

Creating a bereavement memorial protocol using art therapy

Reflecting on two case studies

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Bio

Sandra Greeff is a junior primary trained educator (Johannesburg College of Education) and remedial therapist (College of Education for Further Training), with 35 years of special needs teaching and 20 years of visual arts teaching experience. She also is a trauma-debriefing counsellor with the South African Police Services. She recently completed an Honours in Psychology degree (SACAP) and an Honours in Art Therapy (University of Johannesburg). She is a community arts counsellor trained through Lefika La Phodiso and is currently completing a two-year Master of Art Therapy (University of Johannesburg). She is passionate about community upliftment and founded a non-profit organisation, The Yellow Umbrella Project. She is also an active member of the Institute of Psychodynamic Child Psychotherapy outreach.

Abstract

Art therapy in South Africa has had a clear focus on counselling and grief work. This article acts as an additional source of modelling a persistent complex bereavement memorial protocol in addition to existing bereavement counselling. In so doing, supporting the use of clay process work in creating an art therapy memorial protocol that can add value to existing grief and bereavement protocols. Furthermore, investigating and analysing literature to support this organically modelled and observed bereavement process reflected in the form of interviews supporting this protocol. The result being an art-based therapeutic bereavement memorial protocol providing a valuable contribution to bereavement counselling, especially in persistent complicated

grief. The methodology of this article is a qualitative arts-based inquiry extracting the information of an organically modelled process observing two bereavement case studies of two mothers processing persistent complex grief. They process the bereavement through the action of using clay processing to attach to a surface, creating bereavement artworks as memory capsules to support their unique mourning processes. The time frame of two years of observing, recording, and creating a thematic analysis and synthesis is likened to the mourning process of persistent complex grief. Using a supportive psychodynamic investigation from an extensive literature review enables an art therapy bereavement protocol used to support persistent complex grief and bereavement counselling.

Keywords: Arts-based inquiry, art therapy, bereavement memorial protocol, persistent complex grief counselling, organically modelled.

Introduction

This article draws from a master's research study based on an auto-ethnographical personal account from my Honours in Art Therapy long paper titled *Broken into meaning: An exploration of mosaic and collage as therapeutic methods to transform personal trauma induced by loss* (Greeff, 2020). A link was found in working with difficult ending processes, traumatic losses, and how the action of mixed media art mural processes supported the honouring of persistent complex bereavements in the unconscious process work.¹

This capturing of memories and meaning in artworks created in the murals facilitated the themes of endings. This is an exploration to ascertain how the process of clay work and 'piecing together' in memorial bereavement murals can be used as a protocol in working through grief work in art therapy. A comparative study was conducted of two cases of artworks created by grieving mothers who lost their children to completed suicides.

The primary case, Kate Shand's work, is an example of a practice that can be used as a model for taking clients through their grieving processes.² Her

1 The DSM-5 (p. 789) diagnostic criteria for this are intense sorrow, marked difficulty in accepting the death of a loved one and preoccupation with the circumstance of the death. Preoccupation with the loss on more days than not for 12 months after the loss for adults.

2 Kate Shand is an artist, potter, journalist, and Master of Art Therapy student. Her tiled wall panel was created from a drawing completed by her late son, John-Peter Shand-Butler (19 July 1996 – 31 March 2011).

artwork comprised a ceramic tile panel based on an artwork completed by her late son. Her book titled *Boy* outlines her grappling with her devastating grief (Shand, 2013). In the second case, Matty Strydom's³ artworks were completed in Shand's Studio. The tiles Strydom made were initially meant to be for a general bathroom installation, but this turned into a memorial art process as the tiles started to represent unconscious images connected to Strydom's late daughter. These tiles have become transitional memorial artworks,⁴ like Shand's memorial tile panel (Winnicott, 1971, p. 118). The modelling of this bereavement memorial protocol was observed by myself, the researcher, as a student in Shand's clay studio in 2021. In *The body keeps the score*, Bessel van der Kolk (2012, p. 21) discusses the "utility of words" in therapy used only at the final stages of therapeutic processing in trauma counselling. Hence the importance of this organically modelled clay processing resulted in transitional memorial artworks (Winnicott, 1971) supporting persistent complex grief.

