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**The Dance/Movement Embodied Experience of Grief and Loss Using the Five Senses:
Development of a Clinical Method**

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

5/2/2023

Yarmisha Cofield

Dance Movement Therapy

Dr. Rebecca Zarate Ph.D., MT-BC, AVPT

Abstract

According to recent grief and loss research, creative arts therapy can help people heal after losing something or someone. However, there is little research to support the use of dance/movement therapy (DMT) in the adult population. This literature review investigated grief and loss, with a particular emphasis on embodied grief and how and where grief is carried in the physical body. Furthermore, this study of the literature extended on the implementation of DMT and the five senses with adults experiencing embodied grief, as well as body-based techniques to assist these individuals in understanding their loss. This was an essential subject to explore because, unfortunately, conceptualizing the grief process has been widely accepted as a conventional method of grieving. Adult's and young adults' grief processes, how long they should grieve, and how it manifests, have all been misconceptions. Following a thorough analysis of the current literature, the author identified how DMT, and the five senses could help those experiencing embodiment grief as well as aid in their overall healing process.

The findings indicate that the body plays an important role in the adult grieving experience. The findings further support the notion that the body should be a part of the therapeutic connection and interventions utilized with this population to aid in the grieving process. As a result of the combination of the body and mindfulness grounding techniques, our findings indicate that dance movement therapy and the five senses could be beneficial interventions for this population.

The Dance/Movement Embodied Experience of Grief and Loss Using the Five Senses: Development of a Clinical Method

Grief and loss are ongoing life processes. The loss of someone or something is one of the most traumatic events individuals could experience. Often the pain of loss can feel overpowering in which someone may encounter a wide range of complex and starting emotions. The pain of grief can disrupt a person's whole physical and mental health and be viewed as an embodied multisensory experience.

Since grief and loss are both widespread and unique. The more that can be researched to accumulate information about how individuals lament and express their grief. The more supportive society can be to those lamenting the two inside and beyond the mental health field. Callahan (2011) presents that the body holds memories, and that movement can support releasing some of the body's strains. This shows that a body-based approach to understanding the healing process of bereaved individuals is appropriate for acquiring a fuller comprehension of what they could insight. Dance/movement therapy (DMT) is defined by the American Dance Therapy Association (2009) as "the psychotherapeutic use of movement to further the emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration of the individual (2009, March p1). In her research, Joanna Taubeneck (2022) involves dance movement and Dr. Ross five stages of grief (Carpenter et al., 1979) article to engage in an intentional and immersive grieving process. Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross defines grief in five stages denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although Dr. Ross' five stages of grief may bring awareness that can help name our feelings and experiences inside of grief, healing and understanding grief and

loss takes more than the five stages of grief review. My research will-focus on grief and loss, dance/movement therapy, the five senses, and the embodiment of grief.

This topic of research is extremely important to me as I was someone who was impacted physically, mentally, and emotionally by the loss of a loved one. I noticed my emotions were like a rollercoaster. The only way I could truly express myself was through movement, and it truly made me smile. I consider it a second language. I also witnessed first-hand how death can affect the loved ones around you, and how they can carry that grief with them for years to come. This area of research is important because an increased number of individuals are experiencing grief, especially due to this pandemic. My proposal focuses on the use of dance/movement and the embodied experience of grief and loss using the five senses. The research question for this project is: What is the experience of grief and loss when processing through an embodied, multisensory experience? As a Black woman I have gone through the black grief of despair, self-blame, endurance, and survival. Between covid-19 and social injustice/unrest, my mind, body, and spirit have been tested to their limits. I have firsthand knowledge of and insight into grief and trauma. I see every day in my community how dealing with grief and loss can affect mental, physical, and emotional health. I want to help individuals make sense of embodied grief and loss because it is important for individuals to have the tools that will help them become aware of their grieving and healing process. With the help of this method, I hope that adults can start to understand their process while gaining the tools they need to be able to communicate their grieving experience. Once they grasp these tools it will help them identify what part of their body is holding their grief and start to help them gain different coping strategies.

Literature Review

This capstone thesis project is a development of a method and is primarily about the embodiment of grief and loss. This review will highlight the current literature that relates to utilizing dance/movement therapy techniques and interventions, when processing through an embodied, multisensory experience. In addition, I define attachment, trauma, grief and loss, dance movement therapy, and embodied suffering. I believe it is truly important to address that grief and loss culture shows up differently around the world. In the world's roughly 200 countries, there are thousands of different societies, each with their own distinct culture (Brown, 2018). Grief and culture are inextricably linked (Brown, 2018; Thanasiu & Pizza, 2019). When assisting others in grieving, one must be aware of culture, religion, family bereavement history, and one's own biases and beliefs about death and the bereavement process (Brown, 2018; Thanasiu & Pizza, 2019). Therapists should investigate their clients' cultural beliefs about death because people in grief frequently return to traditional values (Thanasiu & Pizza, 2019). Regardless of cultural differences, it is critical to be open to a variety of responses to death and grief to provide competent care.

