

Colouring Grief:
Translating the Feelings and Experiences of
Parentally Bereaved Children into a Therapeutic Colouring Book

Courtney Lester

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Abstract**Colouring Grief:****Translating the Feelings and Experiences of
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Courtney Lester

This theoretical-construction research paper explores the literature on parentally bereaved young children aged four to six in order to translate the common experiences of these children into a therapeutic colouring book. The Dual Process Model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) is also considered as a theoretical frame and links are drawn between it and childhood bereavement. The overlap between these bodies of literature forms the basis from which a framework of themes for the colouring book and applications for use are discussed. The importance of fostering expression and communication in young bereaved children, as found in the literature, as well as the role of art therapy with bereaved children, provides the rationale for this project.

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Introduction

The intention of this paper is to explore the literature on childhood bereavement and to examine what aspects of the literature are represented in existing art-based activity books for bereaved children. The goal of this exploration is to design a new colouring book for young children who have experienced the death of a parent. The final product of the colouring book is not included in this research paper; however, the colouring book will be published by Bereaved Families of Ontario (Kingston branch), with help from Concordia University, after the writing of this paper. The hope is that a child's use of the colouring book may help to normalize the bereavement experience and promote healing through the artistic expression of feelings related to grieving, while fostering communication between children and caring adults. Often, adults who remain in the child's life are unsure of how to discuss the topic of death, have difficulty interpreting the child's reactions to the loss, or are too upset themselves to fully address the child's needs (Grollman, 1995; Rogers, 2007). Art-based activity books that explore death and discuss the difficult emotions and experience that may follow the death of a loved one can be useful tools for facilitating a child's grieving process.

Statement of purpose

The aim of this study is to create an art-based therapeutic instrument, a colouring book, which has the potential to help parentally bereaved young children process their grief responses. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to first examine the literature on childhood bereavement and to assess how existing art-based activity books for bereaved children coincide with the literature. In an effort to normalize the process of healthy grieving which is often experienced by a young bereaved child the common emotional reactions described in the literature on childhood bereavement, and on the loss

of a parent in particular, guide many of the thematic decisions for the colouring book. The Dual Process Model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) of coping with bereavement is also considered, for although it has not yet been applied to childhood grief, many useful links exist. The theoretical connections that I establish between the literature on childhood bereavement and the Dual Process Model (DPM) help to guide the approach taken in the creation of the colouring book. Furthermore, since the project was initially proposed by Bereaved Families of Ontario, which works toward “bereavement support through self-help and mutual aid” (Bereaved Families of Ontario, 2010), the final content of the colouring book is targeted to fit the needs of this organization. Finally, in this theoretical construction-based paper, the actual use and benefit of the colouring book is not evaluated, yet this topic is addressed in the discussion of future applications of this research project.

Literature Review

Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning

To begin, it is important to distinguish between the terms bereavement, grief, and mourning. Corr (2003) and Webb (2005a) explain that the term bereavement means that a person may be in a state of grieving or mourning following the experience a major loss, and that often that loss is the death of a loved one. Worden (1996) describes grief as a descriptor for the emotional and behavioural reactions that a person experiences following the death of a loved one. Wolfelt (2001) differentiates mourning from grief, where mourning is the outward translation of inner grief reactions – what might be seen as the behavioural expression of emotions, such as wearing black. Mourning is also described as the individual’s efforts to cope with the death through expression; that is, the journey towards acceptance and resolution of grief (Corr, 2003; Webb, 2005a). In

summary, mourning and grieving reflect the process of responding and reacting to a loss. The distinguishing factor is that grieving is an inner response, while mourning is an outward expression of that inner response. If mourning actually signifies a person's efforts to cope with loss and move forward, and the outward expression of mourning depends on the inner response of grief, then both are necessary in order for an individual of any age to heal (Krueger, as cited in Webb, 2005a).

Young Children's Understanding of Death

A child's grieving and mourning processes will be affected by their basic understanding of the concept of death. In the literature, there are two central theoretical approaches to young children's developmental understanding of death: cognitive and biological (Slaughter, 2005). The cognitive view of children's understanding of death is based largely on Piaget's theories of development (Carney, 2003). Siegler, Deloache, and Eisenberg (2003) explain that children between the ages of 3 and 6 are in a mode of concrete and egocentric thinking. This means that they are not yet able to grasp abstract concepts and that they are only able to perceive the world from their own point of view; they cannot take on the perspective of someone else, be it spatially, emotionally, or communicatively. With regards to understanding death, their developmental level makes it difficult for them to grasp the basic sub-concepts of death: irreversibility, causality, universality, and cessation of bodily functions (Lazar & Torney-Purta, 1991; Slaughter, 2005; Smilansky, 1987). Cognitively processing the meaning of death is challenging for young children. Their struggle to understand is often demonstrated in their questions, feelings, and behaviours. For example, if a child does not yet comprehend that death is irreversible, she then views it as temporary and might think that the deceased is merely away and will return after some time (Slaughter, 2005). Similarly, if a child has an

egocentric view of the world and does not understand the sub-concept of causality, she might believe that something she said or thought caused the death (Worden, 1996).

Although the sub-concepts of death are often discussed from the cognitive perspective, they are also the primary components of the biological perspective. Slaughter (2005) writes that if young children had a better working knowledge, or *folk theory*, of the life cycle they would have a better understanding of the sub-concepts of death. Carey (as cited in Slaughter, 2005) explains that children tend to frame death in relation to more familiar phenomena, namely observable, human behaviour, such as sleeping or going away. Since many children today do not witness the life cycle in a real and everyday way (i.e., when compared to children growing up in rural, farm areas), they are less familiar with the biological realities of life and death. In addition, young children in today's Western societies do not usually grow up with their grandparents in the same home. This arrangement further distances children from a realistic perception of natural human death (Wolfelt, 1991). In terms of the sub-concepts listed above, the biological theory suggests that children may have trouble understanding the universality and causality of death, because they have not witnessed the natural process of death from old age, or the unexpected death from disease or accident (Wolfelt, 1991). Children may also have trouble understanding the sub-concepts of irreversibility and cessation if they have not learned that once the body stops working, it cannot resume functioning (Slaughter, 2005). Slaughter and Lyons (as cited in Slaughter, 2005) trained young children from age 3 to age 5 to think and reason about the body within a biological framework; that is, from a functional, scientific point of view that focuses on the natural processes of life and death. They interviewed children before the teaching and then again two weeks after to assess their understanding of death. Their results showed that participants were more

likely to express an understanding of all four sub-concepts of death after having acquired a biological life theory.

The Death of a Parent and the Grieving Process in Young Children

Prior to the study of children's conceptual understanding of death, early psychoanalytically oriented researchers evaluated bereaved children using open, descriptive methods and hypothesized that children's developmental "misunderstandings" of death potentially intensified their emotional responses to death (Nagy as cited in Slaughter, 2005). From those studies onward, children have been viewed as being capable of grieving and their grieving processes are often believed to be more complex than those of adults, because their developmental level drastically affects their experience of death.

Many authors describe the grieving and mourning processes of children as having a number of stages, using slightly different wording for what appear to be very similar stages (Bowlby as cited in Webb, 2005b; The Dougy Center for Grieving Children, 1997; Granot, 2005; Worden, 1996). Briefly, Granot (2005) compiles her observations gathered from an extensive career in adult and childhood bereavement with previous theories of childhood bereavement to describe three main stages of grieving in children: shock, expression of emotions, and readjustment. Worden (1996), whose work is based on large studies of grieving children between the ages of 6 and 17, adds that shock must be followed by an acceptance of the reality of the loss in order for the child to experience and express the resulting emotions. Worden also includes memorializing the deceased as a final stage, yet this, coupled with adjusting to the environment without the deceased, could easily be seen as fitting under the larger term of readjustment. Regardless, authors who are interested in helping young children work through their grief processes

emphasize that the suggested phases and stages of grieving are broad and that each child's process will be unique (The Dougy Center for Grieving Children, 1997; McIntyre, 1990; Wolfelt, 1991). In a review of the literature, Stokes, Wyer, and Crossley (1997) concluded that there is no strong agreement on the typical reaction to the death of a parent in young children.