Literature review

Memorialisation and materials used in grief processing

This research into the significance of art therapy in bereavement counselling acts as a valuable contribution as a protocol because bereavement memorial protocols are available but limited in the current literature (Garti & Bat Or, 2019). Schut and Stroebe (2005) discuss the lack of qualitative research, as bereavement is considered a 'natural' phenomenon. Both argue that natural grief processes should be allowed to unfold with no intervention except for persistent complex grief interventions (Hall, 2014; Garti & Bat Or, 2019). Hence, the value of this research is that it offers an alternative viewpoint in this area of grief counselling and includes the element of memorialisation and attachment of tiles and memorial images onto a surface in counselling complex persistent grief as transitional objects supporting the prolonged grief process.

3 Matty Strydom is an Afrikaans high school language teacher and artist who completed her memorial grief process in July 2021. This was a creation of handmade tiles with pressed flower designs, each part of the ceramic artwork was inspired by the life of her late daughter, Jessica Strydom (15 August 1995 – 1 March 2015).

4 Transitional memorial artworks based on Winnicott's (1971, p. 118) transitional objects.

Bruce Perry and Bessel van der Kolk (Homer, 2015) discuss how non-verbal art processing activates the limbic part of the brain that shuts down due to grief or a sudden traumatic loss. The participants in this article use collage clay processing to attach materials, like tiles, onto a surface. This links to Homer's (2015) neuro-developmental approach to trauma as I investigate this process of installing and attaching the completed tiles onto a surface as a healing protocol. This hypothesis is tested in art therapy as an alternative non-verbal method of regulating disrupted somatic connections caused by the trauma of persistent complex grief assimilation. In this way, the non-verbal art processing can create new neural pathways that were previously absent.

McNiff (2018, p. 4) discusses the importance of the materials used in artistic inquiry in art-based processes, "allowing the art to lead". The participants in this article incorporate a total human experience working with the materials they choose to reflect their unique bereavement process, using clay to make tiles, the firing, and the bisque process takes time and reflects the grieving process (Kessler, 1919). Although there are other arts-based ways of using materials in counselling grief processing, I have chosen to focus this study on what I organically observed as it was profoundly powerful and impactful to witness. I observed how clay supported the creation of this grief memorial protocol.

Observing and modelling the safe place protocol as a bereavement process

A safe place protocol is described in the article, 'The Safe Place collage protocol: Artmaking for managing traumatic stress', where Tripp et al. (2019) describe an intervention that Shand was modelling. Part of this investigation is observing how a process organically played out as the participants worked through a bereavement memorial protocol (Ogden et al., 2006; Seigel, 2012). An unconscious shift was created using the memorial process of "the object" created, which allowed lower levels of activation, or triggering, to be opened within the "window of tolerance" described by Siegel (2010). This is vital to why this art-based method is effective when dealing with persistent complex bereavement trauma. This pendulum shifts from the chaos of grief to a state of integration of grief. The transitional object created during the memorialisation process is the focus of this article (Winnicott, 1971).

Gelinas et al. (2017) further describe three identifying phases of trauma intervention included in the processing of this protocol. The first phase is safety and stabilisation, created by the art therapy therapeutic relationship (per Ephrat Huss' (2015) triangulation relationship between the artist, the artwork, and art therapist or observer). The second phase is remembrance and mourning (this article outlines the final product being a memorial artwork as a transitional object allowing for the window of tolerance to support this deep grief process). The therapeutic safe place is created by the art therapist and the management of the therapy workspace, the client, and the artwork. The third phase is containment and holding of the artwork into the final reconciliation of a bereavement memorial artwork (Tripp et al., 2019; Winnicott, 1971; Bion, 1956). This is the main idea of a pendulum intervention leading to this bereavement memorial protocol.

