

Doll making: An art therapy approach to support bereaved clients

Kate Shand 

University of Witwatersrand
elizabeth.shand@wits.ac.za

Bio

Kate Shand is an HPCSA-registered art therapist based in Johannesburg. Shand and her sister, ceramicist Nina Shand, run the Melville Mudroom pottery teaching studio. Shand is also a research associate at the University of the Witwatersrand, where she is working on The Meaning of Home programme for migrant children. Dr Nereida Ripero-Muñiz and Shand recently published *The Meaning of Home: A toolkit for storytelling interventions with migrant children*. They are also working on a project with colleagues from University College London on arts-based research methods in under-served communities. She was recently appointed as a part-time lecturer with the University of Johannesburg Art Therapy programme.

Abstract

This article is about an art therapy doll-making process to support bereaved clients. Doll making can be a powerful and evocative activity that has many therapeutic benefits, particularly as a support for bereavement. There is limited literature on doll-making, bereavement and art therapy and therefore this article is a contribution to original knowledge. I explore the potential of doll making in the context of bereavement and art therapy, using the lens of object relations theory and attachment theory. I reflect on an arts-based inquiry of my own doll-making experience based on my Honours in Art Therapy research. I present a process that art therapists can use when working with dolls and bereaved clients. The article emerges from a desire to understand how art therapists can use doll making to support bereaved clients, using both the existing literature on dolls and doll making as well as my own experience of making dolls. I use a literature review and reflections on my own doll-making practice. The arts-based approach permits me to write from a personal perspective to investigate and explore my doll-making experience in relation

to both practice and theory. This research derives from a literature review, an arts-based inquiry and personal reflection on my own doll making, producing a process that is original and replicable.

Keywords: Art therapy, attachment theory, bereavement, doll making, grief, transference, transitional object



Figure 1: An interview process was used with the dolls to guide the healing journey, photograph by Kate Shand, 2022

Introduction

"Dolls are toys used for play but they are also fetish objects used for rituals, protection and healing; they are evocative and powerful and have been used for thousands of years"

(Olson, 1998).

This article is a description of an arts-based research project that I undertook in relation to doll making as part of my Honours in Art Therapy research. I present an interview process with my dolls that I developed as a visual research method to approach the theory and practice of art therapy and bereavement. It is an inquiry into a selection of three dolls that I made between the years

2011 and 2016 after the death of my son in 2011. Although art therapists use dolls and doll making in their practices, there is little literature on doll making in psychological and art therapy theory (Feen-Calligan, McIntyre & Sands-Goldstein, 2009; Simms, 1996). I draw on the few articles I could find on art therapy and dolls (Feen-Calligan, McIntyre & Sands-Goldstein, 2009; Topp, 2005; Stace, 2014), the uncanny, the abject and the other (Kristeva, 1982; Carriker, 1998), and a change management programme (Wicks & Rippin, 2010) that used doll making. I also touch on psychoanalytic theories such as transference, the transitional object and attachment (Bollas, 1987; Schaverien, 1990; Winnicott, 1953; Bowlby, 1982), and bereavement theory (Lister, Puskar & Connolly, 2008; Stroebe, 2002) to locate my doll making within psychological and bereavement theory. This article – describing an experience of doll making to support grief and healing – contributes new knowledge to the discipline of art therapy and the benefits of doll making, which is valuable to share with other professionals in the field. Although South Africa has a rich tradition of dolls and doll making, the South African context was not a factor in the article.

This article is my story of bereavement and loss and how my doll-making (in particular) was soothing, comforting and encouraging, as well as, at times, confrontational, reflective, and disruptive. Shaun McNiff (1998, p. 408) says that he is interested in the stories about why art therapists became art therapists, believing that it “may be one of the best ways of understanding and articulating [art therapy’s] unique healing powers”. My chosen dolls were made at a time of early and intense bereavement. I liken early bereavement to a liminal space in that all my signposts had been swept away. Everything I thought I knew had been shattered. I describe this time as moving “like a stranger in a world where the signposts have been removed. The signs I’ve used to navigate my way so far have become foreign, and I cannot decode them” (Shand, 2013, p. 8). My analysis reveals that the dolls have been my signposts. I did not know which way to turn, and the dolls emerged as guides on my healing journey. My arts-based inquiry emerged from a desire to understand the journey my dolls took me on and how doll making can be used by art therapists to support, in particular, bereaved clients.

