



Current bereavement theory: Implications for art therapy practice

Suzanne Lister, PhD^{a,*}, Dolores Pushkar, PhD^b, Kate Connolly, PhD^c

^a Department of Creative Arts Therapies, S-VA 268, Concordia University, 1455 de Maisonneuve Boulevard West, Montreal, QC H3G 1M8, Canada

^b Department of Psychology, PY, Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, QC H4B 1R6, Canada

^c Department of Applied Human Sciences, Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, QC H4B 1R6, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Bereavement theory
Art therapy

ABSTRACT

In a recent survey of art therapists affiliated with the American Art Therapy Association (American Art Therapy Association, I. (2007). *Newsletter*, XL. American Art Therapy Association, INC., pp. 23), bereavement/grief was listed as one of the top 10 specialties of practicing art therapists. Despite the apparent popularity of this kind of work, publications suggest that stage-based approaches to grief still seem to be the norm (Finn, C. A. (2003). Helping students cope with loss: incorporating art into group counselling. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 28, 155–165; Hiltunen, S. M. S. (2003). Bereavement, lamenting and the prism of consciousness: Some practical considerations. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 30, 217–228) regardless of the recent theoretical and empirical advances in bereavement. Instead of seeing the natural process of grief as something that must be experienced in stages, the more recent theories (Neimeyer, R. A. (1998). *Lessons of loss: A guide to coping*. NY: McGraw-Hill; Stroebe, M. S., & Schut, H. (1999). The dual process of model of coping with bereavement: Rationale and description. *Death Studies*, 23(3), 197–224) focus on finding meaning in the aftermath of loss and describe the process in a more complex way. These approaches fit well with the art therapist's orientation towards externalizing, facilitating insight and understanding in the client. The article describes these newer approaches to bereavement and provides clinical and theoretical implications for art therapists working in grief/bereavement.

© 2008 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The “scientific” study of bereavement has been documented since the early 17th century (Parkes, 2001, 2002). Since that time, physicians and researchers, such as Darwin, chronicled both the process and outcome of loss. However, it was Freud's (1917) *Mourning and Melancholia* that propelled the study of grief and loss into the mainstream arena of psychology. Freud's theory of “grief work” laid the foundation and set the assumptions for our understanding of grief for almost a century. In the last 20 years, the assumptions about the process, purpose, and outcome of grief have been challenged. Researchers have proposed new theories that incorporate related fields of research such as attachment theory and emotion theory, while other researchers argue for bereavement specific models (Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe, & Schut, 2001).

The literature on bereavement, both theoretical and empirical, has largely focused on spousal loss late in life. Additionally, much of the literature chronicling the sequelae of loss focuses on negative outcomes such as depression, psychiatric symptoms, and heightened mortality. In the last decade, researchers and theoreticians

have begun to look at some of the positive outcomes of loss. This shift in focus allows clinicians and researchers to investigate more thoroughly the complexity of the bereavement experience.

Theories of bereavement

Freud's grief work hypothesis

The legacy of Freud's work on grief has been both a benefit and a detriment to the field of thanatology, the study of death. The benefit has been that his description of grief provided a foundation from which others could bring the discussion into mainstream research. Freud stated that grieving is an act whereby the libido is withdrawn from the love object and all attachments to this object. With time, the ego becomes free and can invest in other attachments and the person returns to *normal*. The bereaved person follows a predictable course of initially experiencing *acute grief* in which the griever comes to understand, accept, and begin to cope with the loss. This phase supposedly lasts 3–12 weeks, and is followed by the *mourning period* of 1–2 years where attachment is gradually withdrawn from the one who died. At the conclusion of this period, the person is said to have worked through the loss as manifested in the person's return to his/her “*normal*” emotional

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 514 848 2424x4799; fax: +1 514 848 4649.

E-mail addresses: suzanlis@alcor.concordia.ca (S. Lister),

dolores.pushkar@concordia.ca (D. Pushkar), connolly@alcor.concordia.ca (K. Connolly).

life. The grieving process according to Freud was primarily an intra-psychoic one and some expression of grief was essential. This process was considered the standard normal course of bereavement. Therefore, the critical features of Freud's model were: (a) grief is intra-psychoic; (b) one must confront the loss; (c) the purpose of grief is to relinquish all attachment to the deceased; and (d) one returns to normal. An absence of emotional expression was a sign of pathology. It was not until the end of his life that Freud conceded that some losses are irreconcilable (Sanders, 1999).

The latter part of the 20th century has seen a challenge to Freud's theory (Hagman, 2001; Stroebe, 1992, 2001; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1991; Wortman & Silver, 1989, 2001). Prime refutations include: (a) bereavement cannot be described in a stage model; (b) grief is not just intra-psychoic but also interpersonal; (c) grieving includes a variety of emotions, not just sadness; (d) the return to "normal" functioning does not mean a return to previous functioning; and (e) denial is an important component of grieving. Additionally, the "normal" course of bereavement has been derived from clinical samples (Freud, 1917; Lindemann, 1965) and elderly samples (Parkes, 1975; Parkes & Weiss, 1983), thus potentially skewing the description of typical grief. Critiques of Freud's grief work hypothesis have opened the doors to exploring alternative frameworks for considering the course and outcome of bereavement.

