BEAUPLAN, YOUSELENE, M.S. "African Americans, Especially Males, You Know, We Can Grieve": Qualitative Examination of Emotional Expressivity, Bereavement Behavior, and Coping in Response to Homicide among Economically Disadvantaged Young Black Men. (2022)
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The reality of gun violence impacts many economically disadvantaged cities across America and disproportionately impacts young Black men. This thesis uses a qualitative approach to address the experience of grief during homicide loss for young Black men. More specifically, the primary aim of this study was to focus on the emotional expressivity, bereavement behavior, and emotion coping of a cohort of 40 young Black men between the ages of 18-24. Grounded by several theoretical frameworks, the researcher employs Elder's life course theory, Sharpe's Model of Coping for African American Survivors of Homicide Victims, and Worden and Winokuer's Task-Based Approach for Counseling the Bereaved, to explore the coping behaviors of young Black men while navigating traumatic loss. Findings revealed the majority of the participants first experienced homicide loss during adolescence which extended into emerging adulthood for some participants. The participants employed multiple coping mechanisms, such as emotion concealment, that were motivated by contextual factors and masculine duties. Although this study includes a homogenous sample, findings suggest that different modes of expression and coping are employed to meet the needs of the young men. This thesis examined the findings and the implications for next steps to further the field of bereavement and emotions. Future directions and limitations of the study are later discussed.

"AFRICAN AMERICANS, ESPECIALLY MALES, YOU KNOW, WE CAN GRIEVE":

QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIVITY, BEREAVEMENT

BEHAVIOR, AND COPING IN RESPONSE TO HOMICIDE AMONG ECONOMICALLY

DISADVANTAGED YOUNG BLACK MEN

by

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

American cities are disproportionately harmed by the toll of gun violence (Sharpe, 2008; Smith & Patton, 2016; Smith & Robinson, 2019). According to the FBI's Universal Crime Reporting agency, murder is the intentional killing of another person (FBI, 2016). Homicide is a form of murder differentiated from other typical forms of death because of the blame, stigma, and shame associated with the context in which it occurs (Sharpe, 2015). Unlike the death of natural causes, homicide is violent and traumatic, as is the loss and grief it produces (Rando, 1993). Common deaths, such as chronic illnesses, are typically expected, and families have some time to prepare in advance. However, homicide deaths are usually unexpected, and loved ones are taken by surprise. According to the FBI's national database, the homicide rate increased by almost 30% in 2020□the most considerable percentage since the start of national collection in the 1960s (Lucas, 2021). Of the homicides, 70% were as a result of gun violence. Equally important, according to the Center for Disease Control, homicide is the primary cause of death for non-Hispanic Black males of 1-44 years old and the fourth leading cause of death for non-Hispanic males of all ages (CDC, 2019).

The health disparity of homicide also means Black males are unequally burdened with experiences of traumatic loss (Smith, 2015). Qualitative research with young Black men in Baltimore revealed that Black men experienced an average of three homicide-related losses throughout the life course from childhood leading up to adulthood (Smith, 2015; Smith & Robinson, 2019). Peer loss was the most prevalent form of traumatic loss which was most common during adolescence, and consequently impacted their social networks. Smith (2015) also highlighted the impact of timing and multiplicity of loss of young Black males. Timing is vital as homicide loss measured against developmental stages can influence developmental

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trajectories (e.g., cognitive and emotional responses) (Elder & Giele, 2009). As reported by Smith's (2013) study with young Black men ages 18-24 in East Baltimore, some participants reported experiencing loss in childhood and early adolescence, which shifted their decisions and mindsets. Some participants revealed having to mature at an earlier age. The multiplicity of loss was a common phenomenon in which participants revealed losing many loved ones in the same year, some of whom were killed by the police (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019).

Black males are disproportionately vulnerable to police violence (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019). According to Smith Lee and Robinson (2019), participants disclosed witnessing, experiencing, and grieving loss related to police violence across the life course. State sanctioned violence is the sixth cause of death for young Black males (Edwards, 2019) nationally. The use of police force is not limited to gun violence. It can also include asphyxiation, tasers, beatings, and chemical agents, in addition to gun use. Consequently, Black males experience the greatest likelihood of being killed by the police in America (Edwards, 2019), simultaneously increasing their vulnerability to traumatic loss and grief (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019).