Linking the 'unfinished business' of bereavement to theory

In his book, *Finding meaning: The sixth stage of grief*, David Kessler (2019) explores persistent complex trauma. He investigates how a person assimilates the loss of a loved one and continues their life in the absence of that person. In her book, *Complicated grief, attachment and art therapy* (2017), Briana Mac Williams refers to the incomplete relationship as "unfinished business". Her approach is explored from the perspective of the grief process as a continuous journey by reframing and 'piecing together' the unfinished parental relationship (Mac Williams, 2017, p. 21). In her book, *The paradox of loss*, Marylin McCabe (2003) challenges the traditional Kübler-Ross (1969) grief stages. McCabe views the relationship between the deceased and the living as an "ongoing inter-subjective relationship". Even though the loved one is no longer present, the bereaved parents and family have not given up on their existence even though they are no longer present. These ongoing relationships are the fundamental reason behind the formation of this protocol.

The therapeutic non-verbal modality of art therapy in this form of a bereavement memorialisation into an artwork supports a form of integration and reconciliation (Gelinas et al., 2017), 'piecing together' and attaching the artwork to a surface, reflecting the attachment to the deceased in the form of the transitional memorial artwork that supports this ongoing inter-subjective relationship (Mac Williams, 2017; Garti & Bar Or, 2019; Bowlby & Ainsworth,

1991; Stroebe, 2002). In the above cases, it is discussed that the grief process of “unfinished business” as edified over some time, allows the artworks produced to act as transitional objects (Winnocott, 1971). The memorialisation supports bereavement and makes meaning through the integration of this unspeakable separation (Winnicott, 1991; Ogden, 2014).

This bereavement memorial protocol expands from the traditional grief theories in *On death and dying*, in which Kübler-Ross (1969) posits the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Embodying the view of McCabe (2003), the lived experience of completing art mural processes as an organic and gentler process of dealing with loss and grief allows for the relationship and connection to be continued, keeping the experience and the person lost near to them in the form of a memorial artwork.

This metaphorical construction is linked to mother and child. In this case study, the arts-based process work investigates attachment as continuous living process work unpacked for dealing with the “unfinished business” (Stroebe, 2002; Hall, 2014; Mac Williams, 2017). In other words, the mother-and-child attachment relationship links to the metaphorical imagery of the ceramic tile installations. This art therapy bereavement memorial protocol process uses art material linked to the theoretical comparisons of Bowlby and Ainsworth’s concept of attachment and Winnicott’s concept of holding (Stroebe, 2002; Ogden, 2004). As a metaphor, the complete clay work and tiles must be attached or held onto the installation surface as the mother holds the last pieces of the attachment process between herself and her child (Winnicott, 1971).

Making meaning from brokenness though the lens of bereavement theory

Neimeyer’s (1998-2000) meaning-reconstruction model stresses the value of meaning making in bereavement, and specifically the reconstruction of meaning making (Lister et al., 2008). This reconstruction is seen in the process artwork observed in both research participants as they created their bereavement memorial artworks. The reconstruction of an image is exemplified in Shands’ mural taken from her son’s design or idea. Strydom unconsciously created botanically inspired tiles connected to her daughter’s memory. The idea of piecing together, or reconstructing meaning from ceramic processes, is an action that fits Neimeyer’s model.

Therefore, these two case studies display a grief process that will not fit into the traditional Kübler-Ross (1969) model. The case studies connect more suitably to meaning-making models related to David Kessler's (2019) and Neimeyer's (1998) models, as they are more fitting to the case studies' determination of the main idea behind this article.



Figure 1: Tiled memorial artwork by Shand, artwork design by John-Peter Shand Butler (19.06.1996 – 31.03.2011). Melville Mudroom, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2020. (Photograph by author).