Still, much of the literature says that many young bereaved children tend to exhibit certain common emotional reactions to death, including denial, sadness, fear, helplessness, anger, guilt, anxiety, and longing (Dyregrov, 2008; Granot, 2005; Webb, 2005b; Worden, 1996). In addition, children may engage in idealization of the deceased and fantasies of a reunion (Leming & Dickinson, 2007). Behavioural reactions may take the form of crying, questioning about the death, regressive behaviour, acting out, protest, accusing others, withdrawal, negative physiological responses (e.g., sleep-disturbances and somatization), and ignoring one's own needs in order to protect surviving family members from further pain (Dyregrov, 2008; Granot, 2005; Samuels, 1988; Worden, 1996). However, young children often display these emotional and behavioural reactions in waves, which are interspersed with more positive emotions and non-disruptive behaviours (Lieberman, Compton, Van Horn, & Ghosh Ippen, 2003). Some believe that this occurs because young children have a lower tolerance for prolonged, continuous negative affect (Wolfenstein as cited in Webb, 2005a).

When young children experience the death of someone who is particularly important to them, namely a parent, the grief reactions can be especially strong (Lieberman et al., 2003; Worden, 1996). Because the primary love objects of children are their parents, the death of one parent deprives the child of a central attachment figure, someone on whom they depend for protection, nurturance, and guidance (Ainsworth &

Bell as cited in Webb, 2005c). “The child-parent relationship in the early years shapes the child’s sense of self” (Lieberman et al., 2003, p. 8). Thus, from the time of the death and for many years following, the sudden absence of a parent affects the child’s inner and outer life on a daily basis (Samuels, 1988).

The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement

Whereas the literature on childhood bereavement views grieving as divided into “stages/phases/tasks”, a more recent theory developed by Stroebe and Schut (1999) and based on research into spousal loss may also be applicable to childhood bereavement. Although The DPM was formulated to understand the grieving processes of adults dealing with the death of a partner, the authors state that it has the potential to be applied to other forms of bereavement and encourage further exploration.

As opposed to a series of stages that are traversed in an effort to work through grief with some kind of goal or resolution, the principle structure of the DPM consists of two types of stressors. The bereaved individual may move back and forth between these stressors as they adapt to life without the deceased (Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2005). The first stressor, referred to as the “loss-orientation”, is the time a person spends dealing with aspects of the loss itself. This refers to any feelings of sadness, missing, or longing, any thoughts about the deceased, the times spent together, or what it would be like if the person had not died. It also encompasses positive memories and feelings related directly to the deceased. Stroebe et al. (2005) state that although negative affect may dominate in the early period of bereavement, positive affect is equally important and will appear intermittently and with increasing frequency as time passes.

The second stressor, referred to as the “restoration-orientation”, is a completely new aspect to understanding bereavement. It represents the secondary losses the person

must deal with, in relation to the death. This may involve taking on new responsibilities, adjusting to a different schedule, seeking out others to help with tasks, learning new skills, and formulating a new identity (i.e., one without the presence of the deceased). Stroebe and Schut (1999) observe that what is important in this orientation is the process of adaptation the person undergoes, the efforts towards adjustment, emphasizing that there is no ideal end goal. They also point out that a variety of negative and positive feelings may also be experienced when a person is oriented towards restoration tasks.

The third component of the DPM is that throughout bereavement a person will oscillate between the two orientations, as often and for as long as needed in order to reach a healthy state of adjustment (Stroebe et al., 2005). This back and forth movement allows the individual to shift from confrontation with the loss to avoidance of the loss, which are both deemed to be important. Thus, unlike previous models, which only pathologize denial, this model suggests that bereavement includes a healthy amount of denial particularly in the early aftermath of the loss. Denial does not suggest that an individual is unable to cope with bereavement, but rather that through a combination of confrontation and avoidance the person is continually engaged in coping. Stroebe and Schut (1999) point to research which suggests that continuous grieving of the loss-orientation type may have negative health consequences, and that intermittent positive affect and restoration-orientation type grieving is needed to restore balance and promote adaptation. The DPM theorizes that bereavement may be a lifelong process, that negative feelings may return at any point, and that adjustments may continue to be made years after the death.

The model also acknowledges the role that attachment styles play in the process of bereavement. Stroebe et al. (2005) reviewed the concepts of secure and insecure styles

of attachment, and related each of these to different ways of coping with bereavement. Bowlby maintained that “grief [is] a form of separation anxiety resulting from the disruption of an attachment bond” (as cited in Stroebe et al., 2005, p. 56). Furthermore, how an individual reacts to a death is believed to depend largely on his or her pattern of parental attachment behaviour. Essentially, Stroebe et al. paralleled the different styles of attachment to different tendencies towards the loss-orientation and the restoration-orientation. Depending on the style of attachment, an individual may be inclined to spend more time in the loss-orientation and less in the restoration-orientation, or vice versa. For example, securely-attached individuals may be able to confront the difficult feelings encompassed by the loss-orientation, yet may be equally as capable of looking at the tasks of daily living which need to be dealt with in the restoration-orientation. Individuals with secure attachment patterns appear to have an easier time moving between the two orientations (Tancredy as cited in Stroebe et al., 2005). Lastly, Stroebe, Schut, and Boerner (2010) write that attachment styles also affect how bereaved persons deal with their continuing relationship to the deceased. They have observed that maintaining some form of bond with the deceased appears to promote healthy adaptation. This specific task falls under the restoration-orientation, since it involves creating a new understanding of one's relationship with the deceased, yet may be approached in a variety of ways, depending on the person's attachment pattern behaviour.

Appropriate Approaches to Working with Bereaved Young Children

Rogers (2007) states that although experienced grief counsellors and other clinicians can provide helpful exercises and interventions for bereaved children, social support is equally important. Surviving family members are capable of assisting children through their grieving processes if they are aware of their own behaviours and are able to

remember certain important factors when interacting with the child.

Authors, such as Bowlby (as cited in Altschul & Beiser, 1988) and Lieberman et al. (2003) emphasize that in order to help young children cope with the death of a loved one clinicians and caregivers need to provide appropriate environmental support. This involves being open and honest about death in general and, more specifically about the actual death that has taken place (Halamish & Hermoni, 2007; Leming & Dickinson, 2007). Young children will ask many questions and it is best for adults to provide concrete answers and explanations (Goldman, 2009; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005). This honest approach might help children acquire a more complete understanding of death; an understanding which their developmental level does not naturally permit, yet which can greatly facilitate the grieving process. An adult who is available and capable of honestly answering children's questions can help them gain a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of what has happened. It also allows the adult and child to communicate and connect in a genuine way, fostering a sense of validation and love within the child (Altschul & Beiser, 1988; Halamish & Hermoni, 2007).

In addition, environmental support includes being a consistent adult figure who makes an effort to maintain a daily routine for the child and meets the child's essential needs (Lieberman et al., 2003; Worden, Davies, & McCown, 1999). When a child's grief has become *disabling*, familiar activities might encourage the child to step away from her grief for a brief period of time. However, it is important to be aware that while daily routines are important for providing consistency, they may also include activities that remind the child of the deceased and may become triggers for further distress (Lieberman et al., 2003). Parents and caregivers therefore, need to be attentive to children's reactions when engaging in familiar activities and should provide support when a regular event

becomes a difficult experience.

Furthermore, adults need to be emotionally available for children, by being honest about their own feelings (Goldman, 2009; Leming & Dickinson, 2007; Walker, 1998). Such coping behaviour models what clinicians try to foster in bereaved children, namely the expression of emotions. Caring adults also need to listen to children, validate their experience, and encourage the expression of thoughts, feelings, and questions through open communication (Schreder, 1995). For instance, when children ask repetitive questions, they may be dealing with feelings of ill-placed guilt, and need reassurance from adults that they are not to blame for the death (Worden, 1996). It is also important to understand that young children appear to be unable to tolerate strong emotions for very long (Dyregrov, 2008; Lieberman et al., 2003; Worden, 1996). This means that they may display grief reactions intermittently and interspersed with less painful emotions. Adults need to be open to and accepting of abrupt changes in children's affect or behaviour. As many authors point out (Bertman, 1995; Worden, 1996), such shifts do not mean that children are unaffected by loss, but rather, that they themselves know how much grieving they can handle at any given point and when to take a break from their grief. However, researchers are unclear as to whether this change in affect is an instinctive reaction or a conscious response on the part of the child.