Investigating the context of loss is necessary as researchers examine the "unequal burdens of loss" (Smith, 2015) experienced by Black adolescents and young men. The urban context is of paramount consideration as disadvantaged locations can serve as indicators of health outcomes and the likelihood of experiencing homicide loss (Halfon et al., 2010). The World Health Organization defines Social Determinants of Health as "non-medical factors that influence health outcomes" (WHO, 2021, para. 1) on a micro and macro level. Braveman & Gottlieb (2014) called on researchers and practitioners to reconsider the catalyzing agents that impact Social Determinants of Health, such as income and education disparities especially prevalent in disadvantaged communities across America. This suggests social conditions (e.g.,

residential segregation) and inequalities can contribute to health outcomes (Watkins, 2019). Social conditions such as neglected neighborhoods contribute to and uphold the health disparities of homicide and traumatic grief experienced by young Black men and their families.

Grief is a function of loss, and loss is a function of separation from someone with whom attachment and relational bonds existed (Currier et al., 2015). Grief is a nonlinear (Burke et al., 2010; Smith & Robinson, 2019; Worden & Winokuer, 2011) occurrence that can often be defined by social, historical, and communal constraints (Burke et al., 2010; Sharpe, 2015). Grief is multidimensional, and its impact can be experienced emotionally, mentally, behaviorally, physically, socially, and financially (Smith & Robinson, 2019). However, less attention has been paid to the emotional experiences of Black men in the wake of homicide. It is a common misconception that Black males are perceived as calloused or angry. Anger is often misperceived when displayed by Black adolescent boys (Dunbar et al., 2017). Although Black males experience a range of emotions, they may not always be expressed according to mainstream Eurocentric standards (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). Black males are socialized to express their emotions as a function of culture and masculinity from families and fictive kin. For Black men, much of their socialization involves peers and community influence (Beale Spencer, 1995). Contexts of chronic violence may also demand unique forms of adaptive coping and emotional concealment such as "cool pose" (Majors & Bilson, 1993) to protect themselves from additional violent injury and to uphold masculine scripts (Hall & Pizarro, 2010). However, the emotional coping experiences of Black male homicide survivors have not been a focus in the literature.

This qualitative study focuses on the emotional impact of traumatic grief on young Black men by exploring how young Black men cope with the traumatic loss and grief related to homicide. Specifically, emotion expressivity, bereavement behavior, and emotion coping that

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they experience during bereavement. I will explore how young Black men process and cope with their emotions in response to homicide and the key factors that shape their experiences. I will also explore how intersecting identities, such as masculinity and race, influence their coping responses.

- How do young Black men express, process, and cope with the emotional impact of homicide loss?
- How do notions of masculinity influence emotion coping and emotion expressivity during bereavement related to traumatic loss?
- What activities, resources, relationships, and support exist to assist with emotion coping during the grieving process?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Loss, Grief, and Homicide Survivorship

Loss is experienced invariably worldwide (Doka, 2017). Broadly conceptualized, loss is a separation from someone or something to which there was an attachment (Currier et al., 2015; Shear & Shair, 2005). According to the Baltimore Sun Homicide Tracker, Baltimore has experienced 4,122 reported homicides since 2007, of which, 2980 were Black males. Homicide survivor, or co-victim, is the term the literature uses to describe individuals who lose a loved one to homicide (Connolly & Gordon, 2015). For each murder victim, researchers suspect 6-10 family members are co-victimized (Connolly & Gordon, 2015). This does not consider the presence of fictive kin, which is more prevalent in African American communities (Connolly & Gordon, 2015; Taylor et al., 2021). The term fictive kin is defined as families we have constructed for ourselves (Stack, 1975; Taylor et al., 2021). In other words, fictive kin is regarded as one's family of choice while one's nuclear and extended family are considered the family of origin. Families and individuals within each family unit are impacted differently by homicide-related loss (Burke et al., 2010; Mastrocinque et al., 2015). While much of the literature considers the primary victims of gun violence, few consider the experience of surviving members (Bailey, 2013; Smith & Patton, 2016). Even less is known about young Black men's emotional processes and resources as they navigate the psychological, social, and emotional toll of homicide bereavement.

