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BRINGING DREAMS TO LIFE THROUGH DRAMA THERAPY: CAN THE CREATIVE EXPLORATION OF DREAMS AID IN PROCESSING GRIEF?

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> *It seems to me, that if we love, we grieve. That's the deal. That's the pack. Grief and love are forever intertwined… Within that whirling gyre all manner of madnesses exist; ghosts and spirits and dream visitations, and everything else that we, in our anguish, will into existence. These are precious gifts that are as valid and as real as we need them to be. They are the spirit guides that lead us out of the darkness* (Cave, 2018: n. p. n.).

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1. Abstract

In this study, grief dreams are understood as dreams that relate to images of grief or loss; contain the subject of loss; or might allude to such experiences or images. This study aimed to understand what constitutes grief dreams, in order to explore its elements through embodiment and projection with the hope of reaching a deeper understanding and comprehension of the associated grief. Using an arts-based research approach, the researcher, as sole participant, explored her own grief dreams, which involved the grief associated with three distinct losses, namely, 1) dreams dealing with the deceased, 2) dreams dealing with the termination of a relationship, and 3) dreams dealing with the communal loss related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These were analysed through three approaches, namely, 1) thematic analysis of the dream transcripts documented in a dream journal, 2) projection, and 3) embodiment. The results from the analysis showed that dreams, 1) reflect current turmoil, 2) provide comfort, and 3) aid in closure and clarity. The findings from the projective work revealed the following themes: 1) The Electrocardiogram, 2) the dream experience, 3) connecting the body, and 4) exploring the residue. Finally, the analysis of the embodied work displayed the subsequent themes: 1) feeling stuck, 2) spread and stretch, and 3) material carries the load. These findings are important for this study, as it revealed recurring themes in grief dreams that can be explored through embodied and projective means in order to aid in the therapeutic processing of grief.

5 Key words:

Drama therapy – grief dreams – grief comprehension – arts-based research – dreamwork

2. Research Title

Bringing dreams to life through drama therapy: Can the creative exploration of dreams aid in processing grief?

3. Introduction

I have always been drawn to the idea of how people grieve and make sense of their loss. Exploring where I am in terms of my own grieving processes intrigues me. I use the plural form because I am exploring three distinct grieving trajectories: one that is a 15-year-old journey for my mother, another that is rooted in the termination of a romantic relationship, and lastly, a personal and a communal grief associated with COVID-19. I am drawn to the concept of dreaming because of my own experience of dreams, especially grief-related dreams. Bates (2020: 83) writes in her book, *Languages of Loss*, "In my sleep my unconscious deals with trauma the best way it knows how – by dreaming." After my mother's passing, I dreamt that we shared our final goodbye. I believe that my brain and my unconscious formed this image with my mother for me to grasp a sense of closure. Perhaps, unknowingly at times, grief might be too overwhelming for an individual to confront in real life, and therefore, the body responds to loss by dreaming. This is because dreams *might* present themes of grief and loss in an abstract, distanced manner, and hence in a less threatening manner. My assumption is therefore: when one experiences a form of emotional disturbance – in this case, loss – dreaming may form an indirect, abstract or passive way of confronting and processing it.

Drama therapy often refrains from interpretive dreamwork, and rather adopts a practical approach in addressing trauma by either enacting or expanding the dream (Casson, 1999). I believe that dreams are like a narrative or a story that often articulates or visually presents a person's inner turmoil. This study intends to draw from these articulations and presentations within grief-held dreams, in order to better understand their possible purpose in grief comprehension. Drama therapy involves both the mind and the body (Casson, 1999), and hence, could provide the platform or

vehicle to explore one's dreams in order to delve into possible meanings or perspectives behind the dreams, which might aid in the processing of grief.

It is important to provide a description to the reader of what this study means by 'grief-held' dreams. My preliminary understanding extends to the following: such dreams deal with images of grief or loss; contain the subject of loss; or might allude to such experiences or images. For example, the dream might be the experience of an actual interaction with the subject of loss, or an altered presentation or experience of it. For this reason, I am further intrigued by dreams because of its, sometimes, warped and surrealistic representation of reality. In particular, I am drawn to the elements, visuals, symbols and metaphors that give it its quality. The first image that comes to mind for me writing this is Salvador Dali's (1931) artwork, *The Persistence of Time*. How strange to view this surrealistic art piece with its melting clocks, yet it is not completely inconceivable as it holds some measure of truth to reality. In other words, despite its removal from reality, one can still identify human and earth qualities. For this research, I want to draw from these elements, metaphors and images relating to loss or grief in my dreams. I am hoping to gain inspiration from these abstract or actual images as inspiration for engaging in embodiment and projection within drama therapy in order to hopefully reach a point of therapeutic relief or clarity for myself and for contexts outside of this study. In more specific terms, I am using artistic mediums available in drama therapy to access and explore the themes within grief dreams in order to better comprehend loss in the waking life. Finally, this research aims to engage in an arts-based research process where I will explore my own dreams through dramatic embodiment and projection with the hope that this will further elucidate their meaning and might be a useful adjunctive method to other grief-processing techniques in drama therapy.

4. Rationale

I believe that dreams are about knowing, and hence I want to explore my dreams to learn about my own grieving process, so that I can have a better idea of how it manifests in the waking life and, possibly, how it can be applied to drama therapy work with grief. Furthermore, I believe that such a study will not only encourage my own meaning-making processes about my losses, but also might shine light into new therapeutic approaches in drama therapy, so as to deal with patients facing loss or processing grief.

The potential discoveries made from working with dreams within a drama therapeutic context might be beneficial to a South African context, as it may reveal possible ways of contributing towards alleviating deep-seated and widespread loss-related trauma as is prevalent within South African society (Atwoli et al., 2013; Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002; Norman et al., 2007; Wyatt et al., 2017). By exploring my own images in grief-held dreams through embodiment and projective tools, this study might reveal some possible benefits for a drama therapist to apply this approach within a broader societal, loss-laden context, such as South Africa.

I am hoping that this study will lead to beneficial outcomes, especially in terms of advancing the field of drama therapy within the area of working with grief, producing novel knowledge on grief comprehension, discovering connections between dreaming and processing grief, and lastly, revealing a potential tool in addressing the different facets of loss-related trauma in South Africa. This is in line with what McNiff (2018 cited in Potash, 2019) says about the potential discoveries that can be made from arts-based research, relating to improving oneself, inspiring others, furthering professional practice, and satisfying the broadening of knowledge.

5. Literature review

5.1. Drama therapy

Jones (2007) explains that the term *drama therapy*, broadly, refers to the use of drama with the intention of therapeutic healing. He further writes, "It uses the potential of drama to reflect and transform life experiences to enable clients to express and work through problems they are encountering or to maintain a client's well-being and health" (Jones, 2007: 8). However, although he provides a definition, he warns his readers of limiting the profession to a "one-size-fits-all definition", as this would "ill serve clients with very different needs and capabilities" (Jones, 2007: 8). Therefore, it is important to determine *what* the therapeutic goals are for specific clients, as well as *where* the therapy will take place. Lahad (cited in Jennings, 2005), additionally, alludes to the multimodality nature of drama therapy, as it often draws from other art forms, such as music, movement, art, and dance. Personally, I resonate with Emunah's (1994: 3) definition of drama therapy: "Drama therapy is the intentional and systematic use of drama/ theatre processes to achieve psychological growth and change. The tools are derived from theatre, the goals are rooted in psychotherapy". Specifically, drama therapy adopts role-playing, storytelling, theatre games, psychodrama, and other dramatic processes, in order to help clients to understand their thoughts and emotions better or to improve their behaviour (Bailey, 2007). Unique to drama therapy, the medium allows for both the therapist and the client to move through different mediums within a dramatic focus (Lahad cited in Jones, 2007). Importantly, the drama therapist's role is to facilitate the client's experience in a way that keeps the client emotionally and physically safe while the client benefits from dramatic processes (Bailey, 2007).

Many scholars and pioneers refer to the basic concepts of drama therapy. Perhaps most seminal is Jones (2007: 9), who described drama therapy according to the "therapeutic core processes of drama therapy". The core processes include: dramatic projection, drama therapeutic empathy and distancing, role-playing and personification, interactive audience and witnessing, embodiment, playing, life – drama connection, and transformation (Jones, 2007). Important for this study is to

grasp an understanding of the processes of embodiment, dramatic projection, and distancing.

Jones (2007) denotes *dramatic projection* as the process of expressing or externalising inner emotional states onto exterior forms and presences. In particular he writes, "Dramatic forms and processes, whether playing with objects or playing roles, connect outer expression in drama with inwardly held feelings or experiences" (Jones, 2007: 83). In other words, it is the process whereby clients express aspects of themselves (or their experiences) into dramatic forms, and consequently, externalise their inner turmoil. Bar-Yitzchak (2002: 14) additionally writes that, "Dramatic projection is very enlightening, enabling, and non-threatening process. It has two major aspects exploring inner conflicts and hidden unconscious issues and, and the same time, allowing the therapeutic healing process itself". Similarly, Bailey (2007) explains this phenomenon as the process of taking an idea or emotion that is internally expressed in the client and projecting it outwards to be shown or acted out in the drama therapy session.

Jones (2007) captures *embodiment* as the process in drama therapy that involves the way the self is explored by and through the body. Furthermore, he refers to the body as the communication bridge between the self and the outside, and which is usually founded in gesture, expression and voice. The following description by Jones (2007: 114) captures, for me, the true essence of embodiment:

> By physically participating in a dramatic activity the body and mind are engaged together in discovery. Issues are encountered and realised through physical embodiment – they are made, and encountered through, the body. In dramatherapy this physicalized knowing and being within a dramatic representation of a problem or issue makes a crucial difference to the verbal recounting or description of a client's material.

Bailey (2007: 167), instead, refers to "concrete embodiment" which alludes to the process of allowing for the abstract (such as thoughts and feelings) to be expressed through the body in the now. Embodiment encompasses other processes, such as touching, sensing, seeing, smiling, which Bar-Yitzchak (2002) explains as aiding a client to express their core issues, and promotes the therapeutic process more

intensively than traditional therapy. Perhaps, this is what makes drama therapy especially potent, as it involves almost all senses at the same time, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the grief. Relatedly, Callahan (2011) writes in her study on dance/movement therapy in a parent's dealing with child loss that dance and movement serve as a basis for exploration and discovery.

Landy (1983: 175) refers to distancing "as a means of separating oneself from the other, bringing oneself close to the other, and generally maintain a balance between the two states of separation and closeness". Jones (2007: 95) encapsulates *distancing* as the involvement, which is more "orientated towards thought, reflection and perspective… This does not say that the client becomes completely disengaged, but they are involved with material from a different perspective. In some situations, the use of a distancing approach can help a client create perspective on themselves to an issue – the capability to develop such a response may be the therapeutic work in itself". Distancing draws from physical, emotional and intellectual elements, and it is the therapist's role to discern how close she/he/they should practise these elements in terms of meeting the needs of the client in the most appropriate manner. I believe that projection and embodiment would allow for safe distancing to be achieved and sustained.

Understanding what constitutes the processes of embodiment, projection, and distancing respectively, is important for this study. The former is a critical process, as what is expressed and felt abstractly in dreams will be explored through the body and movement. The latter, projection and distancing, is also fundamental to this study, as what is expressed and felt in dreams will be explored through the use of other art forms, such as writing, sounds, drawing, and videography.