Other clinicians emphasize the importance of helping children to form and retain positive memories of the deceased (Altschul & Beiser, 1988; Lieberman et al., 2003). This form of support is encouraged, whereas attempting to impose a substitute figure is highly discouraged. Grollman (1995) suggests that adults can assist children in the act of remembering, by providing photographs of or objects belonging to the deceased. Similarly, adults can share memories, talk about favourite moments together, and invite

children to do the same (Wolfelt, 2001).

Art Making with Bereaved Children

Communication with bereaved children about death and their feelings following a death is extremely important in helping children with their grieving processes (Goldman, 2009; Halamish & Hermoni, 2007; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005; Leming & Dickinson, 2007). However, though adults may be comfortable using words to discuss these topics, young children might benefit from alternate avenues of expression in order to comfortably and effectively communicate their own thoughts and feelings. There is a consensus in the literature that bereaved young children may be able to express more through non-verbal forms of communication, than through verbal communication alone (Dyregrov, 2008; Granot, 2005; Wenestam, 1984). Art making appears to be a viable method for opening up a dialogue with children on the topic of death and gaining insight into their understanding of the subject, as well as their experience with a specific death. Clinicians working in bereavement emphasize the importance of engaging children in play, reading stories to them, and encouraging them to make art, thus providing them with a variety of methods of expression from which to choose (Dyregrov, 2008; Simon, 2005; Walker, 1998).

Children's non-verbal communication. Different studies have attempted to examine children's understanding of death as it is shown in their artwork. Wenestam (1984) found that young children often depict the word "death" with violence and aggression. Wenestam suggests that this tendency may reflect that young children often get their information on death from media sources. If children have experienced the death of a loved one, yet have not been adequately informed by adults around them as to how the person actually died, they may still be struggling with understanding what

happened and may supplement their understanding with other sources of information. However, children also tend to use personal experience – that which they know most intimately – to inform their understanding of life in general (Slaughter, 2005). Halamish and Hermoni (2007) write that in their work with bereaved children, the explanation of death that children give is almost always related to their specific experience with death. Thus, children’s understanding of death may be simultaneously informed by their inner experience of the death of a family member or friend and by outside sources of information. Art therapy can be a useful way to let children tell us what their concrete, conceptual, or personal understanding of death is, and where their understanding comes from (Walker, 1998; Way & Bremner, 2005). The use of visual language with children often grants the therapist access to their inner world, by way of the child’s imagination, and the dialogue is less threatening as it can be made more explicit through talking or can remain implicit in the artwork (McIntyre, 1990).

Considering that young children are still developing both their artistic abilities and their verbal skills, it is interesting that they often appear more comfortable exploring their inner and outer world through art and play than through verbal language. Implied in this observation is a belief that children are better able to project their view of the self, others, and the world onto images than into words; in an artwork there is more space in which to let the imagination run free and to allow the self to run in the direction that it needs.

Art making to facilitate expression and mastery. Eaton, Doherty, and Widrick (2007) maintain that art therapy is a “safe outlet for expressing thoughts and emotions [and can] successfully facilitate recovery from psychological distress” (p. 256). Through colouring, drawing, painting, sculpture, and collage, children can tap into the inner resources that lie in their imagination. Art therapy gives children a safe place within

which they can visually communicate their feelings and questions, and they appear to frequently use this space in a way that facilitates their healing process (Walker, 1998). In this manner, the stories children create in their artwork can be seen as metaphoric reflections of their inner selves.

Other authors describe how art making permits children not only to express themselves, but also to gain at least a degree of mastery over their situation. For instance, Zambelli, Clark, and De Jong Hodgson (1994) describe how many bereaved children create transitional phenomena through their art making. These phenomena, often fantastical in nature, appear to help children deal with the separation anxiety frequently caused by the death. That is, the art making seems to allow them to express fear, anxiety, and sadness that they may have difficulty expressing in other ways, and allows them to create an object or image that may contain a fear or represent that person who is missed. Mills and Crowley (as cited in Zambelli et al., 1994) suggest that the fantasies children engage in through art making may be a way for them to affect or alter an unpleasant situation symbolically. Whether it is through exaggeration, personification, or metaphorical transformation of death, when children are able to safely address their understanding and reactions through creative acts, it may allow them the opportunity to confront, process, and gain momentary control of the situation (Walker, 1998; Wenestam, 1984; Zambelli et al., 1994).

Diversity in art interventions with bereaved children. Art therapy and developmentally appropriate therapeutic work can take many forms with the bereaved child. For example, through play, children may re-enact the death in order to better understand the situation (Dyregrov, 2008). By sharing stories about loved ones children may have an easier time forming positive memories and may feel comfortable thinking

and talking about the deceased (Goldman, 2009). Reading children's books can be a way of communicating both the concrete and more abstract aspects of death (Corr, 2003). Art can be used to create memorial albums and objects about the deceased if a young child expresses a fear of forgetting specific things about the person who has died (Dyregrov, 2008). Having a concrete object that reminds children of the positive memories they hold can be a useful tool to help them accept the death and continue onwards through life, thus "refocus[ing] the emotional tie into a bond that acknowledges the separation [and] symbolically represents the time together" (Lister et al., 2008, p. 249).

Art as therapy with bereaved children. The physical manipulation of art materials in the act of creation can be therapeutic and healing in and of itself (Kramer as cited in Feder & Feder, 1998). The idea of *art as therapy* is that a client need not verbalize, nor even become conscious of, the psychological processing taking place during art making in order for it to be beneficial. However, it does require that the therapist have confidence in the therapeutic potential of the creative process, regardless of whether or not words are used (McNiff as cited in Hinz, 2009). Similarly, the physical act of creating allows the client, regardless of age, to release built up tension and to counter feelings of helplessness and passivity through the direct manipulation of the materials (Kramer, 2001). The inherently therapeutic qualities of art making may therefore help a bereaved child regain a sense of calmness, both physically and emotionally. Moreover, if a child is too young, developmentally, to make use of formal art therapy, the creative process itself may still be quite beneficial to the child.

Artistic Developmental Level of Young Children

In a chart on the stages of child development, Rucci, Luquet, and Di Leo (as cited in Di Leo, 1977) describe the artistic development of children between the ages of 3 and

6 as follows: the child of 3 tends to scribble ziz-zags, whorls, and circles and enjoys observing the mark making process; by the age of 4, the child continues to engage in a process of discovery and begins to recognize that lines, shapes, and colours may represent something; between the age of 4 and 6, the child begins to create more representational images and the human figure is a frequent theme. Moreover, young children tend to visually depict what is most salient to their current situation, what they know to exist in their own lives. (It is important to note that this summary of childhood artistic development appears to be based on Western cultures.) Taking into consideration the artistic developmental level of children between the ages of 3 and 6, and the general consensus that children appear to be comfortable expressing themselves through non-verbal modes of communication, the art as therapy approach might be one of the most suitable approaches to take when working with young bereaved children.

Therapeutic Colouring Books

In an article on the use of activity books for bereaved children, the Keane (as cited in Carney, 2003), the Director of a center for grieving children and families describes her experience of using such tools with her clients. From her clinical perspective, colouring and activity books are “empowering for the children in a situation where they feel powerless” (Keane as cited in Carney, 2003, p. 312). Colouring comes naturally to children and is a familiar and comforting activity. In addition, Keane states that colouring and activity books that are specifically designed for grieving children can teach them how to cope, thus renewing their sense of control. If a book addresses children’s grieving processes while inviting them to use art materials, which stimulate learning, then an art-based activity book such as a colouring book would indeed foster better coping strategies, while providing a sense of comfort. Counter-arguments to the use of colouring

books of course exist, as some therapists feel that they discourage creativity and focus on the product rather than the process (Brown, 2009). However, when one takes into account the varying developmental levels of young children and the suitability of different therapeutic tools, colouring books for bereaved children can be viewed as an important form of support.