Grief broadly describes reactions to loss (Shear & Shair, 2005). Grief is a socially constructed process that can be complicated when the cause of death is violent or traumatic (Currier et al., 2015; Sharpe, 2015). It is a nonlinear occurrence (Doka, 2017; Worden & Winokeur, 2011) influenced by cultural, historical, and social agents (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015;

Stroebe & Schut, 2015) that occurs at interpersonal and intrapersonal levels (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015). There are many different forms of grieving that surface after experiencing a traumatic loss. In circumstances of homicide, individuals may experience what the literature refers to as complicated grief (Sharpe, 2008). Complicated grief is defined as "an elongated, debilitating, and sometimes life-threatening grief response" (Burke et al., 2010). Complicated grief is associated with adverse mental health outcomes such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression (Smith & Patton, 2016). In highly publicized homicide cases, particularly those involving police-involved violence, media coverage can complicate grief due to their inability to cope and move forward (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019). It disrupts a family's grieving process to constantly be forced to witness the last few moments of their loved one's life. Likewise, involvement of the legal system can extend and complicate grief for the families if there is a lengthy trial (Sharpe, 2015).

In addition to complicated grief and PTSD, it is common for homicide survivors to experience disenfranchised grief (Doka, 2007; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2010; Sharpe, 2008; Worden & Winokuer, 2011). Disenfranchised grief is a form of grief that is socially regarded as illegitimate (Doka, 2017; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015). It can result in marginalization if the person's state of grief or the cause of death does not align with the cultural, social, or familial expectations (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015). According to Piazza-Bonin et al. (2015), because of the horrifying nature of homicide, families may experience stigmatization by their social networks (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015). For example, in a qualitative study of a Black mother's experience grieving the loss of her only son. The grieving mother revealed experiencing a loss of empathy from her community, feeling socially disengaged, and enduring isolation (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015). Disenfranchised grief can exacerbate grief reactions and worsen the situation for those with minimal social support (Doka, 2007). For Black young men, the social implications of

homicide loss and grief may be experienced differently due to varying prescriptive and proscriptive norms in diverse contexts.

Racism, Racial Trauma, and Masculinity

The experience of homicide survivorship for young Black men is marked by the sociohistorical contexts of race and racism that intersect with hegemonic and culturally specific notions of masculinity in the United States. Black Americans are more likely to experience racism than other ethnic groups (DiAquoi, 2018). Black American youth in high-risk environments may be especially susceptible to stress consequences (Spencer, 1995). The urban American experience is usually marked by elevated stress and high-risk conditions rooted in and magnified by apparent and embedded racism (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019; Beale Spencer, 1995; Helms et al., 2012; Stevenson, 2016). Present day Baltimore is a reflection of residential segregation policies implemented in 1911 by the mayor and redlining that hinders economic mobility that contributes to the city's racial wealth disparity (Asante-Muhammad, n.d). Racist policies and practices especially structure the neighborhoods and lives of Black Americans who are more likely to reside in economically disadvantaged urban contexts (Spencer, 1995) that experience pervasive violence, rendering them more vulnerable to violence related loss. The effects of racism, coupled with poverty, amplify conditions and alter expected developmental trajectories (Spencer, 1995). Additionally, social context informs the social construction of gender and masculinities (Watkins, 2019) which can also shape both Black men's vulnerability to homicide bereavement and their emotional responses and recovery from traumatic loss.

Gender expectations are complex and context-dependent. Hunter and Davis (1992) argue that gender identities are multidimensional in nature while providing historical context and varying perspectives regarding meanings of manhood and masculinity. In their work examining

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gender construction among Black men, Hunter and Davis (1992) explored the "paradox of crisis and survival" (pg.465) which informs manhood, masculinity, and daily life for Black men in America. The 32 Black male participants of various ages and occupations expressed their endorsements of manhood were shaped by a combination of factors: their self definition of masculinity combined with identity perspectives, familial and communal connections, spirituality, and conceptualization of the world (Hunter & Davis, 1994). Experiential definitions of masculinity were passed down through intergenerational and peer interactions from prominent male figures such as fathers, friends, and fictive kin. Economic capital, dignity, pride, maturity, and independence were additional dominant influences in constructs of manhood (Hunter & Davis, 1994).