5.2. Dreams

Dreams are part of the brain's default system, an interconnected system of regions that include the thalamus, medial prefrontal cortex, and posterior cingulate cortex (Edwards, 2015). Most dreams occur during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep (Barrett, 2020; Braun et al., 1998; Edwards, 2015; Suzuki et al., 2004). REM is a stage of sleep, which is captured by rapid eye movement, irregular heartbeat, and increased rates of respiration. Barrett (2020), a leading researcher in dream studies,

explains that during this stage, an area in the brain associated with image formation, the secondary visual cortex, becomes even more active than when a person is awake. The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, an area that is associated with volitional actions and evaluating what is logically and socially acceptable, becomes less active (Barrett, 2020). In addition, other areas not associated with reasoning also differ in activity levels when compared to awaken states (Barrett, 2020). Domhoff (McNulty, 2017) beautifully compares this process of activation and deactivation of certain areas of the brain as the individual enters the dream state to a symphony – certain instruments soften to allow for other instruments to take front stage. Edwards (2015) writes that as we prepare to awaken, memories begin to integrate and consolidate, forming our dreams.

Another pioneer in dream studies is Hall, a psychologist whose thinking has led to many theoretical, and methodological contributions to the field. Hall (1951: 62) wrote:

> Dreaming is thinking that occurs during sleep. It is a peculiar form of thinking in which the conceptions or ideas are expressed not in the form of words or drawings, as in waking life, but in the form of images, usually visual images. In other words, the abstract and invisible ideas are converted into concrete and visible images. By an odd process, which we do not understand, the sleeping person can see his own thoughts embodied in the form of pictures. When he communicates his dream to another person, he is communicating his thoughts, whether he knows it or not.

Research on and knowledge of dreams have expanded significantly subsequent years. Yet, understanding dreams and their function remains a perplexing task (Black, 2018; Domhoff, 2015; Franklin & Zyphur, 2005). Franklin and Zyphur (2005) write about the difficult task of understanding dreams because of their subjective, nonsensical and irrational qualities. Freud (cited in Tiwari & Anand, 2005) also spoke about the complexity of dream presentation, and explained that dream content may rarely be presented by the mind in a simple and direct manner. In addition, dream presentation varies across individuals, where some may state that they rarely recall dreams, while others experience vivid dreams with rich visual and emotional content (Franklin & Zyphur, 2005). The experience of dreams also varies in terms of the measure of

control the dreamer has over actions and the course of the dream (Franklin & Zyphur, 2005). Domhoff (2015) also writes that dreams are highly personal, making it difficult to make generalisable conclusions about dreams. Hall (cited in Domhoff, 2011) also adds to the complexity of dreams, by stating that dreamers also have more than one conception of themselves and the main people in their lives.

Other attempts at defining dreams and dreaming include the following: Revonsuo (cited in Franklin & Zyphur, 2005) defines dreaming as the subjective, conscious experience that we have during sleep. More elaborately, Oatley (2011: 7) captures dream as, "… how fiction enters the mind, how it prompts us towards emotions, how it affords insights into ourselves and others…" Lastly, another worthy inclusion is a definition captured by Jones (2015: 6), "Dreams, then, can be used to express things that are not easily expressed directly. They create interactions between different states: the world of sleep and wakefulness; the unconscious and conscious; the individually held and the communal; the numinous and the everyday."

Hall (cited in Domhoff, 2011: 51) famously suggested that the images found in dreams are the embodiment of one's thoughts, as captured by the following quote:

> If dreaming is defined as thinking that occurs during sleep, and if thinking consists essentially of generating ideas, then dreaming is also a process of conceiving and the resulting dream images may be viewed as the embodiment of conceptions… A dream is a work of art which requires of the dreamer no particular talent, special training, or technical competence. Dreaming is a creative enterprise in which all may and most do participate.

Similarly, Domhoff (2015: 232), another leading researcher in dream studies, refers to dreams as "embodied simulations". Domhoff (2015: 233) explains, "both waking cognition and dreaming are embodied in the sense that areas in the brain supporting visual and sensorimotor imagery are activated when people make use of simulations. They are also embodied in the further sense that the imagery is subjectively 'felt' as the experienced body in action". This information is important for this study in terms of embodying those 'felt' emotions and experiences within dreams.

5.3. Grief-held Dreams

Grief comprises emotional, behavioural, and cognitive responses following a loss (Zisook & Shear cited in Black, 2018). It is important to note to the reader that persons grieve differently after a loss (Doughty, 2009; Zisook & Shear, 2009). Doughty (2009) elucidates that some individuals might orient their grief more within an affective response, whereas others might comprehend their grief more cognitively. For this study, I will refer to 'subject of loss', so as to encapsulate and include loss in broader terms defined outside of death.

Many writers have supported the notion that dreams hold adaptive and healing qualities in relation to grief (Black, 2018; Black, Murkar & Black, 2014; Bulkeley, 2009; Garfield, 1996; Garfield, 1997; Hendricks, 1997; Helminen & Punamäki, 2008; Jones, 2015; Pagel & Zadra, 2004; Pesant & Zadra, 2006; Ryan, 2006; Vina, 2017). Pesant and Zadra (2006: 1) even refer to dreams as holding a "compensatory function" which insinuates that dreams hold the potential to reduce unpleasant emotions associated with grief and loss. Hartmann (cited in Helminen & Punamäki, 2008: 178) explain that dreaming becomes a safe place where dreamers are able to create new and healing images of their dominant emotional concerns, which is supported by the following quote: "… dreaming can link the shocking and threatening emotional states with similar, but soothing, earlier memories." Furthermore, dreaming can form a coping mechanism in the continuum between conscious and unconscious processes, and hence can aid in the integration of traumatic experiences as part of one's life – in this case traumatic experiences related to grief and loss. Cox and Theigaar (cited in Casson, 1999) write about the wider range of possibilities that the metaphoric language found in dreams have on the unconscious – more so than logical, informative language. McLeod and Walter (cited in Vina, 2017) postulated that since humans are meaning-making organisms, when confronted with the loss of significant figure, people have a need to comprehend and understand the loss. Therefore, the creation of adaptive narrative becomes a critical part of their grief resolution. By finding meaning in their loss, Vina (2017) writes that individuals are more likely to experience positive adaptation to the loss. These sources support the notion that dreams can be a favourable pathway to address loss.

Research has shown that the frequency of recurrent dreams is often related to one's psychological wellbeing (Barrett, 1996; Blagrove, Farmer & Williams, 2004; Domhoff, 2015; Helminen & Punamäki, 2008; Pesant & Zadra, 2006). Helminen and Punamäki (2008) refer to the content of trauma-related dreams that often reflect the dreamer's emotional experience of the loss, rather than the actual event. Emotions – both positive and negative – are prominent features of dreaming (Helminen & Punamäki, 2008). Commonly, dreams contextualise the current emotional state or dominant emotion of the dreamer, and the extent to which the current concern is resolved and how actively the dreamer is processing it (Helminen & Punamäki, 2008). This then suggests that in order to work directly with emotions, dreams may provide a lens through which to explore such emotions associated with loss.

Barrett (2020; 1996) has dedicated her life's work to the study of dreams, particularly distressing dreams and nightmares of those affected by trauma. Barrett conducted an online dream survey to collect information on dreams during the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed that current dream events are comparable to those which people dreamt after the 9/11 attacks in New York City. Barrett postulates that traumatic events such as the 9/11 attacks and the current pandemic are global, disruptive phenomena that make dreams more intense and memorable (Walsh, 2020). The results showed that the increased levels of anxiety during the day might result in more distressing, absurd, and negative dream content (Desai, 2020; Renner, 2020; Walsh, 2020; Walsh, 2021). Frequently, these dreams captured the fear of walking in public without a mask (Walsh, 2020; Walsh, 2021).

In particular, Giovanardi et al. (2021) investigated how the COVID-19 restrictions influenced dream frequency, content, and emotion. In terms of *relationships*, findings showed that dreamers often dreamt that they were among friends and family. Giovanardi et al. (2021) reported that dreams that took place during the pandemic's restrictions took place in a variety of *settings*, which included houses and apartments, types of transport, disoriented landscape, and lastly dreams that relate to a non-place, where dreamers felt a sense of helplessness and displacement. In terms of *natural environment,* this theme was less common in the current findings, yet still apparent. Giovanardi et al. (2021) encapsulate this theme as referring to the elements, ether,

fire, earth, water, and air. Lastly, Giovanardi refer to *trials and challenges* and COVID-19. Here they explain that dreams often pertained to the experience of facing an obstacle that feels impossible to overcome. In addition, dreams often held the realisation of failing to follow COVID-19 associated protocol. According to Giovanardi et al. (2021), one of the main functions of lockdown (associated with the COVID-19 pandemic) dreams is to transform and/or increase the dreamer's mastery over the events of waking life. Not such dreams per se, but rather the idea of presenting a scenario recurrently may result in the dreamer becoming desensitised to the material, and in this way, aid in increasing the dreamer's mastery over emotions related to grief in the waking life. This is perhaps better explained by Hartmann (cited in Giovanardi et al., 2021: 1) who postulated that dreams hold an adaptive function because, "Dreaming about an emotion experienced in real life allowed that emotion attached to be integrated, over time, with memories that have similar emotion attached to them, thereby providing a safe context for the emotion attached to them, thereby providing a safe context for the emotion to appear and be integrated into memory". Similarly, Barrett (cited in Walsh, 2020) explains that dreams may show that our unconscious is more distressed than believed in the waking life, or it may provide a much more optimistic perspective that is perhaps lacking in real life. This information is important for this study as it lends itself to the idea that dreams can aid in the mastery to overcome some level of distress, which could potentially be translated into waking life.

Past research has found that dreams related to the deceased are a common experience in grief (Black, Belicki, Piro & Hughes, 2020; Black, Belicki, Emberley-Ralph & McCann, 2020; Domhoff, 2015; Field & Filanosky, 2010). Black (2018) has even coined a term for such dreams, namely *Grief Dreams*. Three common forms of Grief Dreams are found: 1) dreams that do not have the subject of loss or person of loss present – such a dream may be addressing the feelings of loss, 2) dreams that do not have the subject of loss present but they are mentioned, and 3) dreams that have the subject of loss present. He draws from research suggesting that dreams that involve the subject of loss may aid the griever with positive adjustment. Specifically, these dreams can assist in creating meaning in relation to the loss (Garfield, 1996; Bulkeley,

2009). Black, Murkar and Black (2014) emphasise that not all "grief dreams" provide this positive affect, as others might trigger negative responses.

When processing loss, it is common for a person to maintain a bond or connection with the subject of loss, which is commonly known as "continuing bond" (Black, 2018: 6; Black, Belicki, Emberley-Ralph & McCann, 2020). Research postulates that one possibility of having grief dreams is to maintain a bond with the loss, which in turn may provide comfort for the bereaved person (Black, 2018: 6; Black, Belicki, Emberley-Ralph & McCann, 2020). Continuing bonds encapsulates a wide variety of behaviours and experiences, including reminiscing and talking about the subject of loss, or sentimentally holding onto belongings of that person (Black, 2018; Field & Filanosky, 2010). Field and Filanosky (2010) divided 'continuing bonds' into two groups, namely internalised and externalised. The former refers to experiences that primarily involve contemplations, reflections, and reminiscence. The latter captures experiences of the deceased as still being present in the world. Field and Filanosky (2010) refer to studies supporting that both are linked to greater grief intensity; however, they found that only internalised continuing bonds are connected to personal growth after a specified trauma.