Finally, the goals and approaches of therapeutic colouring books used with other populations can provide a useful perspective. Waldron, Whittington, and Jensen (1985) describe a program they ran for military families dealing with the deployment of one parent. Following information sessions, colouring books were created to address the separation anxiety that the children might be feeling. The colouring books depicted military personnel doing various jobs while deployed, families doing activities with only one parent present, and families being reunited. The objectives were to clarify children's understanding of the situation and to offer reassurance that life without one parent would be fine, since the other parent would eventually return. In another setting, Roberts (1988) reviewed interventions in shelters aimed at helping women and children who were in situations of crisis. Colouring books used age-appropriate language to address the issue of domestic violence and realistic illustrations to address the various emotions children might be feeling. The stated goals were to help children understand the situation, reassure them that they would be safe, help them express their feelings, and improve their ability to cope. In both of these examples, the colouring books appeared to make communication with the children easier and seemed to facilitate the adjustment process of the young children involved. Specifically, in the military setting children spoke openly and honestly about their feelings of sadness, fear, and anger during group discussions following the use of the colouring book, and in the shelter setting, the colouring book

appeared to foster communication between mothers and children about their situations and feelings.

In summary, the literature reviewed above stresses that any formal intervention or informal interactions with parentally bereaved young children need to accept and validate the emotional and behavioural fluctuations – whether the responses seem to be avoiding or confronting the loss – that tend to occur during their grieving processes (Bertman, 1995; Dyregrov, 2008; Goldman, 2009; Leming & Dickinson, 2007; Lieberman et al., 2003; Walker, 1998; Worden, 1996). This approach is supported in the stage models of childhood bereavement (Bowlby as cited in Webb, 2005b; The Dougy Center for Grieving Children, 1997; Granot, 2005; Worden, 1996) as well as in the DPM (Stroebe et al., 2005). Furthermore, grieving children appear to benefit from normalizing and comforting environments and activities (Lieberman et al. 2003; Schreder, 1995; Worden et al., 1999). Art making in various forms can provide familiarity and reassurance, and can allow young children to express themselves more openly if they are still struggling with verbally conveying their feelings and experiences (Bertman, 2005; Dyregrov, 2008; Eaton et al., 2007; Goodman, 2005; Granot, 2005; McIntyre, 1990; Simon, 2005; Walker, 1998; Way & Bremner, 2005; Wenestam 1984; Zambelli et al., 1994). However, many adults may be uncertain of how to foster non-verbal self-expression in young grieving children and may find it helpful to have a bereavement-related art-based tool with which to guide the child.

Primary Research Question

How can theory and research help to inform a colouring book for parentally bereaved young children?

Subsidiary Research Questions

a) What theories seem to inform past art-based activity books for bereaved children, if any?

b) What developmentally appropriate themes potentially correspond to the experiences of bereaved children aged 3-6?

Methodology

Study Design

A theoretical, construction-based research approach was employed to answer the primary and subsidiary research questions stated above. A theoretical methodology always involves an extensive literature search and review, therefore it was an appropriate method of gathering information on current theories of childhood bereavement (Newman & Benz, 1998). An examination of existing grief-related colouring and art-based activity books was necessary in order to evaluate the ways in which the experience of childhood bereavement has been translated up to this point. Furthermore, this review of available material allowed for an assessment of the elements which seemed to be important in colouring books for young bereaved children, as well as what elements or approaches had not yet been used. Thus, it was possible to ascertain what gaps exist in the current materials available for bereaved children and to decide how a new book might fill these gaps. Finally, a construction methodology was essential, as it allowed the process to go beyond simply theorizing about how to create a new colouring book to actually creating one, yet did not require an evaluation of the effectiveness of this new tool (Research Paper Handbook, 2008).

Data Collection and Research Procedures

When using a theoretical methodology, the data is often comprised of written

documents and audio-visual materials, which are usually secondary or tertiary sources (Creswell, 2003). Whether taking a historical, bibliographic, or construction approach, the researcher first collects the relevant data, then organizes, analyzes, and synthesizes the data (Junge & Linesch, 1993). Additional steps follow, yet differ slightly depending on the specific approach. For a construction paper, the researcher uses the synthesized, theoretical data to inform her creation of a practical tool, be it a more elaborate research design, a clinical program design, or a tangible product that is related to the chosen subject matter (Research Paper Handbook, 2008).

For this project, the data collection involved an extensive search of the literature for current theories on childhood bereavement, current approaches to helping children process grief, and the role of art therapy in these approaches. Searches were conducted in databases such as PsychINFO and Academic Search Premier (EBSCO), using a number of keywords, including “bereave*”, “child*”, “grief”/ “grieving”, “mourning”, “death”, “concept of death”, and “understanding death”. These terms were also combined with “art therap*”, “creative*”, and “art as therapy”. In addition, these databases were searched using the keywords “Dual Process Model”, to find literature on a recent theoretical development in understanding bereavement which seemed appropriate to the study. Furthermore, the terms listed above were searched in combination with “colour* book”, “color* book”, and “activity book”.

Additionally, a search through non-academic databases was essential for locating existing colouring books and art-based activity books that target the needs of parentally and otherwise bereaved young children. Namely amazon.com was searched using the term “childhood bereavement”. This resulted in finding books for parents, storybooks for children, and the occasional activity book. Next google.com was searched for “activity

books and bereaved children”, yet this only yielded one or two more sources. Additional smaller databases were searched, as suggested in an article by Carney (2003).

Specifically, Compassion Books’ on-line store was searched and yielded about a dozen art-based activity books for bereaved young children. A number of these books were purchased through amazon.com and centering.org. Lastly, the Kingston branch of Bereaved Families of Ontario was visited, where some additional literature and activity books were found.

Next, data analysis of all the literature and materials collected took place.

Theories on childhood bereavement, the DPM (Stroebe & Schut, 1999), and suggestions on how adults can help children process grief were reviewed and synthesized. This information was then compared with the approaches taken in existing art-based activity books for bereaved children in order to understand how other artists, writers, and clinicians have attempted to translate the grieving processes of young children into activity books. The existing activity books were also analyzed for common formal elements (e.g., kinds of characters used, complexity of images, use of language). This step involved coding the books for visual and thematic elements and, as is common in the coding process, specific categories emerged out of the analysis (Creswell, 2003; Neuman, 1997).

Validity and Reliability

To ensure credibility, the literature that was selected was drawn largely from peer-reviewed journals and academic books (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For each smaller topic of inquiry, several different sources were considered in an attempt to find the beliefs most commonly adhered to by theorists and clinicians, while still taking into account opposing theories (Creswell, 2003). In addition, well-established on-line book-selling databases

were used to locate art-based activity books related to childhood bereavement and reviews and ratings were considered, as well as relevancy, when selecting specific books.

In addition to the credibility of the data, the credibility of the researcher is equally important (Cherry, 2000). Primarily, I needed to be aware of the influence that a Western upbringing had on the way I viewed childhood bereavement. The phenomenon of parent loss during childhood is not one that I have experienced personally, thus any biases originate from a perspective of curiosity and empathy. It is essential to acknowledge that although the attempt has been to create a culturally sensitive colouring book, all of the data is from a Western culture and the result is most likely more appropriate for children who are also being raised in a Western culture.

Delimitations

Delimitations of this study include researching literature on childhood bereavement, with the exception of the literature on the DPM (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). All the literature used dates from the mid-twentieth century to present. Although attempts were made to focus on literature pertaining specifically to the death of a parent in early childhood, there was much more literature available on childhood bereavement in general, and thus the data was expanded. Attempts were also made to find literature focusing on young bereaved children, yet many texts only differentiated between children and adolescents, and not between different categories of children. Throughout this paper however, when the term *young children* is used it refers to children between the ages of 3 and 6 years old.

Assumptions

There are several assumptions present in this study. First, there is the assumption that there is a need for such a colouring book and that young bereaved children can

potentially benefit from engaging with this kind of book, either by themselves or with the assistance of an older person. Second, there is the assumption that although the colouring book is not being tested for efficacy, the use of it will not harm a child emotionally or psychologically. Third, the colouring book is being created with the assumption that any child using it has already received some explanation of what it means biologically when a person dies. Fourth, it is also being designed under the assumption that the rest of the child's family is still alive and present, and thus is not being designed for children experiencing multiple deaths in particular. That is not to say the book cannot be used in such cases, but rather that if that had been the intended demographic, then the resulting images and themes might be different. Finally, the project is being conducted under the assumption that it is producing the only research-based and theoretically-based colouring book for parentally bereaved young children to date. Some existing books of this kind may be based on clinical work, although there is no indication that any might be based on research.