Of the 15 identified qualities of masculinity by Black male participants in Hunter and Davis' work (1992; 1994), the most prevalent identities related to manhood were: the sense of self, resourcefulness, responsibility, parental involvement, ambitiousness, and provider role. The Black male participants also included familial connections as essential aspects of masculinity regardless of marital status. Manhood within the family context consisted of familial connectedness, and gendered expectations (Hunter & Davis, 1994; Powell Hammon & Mattis, 2005). African American men also described selflessness, respect, and care when interacting with members of their community, highlighting their relational nature (Hunter & Davis, 1994; Powell Hammon & Mattis, 2005).

In a subsequent study of Black masculinity and manhood, Powell Hammond and Mattis (2005) similarly reported that responsibility was the most common endorsement among 152 African American males from five metropolitan locations. Moreover, Black men have played an instrumental role in upholding their families as they tend to have high generativity (Hunter &

Davis, 1992; Hunter & Davis, 1994). Hence, the caretaker responsibility of masculinity is a function of the relational nature of how Black men perceive themselves and may shape how they cope with the emotional impact of homicide loss. Black males may conceal their own emotional needs and expressivity and prioritize their families when coping with traumatic loss. However, research is needed to examine emotion coping and related processes among young Black men.

Adaptive Coping and Emotion

According to Nico Friojda, emotions serve a vital purpose in navigating various conditions (Frijda, 1986). Emotions are especially significant in environments that demand adaptive coping. The intersecting identities of race and gender shape how Black men are able to adapt or name, express, process, and cope with the emotional toll of homicide. As discussed by Stevenson (2016), Black males have to cope with "historic and contemporary racial dehumanization" (Stevenson, 2016, pg. 56), which can lead to various forms of adaptive coping and is shaped by the intersecting identities of race and gender (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018; Stevenson, 2016). Racial trauma and racism serve as the framework for Black men to process and cope with their emotions. Helms et al. (2012) posit that researchers should consider the implications of racial stress and racial trauma. Stevenson (2016) defines racial stress as "the experience of being emotionally overtaxed by racial matters" (p. 60). Racial stress and trauma contribute to the appraisal of Black adolescents and young men. Related to racial stress, microaggressions and other racialized encounters with authority figures (eg., police, principles, etc.) can lead adolescents to develop rejection sensitivity. Stevenson (2016) defined rejection sensitivity as expectations of anger or rejection which can result in overcompensation manifested as hypermasculinity. In certain situations, this form of racialized coping may be protective (Stevenson, 2016; Gaylord-Harden, 2018).

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Hypermasculinity reactions may stem from gendered and racial rejection challenges, which may disrupt Black adolescents' emotional well-being and influence adaptive coping mechanisms (Stevenson, 2016; Gaylord-Harden, 2018). Navigating hostile stereotypes and rejection can contribute to an increase in racial stress. Stevenson (2016) developed the Preventing Long-term Anger and Aggression in Youth (PLAAY) initiative to help Black males in their racial appraisal of stressful environments using behavioral scripts to increase positive outcomes of Black adolescents by instilling racial coping skills known as racial literacy. Anderson and Stevenson (2019) build upon racial literacy through a new theory, Racial Encountering Coping Appraisal and Socialization Theory (RECAST), which expands on racial literacy and promotes emotional coping. African American adolescents and young men can overcome trauma-related adversity through adaptive coping (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018).

Comparably, Gaylord-Harden et al. (2018) beckon researchers to shift from deficit models and highlight positive youth adjustments, including strengths and resources to avoid pathologizing adaptive coping behaviors of Black boys and men. Despite experiencing racism and marginalization, African American boys and young men exhibit the necessary developmental competencies to develop positive outcomes. Regulating stress responses cognitively and emotionally can support positive youth development and promote physical and emotional wellness (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018; Stevenson, 2016). Gaylord-Harden et al. (2018) suggest centering race and gender in identity development by considering how societal misperceptions of criminality shape African American adolescent development. The adaptive calibration model provides contextual factors that influence the behaviors of African American boys and young men. For example, African American boys in stressful environments may cope

by exhibiting four stress responsivity reactions: "sensitive, buffered, vigilant, or unemotional." The researchers posit youth may exhibit such behaviors to survive in challenging environments.

