

# Abstracts

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### Experiences and early coping of bereaved spouses/partners in an intervention based on the dual process model (DPM)

Lund D, Caserta M, Utz R, De Vries B (2010). *Omega* 61(4) 291–313

This is one article in a special edition of the journal *Omega* devoted to the dual process model (DPM) of coping with bereavement, developed by Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut. This sees bereaved people as oscillating between loss orientation (LO) (focusing on their loss) and restoration orientation (RO) (learning to cope on their own and gain new life skills). Stroebe and Schut argue that recovery from bereavement requires a balance of the two.

Every article is worth reading, whether you are a researcher or a practitioner. I have chosen to describe in more detail the one by Lund and colleagues as it provides a practical way of helping older people with their bereavement while also testing and considering refinements to the DPM.

The study sought to compare outcomes from interventions based on the DPM model and more 'traditional' approaches offering just LO support. Recently widowed people, all aged over 50, were offered 14 weekly sessions of group bereavement support: 128 attended traditional LO grief support groups, and 170 attended groups that focused on LO and RO – the DPM study groups. These sessions covered an imaginative list of issues that bereaved people might find useful.

Participants in both kinds of group were very satisfied with the interventions. Some in the DPM groups would have preferred activities other than those that were offered – computer skills rather than learning about how to budget, for example. The list of RO topics had been chosen from preferences expressed in previous studies, but the feedback suggests that RO activities are best tailored and individualised to participants. It was also observed that many people in the LO groups engaged in RO activities both during sessions and outside the group.

Participants in the DPM groups showed slightly higher use of RO coping initially, but improved at similar levels and reported similar high satisfaction with their participation as those attending the traditional LO groups. However, although DPM participants had six fewer LO sessions, they showed similar levels of LO improvement.

This study addresses one important aspect of the DPM and the researchers plan to further research and develop this model. ■

### The childhood experience of being a war orphan: a study of the effects of father loss on women whose fathers were killed in World War II

Taylor SE (2010). *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 15(3) 228–241

This piece of heuristic research involves interviews with seven women born in the US between 1941 and 1945 whose fathers died on active service in World War II. Reportedly there is little research in this area, even though some 183,000 US children lost a father during the war. The author is herself a US World War II war orphan.

Of the 100 responses to her search for interviewees via a national war orphan organisation, the author chose seven who consented to participate fully in the study.

Several themes emerged from the interviews. Interviewees described 'feeling different'. Even if their mother remarried, they still longed for a 'normal' family life that included both birth parents. They described a pervasive sense of 'yearning for what could have been', of insecurity and a sense of danger. The result was either hyper-dependency or hyper-independence. Fears were 'rampant' – fears of abandonment, trust, letting go, getting lost, others dying unexpectedly around them, of death and of the dark. There were also fears of being 'replaced' and of loss and being hurt if they gave too much of themselves.

Another key theme was having to care for their grief-stricken mother, and/or siblings. Some simply talked of a need to take care to others in order to win acceptance and retain control.

Relationships with men were difficult and largely unsuccessful. The women described lack of trust, fear of intimacy, fear of abandonment and their disappointed searches for someone to take care of them.

Those whose mothers had remarried often felt far from 'lucky', despite what they were constantly told. Some described terrible abuse and neglect and most reported losing more than they gained from the remarriage. Some retained a lingering fantasy that their father might return, and all felt their father's mystical presence in their lives.

The researcher attempts from these seven interviews to create a 'composite portrait of a World War II orphaned daughter'. I felt there could have been more reflection on the limitations to objectivity. Nevertheless, this study highlights a very particular unacknowledged, disenfranchised grief and may provide a sense of 'commonality' for other women in this situation. ■

## Online dating and conjugal bereavement

Young DG, Caplin SE (2010). *Death Studies* 34(7) 575–605

This study examined the profiles uploaded on an online dating website by people who described themselves as widowed. The aim was to explore how they referred to their past losses, and what it might say about their responses to their bereavement.

The study also compared these widowed people's profiles with those of a sample of divorced online daters.

The researchers viewed the online profiles of 241 widowed daters aged 18–40, and 280 profiles of divorced people.

The profiles were analysed statistically and thematically. Key themes included whether and how the widowed people explained the loss, inclusion of a 'backstory' to the death, indication of a philosophy of life, indication of sense-making of their loss and description of a vision for the future. The authors include direct quotes from what they call 'these self-textual portraits' to illustrate the themes.

Some one-third of the widowed people discussed their loss in their profiles. About one-third of these profiles also made explicit reference to a philosophy of life, and about 16% mentioned sense-making or cognitive reappraisals of their bereavement. Many of the profiles also described a vision of a future partnership. There was also a significant correlation between the inclusion of a backstory and signs of sense-making in their profiles.

In comparison, divorcees gave much briefer mentions of their past relationships, used less sense-making language, and were less likely to describe a vision of future partnerships.

Overall, the researchers conclude that online dating sites may function as places where bereaved people can both explore their past experiences and construct a new, post-loss identity or post-loss 'ideal self'. The study suggests that online dating may assist adaptive coping following the death of a partner. ■

## Voices – A limbo harvest

Carroll B (2010). *Illness, Crisis and Loss* 18(3) 275–277

## Voices – 'Jumping the fence'

Saville A (2010). *Illness, Crisis and Loss* 18(3) 269–273

Brid Carroll is a psychotherapist and counselling supervisor in Ireland. This short article describes how her work is an integral part of her life story and her family history. Every generation, even her own daughter, has had babies that did not survive. She reminds us that we are shaped not just by our present circumstances but by our histories. If we know about them, we can appreciate them so much more. This is also exactly what the war orphans, described in the war orphan abstract, have so sorely missed.

This article has resonance with an article by Anne Williams (2005) where she describes coming to terms with the death of her grandchild through speaking of the experience at a professional conference. It also relates to a biographical account by John MacKenna (2006), who writes of how he came to realise he had many stillborn siblings of whom no one had ever spoken until after his mother's death.

The personal account by Ann Saville, in the same journal as Brid Carroll, highlights coming to terms with losses after breast cancer when working as a counsellor in palliative care. Hester Hill Schnipper (2003) also writes of this experience and the importance of holding on to the reasons for keeping going when our own lives and those of our clients seem impossible.

In all these articles the writers jump fences between personal and professional boundaries. In shock, one could say, their worlds collide. Professional boundaries are necessary but the strands of one's work go beyond this. As Brid Carroll suggests, they are in fact woven together. ■

MacKenna J (2006). *Things you should know. New Island* 74–101.

Schnipper HH (2003). *Perspectives. Sisyphus and other everyday heroes. Journal of Psychosocial Oncology* 21(1) 89–91.

Williams A (2005). *The healer's art. When worlds collide: personal life experiences in the professional arena. Progress in Palliative Care* 13(3) 199–201.