Limitations

By the nature of the chosen methodology, this study is limited by the data that can be found (Newman & Benz, 1998). In this case, the data includes both the literature and the existing art-based activity books for bereaved children, and is limited not only in quantity, but also in form. Here, form refers to the cultural context of the available material, as well as the basis of the literature. Efforts have been made to consider a mix of literature based on theory, clinical practice, and research. With regards to the cultural context of the data, it is necessary to acknowledge that despite the attempts at creating a culturally-sensitive colouring book, all of the data is from a Western culture and the result is may not be generalizable to all cultures. A further limitation is the relatively small

number of pages that are allowed for the colouring book, due to budgetary restraints. This limitation affects the number of themes that might otherwise have been explored in the colouring book and, by virtue of not being able to include more ideas, makes it challenging to translate an experience of bereavement that is more generalizable.

Possible Results

The aim of this research is not to formulate any new theories on childhood bereavement, nor is it to test the efficacy of a new colouring book as a therapeutic tool. Rather, the expectation is that the data analysis will enable a responsible formulation of key themes and visual approach to be used in the creation of a new colouring book for parentally bereaved children. The result should be a developmentally appropriate tool for children aged 3 to 6, that can be used with or without a helping adult, to assist young children in their grieving processes. Still, it is important to be aware that although the book is attempting to translate common feelings and experiences, each child's grieving process is unique and therefore not every child will benefit from this colouring book in the same way.

Existing Art-Based Activity Books for Bereaved Young Children

Despite how useful colouring books for grieving children may be, a fairly thorough search for such materials shows that there are significantly more storybooks for this population than there are art-based activity books. Roughly, there appear to be at least 5 times as many bereavement-related storybooks for children of all ages. Of the small number of art-based activity books found, 15 were selected for analysis in this study. They include: *My Memory Book* (Atkinson, n.d.), *Saying Goodbye*, (Boulden, 1992), *Together, We'll Get Through This: Learning to Cope with Loss and Transition* (Carney, 1999), *The Grief Bubble* (DeBay, 2007), *Children Also Grieve: Talking About*

Death and Healing (Goldman, 2006), *When My Dad Died: A Child's View of Death* (Hammond, 1981), *When Someone Very Special Dies: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief* (Heegard, 1988), *When Something Terrible Happens: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief* (Heegard, 1991), *Why Did You Die? Activities to Help Children Cope with Grief & Loss* (Leeuwenburgh & Goldring, 2008), *Saying Goodbye* (Saynor, 1988), *Goodbye Grandma* (Saynor, 1993), *Buster the Clown is Dead* (Saynor, 2000), *My Grieving Journey Book* (Shavatt & Shavatt, 2001), *Help Me Say Goodbye: Activities for Helping Kids Cope When a Special Person Dies* (Silverman, 1999), and *How I Feel: A Coloring Book for Grieving Children* (Wolfelt, 1996). These books actually represent about three quarters of the total number of activity books for bereaved children that were found.

The criteria used to select the books for comparison were: books which appeared to be aimed at young bereaved children; books that included colouring or other art-based activities; and books that were easily obtainable. The books that were not selected include: books described primarily as journals and did not appear to include any art-based activities; activity books related to dealing with suicide or dealing with one's own illness or death; activity books that were unavailable to order; and activity books that were aimed at bereaved adolescents.

Despite attempting to only review activity books for bereaved children between the ages of 3 and 6, the available descriptions were not always consistent in indicating the intended age group. As a result, eight out of the 15 activity books selected turned out to be for children aged 7 to 12. This left seven books which seemed appropriate for children aged 3 to 6 to use on their own (Boulden, 1992; Carney, 1999; Hammond, 1981; Saynor, 1988, 1993, 2000; Wolfelt, 1996). That being said, all 15 books could be used with

children of any age, if an adult is available to work with them to guide the process. The main challenge for younger children is the amount of text and mature vocabulary included in many of the books for older children. These books could still be very useful for younger children though, if an adult is there to clarify terms and answer questions. Some of the authors of books for older children even suggest that adults be available to read to children and further explain different concepts (Heegard, 1988). The books for younger children also include text, but less quantity and a somewhat simpler vocabulary. Additionally, the activities are simpler and any child has the possibility of doing the activities without reading the text. A final note on age is that each child is unique and has different needs throughout his grieving process (DeBay, 2007). Therefore, at different times, a younger child might benefit from some of the activities in one of the books for older children, whereas at other times an older child might gravitate towards the activities from a book aimed at younger children.

Specific Activities and Approaches in Books for Bereaved Children

Within the 15 books examined, the activities range from colouring, drawing, or collage, to writing a letter, journalling, pasting photographs, or creating entirely something separate from the book. In the seven books for younger children, colouring is the main activity, although none are comprised solely of this task. Rather, every book includes at least one page inviting children to either colour, write, draw, or paste a photograph. These invitations are in the form of letters to the deceased, descriptions of fond memories, or expression of current feelings, and do not always specify a precise activity. In this manner, children have an opportunity for choice, in addition to the activity of choosing colours.

Furthermore, all the books include text and those for older children include more

text than those for younger children. For the most part, the text discusses different aspects of death and grief and appears to be an attempt to foster communication and stimulate cognitive and emotional processes (Shavatt & Shavatt, 2001). In terms of facilitating children's understanding of death, five books for younger children include a clear, honest definition of what it means when a person dies (Boulden, 1992; Hammond, 1981; Saynor, 1988, 1993, 2000). With regards to a description of how to use the book, Wolfelt (1996) and Hammond's (1981) books include an introductory section for adults who will be assisting the bereaved child, while Carney (1999) and two of Saynor's (1988, 1993) include an introductory text addressed specifically to the child. In addition, Hammond includes a more detailed description of children's reactions to the death of a parent and how adults can help bereaved children.

Interestingly, many of the books are not created to address one type of bereavement in particular. Out of the seven activity books for younger children, one refers to the death of a friend (Saynor, 2000), two refer to the death of a grandparent (Saynor, 1988, 1993), one refers to the death of a father (Hammond, 1981), and three do not explicitly detail who died (Boulden, 1992; Carney, 1999; Wolfelt, 1996). Instead of spelling out what kind of death the child might be grieving, these last books use phrases such as "when someone special dies" (Boulden, p. 23) to refer to the general state of bereavement and to create a tool that is accessible to a wider audience.

Another way the books differ is in their use of characters, which might also affect their range of accessibility. With the exception of *How I Feel* (Wolfelt, 1996), which depicts a variety of children, all the books for younger children include one or two consistent characters who are dealing with a death. One uses only animal characters (Boulden, 1992), a second one incorporates animal and human characters (Carney, 1999),

and the remaining five have human characters in their narratives and images.

In terms of the developmental level and accessibility of the existing activity books for young bereaved children, there is immense variability. Many of the books include a fair amount of text in addition to images and seem to rely more on the assistance of an adult (Carney, 1999; Saynor, 1988, 1993, 2000). The books for younger children also frequently include writing activities, such as writing a letter to the deceased or listing favourite memories. The text and activities are written in developmentally appropriate language, yet the amount of reading the inclusion of writing activities suggests that a young child might not benefit as much from the book without the presence of an adult.

Emotional Themes in Activity Books

Similarities and differences also exist in the emotional themes related to grief that are included in each book. Some books for younger children discuss a wide variety of feelings including sadness, anger, fear, shock, loneliness, shame, happiness, pain, surprise, and optimism (Boulden, 1992; Hammond, 1981; Saynor, 2000; Wolfelt, 1996). These books also mention themes related to the grieving process, such as the importance of talking to someone else about one's feelings, the variety of feelings that may occur during the grieving process, the tendency to ask many questions, the natural fluctuation of feelings during the grieving process, and maintaining a closeness with the deceased. The other books mention only a few feelings, namely sadness, longing for the deceased, and happiness in recalling fond memories (Carney, 1999; Saynor, 1988, 1993). Instead of focusing on feelings, the latter discuss the concept of death, events in the child's external environment, comforting activities, and positive memories of the deceased. In contrast, *How I Feel* (Wolfelt, 1996) is the only book to focus solely on the feelings that bereaved children commonly experience. It also includes minimal text, making it the most

developmentally appropriate art-based activity book for bereaved young children examined here. Finally, all of the books for younger children include positive, encouraging words and images near the end of the narrative or directives. For example, one of the final pages in *Together, We'll Get Through This!* (Carney, 1999) says, "Remember: We can get through ANYTHING, with the love and support of family and friends!"

