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Continuing Bonds with Children and Bereaved Young People: A Narrative Review

Abstract (151 words)

Background: Finding alternative ways to reconnect with the deceased is a common feature of bereavement. However, it is currently unclear how bereaved children/young people establish and develop a 'continuing bond' with deceased family members.

Aim: To investigate how bereaved young people continue bonds with deceased family members.

Design: A systematically conducted narrative review was conducted using six electronic databases; CINAHL, Medline, EMBASE, PsycINFO, PubMed and BNI. Limiters were applied to peer-reviewed articles published in English. Studies were assessed for methodological quality using the JBI Critical Appraisal Tools.

Results: Nineteen articles were included in the review. Three overarching themes were generated; *unintended connections*, *intended connections*, and *internalised connections*.

Conclusion: Bereaved young people establish a sense of connection with deceased family members through various means (e.g. unprovoked/spontaneous reminders, physical mementos, internalised memories). Some connections are unintended and occur spontaneously. However, other young people will specifically seek ways to remember the deceased to provide a sense of enduring connection.

Background

It is estimated that approximately 111 children become bereaved daily in the United Kingdom following the death of a parent (Child Bereavement UK, 2018). Similarly, in the United States, one out of every 20 children aged 15 and younger will experience the loss of one or both parents (Owens, 2008). Until recent years, the dominant ideology regarding grief and bereavement emphasised the need for people to engage in *'a very distinctive psychic task [...] namely to detach the memories and expectations of the deceased'* (Freud, 1957, p.96). As such, mourning was focused upon a process of relinquishing bonds with the deceased during a specific period following the death of a loved one (Gorer, 1967; Irwin, 2015). An inability to sever bonds with the deceased was considered *'symptomatic of pathology'* and hinder the person's ability to develop new relationships (Silverman, Klass & Nickman, 1996, p.5). In contrast, later theories began to acknowledge the changeable nature of grief (Wimpenny & Costello, 2012), and influence of society and culture (Thompson, 2002).

The 'continuing bonds' model was first proposed by Silverman et al. (1996), and suggests bereavement to be non-linear, and a process of adaption and change. It is argued that *'people are changed by the experience [of bereavement], they do not get over it, and part of the change is a transformed but continuing relationship with the deceased'* (Silverman et al, 1996, p.19). Consequently, bereaved people do not engage in a process of disconnecting with the deceased but, instead, develop new and alternative bonds with them (Irwin, 2015). With this in mind, a pivotal element of loss and bereavement is to construct a new and alternative identity of the deceased, thus enabling a continued presence within the lives of survivors (Madison, 2005).

Continuing bonds was developed further by Walter (1996) in his theory of a biographical model of grief. The model drew more upon the social context of death, dying and bereavement which highlighted the importance of talking to other survivors about the deceased in order to create a '*durable biography*' (Walter, 1996). He based this theory upon his own personal experience following the death of his father and a close friend. Walter describes a process of '*writing a last chapter*' in which he '*began to find a stable place*' for the deceased in his life as a survivor (p.13). The '*last chapter*' therefore developed through talking to others about the deceased, discussing old memories, and learning about new or previously unknown information. The process enables the bereaved to develop a broader understanding of how the deceased has influenced, shaped and contributed to their life and identity (Walter, 1996). As such, developing a durable biography by 'writing' this last chapter, is a social process through talking to other survivors who knew the deceased.

This concept was further extended and developed by Fearnley (2015) who postulates that young carers of a family member with a terminal illness, will often create a '*penultimate chapter*', precluding the '*last chapter*'. This penultimate chapter will be revised and adapted many times as the condition of the person living with a terminal illness gradually worsens. Consequently, the young person's knowledge of the family member will encompass a plethora of illness related biographical information. Successful synthesis of both chapters will therefore promote the development of a stable, secure and durable biography. Despite this contribution from Fearnley (2015), there are limited publications which have specifically focussed on continued bonds with children and young people.

Aim

The aim of this systematic narrative review was to answer the question; How do bereaved young people continue bonds with deceased family members?

Methods

It was anticipated that the existing literature regarding continuing bonds and bereaved young people would be a variety of qualitative and quantitative evidence. A narrative review was therefore identified as an appropriate way to provide an overview of research, whilst also allowing an integrated and synthesised interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative evidence (Mays, Pope & Popay, 2005; Bryman, 2012).