Methodology

A constructivist framework is explored, whereby each participant's lens is drawn on in this arts-based research from a psychodynamic existentialist⁵ viewpoint (Creswell, 2013) to extract a meaningful conclusion to the hypothesis that artworks could support grief work by creating meaningful

5 This is a Freudian psychodynamic lens used on psychology. A view to art therapy with a focus on creativity and intuition, focusing on the psyche and how humanity deals with inner primal drives (Id) and conflicts that include sexual and basic needs that are in conflict with the conscious (superego) balanced by the ego (Huss, 2015, p. 23).

bereavement memorial artworks. Each participant's personal value, viewpoint, or lens is considered as to how they make sense of their grief, making them the co-creators of this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

This article presents the findings of the two case studies that can be used as an art therapy protocol. Furthermore, this article reflects on the grief model of David Kessler (2019) as a way of finding meaning in the grief process memorial artworks to investigate the connection between Victor Frankl's (1946) work on the purposeful creation of meaningful memorial artworks and Sherry Beaumont's (2013) meaning making in the narrative-based practices found in an art therapeutic approach. This concept is explored in the findings of this study.

In addition, Winnicott's (1971, p. 5) "transitional phenomenon" is explored. In *Playing and reality*, Winnicott (1971) discusses the phenomenon of using a cathartic object to support a transition of creating meaning from the object to support an acceptance of loss. This memorialisation process or protocol object becomes meaningful through "cathexis" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 118). This article investigates the creation of the tiles and artworks as a cathartic transitional objectification of the grief process. The completed memorial artwork installations embody and represent a meaningful bereavement protocol. The attachment process, as described by Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991), is investigated in relation to the grief process as a detaching or letting go of someone who was once here (Stroebe, 2002; Ogden, 2004; Mac Williams, 2017).



Figure 2: Personalised ceramic tiles designed by student potter Matty Strydom, Final installation Van Wyksdorp, Western Cape, South Africa, 2022. (Photograph by author).

Methods

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are an important process of this study. Ethics clearance was obtained by the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee that reviewed the master's research proposal. The identified risks were that there could be a re-triggering of the loss, and the grieving process could be affected by the interviews. Before doing the two interviews, this ethical clearance was approved.

The participants signed consent and agreed to reveal their names in this article before taking part in the study. They began by reflecting upon the directions in which their respective art processes unfolded. McNiff (2018) describes art-based research as being led by the art, in that the art material and processes lead the investigation guided by the lens of the artist. The researcher's personal bias was constantly monitored to guard against transferability when conducting the interviews and asking questions to ensure the rigour of the interview process. Counselling sessions from the Johannesburg Parent and Child Counselling Centre were offered to the participants in the case of triggering emotions. A debriefing process was implemented after the installation of the second participant's interview.

Limitations for this bereavement memorial protocol

After completing this study, I noted two possible limitations that could arise. The area of time frames and completing the art-based processing in dealing with the nature of grief and loss allows for careful monitoring of endings and closure. As a result, the time frames could pose a problem if the client cannot complete and keeps on cancelling sessions to avoid closure or the completion of this artwork.

A suitable artwork space would have to be available and kept untouched to allow the process work to be unpacked systematically. This would have to be carefully managed and contained.

Data collection procedure

The semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, with no distractions or interruptions that could affect the interviewing process. All responses were electronically recorded on a cellular device using a transcribing application. Whilst conducting the interviews, it was important to apply the principle of reflexivity. A verbatim interview transcript was then generated and compiled into a draft.

The thematic analysis involved identifying and recording apparent patterns across the collected data (Creswell, 2013). This completed analysis allowed the emerging themes around the bereavement processes from both interviews to be isolated. The data collection processes were foundational to the study, allowing for the mural modelling bereavement memorial protocol as a therapeutic intervention.

Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a six-step framework for conducting a thematic analysis, which is used to identify themes within the data (Creswell, 2013). Step 1 of the analysis is to increase familiarity with the data by listening attentively to each of the audio recordings a few times without taking notes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by an artificial intelligence application.. Any early impressions were noted and written down for later referrals (Creswell, 2013). Step 2 was to generate primary codes through an open coding method (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). In Step 3, common themes were identified and assigned code. In this step, the themes and pieces were formulated (Creswell, 2013). In Step 4, themes were revisited and modified to ensure support of the data collection without overlapping or concealing any sub-themes within them (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). In Step 5, the themes were defined and extracted and the links between the themes were identified. This is displayed in a thematic map (Maguire & Delahunt 2017) and a colour-coding thematic system was used with themes that linked the two interviews and the ideas that emerged. Step 6, the last step of this thematic analysis focused on common themes in the two interviews to ascertain the presence of links to the theory and practice. The themes that overlap in both case studies were a part of this comparative study, intending to ascertain how these two bereaved mothers experienced arts-based processing of their grief (Creswell, 2013).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to a continuous process of reflection whereby I would actively reflect on my personal background, biases, values and assumptions, which may affect the study (Palaganas et al., 2017). Researchers must reflect on personal biases towards the participant's interviews, especially concerning the second interview wherein the installation of the tiles was observed.

Reflective artworks in Shand's pottery studio allowed me to be an observer without interacting with the participants' interviews and installation processes. Another measure taken to control bias was consultation with a research supervisor who guided and reviewed the process of this study (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). Controlling reflexivity and subjectivity was challenging but vital. Creating a safe interaction that allowed space for Shand's lens, or way of interpreting her experiences, was of prime importance in the hope that an authentic and organic unpacking could be created. The intention was that this interview could serve as the cornerstone of this study, allowing a protocol to be modelled while creating an alternative to grief counselling that uses art therapy as a modality. Journaling, reflective artworks, and supervision would have to be monitored when working with long-term bereavement clients. It would also be advisable to handle only one bereavement case at a time to ensure personal containment and reflexivity by the art therapist.

Findings

Piecing together

Interviews were conducted with the two interviewees. Two case studies were considered. One addressed the interview and findings of Kate Shands' wall panel process, and the second addressed the findings of Matty Strydom's tiled artworks. The reflective consideration resulted in the grouping together of themes using thematic analysis. These themes were as follows: the time frame taken to complete the artworks; the materials of working with clay, wedging, moulding, firing, glazing, bisque work; mark-making and making meaning; broken pieces and imperfection; attachment, permanence and installation; transformational artworks and language; and finally the modelling of this process by Shand with her student, Strydom. This led to the process being

observed and noted by myself and the reflective observation served as an investigation into this process as the protocol that resulted from this study.

I observed the participants, Shand and Strydom, from the inception of the initial clay work to the final installation. The connection between these cases and the “sensory sensibility” was investigated (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 91). This study was an examination of how the agency produced in art therapy supports healing and transformation during a bereavement process (Garti & Bat Or, 2019). A comparison was made between the interviews and the materiality of working with tiles in grief work. Both participants did other artworks and written forms of creative expression regarding their grief processing. However, I have chosen to only focus on the modelled clay processing I observed, as I found this relevant, contained, and a safe space that was organically modelled with gentle sensory mentoring using clay work.



Figure 3-4: Shand and Strydom completing the ceramic basin that did not survive the firing and broke, so it could not be used as part of the initial bathroom installation idea. The artwork in the background is the installed memorial wall panel dedicated to John-Peter Shand Butler. Melville, Johannesburg (2021). (Photograph by author).

The time-taken theme introduced the main idea behind creating this arts-based processing into a possible protocol as a modelled non-verbal art therapy process to unpack and reconstruct a life after the sudden traumatic passing of a child through completed suicide.