Culture in Activity Books

It is worth noting that more than half of the activity books for younger children examined here mention religious ceremonies or beliefs, even though none state this in their titles (Boulden, 1992; Hammond, 1981; Saynor, 1988, 1993, 2000). Many of the books simply use the term "funeral" without naming any religion in particular. Yet, funeral services are not common in all parts of the world, so using this term does imply certain cultural or religious traditions and beliefs, and thus demarcates these books as products of a specific culture. Another factor that indicates they are Western artifacts is the simple virtue of being tools intended to discuss death and grief with children. As St. Thomas and Johnson (2007) describe, some cultures hold the belief that children should only be told about death "when the family elders feel that they are capable and prepared to handle the truth" (p. 124).

Existing Art-Based Activity Books for Bereaved Children:

Reflections of Parental Death in Early Childhood

Of the art-based activity books for bereaved young children reviewed above, many cover several of the key issues described in the literature on childhood bereavement. One issue that is discussed in many of the activity books is the conceptual understanding of death. Some books give a clear, honest explanation of what it means in

biological terms when a person dies (Hammond, 1981; Saynor, 2000), while others add brief comparisons with the life cycles of other natural organisms, such as trees and animals (Boulden, 1992). Honest answers that may have been difficult for adults to verbally discuss with children are presented in a simple and coherent manner with the help of friendly images and characters. Thus, many of the books provide clarification for children by enhancing their conceptual understanding of death which, as described in the literature, can be a significant factor in their experience of bereavement (Goldman, 2009; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2005).

Other issues that are addressed in the activity books include the variety and fluctuation of negative and positive emotions experienced by most bereaved children, and the importance of expressing them and talking to caring adult figures about feelings, questions, and concerns. Thus, the books implicitly and explicitly – by virtue of being a tool that adults can provide for children – encourage adults to be attentive, accepting, and supportive of bereaved children, as advocated in the literature. In terms of the stage models of childhood bereavement described in much of the literature (Bowlby as cited in Webb, 2005b; The Dougy Center for Grieving Children, 1997; Granot, 2005; Worden, 1996), Wolfelt's (1992) book appears to follow to some degree a stage model of childhood bereavement, beginning with disbelief and then traversing a range of difficult emotions and behavioural reactions. The other books for younger children generally include a variety of feelings, yet there is no trend in the order in which they are presented. All of the books for younger children end on a positive note, either by looking to the future, by encouraging the child to continue expressing his feelings to others, or by emphasizing that the love between the child and the deceased will continue to exist. Thus, some key elements from the literature are present, namely providing positive

support for the child, maintaining open channels of communication, and acknowledging the possibility of a continued bond with the deceased. The activity books also do well in stating that each child's grieving process is unique and that many children experience the death of someone they love. Such points work toward normalizing the bereavement experience and helping children understand that they are not alone in their grieving processes.

Other than the specifics of attending a funeral (Boulden, 1992; Hammond, 1981; Saynor, 1988, 1993, 2000) the activity books for younger children rarely address the task of readjustment to new life circumstances, an important factor in bereavement, according to the Dual Process Model (Stroebe et al, 2005). Adaptation to changes in the home environment, interactions with others, sense of self, family constellation, and personal responsibilities can be large obstacles for parentally bereaved young children. However, as the DPM highlights, constant attention to these stressors is not necessary (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Rather, a back and forth movement, between tasks that acknowledge the loss and these types of changes appears natural and adaptive. In addition, the rate of this oscillation will change according to the individual's emotional needs and attachment behaviour. Although a variety of emotions are mentioned within the books for younger children, the task of dealing with changes in everyday life is not consistently addressed.

Creating a New Therapeutic Colouring Book for Parentally Bereaved Young Children

Role of the Dual Process Model

The Dual Process Model is chosen here as a necessary component in the formulation of a colouring book for parentally bereaved young children for strong parallels between the DPM and established theories of childhood bereavement appear to

exist. To begin, the loss-orientation, with its myriad of feelings resulting from a focus on the loss (Stroebe et al., 2005), is similar to the central feelings of sadness, longing, anxiety, and fear that previous stage models of childhood bereavement underscore (Bowlby as cited in Webb, 2005b; The Dougy Center for Grieving Children, 1997; Granot, 2005; Worden, 1996). Since both bodies of literature emphasize the importance of validating all feelings experienced, the inclusion of a variety of feelings is essential in the creation of the colouring book.

For children, the fluctuation of feelings during bereavement may relate in part to some aspect of development, yet it may also relate in part to the DPM's explanation of oscillation – that of the necessity of confrontation and avoidance of the loss. Lieberman et al. (2003) point out that comforting, familiar activities can help a child take a momentary break from grieving, paralleling the DPM's strong support for the acceptance and use of denial in bereavement. While Stroebe et al. (2005) note that models of adult bereavement have been slow to accept the need to move between confrontation and avoidance of the loss, here I point out that the literature on childhood bereavement readily acknowledges this oscillation – without ever using this exact term – as natural and necessary for the grieving child. Thus, the book could include images of characters confronting the significance of the loss, as well as characters enjoying everyday activities, as a concrete way of incorporating this theoretical acceptance of denial.

Another central aspect of the DPM that is found in the literature on childhood bereavement is that of the restoration-orientation (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Through their questioning, bereaved children attempt to gather information which might help them fill in the gaps and adjust to a new reality (Worden, 1996). These efforts correspond directly to the DPM's restoration-orientation, namely understanding and adjusting to life changes,

and accepting new roles, identities, and relationships. This aspect of bereavement – a gradual and continuous adaption to loss – is therefore a necessary inclusion in the colouring book.

Theoretical Rationale Behind the Colouring Book

In accordance with the literature on helping bereaved children cope with their situation (Dyregrov, 2008; Goldman, 2009; Leming & Dickinson, 2007; Lieberman et al., 2003; Walker, 1998; Worden, 1996), the goals for this colouring book are to encourage bereaved children to express their emotions, to normalize the roller-coaster of feelings and experiences that are part of bereavement, and to encourage children to seek support from caring individuals around them. From an art therapy perspective, providing an initial stepping stone into the therapeutic process is achieved by offering the child a choice. A colouring book page that has one or two neutral elements, in addition to the central image clearly related to grieving, gives the child the possibility of choosing what to colour first, second, and so on. This freedom allows children to proceed at their own pace: both in the creative process and in the grieving process. Even in such a small activity as this, the opportunity to negotiate colouring space and the order in which they confront the central image allows them control over their grieving processes. If a child needs more distance from the feeling of sadness depicted in the central figure, he may choose to colour the background elements first. In contrast, if a child recognizes his own feelings in the figure and needs to relate openly to it and express this feeling, he may begin there. This opportunity to negotiate the colouring space and process corresponds to the DPM's view that both confrontation and avoidance are valuable and necessary in the grieving process (Stroebe et al., 2005). In addition, the child's colouring process can be very informative to the art therapist, clinician, or other caring adult. It might give some

indication of whether or not the child is in a state of confronting or avoiding difficult emotions, it might clarify if she is ready to talk about the loss or accompanying life changes, or it might provide insight into other elements of her behaviour. Following this, a dialogue between adult and child might commence, depending on the observations made, or on the thoughts and emotions the images bring up for the child.

The aim of the book is also to address specifically the death of a parent, which is rarely done in the existing activity books. In order to communicate this, the captions use words such as “parent”, “mom”, or “dad”. Furthermore, the images and themes function to communicate two main ideas: the diversity of a child's emotional experience within bereavement, and the different ways that children may cope with the death (i.e., how they adapt to their new roles, their new identities, and new environments as per the DPM). These two ideas correspond with the DPM's notion of oscillation between the loss- and restoration-orientations, as well as the task of readjustment emphasized in the model.