I will present a review of the literature on dolls and doll making where I locate them within a psychoanalytic frame in relation to the concept of the transitional object and attachment theory. The literature review is followed by an arts-based inquiry into my chosen three dolls, a discussion of findings and a conclusion.

Literature

There is very little literature on art therapy and the benefits of making dolls, and my review includes the few articles I was able to source about where dolls have been used therapeutically. I also touch on psychological theories such as transference, the transitional object, attachment theory, and bereavement theory to understand what it is about dolls that makes them evocative and helpful in an art therapy context. Poet, Rainer Maria Rilke (Simms, 1996, p. 672) says, "We found our orientation through the doll. By nature, she was lower than we were, so we could gradually flow down into her, collect ourselves, and recognise, although somewhat dimly, our new surrounding world".

An article by Holly Feen-Calligan, Barbara McIntyre, and Margaret Sands-Goldstein (2009, p. 172) explores a number of short case studies where dolls were used, and in each instance, the participants experienced their own "recreation" as they made their dolls. One of the case studies is about a 16-year-old girl grieving the death of her sister and how she made a doll of her sister. This process helped her to a "deeper resolution of grief and a positive sense of self". Her "identity was concretely explored and became tangible through the doll and the creative process of doll-making" (Feen-Calligan et al., 2009, p. 169). The article concludes that although many art therapists have made dolls and used them in their art therapy sessions, they have not written about the value of this. The authors invite art therapists to explore and describe the benefits of including dolls in their work (Feen-Calligan et al., 2009).

Jennifer Topp (2005) examines the relationship between children and the dolls they make, how the children view themselves through their dolls, and how they play with their dolls. She includes examples of art therapists who have used dolls and doll making successfully in therapy situations. Topp (2005) explains that everyone benefits from doll making – parents gain appreciation of their children's creativity, the children gain self-esteem, and the art therapist gains insight into the child's inner life.

Patricia Wicks and Ann Rippin (2010) describe an arts-based action inquiry using a group of students from a management learning and change programme. The participants were asked to create "leadership touchstones, or dolls, as a way of learning about leadership and themselves as leaders" (Wicks & Rippin, 2010, p. 261). The activity was to show the power of dolls to "provoke, unsettle and evoke strong reactions" (Wicks & Rippin, 2010, p. 261) and how this opens up opportunities for reflexivity. The participants in the

study were surprised by what the dolls evoked. Doll making allowed people to work intuitively and bypass their customary cognitive processes.

Wicks and Rippin (2010) link doll making to learning engagement with the abject, the uncanny, and the other within organisational life. Julia Kristeva (1982) developed the term 'abject' to explore the human reaction to the decayed, fragmented or impure human body. The abject refers to the loss of a sense of self, or to put it another way, a loss of boundaries between self and other. It is activated in the viewer by that which disturbs the boundaries and order rather than the 'grossness' itself. The corpse is the primary example of what makes us feel abhorrence because "It is death infecting life" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). I would argue that the doll, non-human, inanimate and object also disturbs these boundaries between human and non-human, animate and inanimate, subject and object.

Dolls can be used to help adults discover and express their life stories, connect, self-soothe and create a sense of attachment. Sonia Stace (2014, p. 3) uses a case study to explore doll making as a support for trauma and notes that "doll making may help clients to express, transform, and heal from difficulties". Stace (2014) shares what the dolls revealed to Jess (one of her clients) about her internal states, her relationships, and her evolving narrative.

Joy Schaverien (1999, p. 483) writes about the idea of how the embodied image, in this case, the doll, becomes magically empowered, like a talisman, as the image becomes invested in the transference process. She makes the point that in rituals, "an inanimate object is the bearer of a 'transference'" (Schaverien, 1999, p. 483). Transference in psychotherapy refers to the unconscious process whereby the client directs their feelings onto the therapist. Christopher Bollas (1987, p. 23) explains how Donald Winnicott (1953) applies the concept of transference in the therapeutic relationship as looking "within the patient for the infant who lives within a maternal holding environment and to ask how patients communicate their knowledge of this experience through the transference". Art images in analysis play a similar role, except usually as an unconscious process.