Search method

Searches were performed between September and October 2017, and repeated in December 2018 with the following databases; CINAHL, Medline, EMBASE, PsycINFO, PubMed and BNI. These databases were chosen due to the breadth of cross disciplinary coverage (i.e. medicine, nursing, social work, allied health, psychology, mental health etc). Furthermore, these databases search across national, and international, peer-reviewed journals. The following search terms were used ["continued bond" OR "continuing bonds" OR "last chapter" OR "penultimate chapter" OR "relationship" OR "construct*"] AND ["child*" OR "teen*" OR "adolescent*"].

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The working definition of a young person being aged 24 years old and below was adopted for the current study (United Nations, 2013). Publication dates were limited in accordance with the concept of continuing bonds being first published by Silverman et al. (1996) Unpublished dissertations, theses, or non-peer-reviewed articles were excluded. Language limiters were applied for articles published in English. All study designs, and both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were included. Titles and abstracts were individual screened for relevance. Articles which had not focused on bereaved young people were omitted. The majority of these articles were directed towards parents who were bereaved due to the death of a child. Additional articles were located through hand searching the reference lists of papers which met the inclusion criteria

Quality assessment

All articles which met the inclusion criteria were critically appraised and assessed for methodological quality using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools (JBI, 2018). An example of a checklist is offered below in Figure 1. Due to identifying small numbers of appropriate articles, along with wide spread low quality, a decision was made not to exclude articles based on quality appraisal alone. Instead, any prompts/questions within the JBI checklists which were not met by the article, have been utilised within the narrative review to highlight additional study limitations in the support of critique. In accordance with narrative review guidance, all articles included in the review were synthesised into 'article review tables' which feature a numerical indicator of quality based upon the JBI checklists (see Appendix 1 for example) (Green, Johnson and Adams, 2001; Booth, Papaioannou and Sutton, 2012).

Finally, a more detailed table was developed which summarised each of the articles which were to be included within the review. This table was thematically coded by lead researcher before being circulated amongst the research team in order to obtain interrater agreement between the synthesis and developed themes.



JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research

Reviewer _____ Date _____

Author _____ Year _____ Record Number _____

| | Yes | No | Unclear | Not applicable |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Overall appraisal: Include Exclude Seek further info

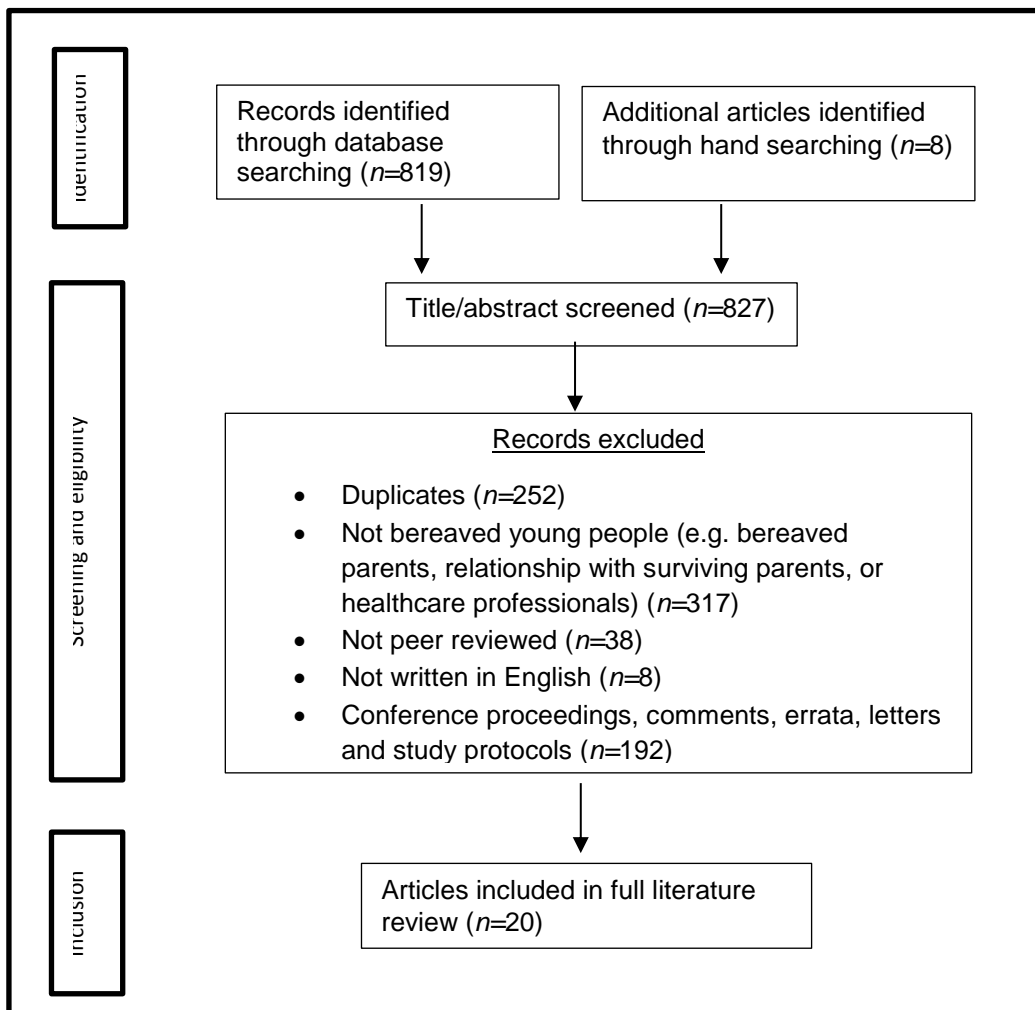
Comments (including reason for exclusion)