Setting Structural Parameters

A structure of themes is needed in order to guide the creation of images if the colouring book is to address the diversity of a child's emotional experience within bereavement and the different ways that children may cope with the death. Both the DPM and certain aspects of the literature on childhood bereavement provide the basis for the structure of the colouring book.

The first two themes for the colouring book are *disbelief or shock over the death of a parent* and *deep sadness and longing for the parent*. These themes reflect the early emotional responses most often noted in the literature on childhood bereavement and the DPM. Stroebe and Schut (1999) observe that in the earlier part of bereavement, negative affect in the loss-orientation tends to dominate the person's response. Similarly, the

literature on childhood bereavement states that initial shock is quickly followed by intense longing for the parent, which eases over time (Bowlby as cited in Webb, 2005b; The Dougy Center for Grieving Children, 1997; Granot, 2005; Worden, 1996).

The third theme developed is *concern over who will take care of the child in the same way*. This theme acknowledges that children's questioning following the death of a parent might reflect uncertainty and worry. Linking directly to the DPM, the theme corresponds to aspects of the restoration-orientation. For example, it refers to moments when a child is attending to new relationships that might develop after the death of a parent or new roles that might grow out of the shift in family dynamics.

The next two themes are *anger at the injustice of the death* and *fear, which may be for a number of reasons*. Once again, these are negative affect responses that the literature states arise frequently in bereaved children (Dyregrov, 2008; Granot, 2005; Webb, 2002; Worden, 1996). The literature discusses how anger often relates to shame in children, emphasizing that adults need to make an effort to explain the death and openly communicate about the grieving process, in order to help children understand and work through these feelings. As it appears to be an aspect of bereavement that is perhaps not sufficiently addressed with children, it seems important to include in the colouring book. The theme of fear is also found in the literature on childhood bereavement and relates directly to both the loss- and restoration-orientations of the DPM. Here the DPM provides a more elaborate understanding of fear in bereavement. Simultaneously it can be seen as a manifestation of a child's realization that the parent is no longer present and this loneliness is frightening, or that she must do things on her own, that were previously done in tandem with the parent, and which now seem more daunting.

The next theme for the colouring book is *easier, happier moments that arise*

intermittently. To accurately reflect the oscillation of the DPM this theme would arise multiple times throughout the colouring book, yet due to the length, it is only present once. This theme is included to reassure children that positive feelings during the grieving process are acceptable and valuable, and that as time passes they may experience positive emotions more frequently. The theme corresponds specifically to the DPM's support for intermittent denial or avoidance of negative thoughts and feelings as a form of healthy coping (Stroebe et al., 2005).

The second to last theme is *particular activities or events that remind the child of the parent*. The literature on childhood bereavement states that familiar activities can provide comfort and consistency for a child, yet also warns that such activities may at times trigger upsetting reminders of the loss (Lieberman et al., 2003). This juxtaposition corresponds to the oscillation described in the DPM, which may occur at any moment, for any number of reasons (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Thus, although a child may generally be doing quite well and may be oriented primarily towards readjustment, certain moments might unexpectedly cause a complete turn around, immersing the child in negative affect associated with the loss-orientation.

The final theme is *normalization of these feelings and encouragement to express them to others*. This reassuring theme relates strongly to both the literature on childhood bereavement and the DPM, as both advocate for increased understanding and acceptance of the variety of emotional and behavioural responses that are involved in bereavement.

To achieve the desired functions, there are additional elements to consider in the creation of the book. For example, the level of detail of the images is important and is dictated by the age group and the activity of colouring. The secondary and background elements in each image must be carefully designed: they must be neutral to provide an

opportunity for emotional distance, yet must connect with the image as a whole and must not deter from the central figure and theme. Some images may even include secondary figures playing a passive role to communicate the idea of social support. While the presence of others will be implied in such an image, the second figure should allow children to associate whichever roles or stories are most relevant to their own situations. Finally, to clarify the multiple purposes of the book, two brief informational texts will be included in the beginning of the book. One will be addressed to caregivers and one will be addressed to parentally bereaved children. The aim is not to direct the use of the book, but rather to briefly and kindly invite adults and children to see the possible ways in which the book may be beneficial. An accompanying booklet with guiding questions for adults assisting children could be a useful tool and is discussed below.

Applications for Use

First, the colouring book may be used simply for art as therapy, meaning the child may derive comfort, distraction, relaxation, creative and sensory learning, or enjoyment from colouring the images. The colouring book could be used without the assistance of an adult allowing the child to autonomously explore and express her feelings and experiences. Different children would gain different things from it, depending on their developmental level and bereavement need. Second, it may also lay the groundwork for future therapeutic work, as a child absorbs the images and captions. Depending on how much they understand visually from the images, as well as whether or not they are capable of reading on their own, individual children will grasp the content of the book to different degrees. Regardless of how much they absorb, every child will hopefully relate to some image or theme in the book. Furthermore, with the assistance of an adult, be it a parent, counsellor, other family member, or friend, the book may become a starting off

point for a therapeutic process. That is not to say that all bereaved children will need therapy, but rather that the colouring book can provide the groundwork for therapy, should it be needed in the future. The book is particularly relevant to approaches that view the therapeutic process primarily as an effort to normalize an experience and encourage the expression of natural emotions.

To give a more concrete example of how each image might serve these various functions, let us look at the theme of *particular activities or events that remind the child of the parent*. The image might be of a young girl wearing a baseball mitt, looking down at a baseball (Figure 1). First, to different children this image might communicate a common emotional response of the loss-orientation type, such as “I miss playing catch with my parent” or “I’m just too sad to play”. It may also represent a thought related to the loss-orientation, such as “I don’t have anyone to play catch with any more”. It may also be seen as addressing the questions that a child might ask himself when grieving in the restoration-orientation, such as “Because mom/dad thought I was a good baseball player, I want to find someone new to play with?” These are all examples of the ways in which a child might relate to the image, how caring adults may view the image, or ways in which the image might spur a dialogue between the adult and the child. Furthermore, the image may communicate possible coping strategies that a child might use when engaged in the restoration-orientation of adaptation to bereavement, as delineated by the DPM (Stroebe et al., 2005). If a child uses the colouring book when her feelings and responses are more in the realm of restoration and she is slowly adjusting to the changes following the death of a parent, the same image might spur thoughts such as “I guess I’m going to have to find other people to play catch with” or “My parent thought I was good at catch... I want to keep playing, because they would have been proud of me”. Thus, the

images are designed to suggest general feeling states related to parental loss in early childhood, yet are not so rigid as to inhibit the child from associating a variety of experiences with each one. In this manner, children are invited to colour in and out of the lines, while their perspective of each image changes as they oscillate between confrontation and avoidance of different loss and restoration tasks of bereavement.