Grief Theories

Early grief theorists (Bowlby, 1973; Freud, 1917; Kübler-Ross, 1969) conceptualized grief as a predictable series of steps, tasks, or stages, focusing on what some still believe are universalities in people's grieving processes rather than everyone's unique experience (Weiskittle & Gramling, 2018). However, as a growing body of empirical evidence revealed that there are multiple trajectories for grief rather than a single standardized process, and contemporary grief theorists began to focus on the variability in bereaved individuals' reactions to loss (Weiskittle & Gramling, 2018). Rather than viewing grief as a series of steps leading to resolution and acceptance, theorists who developed the dual process (Stroebe & Schut, 2001) and

meaning reconstruction (Neimeyer, 2001) models saw grief as a lifelong process of creating and recreating meaning in life after loss and maintaining and evolving one's bond with the deceased (Weiskittle & Gramling, 2018). In bereaved people, the process of finding and creating meaning is associated with higher levels of subjective well-being and immune system functioning (Weiskittle & Gramling, 2018).-

Attachment and Grief

Attachment theory has been linked to emotional regulation and mental health. There are three forms of attachment styles: secure, insecure, and disorganized (Blakely and Dziadosz, 2015). Secure attachment is established based on a primary figure that is actively involved in a child's life. It creates comfort in the child's life as it gives them the ability to maintain attachment relationships. Insecure attachment is when negative factors contribute to a decrease in esteem, confidence, and trust in relationships with others. There are two styles of insecure attachment: insecure anxiety and insecure disorganized. The insecure anxious style is caused by an inconsistent caretaker who constantly praises and condemns the child. This ultimately leaves the child with uncertainty in responding to different relationships. Insecure disorganized style the child views themselves and others as negative as their caretaker has instilled fear and very little coping skills which eventually results in poor emotional regulation and limited social function (Blakely and Dziadosz, 2015).

Defining Grief as a Traumatic Experience

Trauma is defined by The American Psychological Association as a distressing event "where one has experienced death, or the physical integrity of self or others that causes horror, terror, or helplessness at the time it occurs" (American Psychological Association, 2008). Examples of traumatic events include sexual and physical abuse, domestic violence, community,

and school violence, medical trauma, motor vehicle accidents, acts of terrorism, war experiences, natural and human-made disasters, suicides, and other traumatic losses. Throughout everyday life, we as a whole encounter various varieties of distress. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) described grief as the five stages: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. We might encounter these stages as a grouping or all simultaneously, or we might encounter just some of them. Sorrow is complicated and every individual has their own interesting experience of it. Ross depicted traumatic grief as a sudden, unexpected loss. We are not simply grieving the loss; we are likewise traumatized by it. The human body has natural reactions and responses to trauma. These reactions include intense and unpredictable emotions, changes in thought patterns, flashbacks, strained interpersonal relationships, and stress-related physical symptoms such as headaches, chest pains, and much more. Due to the complexities of trauma, a variety of diagnoses exist under the umbrella term trauma; however, for this capstone, the main focus will be on grief, and more specifically, embodied grief.

Defining Grief and Loss

Grief and loss have previously been defined in the literature as “the process of experiencing psychological, social, and physical reactions to your perspective of loss” (Philpott, 2013, p. 143). According to researchers, “theories about grief and loss are generally divided into three categories stages, phases, and task.” (Schuurman, 2003, p. 3). These theories most commonly include Elizabeth Kubler Ross's five stages of grief. However, it has been advised to be careful when reducing grief to a one size fits all approach: "There is no correct or incorrect way to grieve" (McNiel & Gabbay, 2018, p. 6). Since grief and loss are both widespread and unique the more that can be researched to accumulate information about how individuals lament

and express their grief, the more supportive society can be to those individuals inside and beyond the mental health field.

According to Worden (2003), "the argument demonstrates that grief is like the process of healing forces one to abandon health and well-being" (p. 15). Even though loss "involves suffering and an impairment of function that may last for days, weeks, or even months" (Bowlby, 1980), current researchers argue that "grief is not an illness that we treat; it is a natural life experience that children and their families are living through." (McNiel and Gabbay, 2018, p. 10).