Vina (2017: v) aimed to understand the purpose of "bereavement dreams" in relation to the individual's grieving process by exploring the lived experiences of ten bereaved individuals who reported dreaming of a significant person following that person's death. Through a phenomenological, qualitative approach, the following findings emerged: a) despite the time after the death, the experience of grief continues, b) reflecting on their grief dreams allowed for the participants to gain insight into their loss and associated feelings, c) traumatic associations with the death can lead to repetitive bad dreams and waking preoccupations, d) grief dreams provided comfort and relief, e) grief dreams created a sense of connection with the deceased, f) the bereavement dreaming experience provided participants a chance to communicate what was needed to aid the mourning process, and lastly, g) grief dreams aid in keeping the deceased's memory alive (Vina, 2017: v). Black and his team (2020) assign the following functions to grief dreams: 1) processing trauma, 2) maintaining a bond with the subject of loss, 3) and regulating grief-related emotions.

Black et al. (2020) examined why some bereaved individuals find grief dreams comforting, whereas others find them distressing. Their findings largely concluded that dreams passively reflect the dreamer's waking state, and actively function to help the dreamer process grief. Largely concurrent to this study, Black and his team (2020) found the following themes in grief dreams in their study. Positive themes include the dream holding a generally positive affective tone, pleasant interactions with the subject of loss, experience of the subject of loss as happy and healthy, success in finding the subject of loss, and a tone shift in the dream from negative to positive. In terms of negative content, Black and his team (2020) found the following themes in grief dreams: dreams holding negative affective tone, distressing interactions with the subject of loss, failure to find subject of loss, dissatisfying interaction with the subject of loss, the subject of loss disappearing or leaving, and a shift from positive to negative tone.

5.4. Grief, dreams and drama therapy

The most notable form of loss is the loss of a loved one to death (Brooke & Miraglia, 2015). Grief also expands beyond the experience of death, and includes other life experiences, such as job loss, divorce, illness or physical disability, or immigrating away from family (Brooke & Miraglia, 2015). It has been found that the termination of a relationship can be extremely disruptive to an individual (Boelem & Reijntjies, 2007; Robak & Griffin, 2012). Robak and Griffen (2012) performed a study to establish an understanding of the psychological variables at play during the termination of a relationship. In their study, they compared grief symptoms for a romantic termination to those who experienced a loss via death. What they found is that in a normal population of young adults, the former experience of romantic loss plays a more pronounced role in their lives (Robak & Griffen, 2012). Their explanation for this is that the latter is less likely to happen to someone we share an intimate relationship with (Robak & Griffen, 2012). Furthermore, Brooke and Miraglia (2015) write that grieving over a romantic relationship is an important issue to address, because of the bond created with someone and when that bond is broken, it can be emotionally, physically, and mentally devastating to an individual. The global COVID-19 pandemic caused many disruptions in daily routines and ways of living,

and as a result, the experience of grief was/is rife (Eisma & Tamminga, 2020). Because of the pandemic, loss has been expansive, including not being able to attend a loved one's funeral, not being allowed to be with a loved one when they die, unemployment, etc. (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Studies performed by Giovanardi et al. (2021) and Fränkl et al. (2021) suggest that a traumatic collective event such as the aforementioned might have consequences on psychological functioning of the dreamer.

Researchers and philosophers have often compared dreams to a so-called 'personal play'. Domhoff (2015: 232-234) writes, "Dreams embody conceptions primarily through literal enactments, making them somewhat akin to a theatrical play… As such, dreams can be thought of not only as embodied simulations, but also as figurative dramatizations that contain both literal and figurative elements within them." Landy (cited in Casson, 1999: 15) draws from Freud, Moreno and Jung's works the following quote:

> … we can conceive of the dreamland as an altered state on consciousness that contains repressed elements from an individual's past, archetypes from the collective past of mankind, and split-off parts of the self reflecting one's present state of being. Further, we can see the dream as pointing to the future, to the hopes, wishes, and fantasies of the dreamer. Adding a more theatrical notion, the dreamworld can be seen as a stage containing sets, props, costumes, colours, and characters… In working with dreams the drama therapist can begin by asking the client to reconstruct his dreamworld… with objects representing shapes, settings, characters in the dream.

This quote captures the dynamic and complex nature of dreams. It also captures the theatrical realm of dreams, indicating its possible compatibility within a drama therapeutic framework.

Hughes (2011: 611) writes that art is a cognitive behavioural process that lends itself to creating images that help a client to express emotions that words are limited to, which is supported by the following quotation: "Art therapy has the powerful advantage over verbal and written communication of visibly showing clients how they

are thinking and feelings, allowing them to acknowledge and understand hidden thoughts and feelings."

Jones (2015) writes that one way to approach grief is through its story. Storytelling is a prominent technique used in drama therapy. It may provide you with the platform to articulate your inner turmoil, and hence could be a favourable tool in grief-related sharing. Watts, Pearson and Smail (2003) speak about a space that is created from storytelling in which the mind is liberated, and psychological healing can take place. Furthermore, Langley (2006) explains that engaging in story can lead to an increased awareness of the self, and other, more expressive ways of dealing with a problem. A loss-related dream is one that reflects and tells about the loss (Jones, 2015). Such dreams may not be direct or overt about the grief, but rather expressed through metaphors and symbols, concerning life danger, vulnerability, and escape (Helminen & Punamäki, 2008; Jones, 2015). Talking about dreams in a storytelling format may lead to insight into these metaphors and symbols for further therapeutic engagement. Domhoff (2015) speaks about the commonality that dreams hold with parables, fables and allegories because of the shared subjective feeling that they seem to hold lessons or hidden meanings. This led me immediately towards making a link between the use of storytelling in drama therapy, and how dreams might be compatible with the application of storytelling in order to process it, and hopefully find meaning. Various techniques within drama therapy can be used within storytelling, such as puppetry, role-playing, and narradrama, and hence can be used for the re-telling or re-enactment of the dream's material, with the ultimate goal of reaching therapeutic insight and relief (Jones, 2015).

In dreams we find dramatic elements, such as story, location, plot, scene changes, spatial relationships, characters and dialogue (Chesner, 2005). This is supported by what Hall and Van de Castle (cited in Domhoff, 2015: 233) say: "As literal embodiments, dreams are more like plays, than any other waking analog because they include settings, characters, social interactions, activities, and emotions." Chesner (2005) explains that meaning is expressed through these elements and through the atmosphere they create as a whole. The drama therapist may use these elements to facilitate expression of the conscious or unconscious material through the processes of

embodiment and projection (Chesner, 2005). In other words, the story that these elements form in the imagination or memory can be externalised and explored either through movement and the body, or through projective practices, such as writing, sounds, drawing, and videography (Chesner, 2005). Drama therapy allows for an opportunity to express, explore, and resolve grief through the interaction of the dream's symbols and metaphors (Jones, 2015). In addition, dealing with the loss directly may be too overwhelming for the client, and therefore, working with grief-held dreams within a drama therapy framework can allow for some safe distancing (Jones, 2015).

Purves (2018: 14) explains that one of the most beneficial aspects of using expressive therapies with grieving individuals is that such interventions may create a safe container for the grief, which is supported by the following quote, "This takes the feeling out of the person and puts it into an aesthetic form that is of them but separate from them." This in turn allows for the individual to gain some perspective on what they are feeling and what they can do to relieve some of the overwhelming symptoms related to grief. Purves (2018) writes that creative drama is specifically effective when dealing with how to recognise and process strong feelings. In particular, drama activities that involve metaphors for grief distance an individual from painful experiences while creating similar emotions and ideas (Curtis, 1999).

In this section, I have given the reader a glimpse into relevant literature around dreams and grief-held dreams, their potential healing role in grief and loss, and the interlinking role drama therapy can play as a vehicle to explore grief-held dreams. In the next two sections, I will expand on the research aims and research questions for this study.

6. Research Aim

Ultimately, this research aimed to explore the potential of using projective and embodiment tools within drama therapy to highlight themes in grief-held dreams in order to aid in processing and finding meaning in grief. Therefore, the aim was twofold: 1) to explore grief dreams in order to determine any significant or recurring characteristics or themes, and 2) to investigate whether the use of embodied and projective tools used within drama therapy can aid in processing grief through the exploration of grief dreams.

Through this study, I hoped to understand what constitutes a grief dream. Subsequently, I hoped to gain an understanding of the potential role drama therapy, through projection and embodiment (in relation to the grief-held dreams), could play in the processing of grief. I want to highlight to the reader my own preliminary understanding of grief: this study does not aim to eradicate or overcome grief, as I believe that grief does not hold an end goal. It is rather an ongoing, ebb-and-flow experience. This study, therefore, aimed rather to find other means (in conjunction to other therapies) of offering therapeutic relief and clarity for grief or the experience of loss.

7. Research Questions

The research question for this study is twofold.

7.1. How can the analysis of grief dreams, and the use of projective and embodiment tools within drama therapy, be used to highlight and extract recurring themes within grief-held dreams?

7.2. How can the above process aid in creating meaning and processing grief?

8. Methodology

I owe a large part of my inspiration behind my process to Oatley (2011: 19), who wrote, “The dream model when it is externalized into text, or when it is realized in performance of actors on a stage, exists in an intermediate place, halfway between the world and the mind.” This quote, in particular, captivated me for its idea about dreams existing within a space that is both real and imaginary, and subsequently fostered the idea of meeting between the real and the imaginary in the form of embodiment or projection. I hoped to undertake this creative journey in exploring my own dreams in such a nature that would illuminate common themes within my dreams, so that I might gain a deeper understanding of the purpose of grief dreams. I intended to work on exploring, discovery, and depicting these themes through embodiment and projection. In this section, I describe the research design that was adopted, expand on how data were collected and analysed for this study, and finally touch on the ethical concepts that were considered for this study.

8.1. Research Design

Creative arts-based research is considered to be a form of qualitative social science research that draws inspiration, concepts, processes, and representational forms from the arts (Knowles & Cole, 2008). In this creative arts-based research, I adopted an arts-based research design, which McNiff (2018: 78) defines as, “the use of artistic expression by the researcher, either alone or with others, as a primary mode of inquiry”. Specifically, it includes the “systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies” (McNiff, 2008: 29). Potash (2019) elaborates on the distinguishing feature of arts-based research as one that uses the creation of art as a central method of inquiry and discovery. In this research design, researchers are encouraged to trust the significance of their own imagination and source of insight. Therefore, in this study, the researcher’s own use of artistic expression was followed as a primary mode of inquiry.

Furthermore, McNiff (cited in Potash, 2019) captures this design as a method of inquiry that draws from the elements of the creative arts therapies, as a way of understanding the significance of what is done within the practice. In this study, the researcher aimed to identify and understand grief dreams (which has been defined to the reader earlier in this study, as dreams that hold relation to the experience of loss or alludes to grief), as well as to determine how the exploration of grief dreams through embodiment and projection could be used as a tool for therapeutic relief. Because of the highly uniqueness of dreams, the researcher felt it appropriate to pursue as sole participant of her own dreams. By extracting and analysing recurring themes found in her own grief dreams, the researcher hoped that this would lead to insight as to what commonly constitutes a grief dream. Finally, the researcher hoped that this would form a base from which to explore and process these grief dreams further through embodiment and projection. Simply, this study hoped to aid the process of grief comprehension through the embodiment and projection of various themes in grief-held dreams.

8.2. Sampling and participants

This research was centred upon the sole exploration of the researcher's own experiences in the realm of the study's focus.