Time frames around bereavement and grief: Patience and surrendering the grief process

Patience and surrendering emerged during the observation process. A significant theme from the interview and analysis was the time frame to complete both the bereavement memorial projects in both case studies. The time taken to complete both these art projects had significant meaning to both these participants as they connected significantly to the passing of the participants' children and linked to the persistent complex bereavement process that both participants were experiencing.

In *Finding meaning*, David Kessler (2019, p. 21) discusses grief work as being unique to each person concerning a time frame, "I've come to realise that if I've seen one person in grief, I've only seen that one person in grief". This time frame seems immeasurable and in need of patience and courage. When asked how long grief should be, he replied, "How long will your loved one be dead?" Kessler (2019, p. 27) further discusses the lessening of the pain and hurt as the intensity lessens. However, the fact remains that it will always be there. The study suggests that persistent complex grief processing could support acceptance or healing.

Making tiles is well suited as an art-based grief process because one completes a risky process slowly and patiently when dealing with clay, well knowing that pottery is a fragile material (Lister, 2008). As the grieving process is likened to this very risky and uncharted terrain of working with clay and ceramics, Shand (2022) reflects on patience when working with the medium:

This is... its very risky. It's very, you've got to surrender to the kiln, and you've got to you know... things break.

The long process of creating, packing, transporting, and installing the tiles in her new home could be seen as a metaphorical analogy around time, patience, and fragility. Strydom included these peripheral activities along with the clay work as 'a memorialisation grief work'.

The time-consuming work was undertaken with the materials to create a display to memorialise and symbolically represent loved ones no longer physically with them.

Reconstruction and reframing “piecing together” as a grief model

A reconstruction and reframing theme emerged during the observation. Kessler (2019) states that “all of us are broken” and what matters is how we put the ‘pieces together’. The metaphor of ‘broken pieces’ and constructing the tile panel of ‘piecing oneself back together’ after the shattering loss of a child is strongly reflected in both Shand’s and Strydom’s artworks (see Figures 1 and 2) (Kessler, 2019, p. 24). Leavy (2009, p. 164) discusses “the associations and connections that otherwise remain unconscious” when working with ‘piecing together’. Neimeyer (1998) describes that when our schemas or ideas are threatened, especially when a young person passes away from a complete suicide or without warning, the person bereaving will need to find some meaningful reconstruction to make sense of an unexpected loss.

By ‘piecing together’ for the final installation, Shand reconstructed the tile panel she created from scratch in a mosaic style. Shand chose the material, created each tile, and then assembled the tiles into a completed wall mural. This reconstruction as a grief model is the main purpose of Neimeyer’s (1998) meaning reconstruction model. Shand models this grief theory with every stage of her grief process in her personal persistent complex grief journey.

Memorialisation and materials linking unfinished business of bereavement to the theory used in the two case studies

An unfinished business theme emerged during the observation process. The linking of memorialisation and materials with “unfinished business” reflects in the completed installation’s finality and is this study’s core focus. This becomes important to the therapeutic and art therapy element of dealing with persistent complex grief, which creates a sense of closure and a final resting place for the artworks that can be visited in their homes, allowing for a finishedness to be formulated by this process. Literature around this processing can be found in Kübler-Ross’ (1969) grief stages, not as a constant, but rather a vacillation between the five stages mentioned and hopefully settling into acceptance. The “unfinished business” of having the bereavement artworks in the homes of both participants is testimony to the need to have a memory or memorial reminder of their children close to them (McWilliams, 2017).

Bereavement memorials as transitional objects

The concepts of object relation, permanence, constancy, and attachment in the concept of enduring presences tie in with the idea that what is 'gone' can now be memorialised and immortalised by leaving 'a mark' through a memorial artwork. Kessler (Frankl, 1946; Kessler, 2019) discusses finding meaning that "is all around us; it is in our DNA and inherent in all of us".