Grief and Loss treatments

Dr. Aaron T. Beck (2011), who had been observing his clients' experiences with depression, pioneered the field of CBT in the 1950s and 1960s. He noticed that their dreams frequently mirrored their emotional states and that their thoughts made negative associations without any specific grounding. He noticed rapid improvements in his clients' conditions as he worked with them to unpack these automatic thoughts and emotional experiences. In the 1970s, Beck and his colleagues began to apply similar techniques to clients suffering from anxiety and depression. Beck discovered that the outcomes were equally as favorable. His techniques have since been published and applied to a wide range of populations, and CBT is now taught in programs around the world.

The vast majority of CBT treatment in practice is based on exploring and challenging these automatic thoughts. CBT's core theory is based on the idea that dysfunctional thinking influences mood and behavior, and thus it is the root cause of all psychological problems (Beck, 2011). Clients in the most basic form of CBT must learn to analyze their thinking in more realistic terms to improve their mood and behavior. Therapists assist clients in developing an

understanding of their basic belief systems, which include beliefs about themselves, systems, and relationships, in order to effect long-term change. Understanding the cognitive model is necessary for CBT practice. "People's emotions, behaviors, and physiology are influenced by their perception of events," (Beck, 2011, p. 30) according to the cognitive model.

The cognitive model recognizes that everyone perceives situations differently and thus has a variety of emotional and behavioral responses (Beck, 2011). These fleeting thoughts are known as automatic thoughts, and they are not the result of any evaluation or rationalization; rather, they are spontaneous reactions. Once an automatic thought has been identified, the client can conduct a reality check to investigate the thought's validity. This investigation into automatic thoughts may enable the client to alter their reaction to the situation.

Grief and Loss in Children and Young Adults

Death is a natural part of life, and most people will experience a loss throughout their lifetime, though the way in which adults and children cope with the sense of grief and loss differs. Children will often talk openly about the loss whereas adults have preconceived notions and may suppress their feelings (Hospice Northcoast, 2023). In addition, children develop their cognitive, emotional, and social learning in stages, therefore depending on their chronological age they may not understand grief and loss leaving feelings to come over time (Hospice Northcoast.2023). The long-term effects of grief can interrupt developmental expectations and cause further complications in the case of grieving young adults, defined as those aged eighteen to twenty-six (Zhou, 2018, p. 222). Because neurotypical development is still incomplete in the young adult age range, it is possible to speculate on how the long-term effects of grief may affect these developmental expectations (Hall et al., 2014, p. 21).

Embodiment Grief

It is vital to recognize the embodiment aspect of grief, because “these past experiences live in our bodies, and uniquely impact our present moment” (Simpkins Myers Coffin, 2017, p. 191). Scientists have distinguished this idea of previous encounters that live in our body as body memory. (Simpkins Myers Coffin, 2017, p. 191). The concept of body memory, which employs Kinesthetic awareness, is not only complex but also holistic; it necessitates integrated views of mind and body systems.

As a result, some of the most common somatic symptoms of grief and loss include stomach aches, headaches, nausea, insomnia, and weight gain or weight loss. This may bring about a general loss of energy and these responses can change daily (McNiel and Gabbay, 2018). According to Simpkins & Myers-Coffin (2017), body memory is the “embodied information storage function of the body, by which the body recalls the past in the present instant.” Additionally, the brain speech center is frequently cut off by these traumatic memories, making it difficult for the person to orally describe the experience (Van der Kolk, B. 2014).

Embodiment & Awareness Practices

Mind/body connection, mindfulness, embodiment, body awareness, somatic, body-based, felt sense, or playfulness are terms used to describe a person's relationship and awareness of their body (Caldwell, 2018). While various body-based practitioners and psychologists define these terms differently, they all refer to the same sense of connection to one's relationship with their body. Alan Fogel (2020) defines the concept of embodied self-awareness as the “present moment experiencing.” (p. 8). In this vein, the body becomes the site of all lived experience and an incredible source of information and knowledge to the individual if they have access to the resources and practices for attuning to and being in a relationship with their body.

Creative Arts Therapies, Grief, and Loss

Expressive Arts Therapy is an integrated and transdisciplinary approach that combines visual arts, movement, drama, music, writing, and other creative processes to foster personal and community growth (Estrella, 2019). Expression through movement, sound, embodiment, poetry, and visual arts, as evidenced in various cultures and throughout history, may provide opportunities for the liberation of pain and, with it, the acceptance of loss (Rogers, 1993). In many cultures, the use of expressive arts as manifestations and communications of internal grief processes comes naturally. Since the beginning of time, poetry, film, rituals, music, architecture, and visual arts have been used to express emotional responses to grief, commemorate loss, and serve justice to all that a loss involves (Archer, 1999). In the DMT field, there is also knowledge on how movement can guide someone through their embodiment healing process of grief and loss.