8.3. Data collection / Documentation of creative research

Arts-based research can expand on the practices that art therapists engage in with their clients to aid in their own search for meaning and expression (Potash, 2019). Potash explains that the creative process is one that is rooted in the arts with a special focus on drawing from the profession's potential for meaning-making, insight, awareness, and behavioural change. In addition, Potash (2019) highlights the emphasis on arts rather than art to indicate the researcher's use of a variety of creative media. In this creative arts-based research, I drew inspiration from the varied and sometimes nonsensical symbols and metaphors found in my dreams. I aimed to capture the possible purpose of these symbols and metaphors by exploring it through my body, writing, drawing, and videography. It is important to highlight to the reader that the

artistic expressions revealed in the research may be more accurately described as ways of knowing and inquiry rather than data (Potash, 2019).

The "data" collection in this study first proceeded with documenting my dreams in a journal over a timespan of three months. After the three months, I drew from the collection of dreams, dreams that held themes that relate to the experience of loss or grief. At the end of this process, I had 15 loss-related dreams. Because of the focus of the study, I thought it apt to additionally include in two earlier grief dreams that I experienced before embarking on this research (again, those dreams that I associate with grief).

The second part of the data collection consisted of free writing while listening to songs that hold meaning for me in terms of my grief and experience of loss. Music, for me, is a sentimental vehicle that holds a durable link between people, places, and memories, and therefore acted as a container to explore my grief dreams through free writing. What surfaced was subsequently captured on paper with words and images and acted as further data for this study.

The third part of the data collection occurred parallel to the second step, as at times I felt the urge to move along with the song, as well as process those emotions that were brought up by the listening and the free writing. This process was video recorded, and hence formed part of the data to be analysed. Videography was important in this study, as it allowed for the researcher to document, record, and perceive live action and artistic expression (Potash, 2019). In addition, it permitted an ongoing revisit and experimentation of the research. McNiff (2018) writes that the camera can act as a witness and provides evidence of what happened. It is also important to note that throughout this study, an in-depth reflection on the experimental process, and the presentation of research outcomes took place.

Therefore, the data collection process held both written and visual evidence of the emerging themes from the study. All of the modes of inquiry worked together to generate a culminating form of artistic interpretation and integration, and remained in constant alignment with the research focus and the research questions. This study did

not follow an orderly or consecutive fashion of the steps, but rather took the form of an intuitive, circular sequence. This was because the respective "steps" in this study fed into one another. In other words, the step of free writing often led into embodiment and projection, while the latter processes, in turn, fed further inspiration for the written captures. The process, therefore, involved a back-and-forth momentum between the dream-capturing, embodiment and projection, and subsequent or former findings. As researcher, this intuitive approach fits in parallel with those often random and spontaneous dream experiences.

8.4. Data analysis

Potash (2019: 191) writes as follows, "Appreciating arts-based research necessitates accepting art making as a tool for revealing ideas, understanding the world, and enabling us to know something that cannot be known in any other way. Even if images are at first obscure, ambiguous, or confusing, ultimately they offer symbols and metaphors that guide us, as well as point to further questions." In this case, data was first analysed and discoveries drawn by studying and reviewing the projective and embodied work. Further data analysis was based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) basic thematic analysis, which comprises of six steps and largely lends itself to the identification, analysis, and reporting of any patterns or themes in the data.

This paragraph is dedicated to the analysis of the projective work. Throughout the span of this study, I jotted poetic utterances down on paper, which would later form part of the data collected. In addition to this, I allocated an hour to listen to songs that I resonate with in my own grief, or those songs that I listened to when the grief felt heightened. The product of this engagement included various figures and poems. I first grouped figures together that were similar in their presentation, which was then followed by defining this similarity. The same steps were made for the poems – those that held a similar theme or tone, were grouped together, followed by defining the respective groups. The poetic utterances, mentioned earlier, were also incorporated in these groupings.

In terms of analysing the embodiment, I would watch and re-watch the recorded videos of me moving with the grief/loss associated songs. In particular and in addition, I looked for any transitions in movements and gestures, the interaction with

the material, how the body makes use of the surrounding space, as well as the rhythm and tempo of the engagements. By watching the recordings, I made notes describing the movement according to the aforementioned criteria. Subsequently, I looked for any reoccurrences in the notes and any observations that held potential significance to the focus of the study, which subsequently aided in finding and drawing up the themes.

In this paragraph, I refer to the analysis of the dreams by using Braun and Clarke's (2006) basic thematic analysis approach. Their six-step analysis follows as: 1) *In-depth exploration of data*, 2) *Look for potential codes*, 3) *Creating themes*, 4) *Refining and defining themes*, 5) *Create thematic results of the data*, and 6) *Capture results in the form of a report*. Instead of their typical six-step analysis, this study made use of only five steps, and took a form that allowed for the analysis of this specific study. In this analysis, the steps that were followed occurred spontaneously and naturally to the form of the study. For me, it made sense to look for the codes, and from this, create and define the themes, and hence steps three and four were combined. Refinement of the themes was not a step on its own, but rather took place throughout the study.

The first step comprised of writing up the dreams captured in the journal into respective dream transcripts. The second step involved reading and re-reading the dream transcripts in order to become as familiar as possible with the accounts, as well as to start looking for potential themes. Potential themes were based on a metaphor, symbol, or scenario in the transcripts that either appeared repeatedly, or held significance to the research questions and focus. This step also involved drawing up a table with two headings or columns, where the first one denoted *themes,* and the second column indicated their associated *codes*. Codes, in this sense, related to any quotes in the transcripts that held relevance or acted as an identifier to the defined themes. The third stage involved searching for any connections between the themes. The fourth stage was based on refining the themes into final and defined ones, as well as highlighting the important codes that captured the true gist of the particular themes. The fifth and final stage required the writing up of the found themes, in which the analysis was expanded into a write-up or narrative account. This account held the

results of the emergent themes and a discussion linking the results to relevant, existing literature.

8.5. Ethical Considerations

HREC (non-medical) Ethical clearance was received from the WSOA Ethics Committee on the 24th of February 2022. Clearance number for this study is **WSOA/2021/09/04**.

A sense of awareness for and investing in the use of ethical principles can ease the potential issues that may surface in the research (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001). Ethical principles may be rooted in the following aspects: autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Orb et al., 2001).

Autonomy refers to the right for participants to voluntarily accept or refuse to partake in the study as autonomous individuals, as well as exercising the right to be informed about the particular research, and right to withdraw at any point in the study (Orb et al., 2001). As researcher, my experience working within therapeutic settings is limited. For this reason, it would have been ethically irresponsible for me to bring participants into a space that could be emotionally overwhelming. Therefore, I shifted the study towards a sole exploration of the creative process. In other words, I was the only participant of this study.

Beneficence refers to the aspect of the study that promotes benefits in the community and prevents potential harm (Orb et al., 2001). As sole participant in the study, I had to ensure that certain measures were in place that would aid in the prevention of possible mental and physical harm to the self. Potash (2019) also explains that the researcher should be mindful of the degree to which the created art can negatively affect the viewers. He further explains that the researcher can include a disclaimer prior to presenting the research, and in this way alert the audience of the motivations behind the study. In addition, the results of this study might be beneficial to the expansion of dream knowledge and drama therapy.

Lastly, the concept of justice is rooted in equal sharing and fairness, and avoids the exploitation or abuse of individuals (Orb et al., 2001). This principle also lends itself

to ensuring the mental and physical safety of the researcher – especially in terms of what the process end engagement might bring up for me. For this reason, I ensured that therapeutic support was available by seeing a therapist on a regular basis in order to process any probable emotional material that emerged. In addition, I remained in constant contact with my research supervisor who is an experienced drama therapist, arts-based therapist and researcher to ensure that my study was met with rigour and ethical standards.

9. Findings and Insights

In this section, I provide the reader with a thorough presentation of the findings that were revealed in this study. As mentioned earlier, findings were based on discoveries made through the thematic analysis of the dream transcripts, as well as insights gained through the embodied and projective work situated within the focus of this study. This study centred itself within three distinct losses, namely 1) the loss associated with death, 2) loss associated with the end of a romantic relationship, and lastly, 3) the communal loss associated with COVID-19. In this section, the findings discovered through the basic thematic analysis of the dream transcripts are presented first, followed by the insights that arose from the projective and embodied work. This section comprises of three sections, 1) findings that arose from the analysis of the dream transcripts, 2) findings that arose from the projective work, and 3) findings that arose from the embodied engagement. The table below shows a summary of the findings made in this study.

Method	**Themes**
Analysis of dream transcripts	*Dreams reflect current turmoil*
	Dreams provide comfort
	Dreams aid in closure and clarity
Analysis of projection work	*The Electrocardiogram*
	The dream experience
	Connecting the body
	Exploring the residue
Analysis of embodied work	*Feeling stuck*
	Spread and stretch
	Material carries the load

Table 1: Findings and themes that arose from this study

9.1. Findings that arose from the dream transcripts

In this section, the findings that were revealed through the analysis of the dream transcripts are listed and defined here. The chosen themes were either recurring data, or chosen because of their relevance to the study's purpose. As a reminder to the reader, the dreams accounted here are based on 13 chosen dreams from the journal that relate to the experience of loss and occurred during the time of this study. In addition to this, two dream accounts that took place before this study were also analysed, and therefore, in total 15 dreams were included and analysed. The intention was not to refer to all 15-recorded dreams, as this would be outside of the scope of this study. However, to enhance the reader's understanding and insight, these 15 dream transcripts are attached in full in the Appendix.

In order to aid in clarity, the subsequent dream capsules are examples of the three distinct losses, namely 1) loss by death, 2) loss by the termination of a romantic relationship, and 3) communal loss associated with COVID-19 and the pandemic. In order to refresh the reader's memory, grief dreams in this study refer to dreams that hold an actual experience of loss, or one that alludes to it.

a) Dreams dealing with the deceased

These dreams are defined as grief dreams, as they relate directly to the deceased of a loved one. Both of these dreams occurred pre-journal, or before this study took place.

My earliest grief-dream (*Childhood dream 1; pre-journal*) happened after my grandfather's passing. In this dream, we are sitting around a dinner table with other family members. The last image I have of my grandfather is one in which he appears ill and defeated. However, in this dream, my grandfather appears healthy and happy.

My second grief-dream (*Childhood dream 2; pre-journal*) is captured below:

> *I am busy building a puzzle. It's before your funeral and we still have many visitors who wish to show their condolences. You enter the room with Dad, Esté and Etienne by your side. You are wearing this bright coral orange suit, and looking radiant as if you are not sick. You have your handbag over your shoulder, looking like you are about to leave and run some errands. You tell me*

that you are happy and that you have to leave soon. We embrace in a warm hug. I am feeling comforted and held.

I had this dream when I was eleven-years-old. I had it a week after my mother's death.

b) Dreams dealing with the end of a romantic relationship

The dreams that fall under this heading relate to loss experienced from the termination of a relationship. In these dreams, I search for the person, chase a time to meet the person that I never seem to meet, or find the person, only to lose them again. Grief here relates to the aforementioned loss, as I often compared the emotions I faced after the relationship to being similar to those experienced after my mother's death (*Dream 3: 9 June 2021).*

On the other hand, the subsequent dream illuminates the feeling of chasing, trying to meet a certain time, but failing and consequently, failing to see the subject of loss:

I am on a plane, already sitting in my seat. The plane is packed. As always, I am staring at the people walking down the aisle. I see you but you don't see me. You're wearing earphones. I want to reach out and touch you but I am sitting in the middle – between strangers, unable to get to you. I have one confirmation: you are in Cape Town. I know that you are going to the same music show that I am going to tonight. I am so eager to get to the show but I keep getting stuck doing certain activities. I do my make-up but it melts off my face. I do it again but I fill like a circus mask. I wash it off. I try again. Again, we're in my old home. My sister has two small children. I first need to attend to her. I receive a message from a mutual friend. You decided not to go to the show (Dream 14: 4 December 2021).

