collected and your name and other facts that might identify you will not appear in print or presentations of this study.
- If, for any reason, you do not wish to remain anonymous, you may specifically authorize the use of material that would identify you as a subject in the research. I can discuss with

you some of the potential risks and benefits for you if you do not wish to remain anonymous.

- Any and all of your questions will be answered at any time and you are free to consult with anyone (i.e., friend, family) about your decision to participate in the research and/or to discontinue your participation.
- Participation in this research poses minimal risk, but you may feel emotional or psychological discomfort at any time due to the nature of the topic of personal loss and bereavement. However, the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are no greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. If you feel upset during or after the interview process or after having completed the study, or find that some questions or aspects of the study trigger distress, talking with a qualified mental health practitioner may help. If you feel you would like assistance, please contact referral sources listed in your local living area or you can find U.S. and international services through any one of the following internet searches. This is not an exhaustive list and you are completely free to choose whether or not to use any of the following:
    https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists
    https://www.onlinecounselling.com/find-a-therapist/
    https://grief.com/grief-support-group-directory/
    https://www.griefshare.org/
- If any problem in connection to the research arises, you can contact the researcher, Rebecca Arnold, at 610.597.2858 and by email at rarnold4@lesley.edu or Lesley University sponsoring faculty Dr. Michele Forinash at 617.349.8166 and by email at forinasm@lesley.edu.
- The researcher may present the outcomes of this study for academic purposes (i.e., articles, teaching, conference presentations, supervision etc.)

My agreement to participate has been given of my own free will and that I understand all of the stated above. In addition, I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____ _____ _____ _____
Participant's signature   Date   Researcher's signature   Date

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu

APPENDIX F

CONSENT TO USE ARTWORK

Lesley
UNIVERSITY

29 Everett St., Cambridge, MA 02138

CONSENT TO USE AND/OR DISPLAY ART

CONSENT BETWEEN: _____Rebecca Arnold_____ and _____.
<div style="text-align:center">Expressive Arts Therapy Doctoral Student   Artist/Participant's Name</div>

I, _____, agree to allow ___Rebecca Arnold_____.
<div style="text-align:center">Artist/Participant's name   Expressive Arts Therapy Doctoral Student</div>

to use and/or display and/or photograph my artwork, for the following purpose(s):

- Reproduction and/or inclusion within the research currently being completed by the expressive arts therapy doctoral student.

- Reproduction and/or presentation at a professional conference.

- Reproduction, presentation, and/or inclusion within academic assignments including but not limited to a doctoral work, currently being completed by the expressive arts therapy doctoral student.

It is my understanding that neither my name, nor any identifying information will be revealed in any presentation or display of my artwork, unless waived below.

☐ I DO ☐ I DO NOT wish to remain anonymous.

This consent to use or display my artwork may be revoked by me at any time by informing the researcher. I also understand I'll receive a copy of this consent form for my personal records.

Signed Date

I agree to keep your artwork safe, whether an original or reproduction, to the best of my ability and to notify you immediately of any loss or damage while your art is in my possession. I agree to return your artwork immediately if you decide to withdraw your consent at any time. I agree to safeguard your confidentiality.

Signed _____ Date _____
<div style="text-align:center">Expressive Arts Therapy Doctoral Student</div>

Lesley University, 29 Everett Street, Cambridge, MA 02138 - 610-597-2858 - rarnold4@lesley.edu

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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UNIVERSITY

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe yourself as "artist?"

2. Please describe your core beliefs about grieving?

3. Please describe your personal loss experience?

4. Can you tell me about being a grieving artist?

5. Please share any artwork that was created after your loss experience.

6. Are there any other comments you'd like to add or anything further you'd like to share that I may not have asked or that you feel is important to discuss?

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