Eva-Maria Simms (1996) notes that the concept of the doll is hardly featured in psychological theory, and what the doll symbolises is seldom explored. Simms (1996) refers to Winnicott, who did not give dolls their own category. Rather, the dolls formed part of the general category of toys as transitional objects that help children separate from their mothers. The use

of the transitional object, such as a toy or a blanket, by a child to navigate the mother's coming and going is, according to Bollas (1987), the child's first creative act. Bollas (1987, p. 6) describes this act as "an event that does not merely display an ego capacity – such as grasping – but indicates the infant's subjective experience of such capacities". The transitional object helps the child to adjust between the outside world and the inner psyche, and according to Winnicott (1953), the infant is able to manage these transitions by adapting to loss through creation.

Dolls are also not differentiated in attachment theory. They are relegated to the general 'toys' category. Yet, a doll "profoundly attracts the child's desire, evokes passionate love and hate, and fulfils needs that are difficult to articulate in any other way than through play" (Simms, 1996, p. 664). Presumably, this is because the dolls are representations of people, or aspects of people, including oneself (or one's early infant/mother dyad). The theory of attachment, as developed by John Bowlby (1982), explains the attachment behaviour of the infant and the primary caregiver (mother) and how this affects the development of the infant, especially in relation to separation. The various styles of attachment include secure, anxious/resistant, avoidant and disorganised, and are based on the responsiveness, rejection and predictability of the mother towards her infant (Berghaus, 2011). A securely attached child grows up being able to rely on their internal objects or, to quote Bowlby (Berghaus, 2011, p. 6), "the child must develop 'internal working models' of the attachment figure and of the self in interaction with the attachment figure". The formation of early attachment to the primary caregiver determines how future relationships are experienced, as well as the experience of the loss of these relationships.

Recent developments in bereavement theory have linked attachment theory to bereavement. Margaret Stroebe (2002, p. 127) states that attachment theory "is the most powerful theoretical force in contemporary bereavement research". Understanding the early attachment pattern of an individual can assist the therapist in understanding why some people are more resilient than others when it comes to bereavement (Stroebe, 2002). In his trilogy *Attachment and Loss*, John Bowlby (Stroebe, 2002, p. 128) describes "the manner in which patterns of grieving are influenced, positively or negatively, by experiences in the person's family of origin, as well as by more recent experiences". Bowlby (Stroebe, 2002) further proposes that grief is a

form of separation anxiety. In other words, grief is a rupture of attachment, and the early experience of attachment structures it.

Suzanne Lister, Dolores Puskar, and Kate Connolly (2008) refer to the importance of meaning making and the lifelong nature of the grieving process. The authors state that “the art therapist is well suited to address these individual narratives and constructions through creative exploration and metaphor” (Lister et al., 2008, p. 250). The “new theoretical perspectives on grief” include the importance of continuing bonds and, in the case of bereaved parents, keeping a sense of children intact through linking objects (Davies, 2004, p. 509).

The literature provides insights into applicable theory to help me understand the power of making dolls, as well as to derive an overview of how other art therapists have used doll making with clients. During the process of formulating the literature review, I found myself reflecting on my dolls and the doll-making process; memories were aroused, and connections and links were made. As such, it has been a very important part of my research, enhanced my doll inquiry, and provided insights into my work with clients.

Methods

I used an arts-based research methodology, reflecting on the actual practice of art-making (my dolls) as a form of inquiry and discovery of knowledge. Cathy Malchiodi (2017, p. 73) defines arts-based research as “the discovery and identification of knowledge through one or more forms of artistic expression”. Arts-based research can also be about an individual’s personal enquiry into their art-making process and its products. Malchiodi (2017, p. 85) says that much of the knowledge derived from arts-based research comes from the personal inquiries made by arts therapists into their own processes and outputs and that this is “valuable not only on an individual level but also collectively over time”. The aim of arts-based research within the context of art therapy is “to discover and develop arts-based experiences” that will ultimately support those people whom art therapists support (Malchiodi, 2017, p. 74).

In writing about arts-based research, McNiff (1998) says that it is important that we tell our individual stories and integrate them into clinical experience. The arts-based approach permits me to use the subjective perspective to investigate my doll-making experience. I found very little direct first-person

research about dolls as toys and the power of doll making. My own doll-making process has therefore informed my research method.

My arts-based inquiry is based on a selection of dolls made between 2011 and 2016. These dolls exist in two distinct groupings: the first set is rag dolls and the second set is ceramic dolls. For this inquiry, I chose one rag doll and two ceramic dolls that most reflect the psychoanalytic and attachment concepts discussed in the literature review.

I undertook a systematic inquiry, and I asked the same questions for each doll. The purpose of my inquiry is to attempt to capture what inspired the making of each doll, where I made it, how I made it, whom I shared it with, how (or by whom) it was used, where it is now, and what does the doll evoke for me as I look at it? I also looked at what role the doll played in my life.

Phase 1

Initially, I thought my inquiry would only include the set of questions listed below, but my answers were not satisfactory. They seemed superficial and lacked insight and depth. In the end, the inquiry took place in four phases or stages, with each phase of questions deepening the inquiry. The first set of questions I have labelled 'initial inquiry', and I consider it to be the first phase of exploration. These questions were helpful in that they gently reintroduced me to the dolls, which I made many years ago and served to remind them of me.

Phase 1 questions include the following:

- Describe the doll
- When and where was the doll made?
- Describe the material used and the making process
- Why did I make the doll?
- What do I feel when I look at the doll?
- What does the doll mean to me?
- What does the doll reveal to me?
- Where is the doll now?

I wrote a detailed response to each question for each doll. Upon reading my answers, additional and deeper responses to the dolls emerged. I decided I

needed to ask the dolls some direct questions in order to try and hear their voices, not just my own.

Phase 2

Although I found my answers to the first set of questions quite superficial, they did provide a gentle way into the exploration and opened a safe space in which I could deepen my inquiry. I added two additional questions:

- If the doll could speak, what would she say to me?
- If the doll could hear me, what would I say to her?

Again, I applied these questions to each doll. With these additional questions, it felt like I was beginning to really open up a dialogue and exchange.

Phase 3

The questions that I asked the dolls in Phase 2 inspired memories as well as current thoughts about and connections to the dolls. The research still felt incomplete, and I added two further questions:

- How do I remember the feeling of making the doll?
- What do I think about the doll now?

Phase 4

A week later and there still seemed to be an important element missing from my inquiry. I felt a need to engage the dolls more directly. I was tired of hearing only my voice. I was curious about their stories. The dolls, after all, were the participants in this research, and I needed to recognise them. My final question for each doll was:

- Who are you?

Results

What follows is a summary of the answers the three dolls gave me during my inquiry.

Doll 1: Rag doll

Figure 2: Rag doll (fabric), photograph by Kate Shand, 2011

The doll was made towards the end of 2011 – approximately eight months after my son died (Figure 2). She marks the start of the long (and ongoing doll-making journey). The making of this first doll responded to a deep primal need to create something as simple (and as complex) as a doll. It was a curious being that emerged from the scraps of fabric stitched together and stuffed using my own hands. It was a three-dimensional object that seemed to have a life and identity of its own. A little body.

The body and limbs of the doll were made from my son's duvet cover, and the heart was cut from one of his t-shirts. It was very satisfying creating this doll from bits and pieces in the home, and I felt a thrill of excitement when the 'little figure' emerged with her own character. As I remember it, the pleasure was in choosing the wool colour for hair, a hairstyle, buttons for eyes,

fabric for clothes, sewing the outfit, and embellishing the doll with ornaments (jewellery and ribbons, and other bits and pieces). Was it a bit like giving birth to bits of myself that needed loving and caring? I wanted to be a child again, making and playing with dolls. I wanted to use my imagination. I did not want to make useful objects. This doll permitted me to be playful. I made many rag dolls over a year, and then, just as suddenly as I started, I stopped.

Who are you?

I am soft but I've survived a great battle. I have scars to show for it. I may be fierce on the outside but inside I'm soft. My heart is bright and vivid. I have a gash on my face that's been stitched up. I have wounds that are healing.

Doll 2: Abject doll



Figure 3a: Abject doll (fired clay), photograph by Kate Shand, 2014



Figure 3b: Abject doll (fired clay), photograph by Kate Shand, 2014

This doll was made in 2014 (Figure 3a). She is part of a series of similar dolls that I call my puppet dolls. I was uncertain if all her parts would survive the fierce heat of a raku firing. I spent time digging in the sawdust to find all the bits of her, especially the small hands and feet. I took great delight in putting the body parts together – threading and cutting the cable ties – to create the final doll. I was putting my fragmented parts back together. I had a plan to tie the body parts together with a more attractive material later, but I was very impatient and wanted to see it complete, so I used the plastic cable ties as a temporary solution (Figure 3b).