Defining Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT)

The American Dance/Movement Therapy Association (ADTA) has defined dance movement therapy (DMT) as the “psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual for the purpose of improving health and well-being.”(ADTA, 2014) The premise behind this holistic method of therapy is that “mind, body, and spirit are inseparable and interconnected” (ADTA, 2014) This states that “change in the body reflects the change in the mind and vice versa” (ADTA, 2014). We have a unique opportunity in the field of dance movement therapy to explore these elements of the therapeutic relationship through movement. A dance movement therapist can incorporate empathetic attunement, embodiment, and nonverbal expression into the therapeutic relationship. This method of collaborating with grieving individuals may be beneficial.

Dance/Movement Therapy and Grief/Loss

Dance/Movement remedies have been used successfully. "The connection between body and emotion is essential to the work of dance/movement therapists, with the direct relationship between these two entities at the heart of the therapeutic process" (Winters 2008, p,97).Marian Chase introduced the therapeutic concepts of mirroring and circle movement, resulting in "sensitive awareness of the symbolic movement expressions that were offered and to which there was validation and response" (Chaiklin, 2009, p. 7). Within the dance/movement therapy profession, the combination of these therapeutic concepts is known as a Chacian. Mirroring is a strong foundational technique in DMT that supports clients in feeling witnessed (Behrends et al., 2012). Mirroring may facilitate client comfort in terms of new forms of self-interaction, while nonverbally encouraging intermittent adaptation in the qualities and parameters of touch. Dance/movement therapy often draws on attachment theory to guide the therapist-client relationship.

Current Treatment of Embodied Grief/DMT

Dance/movement therapy (DMT), as previously stated, is a holistic approach to healing based on the empirically supported assertion that mind, body, and spirit are inextricably linked; changes in the body affect the mind and vice versa (American Dance Therapy Association, 2009). It is also defined as "the psychotherapeutic use of movement to further the emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration of the individual" by the American Dance Therapy Association (2009). Marian Chace (1896-1970) was a DMT pioneer who began her career as a dancer, choreographer, and performer before beginning her pioneering work with psychiatric patients (Levy, 2005). Many of today's top dance/movement therapists were trained by Chace and continue to use her techniques. Chace's fundamental assumption was that "dance is communication, and communication fulfills a basic human need" (Levy, 2005, p. 21)

Trudi Schoop was another notable pioneer in the field of DMT "Who we are is reflected and manifested in our bodies what happens in the mind has a concomitant reaction in the body, and what happens in the body has a concomitant reaction in the mind," (p. 61). Schoop's main contribution to DMT was her emphasis on structured avenues of self-expression, which provided "a sense of self-control, trust of the body and thus a deeper identification with one's physical self, as well as flexibility and strength in coping with life experiences" (Levy, 2005).

While many other pioneers, as well as more recent dance therapists, have contributed countless attributions and meaningful work to the field, this brief description of three DMT pioneers is important to note before exploring different movement-based interventions and techniques when working with individuals experiencing embodied grief after the death of a loved one, and more specifically, the benefit of DMT in treatment. Healers of color have emerged in the United States and the Caribbean to care for their communities with the awareness and understanding that the body contains all of its history and collective memory. In the field of dance/movement therapy, an undercurrent of energy is rising to the surface in direct response to the historical and ongoing need to develop therapeutic approaches that align with African-based culture and belief systems. An exploration of the mind-body-spirit dynamic using Afro-Caribbean dance principles, according to Nancy Herard-Marshall (2019), can foster in the mind the determination to fight and liberate the self, physically activate, claim, and re-occupy the body, and reconnect with spirit through the connection with ancestral embodied knowledge and values for strength and guidance. According to Panagiotopoulou (2011), DMT has an advantage over verbal treatment because it assesses movement and nonverbal body manifestations, resulting in a more comprehensive and integrated picture of the whole individual and their needs. According to Levy (1995), movement and dance may be a better source of information than

verbalization because "words alone are insufficient to express the totality of the experience" (p, 67).

Multi-Sensory Five Senses and Grief

The five senses of sight, touch, taste, sound, and smell can be considered a physical mindfulness grounding technique. The five senses are vital to the grieving healing process, as they use the five senses to aid in the interpretation of thoughts and feelings about surroundings and contribute to the understanding of feelings of well-being. According to Kabot-Zinn, (1994) "mindfulness is the process of a particular way of paying attention, non-judgmentally, and in the present moment. Mindfulness works towards an increase in awareness and acceptance, assisting in the emotional and cognitive process through the attitude of acceptance and non-judgment". (Kalmanowitz,2016). It is important to remember that mindfulness practice does not attempt to remove symptoms or change thought content; rather it simply brings one's awareness to the present moment and thoughts. A stressed mind grounds the present moment when mindfulness is combined with a conscious evaluation of our senses.