This dream captures grief in the sense of realising that what you want is out of reach, and in a way, no longer available in existing proximity.

The following two dream capsules capture the realisation that the loss is certain and final:

I search through his belongings and find ID photos of his new girlfriend. I go back to find you but I can't seem to find you again (Dream 8: 10 August 2021).

It is at my current house. You and your girlfriend visit. It is a strange experience. However, I warm up to her and we become friendly. You seem distant, understandably. You tell me that at the beginning it was also "forever" for you. But you explain that time has passed and that you're happy with your current relationship. I wake up, feeling at peace and somewhat happy for them (Dream 15: 5 January 2021).

c) Dreams dealing with the communal loss associated with COVID-19

This study was conducted during the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Often in this time, I had dreams that were associated with feelings of being restricted and stuck, and those that were related to failed plans and disappointment.

The following dream captures the loss of traveling and movement, and the resulting experience of disappointment:

Emerald green forests surround me. My brother, Etienne is with me. We walk towards crystal clear waters filled with people doing all kinds of acrobatic sports. Stretching through the middle of the lake is a green, grass-lined path. We are child-like happy, running, and losing each other in the excitement. We are not panicked by this realisation, but rather in awe of what is around us. As I am running, I am thinking, 'this time it is for real. I am here.' I am content. I am happy. I observe the strange sighting of snow surrounding the waters, because it feels like a hot, summer's day. Lights, similar to the Northern Lights, swim above me. I am in a trance (Dream 9: 3 September 2021).

These dreams also related to grief in not being able to travel to see loved ones, as well as the grief associated with not being able to attend a funeral of a loved one. The following dream captures this feeling of loss:

Finally you arrive and I want this picture set in cement. I run back to find my shoes. Upon returning, you are gone (Dream 4: 11 June 2021).

The aforementioned headings revealed the three types of grief dreams that were prominent. Analysing the dream transcripts allowed for three broad themes to arise, namely: 1) *Dreams reflect current turmoil;* 2) *Dreams provide comfort;* and 3) *Dreams aid in clarity and closure*. These are expanded on below. From this point on, it is important for the reader to note that the term dreams will imply grief dreams.

9.1.1. Dreams reflect current turmoil

It was often evident that whatever I was dealing with in the waking life, revealed itself in my dreams. COVID-19 and the pandemic played a significant role in my experience of loss: loss of normality, loss of seeing certain family and friends, loss of going to funerals, loss of traveling, loss of in person teaching, etc. As seen in the aforementioned dream *(under loss associated with COVID-19)*, I am itching to move and travel yet the reality of restriction strikes when I wake up. Across dream transcripts *(see Appendix A: Dreams 5, 6, 14)*, my dreams would often take place at an airport or in an aeroplane. However, these dreams were often filled with anxiety, as I would struggle to find my boarding gate, miss my plane, or arrive at the wrong airport. This reveals that associated feeling of loss in relation to normality and freedom, and consequently, feeling stuck.

At the time of writing this study, I was (still) dealing with emotions linked to the termination of a romantic relationship. In the waking life, I experienced a deep longing for the person, I felt immense sadness, and I often found myself searching for that person. This was translated into my dreams. In addition to the dream capsule above, the following dream segment shows this feeling of longing, sadness and searching: *I am running down a straight, narrow street in a foreign city. I am running as fast I can because I know I only have so much time before you leave (Dream 11: 20 October 2021)*. Other times, I would endlessly search for an inanimate object, such as shoes or earrings *(see Appendix A: Dreams 4, 7)* but the quest always seems to be impossible. Sadness was linked to the realisation of the ending: *Finally, you arrive and I want this picture set in cement. I run to get my shoes. Upon returning, you are gone. In my dream, it is still you and me. I wake up alone. My body aches. I am left with a pointless sense of hope. It sits deeply in my abdomen (Dream 4: 11 June 2021).*

As seen in this section, often those emotions, sensations, and feelings confronted with in the waking life, were often translated into my dreams.

9.1.2. Dreams provide comfort

This theme relates to dreams that offer a scenario, experience, realisation or feeling that is associated with solace or comfort. They are still grief dreams because they either hold the subject of loss or allude to the experience of loss.

Both my grandfather and mother *(see Appendix A: Dreams 1, 2)* suffered from terminal illnesses before they died. My last memory of them both is one of illness and suffering. However, in my dreams about them, they appeared healthy and happy. In this way, these dreams provided comfort in replacing a negative image with a positive one. In addition, in both of these dreams, I received a hug from the deceased, reassuring me that everything will be all right. In effect, the subject of loss comforted me.

A prominent reoccurrence in my dreams is my childhood home (*see Appendix A: Dreams 3, 10, 13, 14*). Despite the content and people present being different; the setting would often be my childhood home. I believe that in this case, revisiting my childhood home provides me with great solace. Therefore, although the dream may hold themes of longing, pain, and searching, the home would in many ways feel life a safe haven. Similarly, I would also often return to my primary school playgrounds or return to a holiday home – perhaps, I associate positive and favourable memories with these settings, and hence, going there would be soothing. In addition, my dreams were frequently met with family and friends in various settings, which again could pertain to feeling safe with positive and significant figures.

9.1.3. Dreams aid in clarity and closure

My dreams have presented various scenarios or experiences that, retrospectively, have directly aided in dealing with my grief. In one dream (*see Appendix A: Dream 8)*, I had an encounter with the subject of loss providing me with affirmation that I lacked in the waking life. I believe that seeing and living this image allowed for myself to reach some sort of closure. Although it did not happen in real life, I was able to experience a scenario that would aid in my process of gaining closure. In other words,

it allowed for me to imagine an interaction that took place that would perhaps weaken the need to search, as I believe that the need to search was strongly linked to the search for clarity and peace of mind. In addition, it also allows for new, positive associations to be formed with the subject of loss, for example: *We finally meet. It's friendly and warm. Not romantic, as I am aware of the now existing boundaries (Dream 7: 5 August 2021).* Subsequently, this dream aided in the processing of the loss or reaching some point of acceptance of its finality.

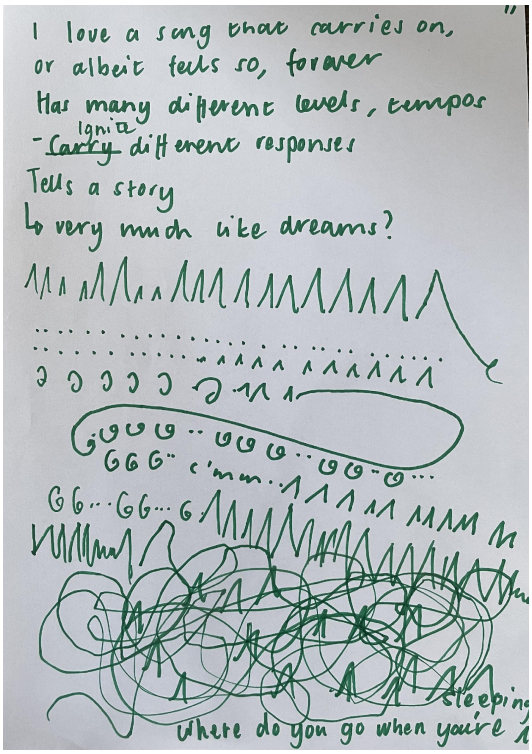
The dream of my mother (*see Appendix A: Dream 2*) provided me with a sense of closure for two reasons. I never had the chance to actually say goodbye to her, and my dream offered such an opportunity. Secondly, in the dream she told me that she is happy and ready to return. From this, I could draw my own conclusions that could aid my grief, such as the idea that she is at peace. At age 11, I believed that this was an actual visit from my mother, which provided immense comfort and relief.

9.2. Insights gained from projective engagement

This section captures findings made through an attempt, using projective work, to understand my own grief dreams, and the therapeutic potential thereof. This section comprises of four groupings of projective work, namely, 1) *The Electrocardiogram*, 2) *The dream experience,* 3) *Connecting the body to the grief dream experience,* and 4) *Exploring the residue*.

9.2.1. Grouping 1: The Electrocardiogram

Figures 1 – 4 *(see below)* reveal what was projected while listening to the songs that either reminded me of my own grief, or songs that I had listened to intensely when grief over spilled me. This was a spontaneous, free writing exercise. Anything that was written here was produced in the here and now.



During this process, I would write down any thoughts that arose in the process. For example, Figure 1 captures one such thought, *I love a song that carries on, or albeit, feels so, forever. Has many different levels, tempos – ignite different response. Tells a story, very much like dreams?*

Figure 1: *I love a song that carries on* (5 December 2021)

In itself, this is a finding. Songs carry different emotions, tempos, and rhythms that can resemble the experience of grief dreams. Grief and dreams are not straightforward, one-dimensional concepts, but rather consist of richness, depth, and complexity, making it difficult to grasp.

It was interesting to me to note how spontaneously my hand led the activity. I started drawing and writing according to whatever was brought up for me while listening to the songs. This took the form of doodles, scribbles, and dispersed lyrics. I would capture any lyrics that resonated with me in terms of thinking about my own experience of grief – in particular, my experience of grief dreams, what the grief dreams mean for me, what it stirs within me, and what I am left with after the dream experience.

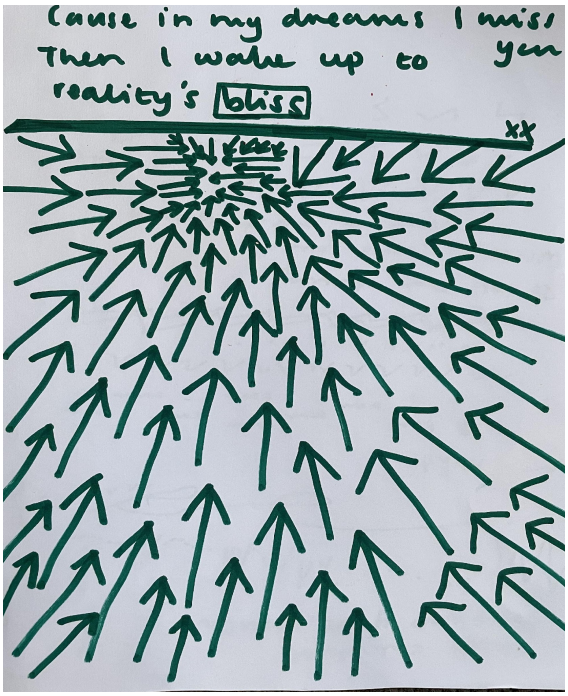


Figure 2: *'Cause in my dreams I miss you'* (5 December 2021)

For example, Alex Cameron's (2017) *Stranger's Kiss (see Appendix B)* has the following lyrics, 'Cause in my dreams I miss you. Then I wake up to reality's bliss'. Other lyrics are less direct, for example Future Islands' (2015) *Haunted By You (see Appendix B) sings*, 'Like forever was, she waits for us, and she takes from us. Oh sweet life might give and take from us.' For both of these lyric segments, I felt the urge to write it down, as it ignited a resonance within me. This could be because it reminded me of the subject of loss, or it simply reminded me of loss and grief in the general, communal sense.

As seen in Figure 3, I made figures that resembled the tempo of the music. Perhaps, I attempted to capture the music in a projective, concrete form. It reminds me of an electrocardiogram, depicting the heart's rhythm and electrical activity. At times, these peaks were pronounced and large. Other peaks were small, but still defined, whereas others took on an undefined shape. Again, this is reflective of the dream experience itself – some dreams held peaks, whereas others held troughs.

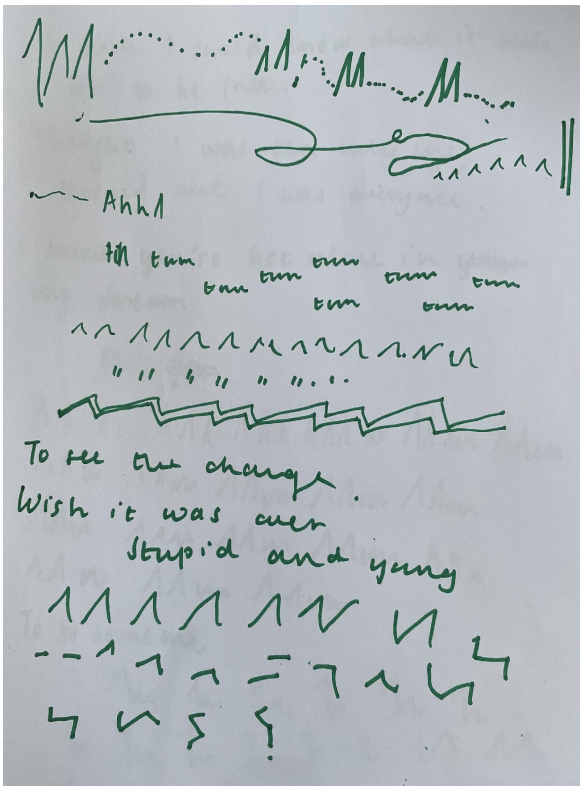
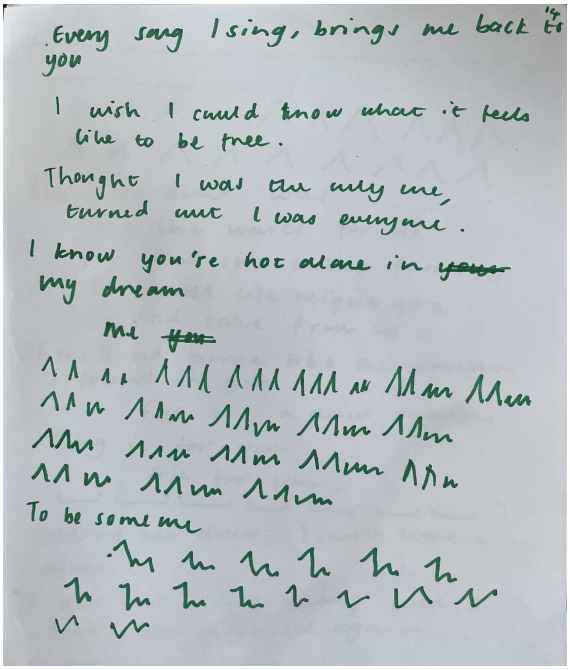


Figure 3: *To see the change* (5 December 2021)



In many ways, the changes in the illustrations might represent the non-predictable nature and trajectory of grief. At times, your emotions are intensified and felt deeply, whereas other times you may experience a sense of peace.

Figure 4: *Thought I was the only one, turned out I was everyone* (5 December 2021)

9.2.2. Grouping 2: The dream experience

This grouping is dedicated to the projected work that attempts to capture the grief dream experience, or rather, what the dreams mean for me, and *how* I experienced it.

Poem 1: *Encounter with having; Encounter with losing* (18 June 2021)

Some dreams
Leave me
Chasing
Searching
Chasing
Others
Leave me
Packing
Only to realise
That my suitcase is
Empty

This poem relates to three dominant feelings experienced in my grief dreams, namely, the feeling of chasing something or someone, searching for something or someone, and the feeling of being stuck or enclosed.

The following poem (*see Poem 2 below*) also captures my attempt to make sense of these grief dreams. It explains the similarity that I find between dreams and real life, but also the vast differences between the two realms – *a false belief*. The words *saturated, drenched, bamboozled, hoodwinked* demonstrate my, sometimes, responses after the dream. It may, at times, be overwhelming and perplexing, leaving me to grasp my cushion, as at that moment, it feels like *the most REAL thing*. Despite, at times, feeling bewildered and, perhaps, deceived, I am grateful for my mind to allow for an altered life. I played around with the layout of the poem, depicting the various layers of reality (or abstractness) of the dream experience.

Poem 2: *Sometimes I dream* (8 December 2021)

Sometimes, I dream
Reality versus reality

Imagination in overdrive

Enhanced

Captured

Stuck

(Or so it feels)

A mirror | rorrim A

Truth, but not
A version of it
False belief
A construction

Saturated
Drenched
Bamboozled
Hoodwinked

Holding my cushion
As if it's the most
REAL thing
To grab

Revealing

An empty grip

A showcase of

My deepest

Deepest

Fears

A living nightmare
Hah!

So senseless
A laughing act
A mad show
Delusional fantasy
Intricately wonderful

A consolation
I love my mind

I dream Sometimes

9.2.3. Grouping 3: Connecting the body to grief dreams

I wanted to form a linkage between the projective, written work and the embodied work, by particularly making reference to various body parts. In many ways, again, poem three reveals the often chaotic, non-sensible nature of dreams. The segments are related, but also distinct, creating a staccato-like tempo. For me, this captures the, sometimes, disjointed nature of dreams.

Poem 3: *The labyrinth of the mind* (20 June 2021)

1. *It feels like my stomach has swallowed a body of ocean, storming within me, leading me with its inertia.*
2. *My oesophagus swirls into my intestines like a collapsed tower of hope.*
3. *Body feels hollow. The site of you fills it with cement.*
4. *I feel it mostly in my face, as if it was a desert-like sponge, finally, falling into a well of water, blocking my sight.*
5. *Like petals released from their hold, I fall to the ground, still keeping my covert form, cupped like a vessel, drifting away from that what I have always known.*

Poem 4: *Dizzy* (8 December 2021)

Move too quickly
Dizzy
Sugar penny drops
Heart propels
You must slow down

Poem four was written straight after an embodied engagement. I felt that it was important to capture my embodiment in response to the grief dream through a verbal capture. I also want to demonstrate to the reader that, through my exploration, it was not possible to view projection and embodiment as two separate processes, but rather one interconnected process that unfolded, fuelled, and propelled one another. In addition, it is impossible to locate the above processes in neat, discrete steps, which again, lends itself to the idea that dreams are chaotic, non-linear phenomena.

9.2.4. Grouping 4: Exploring the residue

This grouping is made up of only one poem. I wanted to capture the feeling of nostalgia and gratitude, but also a sense of sadness for knowing that it was only a dream. Poem five is based on my dream of my mother in which she says 'goodbye'. *A bittersweet aftertaste* – bitter, because dreaming is removed from waking reality, and hence, not actually true; sweet because it is a glimpse and touch of someone or something lost in real life.

Poem 5: *Lag met 'n traan* (12 January 2022)

You taste it in its fullness
Round, plump, ripe
Juicy, juicy
Coral orange button suit
Vibrant, alive
A bittersweet
Aftertaste

Ultimately, the projective engagement revealed my thoughts, comprehension, and emotions towards grief dreams in a written, concrete form.

9.3. Findings that arose from studying the embodied engagement

As a reminder to the reader, the analysis of the embodied engagement took place by watching and re-watching the video recordings of the embodiment. Special attention was placed on noticing any transitions in movement and gesture, the interaction with the material, how the body made use of its surrounding space, and lastly, the rhythm and tempo of the engagements. The images included below are frozen frames from the video recordings. In other words, these represent moments during the watching of the video recording that I felt had to be paused and saved for its weight in supporting a particular theme. Based on the notes, descriptions, and observations of the video recordings and related images, I had found three trends or themes: 1) *Feeling stuck;* 2) *Spread and stretch;* and 3) *Material carries load*.

9.3.1. Feeling stuck

Often in the observations of the recordings, it was evident that at times my body seemed restricted and stiff. The movements were slow, undefined, and aimless. Images one and two show this sense of heaviness and motionlessness. The images also show my body tilted forward with my head hanging. This felt like a safe space to feel 'stuck'. As already revealed in the projective work, the feelings of being stuck and having aimless motivation were prominent sensations experienced in the grief dreams (*see Appendix: Dreams 6, 9, 10, 14)*. Perhaps the experience of having recurring dreams also lends itself to this sensation, as the dreamer is stuck in a never-ending replay of an event. The experience of restriction and immobility can relate to the traveling dreams where there seems to be no destination, or it may relate to the endless feeling of searching for something and never finding it.



Image 1: Feeling stuck



Image 2: Still feeling stuck

9.3.2. Spread and stretch

Between the moments of appearing stuck and restricted, there were large and exaggerated gestures as pronounced by my arms and legs. My limbs led the way away from my torso, as if being pulled in opposite directions. Perhaps, this was what I needed, after feeling immobile and restricted. It was evident that in my dreams I sought this freedom with my travel dreams *(see Appendix A: Dreams 6, 7, 9, 11)*, as well as my dreams in which there is a social theme *(see Appendix A: Dreams 3, 10, 12, 13, 14)*. It is evident in these dreams that I wanted to experience what was

restricted by the COVID-19 pandemic, like traveling and socialising. In addition, the use of materials aided in the stretching motion, allowing for my arms to have something concrete to move and stretch. Perhaps, this need to claim the space around me relates to the desire to reach a point of closure, and to remove myself from the cyclical pattern of healing and grief. This is in parallel with my confrontation or experience with closure in my dreams. As mentioned already, some of my grief dreams mediated a sense of reaching a point of insight and closure *(see Appendix A: Dreams 1, 2, 8, 15)*.



Image 3: Spread



Image 4: Stretch



Image 5: Fly



Image 6: Go where the body needs to go

9.3.3. Material carries the load

This theme relates to the incorporation of material in the embodied process. I was in awe of how the material facilitated the movement, as if acting like a steering wheel. It allowed for my movement to take shape, as well as provide a vehicle to carry my emotions. At times, it provided comfort when I covered myself with it *(see image 7)*. Other times, by twirling and throwing it in the air, it aided in transporting my

frustrations, and possible anger. Referring to my grief dreams, it was common for me to receive comfort from the subject of loss – either in the form of visualising the subject of loss, or receiving words of affirmation or affection from the subject of loss *(see Appendix A: Dreams 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 15)*. In addition, it made me aware of these emotions, which were otherwise hidden or suppressed. Similar to dreams, where emotions are perhaps, hidden or supressed in the waking life, they appear in the dreams. For example, the sensation of chasing, the experience of hurt and feeling replaced, and the feeling of deep disappointment were brought to light *(see Appendix A: Dreams 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)*. As seen with image 10, the material aided in being creative, as I started to play with the reflections of the sun rays. Importantly, I felt freer to move with the material than without it, providing a sense of safety, containment, and familiarity.



Image 7: Hold me



Image 8: Transfer



Image 9: Twirl



Image 10: Hide

This chapter revealed rich findings related to my understanding of grief dreams, as well as its potential therapeutic role through projection and embodiment. These are further discussed in the next section.

10. Discussion

In this study, I hypothesised that the more I actively engaged with my grief dreams through projection, embodiment, and analysis of the dreams, the more adaptive I will become to coping with the associated grief. I completed this project experiencing, at many times, low, heavy energy. Even at times, a deep reluctance to engage with the project, as doing so meant that I was confronting grief and its related undesirable feelings. I was in many ways, after all, the grieving individual seeking therapeutic relief. As mentioned before, grief is not a graspable concept, as it is often ongoing and complex. However, the findings in this study reveal support for working with grief dreams as means of processing grief and loss. I am able to view the process retrospectively and holistically, and thereby note the growth and positive adaptation in my mourning processes.

As a reminder to the reader, the study's research questions aimed to understand how the analysis of grief dreams and the use of projective and embodiment tools in drama therapy can be used to extract and highlight recurring or significant themes in these dreams, as well as to determine how the aforementioned processes can aid in creating meaning of grief and processing grief. In this section, by connecting it to current literature, the established findings are discussed to determine its therapeutic potential in grief.

10.1. What did the study reveal about grief dreams

The analysis of the dream transcripts revealed possible functions of grief dreams, namely that dreams 1) reflect the dreamer's current turmoil, 2) provide comfort and solace, and 3) aid in clarity and closure. This is important for understanding the possible role that dreams play in grief comprehension, and consequently, provides a platform to explore possible therapeutic entry points. If such dreams aid in positive adaptation, then this study postulates that such positive adaptation can be enhanced and cemented in the dreamer's waking life by exploring these grief dreams.

The product of the projective work *(see 9.2.1.)* and the embodied investigation *(see 9.3)* often fit the characteristics of grief being multi-dimensional, complex, spontaneous, and chaotic. The incorporation of songs about grief into the study's

process supports the notion that loss, and the experience of it, is universal. Dreams differ in their impact on the dreamer, as some leave a profound, lasting effect, whereas others are less memorable. In addition, like grief, dreams are unpredictable and uncontrolled. For example, during the time of this study, some timeframes held a higher frequency of grief dreams, whereas others were less active. This was usually concurrent to the intensity of grief. Lastly, dreams vary in their measure of abstractness (or measure of reality); however, the carried themes might be similar. Knowing this information could be helpful for future practitioners working with grieving individuals who experience grief dreams.

10.2. Exploring the content of grief dreams

The analysis of the dream transcripts revealed some dreams to strongly hold a negative valence, some a more positive valence, and others a combination of the two. To consider the valence attached to the dream is important for this study, as it reveals how the dreamer emotionally experienced the dream. Dreams that carried negative content often led to a distressed waking state, whereas, dreams that carried positive content led to a lighter waking state. Those that were mixed would result in an indifferent state. The dreamer would often ruminate about the loss, or analyse the dreams in these waking time frames. This study postulates that during these post-dream timeframes that therapy, or engagement with the dream material, would be most effective.

As mentioned in the literature review, it is postulated that dreams hold the potential to reduce unpleasant emotions associated with grief and loss (Black, 2018; Black, Murkar & Black, 2014; Bulkeley, 2009; Garfield, 1996; Garfield, 1997; Hendricks, 1997; Helminen & Punamäki, 2008; Jones, 2015; Pagel & Zadra, 2004; Pesant & Zadra, 2006; Ryan, 2006; Vina, 2017). Concurrent to these studies, this study suggests that confronting the negative content in dreams will, over time, result in them losing their potency for emotional disruption. Hall (1951) wrote that the abstract and invisible ideas that we experience during the day are translated into concrete and visible images in our sleep. It is evident that in this study, those thoughts that dominated the dreamer's mind in the waking life were converted into tangible scenarios. For example, the frustration towards the pandemic's restrictions was translated into a tangible scenario in which the dreamer could not leave the airport.

This conversion from intangible to tangible is highlighted in this study, and is noted as a possible favourable point of entry for therapy. By working with the tangible, the intangible could possibly be better understood by the client and their therapist.

One of the most important findings of this study is that both positive and negative content held dreams allow for the dreamer to play out a scenario, express emotions, or confront situations that would not be possible in real life. In this way, the dreamer achieves something in their dreams, outside of the waking life. Parallel with current literature, the dreamer is able to integrate these experiences, solutions, successes, interactions, etc. into their own lives (Cox & Theigaar cited in Casson, 1999). Positive-content dreams that included a positive interaction with the subject of loss allowed for a negative memory to be replaced with a positive encounter. The dreamer was able to create an adaptive narrative that adds in her grief understanding. By working with these adaptive narratives through embodiment and projection, it might aid in the integration of these narratives into an individual's waking life. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest this entry point to be a favourable one for grief counselling. Particular dream scenarios allowed for me to experience a positive interaction with the subject of loss, or other scenarios that aided in my meaning-making process. I believe that drama therapy offers a route to create and discover meaning in relation to grief.

During the time that this study took place; South Africa entered their third lockdown. Widespread in the literature is the notion that the frequency of recurring dreams is often associated with one's current psychological wellbeing (Barrett, 1996; Blagrove, Farmer & Williams, 2004; Domhoff, 2015; Giovanardi et al., 2021; Helminen & Punamäki, 2008; Pesant & Zadra, 2006). The findings here support this notion, as the dreamer experienced recurring dreams in which she was either trapped in an aeroplane or at an airport, lost in another country, or enjoying the act of traveling only to wake up with deep disappointment. This study shared large resonance with Giovarnardi et al.'s (2021) study that postulated that the dreamer, when presented with recurring material, becomes desensitised to the material and in this way, assists the dreamer's mastery over emotions related to loss and grief in the waking life.

It is evident that the dreamer in this study sought freedom and fought the restrictions associated with the pandemic. Hence, this study suggests that the dream-space allows for those thoughts related to COVID-19 to be played out in the dream. In other words, by being presented with particular grief-associated feelings and scenarios, an individual is given the opportunity to process this in a realm outside of waking reality, and hence in a distanced manner. In this study, lockdown-related dreams were prominently explored through embodied work, which revealed obstructed movements. In this case, embodiment allowed for that what was experienced in the dream to be converted into an embodied shape, which in turn, could help both the client and their therapist to approach the grief from another, more graspable, angle. Therefore, I believe that embodiment and projection add another layer to therapy – one where thought, feelings, and responses can be framed to be observed in order to gain a deeper understanding.

10.3. Using grief dreams as an entry to process grief

10.3.1. Embodiment and projection as favourable processes

This study allowed for the re-telling of grief dreams in different forms, such as through projection, embodiment, and transcription. In her study, Vina (2017) also found that the act of re-telling dreams fosters positive processing of loss. This is important for this study, as the use of drama therapy, through projection and embodiment, in grief therapy, allows for grief dreams to be told in different forms, which could lead to enhanced insight of the self in relation to grief.

Embodiment and projection provided a vehicle to express and actively explore and process what surfaced through my experience of grief dreams. *Actively* is important to highlight to the reader, as embodiment and projection allowed for an interaction that included the body and the mind. Through these processes, inner thoughts and insights could be objectively witnessed and studied. Specifically, it mapped out the dream experiences in a viewable and graspable form, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of the grief dreams. This study showed that working with grief dreams provides material and language for both the client and their therapist to work with, and subsequently, further provides the opportunity to create meaning from and process the grief.

10.3.2. Drama therapy allows for safe distancing

As a reminder to the reader, Landy (1983: 175) refers to distancing "as a means of separating oneself from the other, bringing oneself close to the other, and generally maintain a balance between the two states of separation and closeness". For me this captures my experience of using the two processes. Embodiment and projection formed a vehicle to touch the grief dream material, but also to move away from it when necessary. Engaging in projection and embodiment was like a box in which the dreamer could climb into to confront and process the grief dreams and exit by disengaging from the projection and embodiment. This allowed for safe containment of the exploration of the grief dreams. My experience also resonates with what Jones (2007) wrote about distancing – when working with distressful material, it allows for a different perspective to be adopted, which in turn can aid an individual to develop a perspective of themselves in relation to the issue. Through these processes, I was able to position myself as an outsider, viewing the 'insides' of another (in this case, myself). The projective work, in particular the poetry, provided insight into how I often experienced dreams, what dreams brought up for me in the waking life, which part of my body holds the emotional weight of these dreams, and my attempts of trying to make sense of them.

It is important for this study to also pay tribute to the use of a timeframe in therapy. By keeping a dream journal over time, and working with the material through analysis, projection and embodiment, I was able to note the improvement over time. This could be because of time allowing for healing to take place, but another possibility could be because of the active processing of the dream material, I was able to, without perhaps knowing it, create meaning from a distance. Again, in resonance with what Jones (2007) said, I was able to draw from the physical, emotion, and intellectual elements in order to arrive at my own meaning in terms of loss and grief (in relation to my grief dreams).

Grief, for me, follows an ebb-and-flow pattern. It is not static, nor is it a consistent, straight trajectory, but rather comprises of waves of dominating sadness, and other times, a light flush of closure. This was evident in my active exploration. Dreams themselves are chaotic and random. I was often left confused after a dream at having

experienced such a warped version of reality. However, instead of leading to an over-spilling of emotion, the embodied engagement, projective investigation, and use of materials, allowed for a measure of containment, as I was able to project my frustrations, anger, heartache, and longing onto the material, paper, and the movements. Therefore, emotions were safely brought into the space to be digested.

10.3.3. Drama therapy aids exploring the bond with the subject of loss

Zisook and Shear (cited in Black, 2018) wrote that grief relates to emotional, behavioural, and cognitive responses following a loss. This was evidently present in my grief dreams. Some dreams were dominantly behaviourally rooted, whereas others were more emotionally centred. However, important for this study is to note how behaviour, emotion, and cognition aided in the creation of experiencing a bond with the subject of loss in the dreams. The bond was re-established by drawing from memories in which I felt these bonds in real life. I would either be magnetically drawn to the subject of loss, which was expressed behaviourally or emotionally; I was held by the subject of loss, creating that emotional connection; and other times cognition dominated when I realised the subject of loss was impossible to find. The idea that grief relates to these three facets could provide a platform to explore dreams according to these three categories. In turn, arriving at an in-depth understanding of how these grief dreams impact an individual behaviourally, emotionally, and cognitively.

This chapter has explored and presented the findings in a reflective and discussed manner. It has showed that drama therapy can act as a favourable tool to addressing grief through grief dreams. This section has also offered a brief connection between the literature and self-reflection regarding comprehension of the nature of grief dreams.

11. Recommendations and Limitations

Despite this study's attempt to do so, it is still unclear whether dreaming aids an individual's mourning process. This is because the findings of this research are based on the experience of the researcher. As shown in the literature and, perhaps, in this study, dreams hold subjective, nonsensical and irrational qualities, and hence, applying the findings of this study to a wider population could seem to be problematic or warped. Further extensive research on a wider population is required to understand the potential aid that grief dreams may play in positive adaptation to loss.

It is also important to note that persons grieve differently after loss, and hence the findings of this study might look different to another, similar one. In addition, this study also revealed that the scope of this study is too limited to truly understand the possible purpose of grief dreams, and hence this study falls short in this quest. This study can be shaped into further research that could include a larger number of participants. This may lead to further insight into how drama therapy can be used in grief work, and consequently, advance the field itself, as well as, widen the range of options for drama therapists to use in their work.

12. Conclusion

In this study, I outlined to the reader relevant literature applicable to this study, the research aim and research questions, the study's rationale, a framework on the executed methodology of the study, the findings made in this study, a discussion on the findings, and lastly limitations of the study and recommendations for future studies. I am hoping that a possible outcome from this research might lead to further exploration of the potential usefulness of working with dreams and grief through the practice of drama therapy.