Placing the participants' artworks was the next step of the process. Shands' wall panel was attached to the wall on the veranda of her pottery studio at the Melville Mudroom and Strydoms' memorial tile clusters were positioned in strategic places of light around her new home and *stoep* at the farmhouse in Van Wyksdorp. Both participants chose communal gathering areas for shared remembrance.

A theme emerged during the observation process of linking transitional objects to meaning making. Both participants were asked what would happen to the fixed memorial artworks if they were moved from the places their bereavement artworks were placed. Mark making and leaving 'a mark' behind as a transitional object for both grieving participants was a dominant theme in their processing.

Attachment

Both interviews presented a pervasive theme around the language of attachment to permanent form. Shand (2021) talks about wanting something permanent in any form: "Something of him, part of my response to him but his drawing, I've taken from his marks". Shand discusses her grief processing of creating a permanent wall panel of John-Peter's actual marks. She recreated and reframed the designs into a permanent artwork she could engage with whenever she needed.

In the processing of the clay work, Strydom describes her process of moulding and wedging to form the clay. There is a metaphorical connection to this moulding action as a mother takes her time to mould and guide her child through life. Strydom expresses her connection to the clay work by describing the wedging process to form something visual. Using clay in grief work reflects how a mother incubates and moulds her child internally, holding and containing the child in the womb (Winnicott, 1971, Bion, 1956). This reflective

process of moulding clay is also linked to theoretical concepts such as Bowlby and Ainsworth's (Stroebe, 2002; Ogden, 2004) concept of attachment.

The memorial artworks became keepsakes or memories of their children (Ogden, 2004). Creating the memorial bereavement pieces and the immediate meaning it gave the participants was of prime value to their grieving processes (Kessler, 1919; Frankl, 1946; Neimeyer, 1998). Garti et al. (2019, p. 69) discuss how non-verbal meaning-making bereavement memorial art creates a sense of "emotional catharsis". There is a strong link between the physical attachment of tiles and the metaphorical parental attachment (Stroebe, 2002; Ogden, 2004; Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991).

What was observed during the analysis of the interviews was the language used around the attachment of the wall panel and the individual tiles, as well as how they were installed, which became vital to each mother's bereavement process (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991). The significance of the installation and permanence of the tiles became an embodiment of that final connecting attachment between mother and child (Winnicott, 1971; Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991; Stroebe, 2002). A sense of connection and permanence is created in this process, which creates a sense of stability (Testa & McCarthy, 2004).

Modelling a bereavement protocol

Support is offered by gathering collectively to discuss, mourn, and give purpose to the loss. McCabe views the relationship between the deceased and the living as an "ongoing inter-subjective relationship" (2013). Hope and support are given through gentle modelling in a creatively held and purposeful manner (Bion, 1956). In *Finding meaning*, Kessler (2019, p. 26) states that "The loss is made visible". He discusses the brain's hard wiring and how we need our emotions to be validated by someone seeing the process. He further discusses that these bonds are key to survival (Kessler, 2019). This sense of camaraderie, understanding, and mentorship was evident in the interviews and the main reason behind this study. Kessler (2019) describes how adults need to feel that their grief is acknowledged and reflected by others.

Results

A significant theme in this study was support and was organically noted as the relationship between observing, modelling, and mentoring. Working with clay became a therapeutic grieving process within the safe place that Shand's

studio provided. Strydom (2021) understands a mentor as someone who does not “interfere, but subtly and caringly holds the process while giving some guidance”. Strydom (2021) could unpack her grief. Therefore, being in the company of someone who had experienced a similar loss became important to Strydom (2021). This bonding and modelling support the testimony to this study of mentorship and mirroring healing grief work.

After observing and analysing common themes, I identified criteria for this organically modelled bereavement process. The unspoken theme of a memorialisation grief process or protocol was developed while I observed the therapeutic process unfold in this supported space (Tripp et al., 2019). Grief work must be available to parents, children, and families adjusting to life after losing a loved one. Therefore, this study suggests a bereavement memorial protocol supported by an art therapist. This may be a valuable resource for practitioners counselling clients experiencing persistent complex grief.