Figure 1- An example of a JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist (from the article by Lockwood, Munn & Porritt).

Results

A summary of the search results is provided below in Figure 2. In total, 819 hits were returned with a further eight papers identified through hand searching. The majority were ruled out due to duplication ($n=252$), or, incorrect focus upon parental loss of a child, bereaved young people's relationship with surviving parents, or healthcare professionals ($n=317$). Following scrutiny of the remaining article titles and abstracts, 20 met the inclusion criteria. Articles were then thematically synthesised into three over-arching categories of; *unintended connections*, *intended connections*, and, *internalised connections*.

Figure 2- Systematic selection process of articles



Unintended connections

The experience of bereaved young people having unintended connections with the deceased was described in ten articles (Normand, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Field, Gao & Paderna, 2005; Packman, Horsely, Davies & Kramer, 2006; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Foster et al., 2011; Wood, Byram, Gosling & Stokes, 2012; Root & Exline, 2014; Hansen, Sheehan, Stephenson & Mayo, 2015; Irwin, 2015; Simpkins & Myers-Coffman, 2017). This is the idea that bereaved young people often feel a sense of connection with the deceased, through natural and spontaneous occurrences. As such, the young person may feel like the deceased person is suddenly around, or watching over them. One of the earliest articles which emphasised this as a potential way in which bereaved young people continue bonds with the deceased, was a literature review conducted by Field et al. (2005). The authors highlight that often, bereaved young people have fleeting reminders and hallucinations of the deceased. These experiences are often naturally occurring and not explicitly sought by the young person. However, experiencing such vivid reminders of the deceased is suggested to provide an unprovoked reminder of their absence in the young person's life.

Similar findings were described in a later literature review which investigated continuing bonds in young people following sibling bereavement (Packman et al., 2006). It was suggested that bereaved young people often experience a sense of presence from the deceased, feeling as if the person is around them and watching over them. This was perceived to be a positive experience through providing a sense

of connection with the deceased, particularly during periods of hardship. In contrast, a later literature review described this experience and feeling of being 'contacted' by the deceased to be a potential source of distress for some bereaved young people (Root & Exline, 2014). The authors outline that having spontaneous and unplanned thoughts of the deceased, may provide the young person with a sense of the deceased initiating contact with them. As such, the young person has little control over their own thoughts, meaning the deceased can influence their cognitions from the grave. This additionally raises the potentiality of confusion whereby the bereaved have become accepting of the physical absence of a loved one, yet, they are still somehow initiating contact and influencing the young person's thoughts.