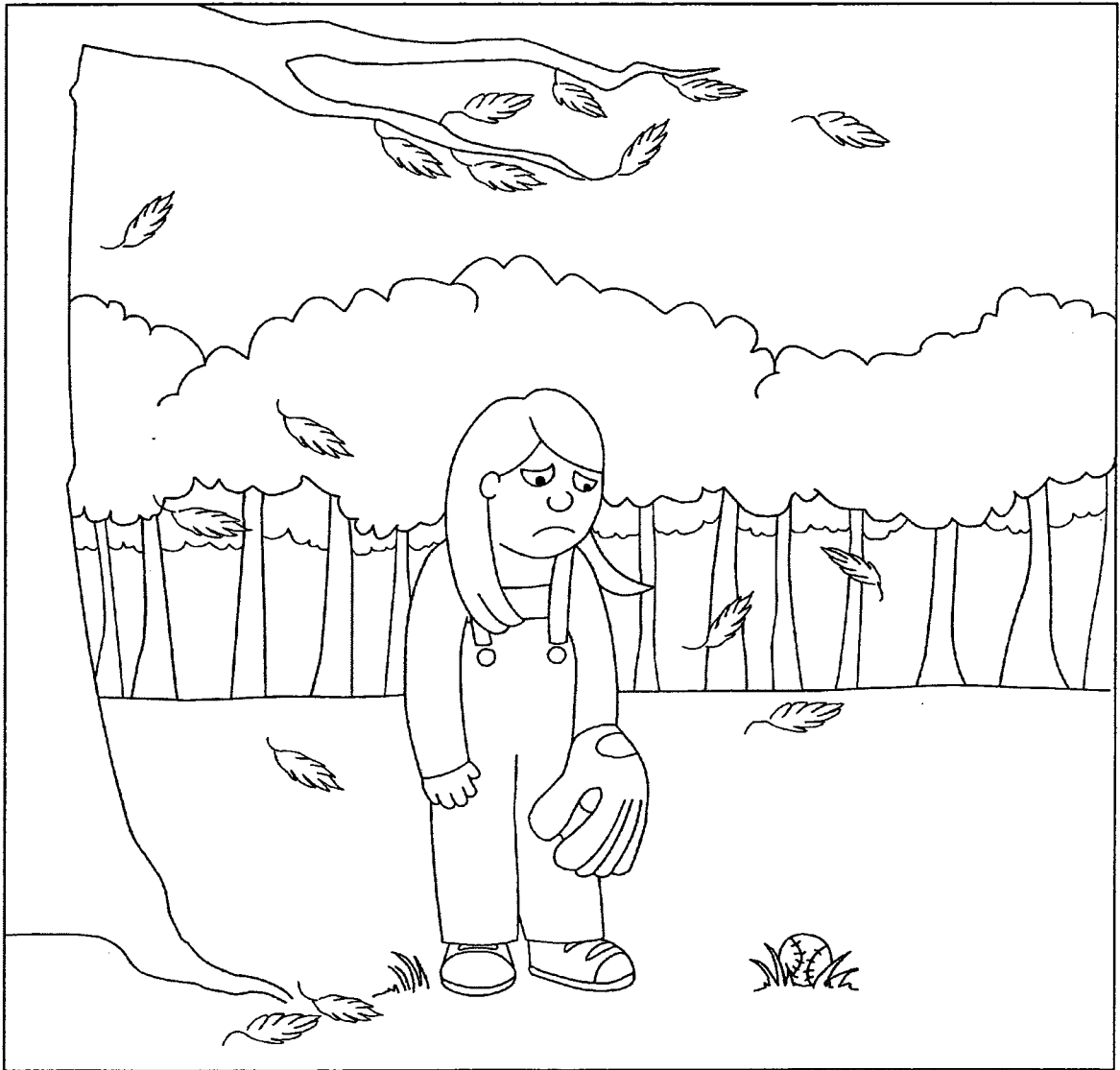


Figure 1.

Reflections on the Process of Creating and Suggestions for Use

Many adults may be uncertain of how to foster non-verbal self-expression in

young children and may find it helpful to have a tool of some kind with which to begin. Art-based activity books designed specifically for bereaved children are one possibility. There is currently a limited selection of available activity books for bereaved children, despite a great need for and potential benefit of using such materials (Keane as cited in Carney, 2004). The main purposes of the colouring book designed here are based on the literature on parentally bereaved young children, the DPM (Stroebe et al., 2005), and the desire to address parental loss in early childhood in a manner that existing colouring books do not. The purposes are to open up communication with young bereaved children, to normalize the experience of bereavement, and to foster social support for these children. This is accomplished by using images, themes, and captions to communicate two central ideas, which are the variability of a child's experience with bereavement, and the diverse ways in which a child might need to adjust to and cope with the death of a parent.

There are other directions in which this project may have continued beyond the practical constraints of finances and school year. For example, given more time and financial resources, the colouring book could have been longer, making it possible to address a larger number of emotional and adjustment reactions experienced by parentally bereaved young children. This would have increased the potential for more children to find at least one image and theme that they relate strongly with. Another direction would have been the addition of a short guide book for adults who are accompanying bereaved children in the use of the colouring book. Although the opening texts to adults and children briefly outline the potential uses and benefits of the colouring book, a more thorough text or accompanying booklet could include possible developmentally appropriate discussion points to go along with each image. The guiding questions would

aid in clarifying the perspective from which the images were created, which was largely based in the DPM (Stroebe et al., 2005). For example, for an image related to the theme of *particular activities or events that remind the child of the parent* the booklet might suggest the following questions: What activities remind you more of your parent? How does it feel when you have to do those activities without your parent? Do you still want to do those activities without your parent? Who else could you do those activities with? What helps you get through that activity without your parent? Questions such as these invite the child to think about and discuss concrete elements (e.g., specific activities), as well as more abstract ideas (e.g., describing how they are feeling). Including a variety of questions for each image leads the adult and child to think about the same image from the different perspective of the loss- and restoration-orientations, and acknowledges the oscillation between these that will most likely occur. Furthermore, questions that invite the child to think about ways of adjusting to the death of a parent can foster communication about coping strategies and healthy adaptation to the loss. Lastly, the supplementary guide book could also describe the theory behind the book, clarifying childhood bereavement, and further encouraging open and accepting support for bereaved children in and outside of the home.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this paper describes the possible ways in which the colouring book may be used, either by children on their own or by children accompanied by an adult or therapist figure, these claims are made with the assumption that the book will be beneficial to bereaved children. Because this book is in the process of being published, no research on its effectiveness has been done. However, further research on the efficacy of this colouring book would be useful. Such research might assess the strong and weak

points of the book by collecting feedback from the children who use it, the family members of these children, any therapists who use the book with children, and bereavement agencies, such as BFO, who might incorporate the book into their programming in addition to providing families a copy to use independently. The results of this kind of outcome evaluation could provide suggestions for improvements or changes to the book, insight into the creative and verbal expression of bereaved children when provided with such a tool, information on the benefits of using the colouring book, and empirical support for more art-based activity books for bereaved children.

Another recommendation for future research is the exploration of apparent links between the DPM and the literature on childhood bereavement. Stroebe and Schut (1999) themselves claim that their model is potentially applicable to other groups of bereaved persons, yet state that research evaluating the bereavement process in different situations of loss is needed in order to justify a formal expansion of the theory. Theorists of childhood bereavement might welcome the explanation of oscillation presented by the DPM. In addition, if the literature encourages adults working with this population to be aware of, open to, and accepting of the tendency for children's affect to change quickly and frequently during grieving (Dyregrov, 2008; Lieberman et al., 2003; Worden, 1996), a more developed understanding of this unpredictable process might facilitate such acceptance. Furthermore, Stokes et al. (1997) highlight the potential utility of using the DPM to understand bereaved families and improve treatment interventions for bereaved families and children. They argue that the dynamic family system in which a grieving child exists might be better understood in terms of changes in oscillation. They suggest that each family member's oscillation between the loss- and restoration-orientations might balance out the bereavement process of one another and improve family

functioning. As described in this paper, remaining adults and family members can have a great impact on the adjustment of a bereaved child, so it makes sense to consider both the individual child and the dynamic family system when examining the bereavement process from the lens of the DPM. Furthermore from a therapy perspective, the research suggested above might contribute to a richer understanding of childhood bereavement, which could lead to improved interventions for assisting children in adjusting to the loss.

Conclusion

This theoretical-construction research paper utilized the literature on parental death in early childhood and the DPM of coping with bereavement (Stroebe et al., 2005) to formulate a framework from which to create a new therapeutic colouring book for parentally bereaved young children. Although the DPM has as of yet only been described as a model of adult bereavement, the core elements of the model appear to correspond with much of the literature on childhood bereavement. Most significantly, the latter states that children demonstrate a mix of negative and positive affective responses during bereavement and that their emotional and behavioural shifts seem unpredictable (Dyregrov, 2008; The Dougy Center for Grieving Children, 1997; Granot, 2005; Worden, 1996). Whereas the literature on childhood bereavement merely explains these fluctuations as related to developmental limitations that decrease tolerance for strong negative feelings, the DPM suggests that all bereaved individuals oscillate in this manner and that it is necessary for healthy adaption to a significant loss. The oscillation between loss- and restoration-orientations is seen as a natural way of balancing the tasks of confronting and avoiding the difficult aspects of bereavement. Here, this explanation is hypothesized to be useful in understanding the emotional and behavioural fluctuations in childhood bereavement. Accordingly, the themes developed for the colouring book are

conceived to reflect the areas of overlap between theories on childhood bereavement and the Dual Process Model.

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