DMT and the Five Senses?

Dance/movement therapy is based on the idea that the mind and body are intrinsically tied, and that dance can be utilized to heal through psychotherapeutic methods. According to American Dance Therapy Association (2018), dance can improve health and well-being by promoting emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration. Dance, with its complexity of movement, rhythm, and sensory interaction, provides additional healing elements through embodiment. It includes hedonism non-goal-oriented pleasure, aesthetic experience, communication through expression, creativity, and specific body feedback mechanisms related to movement, shape, and physical sensation as a therapeutic technique (Koch et al., 2019).

Images, sounds, pressure, and body movements all activate sight, hearing, touch, and sense of space. Our perception of the environment is not a static or objective process, but rather an integration of sensations. As a result, in situations where physical movement is not possible, visualization can be a powerful healing tool.

Methods

The literature, my graduate classes, and my internship taught me about embodied grief and how it can manifest in complicated and complex ways. It can manifest as somatic complaints such as headaches or stomach aches, as well as sleeping too much or too little. The literature also taught me how mindfulness techniques such as grounding with the five senses can guide one in their healing process. With this knowledge, I facilitated an adult grief and loss support group on the DMT embodied experience using the five senses. During data collection, I followed the Moustakas (1990) heuristic model which helped me to keep myself organized with what needed to be done and when I needed to do it during data collection.

Materials

Participants were handed a yoga mat, water bottle, journal paper, a notebook paper, puzzle paper pens, pencils, and markers upon arriving to the space. A music speaker and candy were also items used for this group.

Participants

As part of my internship, I led a two-hour single-session in-person group method grief and loss adult support group. This group took place in a large classroom at a school located in the greater Boston area, and the session was solely for adults. There were twelve participants in total the participants consisted of teachers and staff. The participants identified as white/Caucasian, Hispanic, and Black/African American. Some participants had previous

experience with dance/movement therapy and embodiment grief knowledge. Through a six steps process, participants had the opportunity to connect with peers, focus on their own grief process, and learn about various dance/movement therapy techniques to aid in their healing. "Your Grief Matters" was the day's theme, and the focus was "Understanding Embodiment Grief Through Movement and a Multisensory Experience." The adults who took part signed up after receiving an email explaining what the two-hour one-day grief and loss adult support group experience included.

There was a total of ten participants. The participants learned how each of the five senses can contribute to memory about their loss. The participants learned how the five senses can connect them to a positive memory of their loss. Participants also witnessed how those memories can show up through their bodies. Following the single session, I kept a written journal. This journal was where I recorded my observations of the participants in the session, what I noticed from their body language, and my experience of witnessing the participants. I immediately began journaling after the group. I also journaled after discussing the day with my internship site supervisor, and then again, the next day after having some time to reflect on the experience.

Six Steps Description

Step 1. The first step involved participants forming a circle around the facilitator. We all participated in an opening grounding ritual. The ritual helped to develop a grounded sense of physical self in the present. I then introduced a tiny pink crystal heart to the group and informed the participants that passing the heart is an activity that allows participants to share personal information with the group. Passing the heart also gave me the opportunity to introduce the group to the day's theme. This activity also allows the group to share why we are in this group, giving the participants the opportunity to discuss their loss. The first question that was asked of

the participants was to introduce themselves and pronouns. The second question asked was to introduce their loss and the relationship to their loss (Wiles, 2020). After all the participants engaged in the passing of the heart we inhaled and exhaled two times before moving to the warmup. For the warmup, participants joined the facilitator in doing a ten to one shake out. As a group we repeated shaking each hand and legs until we reached one. The goal of the warmup was to guide participants to check in with their body and help create a group rhythm.

Step 2. The next step of the session began with a music body scan, participants moved from the circle to their yoga mats. Participants were invited to lay, sit, or stand on their mats with their eyes open or closed. I played the song “Lift Me Up” by Rihanna (2022). The first time I played the song “Lift Me Up,” she guided the participants to breathe with the song, and to think of their loss. The second time the song “Lift Me Up” was played the facilitator invited participants to check-in with various parts of their bodies, such as head, shoulders, knee, toes, neck, and giving gentle rubs to those parts, and to ask those part how are they doing.? The facilitator then asked the group to place their hands on the part of their body that felt heavy and to check-in with that part of their body by providing some gentle rubs, and deep breathing. While participants were breathing and providing gentle rubs, the facilitator talked about the word embodiment grief. The goal of doing a body scan what to guide participants to check in with themselves and their bodies.