Whilst informative, all of these literature reviews possess methodological limitations due to a lack of transparency regarding search strategies employed and eligibility criteria for articles (Field et al., 2005; Packman et al., 2006; Root & Exline, 2014). However, a number of additional empirical studies have similarly reinforced the concept of unintended connections occurring in bereaved young people (Normand et al., 1996; Foster et al., 2011; Hansen et al., 2016; Simpkins & Myers-Coffman, 2017).

One of these studies was conducted with nine parentally bereaved adolescents who were recruited from a hospice in America (Hansen et al., 2016). Open ended interviews were conducted to explore how they perceived their relationship with their parent to have changed following the death. The young people commonly described 'encounters' or unexpected interactions with their dead parent. These were often

sudden 'appearances', feeling like they were being watched, or, having internal conversations with their deceased parent. Similar findings were also outlined in a larger scale study with 24 bereaved children aged six to 17 years old, also conducted in America (Normand et al., 1996). The bereaved young people commented upon being able to 'hear' the deceased when they communicated with them. Such experiences tended to occur during the earlier stages of loss, and, to be more prevalent for the younger participants.

In contrast, a later study identified young age not to be a contributing factor in bereaved young people experiencing unintended or spontaneous encounters with the deceased. In a novel study of Facebook profiles from 12 deceased people, 1270 posts that were written by bereaved friends to the deceased were analysed (Irwin, 2015). As such, the majority were aged between 18 to 25 years old, and commonly wrote to the deceased to describe spontaneous visits and unprovoked experiences or messages which were interpreted to be from the deceased. This suggests that experiencing spontaneous and unintended connections with the deceased, may not be distinct to only younger children. Critically, however, limitations for this study lie in the public nature of mourning on Facebook. Irwin (2015) describes that the posts tended to be written as if it was a private and personal message to the deceased. Yet, posts on memorial pages are published with an awareness that other survivors will read the content. It is therefore unclear whether survivors are attempting to communicate with the deceased, or, drawing upon Walter's concept of the last chapter, attempting to gain information and stories from other survivors (Walter, 1996). Regardless of this, it is clear from a number of articles that bereaved young people tend to hold beliefs that the deceased still exist in some form and remain able

to see and hear the young person (Silverman, Baker, Cait & Boerner, 2002; Foster et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2012; Pennington, 2013).

Also prominent within the literature, was the concept of unintentional stimulation of senses to re-establish a connection with the deceased (Simpkins & Myers-Coffman, 2017). One of these studies was conducted in the United Kingdom through conducting semi-structured interviews with a sample of 13 parentally bereaved young people (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011). Based upon the findings from the study, the authors suggest that *'sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, individually or collectively, can act as a bridge in the continuity of relationships'* (p.289). Such findings were similarly reinforced in a small scale American study with three bereaved young people (Simpkins & Myers-Coffman, 2017). It was specifically identified that memories were commonly evoked through unintentional exposure to special songs that reminded the bereaved young person of the deceased. Interestingly, both of these studies highlight that a connection with the deceased can be re-established through unintended and spontaneous exposure to a stimulus. Yet, of further interest, is that bereaved young people may purposefully seek ways to stimulate their senses in order to control their continued bond with the deceased.

Intended connections

A number of the articles ($n=11$) highlighted that bereaved young people will often purposefully seek the use of stimuli in order to create an intentional connection with the deceased (Normand et al., 1996; Nickman, Silverman & Normand, 1998; Christ, Siegel & Christ, 2002; Saldinger, Cain, Porterfield & Lohnes, 2004; DeVreis and Rutherford, 2004; Packman et al., 2006; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Foster et al.,

2011; Wood et al., 2012; Pennington, 2013; Karydi, 2018). One of the earliest articles was based upon data collected in America using semi-structured interviews with 24 parentally bereaved young people (Normand et al., 1996). A common method for young people to maintain a connection with the deceased, was through maintaining and preserving memories of the deceased. Often this would require stimulation through use of objects and mementos that were once owned by their dead parent. Objects therefore became a link with memories of the deceased providing what the authors describe to be a '*bridge between the world with and world without one parent*' (p.91). A later article by the same authors identified objects such as photographs, jewellery and clothing to be commonly used by the bereaved young people to 'bridge' the gap (Nickman et al., 1998). However, it was also noted that a conflicting coping mechanism for some widowed/surviving parents is to dispose of, or hide, objects that remind them of the deceased. Whilst the use of objects to reconnect with the deceased gradually reduces over time, the premature disposal of mementos may create additional challenges for a bereaved young person.