Having a sense of safety and security is necessary for healthy emotional adjustment for all youth, especially African American youth (Stevenson, 1998). African American adolescents must navigate society through oppressive systems (Banales et al., 2021; Lozada et al., 2017; Velez & Beale Spencer, 2018). African American adolescents face unique challenges, as homicide is the primary cause of death for African American males from early childhood into adulthood (Smith, 2013; Smith, 2015; Smith Lee et al., 2020; Stevenson, 1998). Exposure to community and police violence can lead to psychological and emotional maladjustments for African American youth. Youth in urban neighborhoods are at an increased risk of facing, witnessing, or perpetuating violence (Stevenson, 1998). Youth have a heightened awareness of violence within such communities and must adapt to the neighborhood's culture to survive. In doing so, they create a sense of security. Violence is a coping strategy (Stevenson, 1998) to combat sentiments of fear and depression. Both of which are consequences of feeling unsafe. Emotion socialization in African American households may protect Black children from racial bias and discrimination (Dunbar et al., 2017; Labella, 2018; Nelson et al., 2012) outside of the home environment. Dunbar et al. (2017) propose the paralleled nature of emotion socialization and racial/ethnic socialization in African American families. In some cases, they often overlap in preparation of bias to combat discrimination and racism.

Gendered expectations of emotion expressivity may vary in diverse populations, resulting from environmental stressors (Panjwani et al., 2016; Shaffer et al., 2012), social, and cultural norms. African American adolescent males are inaccurately portrayed as void of emotions (Beale Spencer, 1995; Stevenson, 1998). Deficient views such as "the emphasis on the physical

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attributes of the Black male, the limited capacity of the mind, and the absence of the soul"

(Hunter & Davis, 1992, pg. 466) were narratives used to justify slavery and have trickled into

mainstream culture. The media's portrayal of African American adolescents as combative,

aggressive individuals is internalized by youth and can damage emotion and psychological

outcomes (Stevenson, 1998). Because emotion socialization may, directly and indirectly,

influence racial and gender socialization, academics should rethink Eurocentric norms (Garcia

Goll et al., 1996; Rious et al., 2019), especially regarding emotion expectations. Shaffer et al.

(2012) revealed household risks such as poverty, education levels, and mental challenges might

influence emotion expectations.

Emotion Coping Resources and Social Support

Grievers tend to engage in individualized and relational mourning (Bottomley et al.,

2017; Burke et al., 2010; Stroebe & Schut, 2015), in which they look to others for social support.

Researchers are increasingly aware of the role of family during bereavement (Englebrecht et al.,

2016; Stroebe & Schut, 2015). According to Burke et al. (2010), grieving individuals usually

include others in the process. Family members and peers are essential providers of social and

emotional support, during coping, particularly for African American families as they engage in

reconstructing life after traumatic loss (Bottomley et al., 2017; Mastrocinque et al., 2015; Piazza-

Bonin et al., 2015; Sharpe, 2008; Sharpe, 2015; Smith Lee et al., 2020).

The African American experience of dealing with grief consists of a communal approach

involving the metaphorical "village" (Bottomley et al., 2017). Homicide survivors who received

emotional support from family were better equipped to deal with the impact of loss (Sharpe,

2008). Most notably, African Americans are more inclined to rely on their family and fictive kin

for a host of domains of support (Bottomley et al., 2017; Englebrecht et al., 2016) rather than

seeking professional support. Social support is usually more present after the immediate loss of a loved one rather than later in the grieving process. According to Worden and Winokuer (2011), support typically dwindles between four to six months after the funeral. In Piazza-Bonin et al. (2015), participants recalled having a robust support system in the immediate aftermath of a homicide that provided physical and emotional support. Both interviewees disclosed their support gradually vanished after the funeral. One of the participants, Louise, indicated she felt "deserted" by her social support system. Her family neglected to mention her deceased son during holidays and his birthday. She desired someone to talk to, and no one was there, and if they were there, they were unwilling to engage in the conversation. Ultimately, it resulted in the loss of her romantic partner. Although these specific participants were not Black men, the lapse in support may be even more prevalent for young Black men given gendered and developmental notions and norms.

It is worth acknowledging that social networks are not uniformly positive and may not all provide needed support for homicide loss. Some studies show social support serves as a protective factor against depressive symptoms, while other studies have indicated no direct impact. There are also mixed findings regarding whether social support serves as a buffer for distress after traumatic loss (Bottomley et al., 2017). Grief can disrupt previous relationships when individuals and families fail to support or engage in the grieving process with the bereaved. Negative social interactions can result in negative social support when grievers perceive the support as voyeuristic or invasive (Bottomley et al., 2017; Burke et al., 2010). For example, if intended supporters are draining to the individual, that can result in negative support. Social support can also become harmful if grievers avoid grieving to not add stressors to their

supporters (Sharpe, 2015). This is known as concealment and can result in the individual suffering in silence.

Still African Americans are less likely to seek mental health professionals and more likely to spend less time discussing their grief than their counterparts (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015). Sharpe (2008) revealed similar findings where participants primarily relied on informal social support (e.g., religious leaders). Participants cited distrust of mental health professionals and discomfort as reasons they did not seek professional help (Sharpe, 2008). This is especially daunting as harbored grief can lead to far worse outcomes. In one instance, when a participant reached out to a social worker, she left feeling more discouraged and ostracized because she believed that the social worker did not want to meet with her (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015). On the other hand, the same participant recalled positive sentiments after joining a peer support group.

Powell et al., 2016 argue masculinity shapes men's help-seeking behaviors. More specifically, when men experience an occurrence that is associated with a decreased sense of control, sense of freedom, and adverse mental states. Based on a study of 458 African American men, findings indicate men with lower sense of control scores were negatively associated with help-seeking behavior. This suggests African American men may delay or avoid seeking support as it may threaten their identity and sense of control.

Religious and Spiritual Coping

Spirituality serves as a critical source of emotion coping, maintaining connections with the deceased, and engaging in meaning-making after experiencing traumatic loss. Given spirituality is a feature of gender construction for Black men, researchers have also identified religion and spirituality to be common coping resources for Black men (Smith Lee et al., 2020). Victims of homicide loss may rely on religious leaders and fellow church parishioners (Sharpe,

2008; Sharpe, 2015; Smith Lee et al., 2020) for social support. However, there are inconsistencies in the literature concerning the effectiveness of religious coping (Boulware & Bui, 2016; Worden & Winokuer, 2011). Some survivors look to their faith for solace after experiencing a homicide-related loss (Sharpe, 2015; Smith Lee et al., 2020), while others experience "spiritual grief" (Bottomley et al., 2017; Sharpe 2015) in which they experience a loss in faith resulting from their inability to comprehend such traumatic loss. Many of the young men in Smith Lee et al. (2020) who identified as Christians were able to release the burden and stress of survival by relieving themselves of the burden and putting it "in God's hand." Religious coping is often supplemented with rituals such as having funerals, getting tattoos, and annual candlelight vigils (Doka, 2017; Sharpe, 2015; Smith Lee et al., 2020) to celebrate and remember their loved ones. Additionally, prayers to the individual or their higher power allows homicide victims to maintain a spiritual connection to their loved ones (Sharpe, 2015) through prayers for protection, endurance, and grace to see another day (Smith Lee et al., 2020). This research suggests religious and spiritual resources may offer critical support as young Black men navigate the emotional toll of homicide loss.

Summary

There are a multitude of adverse physical, mental, and emotional outcomes associated with homicide-related loss. Across America, young Black men are disproportionately impacted by the reality of homicide loss and the emotional toll of grief, as concepts of race and masculinity continue to shape the bereavement experiences of young Black men. Discriminatory experiences, weaved into the urban context, contribute to the adaptive coping mechanisms exhibited by Black adolescents and young Black men. The current literature provides a glimpse of the coping process for African American individuals and families after experiencing loss.

However, researchers have yet to closely examine the emotional impact of homicide and the resources employed to cope with homicide-related loss.

Theoretical Frameworks

There are a wide range of commonly used theories in the bereavement literature, from Cognitive Stress Theory to the Two-Track Model of Bereavement (McDuffie et al., 2021). However, Glen Elder's (1998) life course theory, commonly referred to as life course perspective, will serve as the primary lens through which I examine the emotional responses and coping experiences of Black male homicide survivors due to its robust components that allows researchers to address nonlinear contextual differences in Human Development and Family Studies. Life course theory will be supplemented with supporting models that help to unpack the constructs specific to young Black men and traumatic loss. Upon setting the stage with life course theory, the Sociocultural Context of Coping for African American Family Members of Homicide Victims (MCAASHV) model developed by Dr. Tanya L. Sharpe (2015) will provide more insight into the Black experience. Lastly, I will draw upon Worden & Winokuer's (2011) Task-Based Approach for Counseling the Bereaved. Combined, these frameworks set the stage for nuanced considerations of the lived experiences of young Black men navigating community violence, traumatic grief, and loss in an economically disadvantaged American city.