Step 3. The third step of the session went into a multisensory approach. Participants engaged in a five senses museum while connecting a memory to each of the five senses to their loss and identify which of the five senses they felt the most connected to and why. On each of the five senses posters there was a description of the sense, and item placed on a chair next to the poster. The items that were presented represented each of the five senses. Participants went

around the room with their puzzle paper, reading about each of the five senses that were hanging up in five different corners of the room with the invitation to engage with the objects in each corner as well. Once each participant engaged in the five senses museum, they made their way to their mats to answer the following four questions. What connections did you have with each of the five senses? Which of the five senses did you least connect with and why? Which of the five senses did you have a strong connection to and why? What part of your body was holding this feeling and or connection.? Participants joined facilitator back in the circle, each participants shared which of the five senses did they had a great connection to, and which of the five senses they least connected with.

Step 4. “My grief matters” was the fourth step of the session. The facilitator introduced my grief matters cup to the group. During this step participants joined the facilitator back in the circle to begin the group activity. I explained as a group we will take turns passing and taking one paper at time, while doing what written on each paper. Before taking a paper out the cup as a group we repeated “my grief matters.” Inside the cup were ten pieces of paper that were labeled with the following words.

- Laugh
- Scream
- Yell my grief matters
- Have some candy.
- Give yourself a hug.
- Clap your hands two times.
- I love you.
- Breathe.

- Close your eyes.
- Stomp your feet.

The goal for this step was to bring awareness to the participants that it's okay to feel and have many different feelings while grieving.

Step 5. The fifth step of the session was a writing prompt. During this step participants spent fifteen minutes writing a letter to their loss, loved one or self. At this time soft piano music was being played. Before moving to the final step participants met the facilitator in a circle again at their own pace. Once all participants joined the circle, I invited everyone to take a deep breath in and out and held a space of silence for two minutes. The goal for this step was to give participants time to write out what their bodies were holding and expressing through writing language to their loss. Throughout this step I continued to take note of what I was witnessing in the room while participants were focusing on the fifth step.

Step 6. The last step ended with encouraging participants to dance with their loss. During this time participants moved across the room in different directions while dancing and singing to the song "I'll Be Missing You" composed by Puff Daddy and Faith Evans (1997). Participants moved in ways they felt most comfortable. For the last two minutes of the song participants dance their way back into the circle, while in the circle we clapped to the music, raised our hands down low and ended with our hands held high while singing the final words of the song "I'll be missing you." The goal for this step was for participants to dance with their loved ones, I informed the participants that grief is love with no place to go. The session ended with a brief group discussion on the session activity to the process of healing.

Data Analysis

Using journal reflections, I examined the frequency of recurring themes across the five senses. The ability to focus on the presented material, as well as the overall effects and moods of the group appearing to be friendly and supportive of each other, emerged as a general overarching theme from participants' interactions with peers.