Regardless, later empirical research has also evidenced the importance of objects for bereaved young people. In a study with 39 siblings, bereaved young people, 44% ($n=17$), discussed playing with toys and personal belongings once owned by their deceased sibling to feel connected with them (Foster et al., 2011). Similarly, the bereaved young people also described the purposeful use of scrapbooks and photographs in order to '*go back to the memory*' associated with the stimuli (p.429). This reinforces the previously mentioned 'bridge' that bereaved young people seek with the deceased. As described by Brewer & Sparkes (2011) '*sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, individually or collectively, can act as a bridge in the continuity of*

relationships between the living and the dead for parentally bereaved young people' (p.289). It is therefore unsurprising that the use of photographs, videos and audio recordings have been described to bolster a sense of connection with the deceased, through providing a way to recognise physical and audio similarities between the young person and deceased (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011). As such, visual and audio representations were reported as the preferred method of reconnection for bereaved young people.

Consequently, many hospices now encourage patients to create resources such as memory boxes for young people in their family to use in the future. Similarly, bereaved young people may also create a memory box which contains the various objects and photographs which elicit happy memories and provide a connection with the deceased. Further described in a qualitative UK based study with ten bereaved young people, memory boxes provide young people with an important sense of control regarding where and when memories of the deceased are evoked (Wood et al., 2012). It can therefore be argued that the process of creating a memory box can also support the development and refinement of the deceased's last chapter (Walter, 1996).

However, additional research with 58 parentally bereaved young people, suggests that the most treasured objects and mementos were those that were specifically created by a parent before death. Saldinger et al. (2004) conducted semi-structured interviews and identified mementos such as videos and letters to be commonly used by the bereaved young people to reconnect with the deceased. These were often revisited throughout the young person's life in accordance to developmental stages

whereby understanding of the content would be gradually refined (Biank & Werner-Lin, 2011). Furthermore, interviews with the surviving parents outlined that many of the dying parents gained a sense of enhanced parenthood, and the ability to '*parent beyond the grave*' through creating the mementos (Biank & Werner-Lin, 2011, p.932). However, such findings are tentative due to the qualitative data being provided through proxy accounts from the surviving parents regarding the experiences of the deceased parent prior to death.

An alternative way in which bereaved young people continue bonds with the deceased, is through a purposeful use of internet-based resources (DeVries & Rutherford, 2004; Pennington, 2013; Irwin, 2015). The earliest of these articles investigated the characterisation of an online memorial site (DeVries & Rutherford, 2004). A sample of 5% (n=244) of memorial posts made to the site were thematically analysed to ascertain that the majority were written as letters from bereaved young people (n=111). As such, writing online letters to the deceased was suggested as an important way in which young people continue bonds with the deceased. This has similarly been identified in later studies which focused on the use of Facebook (Pennington, 2013; Irwin, 2015; Hansen et al., 2016). An American study collected qualitative data with 43 bereaved young people aged between 18 to 24 years old (Pennington, 2013). Each of the young people were a mutual friend on Facebook with a deceased peer. Interviews were conducted to identify that Facebook provided a platform in which bereaved young people continue a connection with the deceased through writing posts on their wall. Additionally, mutual friends could read the posts written by other bereaved peers to gain insight to new stories of the deceased which supported the development and refinement of their last chapter (Walter, 1996).

Similarly, the importance of sharing and hearing new stories about the deceased has additionally been reported through more traditional means. A literature review conducted by Christ et al. (2002) outlined it to be essential that bereaved young people have memories evoked by other surviving adults. Often such memories are evoked immediately after the death, or during the funeral, when stories are frequently shared. However, this sharing of information about the deceased gradually decreases over time meaning bereaved young people may not have special memories evoked. Whilst limitations of this literature review lie in the lack of detail that is published regarding the identification and selection of articles, similar findings have also been reported in later empirical research (Pearce, 2008; Foster et al., 2011; Fearnley, 2015).