I could see this doll was potent and evocative when she came out of the raku kiln. However, she was the last in the series of puppet dolls. As with the rag dolls, I made many versions of this doll, and as suddenly as I started, I ended. I no longer wanted to make them. I tried to display them, but they disturbed and unsettled me (Figure 4). *I did not know what to do with them. There were so many.*



Figure 4: Abject dolls (fired clay), photograph by Kate Shand, 2014

I packed the doll away carefully in a box and put it out of sight. I took such trouble over creating this doll and then could not extend this care to finishing it off properly and finding a place for it to exist. Instead, I left it on a shelf, and someone moved it, and a limb broke and then went missing, and then I threw it away. I was careless with this powerful doll.

Who are you?

Although my bones rattle, I am graceful. I dance. I can hear my bones crackle. Around a fire. I am tribal. I have ancient markings burnt upon my body. My body shows that I have lived. It is marked by fire. The marks protect me. My skin has cracked. I am smiling. I wear a mask.

Doll 3: Snake goddess doll

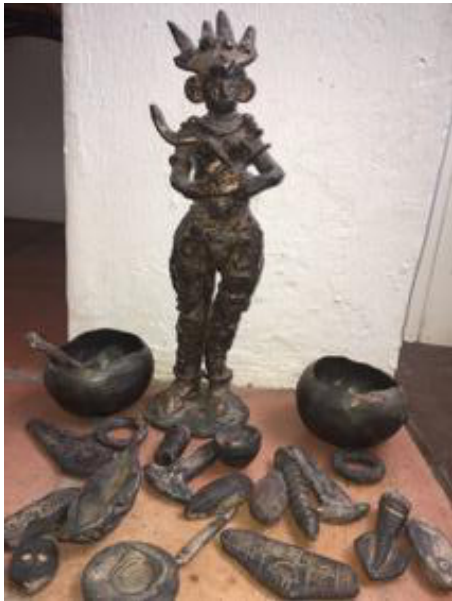


Figure 5a: Snake goddess doll (fired clay), photograph by Kate Shand, 2016



Figure 5b: Snake goddess doll (fired clay), photograph by Kate Shand, 2016

The doll was made in early 2016 (Figure 5a). She is my first standing doll. She was complete, and I did not have to stitch or attach body parts. I had never made a sculpture before, and it was technically challenging – just keeping the figure vertical required great ingenuity. I built her up slowly, which was difficult for me because I like to work quite fast and spontaneously. I glazed this doll with a bronze lustre to give her and her tools a precious and ancient patina.

Her body is adorned with magical signs. Could it be armour to protect her? At her feet are ancient relics (Figure 5b). They are her talismans. The doll is whole, but there are still fragments lying before her. Sometimes, I look at her, and she looks like a dancer from the East. At other times, she looks like a sentinel. This doll is linked to the spiritual world of ancient ritual and magic. She is from a time and place where people still believe in signs and rituals and magical belief to make sense of that which is incomprehensible, a place where spells can be cast, demons expelled, myths believed, bones thrown, incantations mumbled, herbs burned, and crones revered. She belongs to that space and time between death and life. She provides a bridge between the two worlds. She is telling me that I can trust her to guide me to a life after death.

Who are you?

I am a snake goddess. An ancient priestess. My body has a lustrous bronze sheen. I am valuable. I am wearing a crown. Goddess, priestess, queen. I can invoke the wrath or goodwill of the gods in equal measure. Be careful of me, treat me with respect, and I will protect and look after you.

Emerging themes

Next, I reflected on the themes that emerged. I read and re-read the doll 'interviews' to reveal and amplify these themes, connections, and relationships. What became apparent was that dolls are so much more than their connection as a toy and transitional object from early childhood. Dolls and the making of them are also about keeping parts of our loved ones alive, the abject and the uncanny, dis-membering and re-membering, signposts and guides, liminality, protection, the transitional object, attachment and play, and making meaning.

Keeping parts of our loved ones alive

Making the rag dolls seems like a curious and obsessional activity. In the beginning, my son was close to me. I needed a place to put the love. I sent the dolls out into the world like prayers of gratitude and love.

The object and the uncanny

I wonder about the hanging dolls that so resemble puppets (Figure 4). The puppets were waiting for life to be breathed into them. In puppetry, using an object means “giving life and meaning to the lifeless object that has a certain function in everyday life”. Hence, the object comes to us through personification and the removal of its previous roles and functions (Mirfendereski, 2016, p. 28). The dolls hung from their rod, apparently lifeless but with the possibility of a puppet master bringing them to life. These dolls seemed able to hold some of my grief, but then they became quite unbearable. I did not throw them away; instead, I carefully placed them in a box with a lid and put them on a shelf where they were safe but out of sight.

Dismembering and re-membering

Did I make these dolls to try to piece the shattered fragments together? Grief is a metaphoric dismemberment, and making these dolls was a metaphoric re-membering. It is a reclaiming of what has been taken. Dismembering and re-membering – creating the limbs of dolls that I put together as an act of remembering, coming back together. Instead of dismembering my son, I can re-member him. My dismembered grieving body is now re-membered in these dolls.

Signposts and guides

Grief is a desolate land of alienation, isolation, and fragmentation. When all the signposts have been removed, we need to make new ones. Who am I now? Where am I now? Where must I go? Grief is like being lost, and the dolls provided the first solid signpost – they were my guides. Making the dolls helped to re-locate me in time and space. Working with clay is also a similar experience in that it is process work. Making the clay dolls was immensely stabilising. These dolls were showing me the way. The dolls revealed parts of

myself to me when I was ready to receive them. Through these dolls, I seemed to encounter parts of myself.

Liminality

Grief occupies a liminal space – there is the before and the after that is yet to happen. Grief occupies the space between what was known and what is emerging and yet to be known. It is a similar space to the one I occupied when making the dolls. I am so deeply absorbed in the work of creating them, and a transition happens. And I am in a space I have never been in before, connected through the act of creating the doll to the past and to the future. And what of the dolls? Do the dolls now occupy a liminal space? Do the dolls represent a liminal space? The dolls showed me that I am not fully in the world yet – that I am still occupying a liminal space between two worlds of life and death.

Protection

The goddess doll (Figure 5a) looks like she is protecting herself from “attacks which only strengthened the impregnability of her psychic armour” (Milner, 2010). I read this line and thought of my goddess doll – she is covered in psychic armour. She was made at a time when I was immensely vulnerable. I wonder at how defended I was then or should have been. The dolls protected me when I needed to be protected.

Transitional object

Unlike a child’s transitional object, the act of creating the dolls became my transitional object – a way for me to navigate the before and after space of loss. The making of the dolls, at times, felt similar to the act of making mud pies when I was a child. I have a distinct sense that I make my dolls because I need to and not because I need affirmation or confirmation that I am good enough. I sense that this kind of ‘playing’ and creating helps repair the rupture / the ‘I am not a good enough’ object. On an even simpler level, making dolls can be soothing and comforting. For many years after my son died, my brain refused to function in the way it had before his death. The one thing I could still do was create, and it helped. There has been a terrible tragedy, one in the shadow of which my family will exist all our lives. Maybe these dolls were

about my deep desire and need to breathe life into new beings – to animate that which is seemingly inanimate.

Attachment and play

An important shift in how I approached the making of dolls occurred during the time I made rag dolls. In 2014, an art therapist in a workshop suggested that dolls can be made out of anything. It was all the prompt I needed. I was soon completely caught up in creating my first newspaper doll, wrapping her limbs and torso with coloured wool. The finished product was clumsy and childlike and looked as if a child made it. A child made it – my inner child. I was so delighted to discover her. I could create a doll with no expectation of how it *should* look. I could pick up the newspaper and wrap it into shape, all the while absorbed in the process and curious to see what would emerge.

I am interested in attachment and trauma theory in relation to the resources I had in my own childhood to manage difficulties and how this prepared me to cope and added to my resilience as an adult. The inquiry revealed that not only did making dolls support my grief, providing a bridge between the 'before' and 'after', but it also (perhaps simultaneously) provided some healing of my childhood, and this childhood healing had to take place in order for the loss of my son to become something I could tolerate. What healing had to take place? I had to learn to feel safe enough to play. I want to make stuff like a child, engaging my imagination and creative centre, not to be useful but for the sheer pleasure of seeing what will emerge.

Making meaning

Making meaning has been an important part of my healing. I understood that one of the ways I could make sense of what had happened would be to make what happened not be meaningless. Making the dolls strengthened me and gave me back to myself in bits and pieces until one day, I was able to believe that perhaps I could create spaces for people to make their own dolls.

Limitations

The limitation of this research is that it is based on my subjective experience of doll making. I am also aware that my reflections and observations are preliminary and tentative. Nonetheless, I believe that the description of my

doll making has provided original and replicable practice for arts therapists – and I would assert, could be used and adapted across all the arts therapies – supporting bereaved clients.