Elder's Life Course Theory

Glen H. Elder's life course theory postulates lifelong development is a multidimensional, multidirectional, and multidisciplinary process that occurs at the intersection of history and culture (Elder, 1998). Elder argues that circumstances occur in temporal stages rather than age-based stages, which previously served as the preferred benchmark for scholars. Elder highlighted the person-environment interaction through five main tenants: (a) time and place (e.g., Historical

time); (b) linked lives; (c) agency; (d) development across the lifespan; and (e) timing (transitions and trajectories). Ultimately, there are many competing demands that individuals and families must contend with to reach equilibrium, including time, space, attention, finances, energy, and related responsibilities.

Historical time and place are closely associated with culture as social conditions cultivate experiences within the historical and place context. For example, the traumatic impact of the transatlantic slave trade in 1619 continues to have lasting effects on the 21st century (Degruy-Leary, 2017). Most notably, slavery has contributed to transmission of racial marginalization and gendered expectations experienced by many African Americans today. Additionally, many African American traditions stemmed from the necessity of survival during slavery, such as the generativity of Black men. In considering more contemporary influences in the Urban South, young Black men are influenced by their physical environment and the overarching formal and informal laws that were present during those times. Thereby, history creates its own culture and associated cultural expectations.

The social climate serves as the medium to facilitate interactions between cultural, societal, and historical factors. An integral aspect of life course theory is social change. With change comes novel role expectations (social imperatives) and efforts to maintain normalcy (control cycles). Considering emotional resources are shaped by age and socialization practices, this suggests violence, trauma, loss, and grief are also related to socialization processes that may shape the emotionality of Black men. Elder's linked lives construct alludes to attachment; as loss is a function of broken attachment bonds (Bowlby, 1979). Linked lives forge attachment and emotional bonds, impact peers, and structures loss. Homicide-related loss influences future loss

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and current relationships. Linked lives also shape endorsements of grief, masculinity, and emotional processes as Black men engage in meaning-making post homicidal loss.

Though human lives are interconnected, they are also independent (Elder, 1998). Black men have agency that motivates their actions and influences that of others simultaneously. Elder views human beings as dynamic individuals that function in continuous and reciprocal interactions with the environment. African American boys and young men have agency to make adjustments to the changing demands of their environment (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). Elder underscores how age is an insufficient developmental marker as it masks distinct individual lived experiences (Elder, 1998). Although age simplifies developmental timetables, it also misses the mark in defining what is considered normative experiences of historically excluded populations.

Development occurs during different time points; meaning, social factors can influence developmental trajectories. Individuals may experience a cognitive, behavioral, or emotional disruption after experiencing homicide-related loss (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019). Behavioral and mental changes are valuable indicators of human and family development that also influence agency. Elder's life course theory suggests individuals' agency influences actions and events. Each event has protective and harmful consequences that may have lasting effects on Black men and communities due to human interconnectedness.

Timing is equally important as it can result in reverberating effects based upon timing of events. Transitions and trajectories affect timing as transitions usually denote an abrupt change, while trajectories are more long-term, such as declining mental state over time. In considering transitions, one must consider what is an "on time" or "off time" occurrence for specific contexts. The young Black men are not only surviving the threats of violence, but other cumulative pressures in their communities and lives at large. Elder believed individuals are

impacted by a series of events that include transitions, and each event may have differential durations, leaving lasting impacts on the individual. The same argument could be made for homicidally bereaved families after the loss of a loved one. The occurrences of such transitions and trajectories vary from person to person and could be considered normative or atypical depending on the temporal association. For example, the timing of loss shapes and develops resources available to emotion expressivity, management, and coping with loss. Trajectories and transitions throughout one's lifetime are rarely linear—if ever; and transitions are pivotal.