Newer approaches to bereavement

Over the last two decades bereavement theory and research have been informed by the corollary fields of stress and trauma theories (Janoff-Bulman, 1989, 1992; Lazarus, 1999), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980), and cognitive process models (Folkman, 2001; Nolen-Hoeksema, Parker, & Larson, 1994). While these have been helpful areas of inquiry, many feel that the complexity of the bereavement process necessitates its own research and theories (Stroebe & Schut, 2001a). Stroebe (2001) also argued that in these early days of bereavement research, a pluralistic approach may be necessary because of the complexity of bereavement. Two theories have emerged in the current literature that have been amenable to preliminary research: the Dual-Process Model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999), and the Meaning-Reconstruction Model (Neimeyer, 1998). Each of these theories attempts to include some form of meaning-making in their models; however, Neimeyer's model is the only one that specifically focuses on the importance of meaning in bereavement. Neimeyer states that the central process of grieving is the reconstruction of meaning. As art therapists attempt to work creatively and therapeutically with bereaved people, these models may provide guidelines for awareness, orientation, and inquiry. The following section describes each model and follows with the therapeutic implications for art therapists working in bereavement.

The Dual-Process Model

The Dual-Process Model (DPM) is not a phasal model but one that regards the process of bereavement as an oscillation between two types of stressors (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). This model is defined as "an attempt to integrate existing empirically based ideas found in related fields (example, Folkman, 2001) rather than an altogether new model" (Stroebe & Schut, 2001a, p. 394–95). The DPM is regarded as more of an integrative model of bereavement. It was originated as an effort to understand coping with the death of a partner and recent research shows that this model accurately describes the bereavement experience of widows (Caserta & Lund, 2007).

Stroebe and Schut (2001a) argue that previous models of bereavement lacked definitions of stressors; thus, their model

delineates two broad types of stressors: "loss-orientation" and "restoration orientation." Within each of these stressors, they have situated bereavement relevant theories that have been developed in related fields.

The loss-orientation describes the person's concentration on, and dealing with, some part of the loss itself. Attachment theory would provide one theoretical foundation for this stressor as would Freud's theory of grief work described above. Thus, experiences of rumination, replaying the circumstances of the death, yearning, and emotional responses such as crying are all part of this orientation. Consequently, one would expect negative affect to predominate in the beginning and with time, positive emotions would begin to emerge. Because this model is not a phasal model, the emotional experiences are seen as waxing and waning over time. The model predicts that the loss orientation will tend to dominate early on in the bereavement (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). While bereaved people are negotiating the stressors in the loss orientation, Stroebe and Schut allude that there is a potential for finding meaning. As one oscillates between approach and avoidance of the loss and resultant feelings, meaning is being created. This will be discussed further below.

The restoration-orientation is seen as an aspect of loss that has not been developed in the literature as much as the loss-orientation. This stressor refers to the consequences of bereavement, primarily seen as secondary losses. Secondary losses are regarded as losses that come about as a result of the direct loss, and how they are handled. For example, a secondary loss may be that a widow feels she cannot participate in couples' gatherings anymore. Thus, the restoration is not about the outcome but it is about the *process* in which the bereaved person engages in order to adjust to the significant changes created by the death. Therefore, the widow in this example may need to reconsider how she will stay in touch with her coupled friends. Themes that are pertinent to restoration-orientation include mastering tasks originally assumed by the deceased, re-defining an identity, and dealing with living arrangements that may now be different (Stroebe & Schut, 1999).

The second aspect to Dual-Process Model is the oscillation that occurs between these two orientations. The unique feature of this model is this dynamic fluctuation between the two stressors rather than the phase-based models that had dominated bereavement theory previously. They propose that the bereaved person will oscillate between and within the loss- and restoration-orientations. For example, the individual will periodically confront emotional aspects of the loss and at other times, will avoid or deny them in favor of restoration-orientation related activities.

The final aspect to the Dual-Process Model refers to the cognitive processes in the bereavement experience. Drawing from the cognitive process models (e.g. Folkman, 2001), Stroebe and Schut describe the meanings, assumptions, and types of expression that are reflected in good versus poor adaptation (Stroebe & Schut, 2001b). Thus, the oscillation that occurs is a confrontation-avoidance dynamic occurring between positive- and negative-affect (re) appraisal, and between positive and negative appraisal. For example, grief is heightened when negative affect such as sadness dominates. However, working through this sadness, which includes rumination, can be helpful in coming to terms with the loss. Conversely, positive reappraisals sustain the coping effort giving it meaning, yet if these positive appraisals are done relentlessly, grieving is denied. The authors suggest that this cognitive oscillation helps explain the meaning systems or narratives created by the bereaved person. Stroebe and Schut (2001a) have included rumination and positive reappraisal in an effort to address the meaning process in bereavement. Therefore, while meaning is not a focus in the model, they suggest that meaning-making can occur and the

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات