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

André, Berdine

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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.