The following unpacks the various stages of the protocol and analyses the various functions and steps of the process. This protocol was created by observing and investigating possible memorial materials, the processing time, the bereavement space, the role of the art therapist, the installation, and the contained process of a gentler closure.

Steps of this protocol

Memorial materials

This arts-based process does not have to be facilitated using clay work only. However, it is the preferred material because of its fragility and unpredictability, as was seen in this research. By extension, the client could choose a material that fits their unique connection.

Processing time to mourn

The main conclusion of the study was that bereavement processing is time-consuming. The time, patience, and holding space provided are paramount because the mourning process will mirror the action of the arts-based process. Based on both case studies in this research, it is recommended that the client have access to an undisturbed space and place where they could work over a

long period, allowing the artwork not to be disturbed or damaged over this creative period (Bion, 1956).

Bereavement memorial 'safe enough' place

The bereavement process mural, wall panel, or artwork should be created in a 'safe enough' space where the contents of the artwork (photos or objects) are not touched or disturbed. This would mean the art therapist has to create a 'good enough' and safe enough working place for the client to feel safe enough to go into mourning and loss to work with materials, objects and most importantly, the memories of their loved one (Tripp et al., 2019; Winnicott, 1971).

Installation

The client would decide if, when, or where they will display, install, or dispose of the artwork. This would be at their discretion and within their time frame and processing requirements. This would be their bereavement process, which the client will guide and lead. They would choose what products to use for attachment, glueing, installing or burning, burying, or keeping the artwork.

Contained closure

This would be the most important process of this grief and bereavement processing work. The art therapist would need to create options and support the client's final decision of how their grief memorial artwork will be kept, preserved, displayed, or put to rest. This could be something to revisit or reframe with the careful containment of the client and artwork, which is paramount to this process. The art therapist must create a carefully contained "safe place" using workable "good enough" options when supporting the client's processing (Tripp et al., 2019; Winnicott, 1971; Bion, 1956).

Discussion

This study found how both case studies' bereavement memorial artwork processes support this "ongoing inter-subjective relationship" (Streobe, 2002; McCabe, 2003). This means re-evaluating traditional stages of grief, for example, Kübler-Ross's five-stage model as a "tick list for moving on" (Hall, 2014). To "give up" the grief process as quickly as possible allows others to sit

more comfortably with the discomfort of loss and death but may not be the best approach for the bereaved (Hall, 2014). This study investigated an arts-based protocol to support persistent complex bereavement as an art therapy counselling modality. The interviews with two participants allowed for the formalisation of important themes in response to theoretical frameworks and grief models and have led to the creation of a possible proposed bereavement memorial protocol that has been formalised based on these findings. This process was observed from 2020 to 2021, and this research was concluded in 2023.

Conclusion

Two participants were interviewed as case studies of mothers processing persistent complex bereavement due to the loss of their children to completed suicide. Both participants completed ceramic artworks of different styles to process their grief. The first participant Kate Shand modelled a ceramic artwork process to the second participant Matty Strydom who was her pottery student. The observed and modelled arts-based bereavement memorial protocol of memorialisation using fundamental art therapy strategies is the hypothesis of my observations as the researcher who was the primary observer of both these cases.

The safe place protocol organically modelled by Shand proved to be an example for the premise of this investigation of two bereavement processes that use an art-based practice as a formulation modelling of a bereavement memorial protocol (Tripp et al., 2019). This organic processing of memory making led to a protocol testimony for making meaning by 'piecing together' memorial bereavement artworks and reframing such a process into a protocol that could be used in art therapy as a therapeutic practice and addition to grief counselling (Frankl, 1946; Beaumont, 2013). This protocol is suggested for bereavement counselling for use in future art therapy practices motivated and formulated as a result of this study.

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