Internalised connections

Reported within a number of articles ($n=10$), bereaved young people maintain a connection with the deceased through internalising aspects of the deceased's values, beliefs, personality and identity (Normand et al., 1996; Nickman et al., 1998; Christ et al., 2002; Silverman et al., 2002; Field et al., 2005; Packman et al., 2006; Pearce, 2008; Biank & Werner-Lin, 2011; Root & Exline, 2014; Hansen et al., 2016). This is arguably a later stage of bereavement for young people, whereby the use of objects and stimuli gradually diminishes over time as the permanence of death is internalised (Field et al., 2005). Over time, bereaved young people achieve a state of 'reconstitution' through adjusting their perception and understanding of their new relationship with the deceased (Christ et al., 2002). The young person therefore

develops new meaning to the relationship and finds alternative ways to connect with the deceased (Packman et al., 2006).

This concept has been reinforced by a qualitative study conducted with 23 bereaved young people and their families (Nickman et al., 1998). Connection was seemingly maintained through the bereaved young people developing a new and alternative representation of the deceased. The authors suggest that this internal image develops from a preserved set of memories and knowledge regarding the parent who had died. Once this preservation has taken place, there is less of a need for the young person to use external stimuli to create a sense of connection with the person who has died (Normand et al., 1996). Instead, the young person has a stable representation of the person which they can draw upon when seeking to reconnect and remember their dead parent. It is therefore argued that this representation of the deceased becomes *'an important role model [and a] valued part of the bereaved's autobiography'* (Field et al., 2005, p.284). This inner representation may also change and evolve over time as new information is obtained regarding the person who has died (Root & Exline, 2014). As such, bereaved young people will adjust schemas to accommodate new information regarding the person who has died (Field et al., 2005).

Practical examples of internalising the memory and identity of the deceased has been noted in a number of articles (Silverman et al., 2002; Pearce, 2008; Hansen et al., 2016). One of these was an auto-ethnographic study conducted by Pearce (2008). This described how a bond with her deceased mother was maintained

through adopting aspects of her mother's identity within herself. The author additionally interviewed her sister and noted that memories of their mother were internally relocated following her death. Recollections were selected and drawn upon throughout bereavement to suit mood and situation. Such memories were described to '*diffuse and weave into all action, choices, and built [their] character*' (p.143). As such, the internalised representation of their dead mother influences and shapes their daily life, and become especially important during milestone events. Clearly, a key limitation of this study is the small and somewhat subjective nature of an auto-ethnographic study, thus questioning the transferability of findings. However, similar findings were noted by Hansen et al. (2016) in their qualitative study with nine bereaved adolescents. The participants described how their dead parent became an 'inner guide', shaping their thoughts and behaviour according to how they felt their parent would have wanted them to be. Often this would occur through mentally playing back words or sayings associated with the deceased. This was described to reinforce a sense of connection with the deceased through providing a sense of enduring contact.

In contrast, a larger scale study conducted by Silverman et al. (2002), outlined a series of potential challenges and difficulties when bereaved young people develop a negative internal representation. In total, 120 bereaved young people between the ages of 6 and 17 years old were recruited to take part in a semi-structured interview. It was identified that 'negative legacies' were often described by the bereaved young people. One such legacy adopted by the participants, was a fear or sense that they will also develop the same condition or disease which their dead parent had. The young people also described feeling as though they must '*fill the space their parent*

left' (p.340) by adopting a parental role in the family home and caring for younger siblings. Additionally, the young people developed an awareness of some qualities and characteristics which were not desirable and hence, were rejected. Consequently, the internal representation constructed by young people, may endorse a sense of negative connection with the deceased. As such, Silverman et al. (2002) outline the importance of young people becoming aware that the deceased was an individual person in their own right. This promotes a sense of 'healthy bonds' whereby the young person can distinguish between both the positive and negative representations. They are then able to prioritise the assimilation of positive traits to their internal representation of their dead parent.

A limitation of this study lies in the sample of adolescents being classified as 'high risk' within the Child Behavior Check List (CBCL9) (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). It is therefore unclear whether bereaved young people who are not deemed at risk, would similarly develop negative representations of the deceased. Regardless of this, application of findings from the study emphasise that the connection a young person experiences with the deceased, can be negatively influenced. It is therefore important that positive memories and stories of the person are prioritised to the young person, thus promoting the development of a positive internal representation of the deceased.