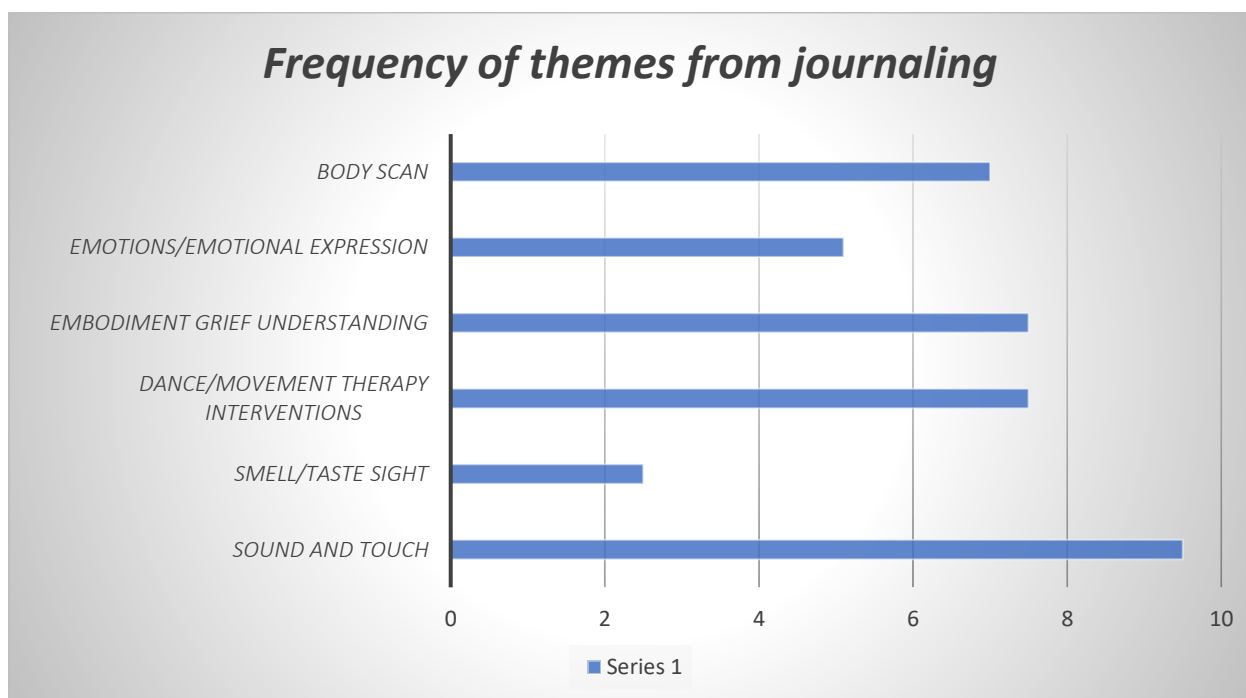
Table 1

Table Showing the Three Major Categories Across the Journal Reflection

| Three Major Categories | | |
|--|---|---|
| The Five Senses as a connection with a memory of a loved one | Dance/Movement Therapy as a Psychoeducational interventions | Increased awareness of embodiment grief and loss within self, and others through verbal interactions, facial expression, and body language. |

Table 2

Table Showing the Most Frequent Themes from the Journal Reflection



Changes in Body and Emotions Before and After the Method

During the whole group circle and the journaling reflection, I reflected on the participants' statements and comments. These comments indicated that the intervention was well received by the participants and provided insight into whether they could recognize and verbalize how their bodies were feeling through words or movement.

Five Senses Memory Connections

From the activity that exhibited the five senses participants in the group connected with more memories of their loss to both sound and touch. Other participants were concerned about not being able to connect with other senses. I acknowledged that not having memorable connections to one of two of the five senses such as taste doesn't necessarily mean you are forgetting about your loss.

Discussion

The purpose of this method was to bring awareness that grief and loss can be stored in the body, and to consider ways in which Dance/Movement Therapy and the five senses can create meaningful and healing experiences for individuals grieving. It has been confirmed in research that embodiment aspect of grief of past experiences lives in our bodies and uniquely impacts our present moment (Simpkins 2017). I wanted to provide not only an open space but a safe space to guide those who are grieving a chance to be heard. This method can provide individuals a safe place to acknowledge their grieving process as well as providing them the space to experience a multi-sensory approach with the hopes of giving them a better understanding of stages they may face when processing grief and loss. This can be accomplished by teaching body-based practice skills that will help individuals with embodiment grief.

Working with adults as they continue to grow and develop creatively, and with DMT or movement-based interventions, I believe is critical in allowing them to experience and honor their grief while also learning new ways to cope with their loss. It is also important to note that loss is unavoidable and will affect people again and again as they grow older, so assisting people in developing a healthy way to process grief as well as their emotions is critical.

This method's themes and techniques demonstrated promising implications for developing ways to process grief and loss in the body. In addition to demonstrating the use of The Five Senses as a multi-sensory approach. Studying and practicing this method has taught me that there is power, strength, and vulnerability in being connected to one's process of grief and loss. Teaching individuals about the Five Senses as a grounding technique, and embodiment grief can help individuals to physically, and mentally process on what is going on in and outside their bodies and, in the end, be able to process it with coping skills. The Five Senses grounding technique guides individuals to manage their traumatic memories or strong emotions giving people a better understanding of their own emotions and the ability to communicate positively.

Dance/movement therapy can provide a safe environment in which to explore and process difficult feelings and emotions, including those associated with grief. Introducing art and the creative process into personal grief narratives may make them easier to engage with, as well as increase willingness to share them with others.

The strengths of this method can increase awareness of emotions. When I ran the activity of My Grief Matters the participants learned the importance of not closing the door on their emotions and days that feels easier than most. I acknowledge that their grief matters when they are smiling just as much as it matters when they are sad and to take each day at a time. This appeared to be a mechanism for making the group members feel safe enough. I also noticed that

there was a general sense among the group members that they could attend to the tasks that I assigned to them, and that they were all able to focus as a team.

Remembering as Re-Embodying

Van der Kolk (2014) discusses how trauma patients lose touch with their bodies, sometimes losing the ability to feel sensations or entire areas of their bodies. Trauma can even cause depersonalization, in which the self becomes detached from the body and unable to feel pain or pleasure. He also expresses the importance of reconnecting with the body to recover from trauma, but some individuals are not ready to do so. (Van der Kolk, 2014). Listening to, honoring, and respecting the body is critical when working with people who are experiencing embodied grief because it can be a gateway to understanding what is going on at a physical level. Addressing their grief process through movement-based therapies and interventions can give them the time and space they need to work through these various emotions while also assisting them in understanding what is going on. These individuals can explore self-regulation, benefit from peer support, discover, and name different emotions and feelings, track and identify where they feel these emotions in their body, and honor their loved one through expressivity by using DMT and body-based practices.