Conclusion

I have provided insight into the transformative power of doll making to support not only bereaved clients but also beyond. There is something about dolls that is very complex and uncanny. Dolls are objects of darkness, mystery, witchcraft, and magic, but paradoxically, they are also objects of childhood play and memory. It is this interplay between the danger and darkness and the benign (dolls are pliant and cannot fight back) and playful that is so generative of playfulness, imagination, exploration, and stories. In the end, the doll cannot share our confidences, and all of those conversations, “the most intense and the most incriminating of all”, have really been with ourselves (Carriker, 1998). It is not so much that the dolls heal; it is that they reflect to us our capacity to heal. The dolls provide a mirror to our brokenness and loss, as well as to our strength and resilience. The dolls are figures that emerged from the unconscious to protect, guide, nourish, and reveal a new path and way of being.

I knew that making the dolls helped me, but I did not understand how. The act of making my own dolls, this inquiry into my doll making, and the doll-making I have facilitated over the years have confirmed for me the healing benefits of dolls. I made my dolls on impulse and relatively unconsciously in that I did not reflect on them with myself, nor did I reflect on them with others. It would have been so beneficial if there had been an art therapist by my side asking me, ‘Who is she?’, ‘What story does she want to tell?’, ‘How do you feel about her?’, ‘How does she feel about you?’, ‘What do you want to say to her?’.

Doll making is a very profound area of art making and practice in relation to coping with grief and loss. It is an area of art therapy that has not yet been properly and fully explored. This article attempts to contribute to the emerging body of knowledge around this subject and to help open further areas of inquiry.

References

- Berghaus, B. J. (2011). A new look at attachment theory and adult attachment behavior. *Behaviorology Today*, 14(2), 3–10.
- Bollas, C. (1987). *The shadow of the object: Psychoanalysis of the unthought known*. Columbia University Press.
- Bowlby, J. (1982). *Attachment and loss, Vol. 1 Attachment*. Tavistock Institute of Human Relations.
- Carriker, K. (1998). *Created in our image – the miniature body of the doll as subject and object*. Lehigh University Press.
- Davies, R. (2004). New understandings of parental grief: Literature review. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 46(5), 506–513. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2004.03024.x>
- Elliott, B. (2011). Arts-based and narrative inquiry in liminal experience reveal platforming as basic social psychological process. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 38(2), 96–103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2011.01.001>
- Feen-Calligan, H., McIntyre, B. & Sands-Goldstein, M. (2009). Art therapy applications of dolls in grief recovery, identity, and community service. *Art Therapy*, 26(4), 167–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2009.10129613>
- Gayá Wicks, P. & Rippin, A. (2010). Art as experience: An inquiry into art and leadership using dolls and doll-making. *Leadership*, 6(3), 259–278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715010368767>
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of horror: An essay of abjection*. Columbia University Press.
- Malchiodi, C. (2017). Drawing and painting research. In P. Leavy (ed), *Handbook of arts-based research* (pp. 68–86). Guilford Publications.
- McNiff, S. (1998). *Art-based research*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Mirfendereski, S. (2016). *Dolls and puppets as artistic and cultural phenomena*, K. Kopania (ed). Aleksander Zelwerowicz.
- Olson, G. (1998). *Dolls: Protection, healing, power and play*. Somantics.
- Schaverien, J. (1999). Art within analysis: Scapegoat, transference and transformation. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 44(4), 479–510. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1465-5922.00116>
- Shand, K. (2013). *Boy. The story of my teenage son's suicide*. Jacana Media.
- Simms, E. M. (1996). Uncanny dolls: Images of death in Rilke and Freud. *New Literary History*, 27(4), 663–677. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.1996.0056>
- Stace, S.M. (2014). Therapeutic doll making in art psychotherapy for complex trauma. *Art Therapy*, 31(1), 12–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2014.873689>

- Stroebe, M. (2002). Paving the way: From early attachment theory to contemporary bereavement research. *Mortality*, 7(2), 127-138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576270220136267>
- Topp, J. (2005). *The uses of doll making in art therapy with children: Four case studies*. Concordia University (doctoral dissertation).
- Winnicott, D.W. (1953). Transitional objects and transitional phenomena—a study of the first not-me possession. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 34, 89-97.
- Winnicott, D.W. (2005). *Playing and reality*, Routledge.