This is of pertinence for young people who are bereaved due to progressive conditions. In support of Fearnley's (2015) notion of a 'penultimate chapter', it can be argued that the internal representation developed by young people, will be shaped by the most recent memories of the person. Consequently, a negative image may be

developed due to the physical degeneration caused by the disease and associated symptomatology (Sirrime, Salloum and Boothroyd, 2018). Therefore, interventions which promote the development of positive internal representations, may be of benefit for bereaved young people. However, to date, there is a dearth in the literature which explores ways in which bereaved young people can be supported in developing positive internal representations to endorse healthy connections with the deceased.

Strengths and limitations

Strengths of this paper lie in the description of how the narrative review has been conducted. The methods employed for searching, identifying and reviewing the literature, were standardised and have been provided in detail. Furthermore, the broad inclusion/exclusion criteria ensured that reviewed papers were of diverse methodologies and varied study designs. A clear limitation of this review is that articles were limited to those written in English. However, articles included in this paper did not refer to any non-English publications.

Implications for practice

A crucial finding from this narrative review is that seeking a connection with deceased family members is a crucial element of grief for children and young people. As such, practitioners should actively support bereaved young people to find suitable ways to 'bridge the gap' with the deceased (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011). With each young person and their relationship with the deceased being unique, it should be noted that the method of reconnection will also be distinct. It is therefore imperative

that practitioners ascertain the type of connection being desired by the young person, and provide support accordingly. For example, the use of pre-recorded family videos or a digital legacy could be useful in a therapeutic context with some bereaved young people who resonate with audio or visual stimulation to bridge connections.

Future research

This review highlights scope for future research to empirically investigate the three stages of connection for bereaved young people; unintended, intended and internalised. This disputes the idea of there being a typical or 'normal' reaction to grief. Instead, experiences of bereavement will vary greatly over time within individuals, and also, between individuals. Subsequently, grief is highly influenced by a number of stressors within the bereaved person's life. To name a few, their relationship with the deceased, cultural influences, and importantly the coping mechanisms and support systems that surround them (What's Your Grief, 2016). With so many factors to consider when it comes to defining 'normal' grief, empirically testing the three stages of connection for bereaved young people identified within this literature review, would be extremely useful. This would further reinforce the notion that there is no 'normal' bereavement and grief work. Instead, bereaved young people may oscillate and revisit the three types of connection throughout their bereavement. Consequently, it would also be valuable to longitudinally assess bereaved young people to better understand the transition between each category, and potentially map the three connections to key milestones within the grief journey.

Conclusion

This literature review has investigated the various ways in which bereaved young people continue bonds with deceased family members. Within the paper, we have outlined that connections can fall within one of three distinct categories. Firstly, bereaved young people may achieved a type of unintended connection with the deceased. Often this occurs spontaneously, without the young person's intention. Secondly, bereaved young people gain a sense of connection with deceased family members through more purposeful means. Within this, young people intentionally seek to remember and reconnect with the deceased, often through using methods of stimulation. Lastly, bereaved young people develop internalised representations of the deceased which gradually develop and evolve within the young person throughout their life.

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Appendix 1- An example of the article review table

| Authors | Country | Sample (age range in years) | Methodology/ data collection | Summary |
|---|---------|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Biank, N. and Werner-Lin, A., 2011 | USA | n=1 (4-14) | <i>Qualitative</i> >Case study | >Young people reinterpret the deceased's life and personality as they grow up and gain develop cognitive and emotional skills. |
| Brewer, J., and Sparkes, A., 2011 | UK | n=13 (9-25) | <i>Qualitative</i> >Semi-structured interviews | >Young people use many senses to 'bridge' a connection with the deceased and continue bonds |
| Christ, G., Siegel, K. and Christ, A., 2002 | (USA) | (unspecified) | <i>Literature review</i> >(unspecified) | >Bereaved young people engaged in a process of 'reconstitution' by developing a new relationship with the deceased |
| DeVries, B. and Rutherford, J., 2004 | USA | n=244 online memorials | <i>Qualitative</i> >Analysis of online posts | >Majority of posts were written as letters to the deceased by bereaved young people |
| Field, N., Gao, B. and Paderna, L., 2005 | (USA) | (unspecified) | <i>Literature review</i> >(unspecified) | >Symbolic use of objects to continue bonds with the deceased which are gradually diminishes over time as the connection becomes internalised |