I took advantage of the time together as a group to share with them some grounding approaches that would help them have emotional control and talked about the benefits of maintaining their own emotional health. By implementing DMT, and the five senses as a grounding technique I was able to provide my participants with healing approaches. In the literature review, it was noted that dance/movement therapy can improve health and well-being by promoting emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration. American Dance Therapy

Association (2018), My method provides individuals with the opportunity to learn the skills necessary to express their emotions around loss in an appropriate and meaningful manner.

Considerations for Future Research

If I had been able to implement this method in more than a single session, I would have considered doing three two-hour sessions instead of one single session. It would be interesting to explore the five senses using other objects for a long period of time. It would also be interesting creating movement to each of the five senses. I could educate with empathy and share how movement is a form of communication and share that it's okay to feel that you may not have the necessary words to express how you are holding your grief. It would also be interesting to have participants spend longer time in step five of the descriptions writing a letter to their loss as this step was very meaningful both physically and mentally.

I would also share more DMT interventions that can be beneficial to their healing process.

Based on my findings, I see a lot of potential for this method and am excited to keep working on it. I recommend this method for further investigation and research, and I intend to use it when teaching it to other mental health professionals. Future researchers can look into the effects of teaching and doing more applications with the five senses.

The ethnicity of the clients was known, but the group's socioeconomic status was unknown. The group consisted of two men and ten women. The majority of the group's clients were Caucasian and Black African American. The socioeconomic status was unknown but based on the stories and contexts I witnessed during the session; it appeared that a diverse range of socioeconomic experiences was present. According to Stutey and colleagues (Stutey et al.,

2016), there is a value and importance in understanding the individual's context and how that impacts the experience and expression of loss and grief emotions.

Limitations of the Project

While the findings indicated that DMT could be beneficial in the treatment of grief and loss, the method was only used in a single session. The Capstone project limited the amount of time that could be spent and the amount of information that could be gathered. If the project could be replicated over a longer period, more patterns could be identified.

Conclusion

My hope is that participants who participated in my grief and loss support group will now be able to identify ways to process grief and loss through movement and a multi-sensory approach. The results of this method can assist individuals in becoming aware of their current level of alertness. It provides an opportunity for people to learn how to process their grief and loss while also learning about DMT interventions and embodiment grief. I now have a better understanding of how emotions physically manifest and how this method may help to ground complex grief experiences as a result of completing this capstone thesis method project. This research provided me with a better understanding of how to provide more empathy and understanding as a healer.

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Appendix

Information of Specific Techniques, Music and DMT Used, and Clinical Goals

| Session Activity | Music Used and DMT | Clinical Goals |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Ritual circle</p> <p>Body Scans</p> | <p>No music</p> <p>Breathe work.</p> <p>Witnessing</p> <p>“Lift Me up” by Rihanna. -Small upper and lower movements on self.</p> | <p>To develop a grounded sense of physical self in the present</p> <p>-To guide participants to check in with themselves and their bodies. -identify emotions that arise faster and become more mindful of them. -gross motor stretches increase range of motion flexibility</p> |
| <p>Multisensory approach.</p> | <p>No Music</p> <p>Objects of the five senses.</p> <p>Hands on activity</p> | <p>-Ground self in the present moment. Enhance your experience with the world around you. -Witnessing -foster reflection and reminiscing</p> |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| My grief Matters | No music Verbal and movement expressions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Bring awareness to the participants that it's okay to feel and have many different feelings while grieving. -Identify the stages of grief and loss. - participants establish a pattern in their movements -Mirroring -Witnessing To discuss embodiment grief - encourage individuation and recognition |
| Letter to You | No music | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -give participants time to write out what their bodies were holding and expressing through writing language to their loss. -Self expression -foster reflection and Reminiscing |
| Dancing with your loved one | "I'll Be Missing You" by Puff Daddy and Faith Evans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -process grief through movement. participants in healing techniques -increase the participant's use of the space around them -create a sense of autonomy for the participants. |

THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Lesley University

**Graduate School of Arts & Social
Sciences Expressive Therapies
Division**

Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Dance/Movement Therapy, MA

Student's Name: _Yarmisha Cofield

Type of Project: Thesis

Title:

The Dance/Movement Embodied Experience of Grief and Loss Using the Five Senses: Development of a Clinical Method

Date of Graduation: May 20th, 2023

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

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Rebecca Zarate MT-BC, AVPT, LCAT