My initial assumption underlying this study was that when one experiences a form of emotional disruption, in this case, loss, dreaming becomes an indirect, abstract, and passive way of confronting and processing it. Albeit, this study revealed a measure of truth in this, I also believe that this study revealed dreams to also hold the opposite qualities, such as being direct, real, and active in confronting and processing grief.

As a reminder to the reader, I wrote in the introduction, *I believe that dreams are like a narrative or a story that often articulates or visually presents a person's inner turmoil. This study intends to draw from these articulations and presentations within grief-held dreams, in order to better understand their possible purpose in grief comprehension (see page 8)*. Critically, after the conclusion of this study, I can address this statement in the following way. Yes, often my dreams did represent my inner turmoil, but they also presented the states in my grief process where I have reached some point of closure or reassurance. Hence, relating to a more inner content state. In addition, I also wrote, *I believe that it could provide the platform or vehicle to explore one's dreams in order to delve into possible meanings or perspectives behind the dreams, which might aid in the processing of grief (see page 8-9)*. I strongly support this notion, and I believe that this study carries weight for this statement. Drama therapy, in the form of embodiment and projection, allowed for me to transform my experiences of the dreams into a concrete, packaged presentation. I was able to objectively view and note my thoughts and feelings in relation to my dreams and associated grief.

I want to take the reader back to the writer's analogy of dreams to Salvador Dali's (1931) artwork, *The Persistence of Time*. This study supports the initial notion that dreams hold surrealistic qualities; however, there is still a noticeable measure of reality. I believe that it is this quality of dreams that make them truly powerful to work with, as this mirror of reality in an abstract form could be untangled and processed through therapeutic means, in this case drama therapy.

Projective and embodied techniques provided a different entry point and pathway to understand, investigate, and process grief dreams. After this investigation, I have gained a greater appreciation for grief dreams and their healing properties. Viewing it personally, collectively, holistically, and retrospectively, I can witness my increased sense of clarity towards the progress I have made in terms of this mentioned restlessness. I am no longer seeking or chasing. The active exploration of the grief dreams revealed the intricacy and complexity of the various forms of loss. In addition, in studying these dreams, I am better able to realise what my dreams are trying to process in terms of loss.

Ultimately, this study encouraged the dreamer to create meaning of particular grief dreams, which I could translate to my own life. Again, it is important to remind the reader that grief has no end-point; however, this study offered a way of mediating grief-related experiences. In many ways, drama therapy acted as an intermediate step between the dreams and reaching meaning. I, therefore, believe that this study has shone light into a new and potential approach in drama therapy when working with patients facing loss or processing grief. This is especially important in South Africa during the pandemic, where already high measure of loss exist in combination with newly established loss associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic. Therefore, of great importance, this study provided a potential tool to address the different facets of loss-related trauma in South Africa. Lastly, this study also showed that grief expands beyond the experience of death, and includes other life experiences that perhaps do not receive the same urgency or priority as the former.

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14. Appendix A: Dream Transcripts

Dream 1: Childhood dream (pre-journal; age 9)
This is my earliest experience of a grief-dream. After my grandfather's death, I dreamt that we had a big family dinner. He was sitting at the end of the table, looking vibrant and healthy. I walk straight to him and he embraces me with a hug.

Dream 2: Childhood dream (pre-journal; age 11)
I am busy building a puzzle. It's before your funeral and we still have many visitors who wish to show their condolences. You enter the room with Dad, Esté and Etienne by your side. You are wearing this bright coral orange suit, and looking radiant as if you are not sick. You have your handbag over your shoulder, looking like you are about to leave and run some errands. You tell me that you are happy and that you have to leave soon. We embrace in a warm hug. I am feeling comforted and held.

Dream 3: 9 June, 2021
Setting is my childhood home – the home I grew up in. I am not sure what the event is but there are a lot of people. People that I know. I know this dream – same setting, event, feeling. We're playing hide-and-seek. You are there. I know that you are there but I can't find you. I become panicked knowing that I might never find you. I am feeling chased, rushed, panicked.

Dream 4: 11 June, 2021
I am in a bathroom looking through my toiletries for a particular jewellery piece. I know that you are coming. I wait and wait. Finally, you arrive and I want this picture set in cement. I run back to find my shoes. Upon returning, you are gone. In my dream, it is still you and me. My body aches. I am experiencing a pointless sense of hope. It sits in my abdomen.

Dream 5: 12 June, 2021
Setting is an aeroplane. Again filled with people I know – including your friends and family. My sister is with me, and she and your dad share some banter. I am constantly

searching for you but you seem unfazed and uninterested – perhaps, distracted. I move around so that I can be closer to you. Eventually, I get to sit next to you. However, it is deeply disappointing. We don't seem to have much to say to each other. You are busy with your phone and I can see you leaving a comment on her Facebook profile with a "<3". I feel deeply hurt, replaced, hurt.

Dream 6: 2 August, 2021

I dream that I am at the airport, leaving for the Netherlands. I am feeling mixed emotions of excitement and nervous anticipation. The thought of being close to you warms my abdomen. However, I never seem to reach my destination. The following scenarios happen: ending up in a big, overwhelming city, not knowing where to go.

Dream 7: 5 August, 2021

In bathroom, looking for a particular pair of shoes. You're there, and it would be the first time to see you since our parting. We finally met, and it's friendly and warm; non-romantic because I am aware of the newly existing boundaries. I am feeling so happy to be around him. I wrote in my diary, "What I imagine it would be like meeting, but rather, what I hope or wish for. Creating a sense of comfort. We're secretly holding hands in the car – giving a sense of familiarity. I forget my shoes and drive back in the car, and never reunite. I wake up, and I am left with a sense of gratitude for the dream – especially being on good terms, which is perhaps, again, my hope and wish for us.

Dream 8: 10 August, 2021

Gives long heartfelt and meaningful hug and says, "aan die begin was dit ook regtig vir my forever." I search through his belongings and find ID photos of his girlfriend, and again I swallow the realisation. I want to spend maximise time with him but I can't seem to find him again.

Dream 9: 3 September, 2021

I am in Switzerland, surrounded by emerald green forests. My brother, Etienne is with me. We walk to crystal clear waters filled with people doing all kinds of acrobatic sports. Stretching through the middle of the lake is a green, grass-lined path. We are

child-like happy, running, and losing each other in the excitement. We are not panicked by this realisation, but rather in awe of what is around us. As I am running, I am thinking, "this time it is real. I am here." I am content. I am happy. I observe the strange sighting of snow surrounding the waters, because it feels like a hot, summer day. In the same dream, I observe the dream-like, surrealistic Northern lights. I am in a trance. Again, I wake up in a flood of disappointment.

Dream 10: 13 October, 2021
Setting is a social event and my childhood home. I am crying. I am crying because my friend is climbing onto a bus and I don't know when I will see her again. In my dream, I am leaving for Leiden, and the idea of leaving family and friends all of a sudden seems overwhelming.

Dream 11: 20 October, 2021
In Cape Town but it feels like a city overseas. I am running down a straight line as if I am running against time – chasing time, rather, knowing that you are there and I only have so much time before you leave.

Dream 12: 21 October, 2021
In Stellenbosch and I know that you and your friends are there. Again I am chasing and searching. I call you by mistake and you answer. It is a friendly exchange – I ask if you want to join me for coffee and you agree. I wake up. Hope met with disappointment.

Dream 13: 14 November, 2021
As always in my dreams, this one takes place in my childhood home. Always. Always hosting. In this one, I am frantically obsessing about whether everyone is enjoying themselves. I am trying to shuffle everyone into one activity. It is deemed unsuccessful. I wash my hands inside, but decide to rinse it using the outside tap. While washing, I am spraying water onto someone. I then move to the swimming pool where I rinse the rest of the soap.

Dream 14: 4 December, 2021

I am on a plane, already sitting in my seat. The plane is packed – it is clearly December time. As always, I am staring at the people walking down the aisle. I see you but you don't see me. You're wearing earphones. I want to reach out and touch you but I am sitting in the middle – between strangers, unable to get to. I have one confirmation: you are in Cape Town. I know that you are going to the same music show that I am going to tonight. I am so eager to get to the show but I keep getting stuck doing certain activities. I do my make-up but it melts off my face. I do it again but I fill it in like a circus mask. I wash it off. I try again. Again, we're in my old home. My sister has two small children. I first need to attend to her. I receive a message from a mutual friend. You decided not to go to the show.

Dream 15: 5 January, 2021
It is at our current house. You and your girlfriend visit. It is a strange experience. However, I warm up to her and we become friendly. I show around, wanting to show off the house. You seem distant, understandably. You tell me that at a time what you feel for her you felt for me too. But what they have is really special and his staying with her. I wake up, feeling at peace and somewhat happy for them.

15. Appendix B: Lyrics of included songs

15.1. *Stranger's Kiss* – Alex Cameron, Angel Olsen

Don't even bother climbing out of the well
That ain't no way to get out of the hell that you're in
If you wanna see the back of it, girl
You better start digging down with your pail of tin
I got shat on by an eagle, baby
Now I'm king of the neighborhood
And it feels like I could
Just peel the gym pants off a single mother
But this run of good luck don't got me feeling all that good
And it hurts, and it hurts
But I don't wanna talk about it
'Cause in my dreams, I miss you
Then I wake up to reality's bliss
Now all I ever wanted and all I ever needed is right here
In the stranger's kiss
Don't bother flying when we jump off the cliff
Make sure it's head first if you don't want to deal with what ifs
I know you're wondering if you'll feel it again
Just keep on digging it down with your pail of tin
No shame in sleeping with the seagulls, baby
This town's a tourist trap, it's no place to be living
They made a meme out of my legacy, darling
My hands are caught in the net and they're pale and thin
And it hurts, and it hurts
Well I don't wanna talk about it
'Cause in my dreams, I miss you
And I wake up to reality's bliss
All I ever wanted and all I ever needed was right here
In the stranger's kiss

Me and Roy, we got a pretty mean posse
With a Down syndrome Jew from the real estate crew
He keeps me busy with a shift now and then
But it don't ever really stop me from thinking of you
I know you're wondering why you wish you were dead
And there's no solace in the fact that it's all in your head
Try not to focus on the pain that you're in
Just keep on digging down with your pail of tin
If it hurts, well it hurts
But I don't wanna talk about it
'Cause in my dreams, I miss you
And I wake up to reality's bliss
All I ever wanted and all I ever needed is right here
In the stranger's kiss
'Cause in my dreams, I miss you
And I'll just stick 'em right there in the bin
Thought I needed buckets of gold
But all I needed was a dirty little pail of tin

15.2. *Haunted by You* – Future Islands

Pensive and quiet
Like forever was
In a chrysalis she waits for us
And she takes from us
Oh sweet life, why give and take from us?
It's all for you
It's all for truth
Feels like I'm holding you down
But you won't leave me alone
And you're holding me now
But I'm so far away from you
There's no home
No home like the one I found in you

Now you're running away
Oh to feel like a child again
And the song he sings, he brings to life for you
It's all for you
It's all for you
And the words he places on the page just can't admit
This song's for you
This song's for you
Feels like you're holding me down
But I can't leave you alone
And I'm holding you now
But you're so far and lost to me
There's no home
No home like the one I found in you
Now I'm running away
And I feel like a child again
Oh to feel like a child again
And I'm haunted by you
I'm haunted by you
Every song I sing, it brings me back to you
I'm haunted by you
I'm haunted by you
I'm haunted by you