In summary, life course theory contributes significantly to exploring how the intersections of time, age, history, and culture influence homicidally bereaved victims' behavior. In addition to overarching sociohistorical influences, the impact of the physical environment or community is equally important. Humans are linked to other humans in physical spaces through platonic and romantic relationships, which impacts one's closeness or emotional bonds with others. This is useful in considering differences in the emotional responses of young Black men. Moreover, timing and the interconnected, interdependent nature of our embedded lives are unquestionably vital for young Black men who may experience nonnormative loss that is "off time" or premature in a context when violence is expected. Thereby, Elder's life course theory is helpful for this thesis.

Model of Coping for African-American Survivors of Homicide Victims

Few theories specifically speak to African American populations. Hence, contemporary scholars have developed conceptual models, such as the Model of Coping for African American Survivors of Homicide Victims (MCAASHV). Tanya Sharpe (2015) developed the MCAASHV conceptual model to better assess strategies used by surviving African American family members post homicide. Adapted from Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus &

Folkman, 1984), Sharpe's MCAASHV addressed demographics, stressors and challenges, appraisal and mediators, and the impact of coping strategies and stressors. Stress and coping theory highlighted the transactional relationship between the person's appraisal, coping mechanisms, and the environment. Sharpe builds upon that foundation by exploring tension at the intersection of history, context, and culture for homicidally bereaved African American families.

The MCAASHV model begins with the first notion that African Americans process grief through a cultural trauma lens. The lens consists of ancestral survivorship and anticipation of hardship as two important sub-constructs. Ancestral survivorship consists of the unprecedented strength of African American ancestors despite traumatic events resulting from culminating historical maltreatment (e.g., slavery, segregation, ethical misconduct) and political disenfranchisement (e.g., eminent domain, gerrymandering, redlining). This expectation goes far beyond the self and extends to a historical connection to ancestral strength. Similarly, anticipated hardships stem from historical brutality experienced by African Americans. Many African Americans have grown to expect adversity as a byproduct of existing in and navigating America. Unfortunately, this expectation of hardship can lead to distrust of clinicians and interventionists. The crux of the MCAASHV is the historical influences & unique stressors that African Americans endure when faced with traumatic loss.

The culture of homicide follows cultural trauma after experiencing homicide-related loss. Sharpe describes a post homicide environment that usually includes shame, stigma, and the absence of justice. Shame usually arises from mixed emotions regarding how the victim may have lived and passed away. Stigma is often present when issues of illegality surrounding the victim's death are assumed, and many family members may feel overlooked by law enforcement

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and the criminal justice system as a whole (Sharpe, 2008; Sharpe, 2015). I would argue the media contributes to sentiments of invisibility. According to Parham-Payne (2014), the media provides unequal coverage of Black murder victims as there is a racial schism in which the general public struggles to perceive Back bodies as victims. Because of this, it is commonly understood that media involvement can decrease trust in law enforcement (Mastrocinque et al., 2015) and alter the coping experience for African American families (Connolly & Gordon, 2015).

Additionally, racial appraisal is the secondary component of the culture of homicide in which African Americans experience the impact of stressful events through scrutinizing race and race-based inequities. Racial appraisal considers culture and systems as crucial factors when examining the use of resources or lack thereof by minority populations (e.g., existing in a racialized society in which racism may be present). Sharpe highlights that coping with homicide loss for African Americans incorporates "psychosocial, cultural, and structural" (pg.51) processing to survive. Each of these factors contributes to individual perceptions of the incident and consequent actions resulting from homicide loss.

McGuffey and Sharpe (2015) present racial appraisal as a cultural and structural process. The researchers contend that the cultural component is fundamental to understanding trauma coping and responses. Race and culture are regarded as "toolkits" when assessing impacts of traumatic loss. Survivors of homicide related loss rely on such efforts to engage in meaning-making after loss. The racial appraisal approach asserts that race interacts with sexuality, gender, and class. Gender and class are important considerations for this paper. In other words, racial appraisal informs the schematic understandings of minorities including the health, well-being, and coping strategies of Black men in urban contexts.

The last component of the MCAASHV entails four subcomponents: meaning-making and spiritual management, connections to the lost loved one, communal coping, and caring, and concealment. Religious or spiritual coping are distinct but closely related constructs that previous researchers have indicated are critical sources of coping (Chatters et al., 2011). Connections to the loved ones are maintained through various means such as memorials after the initial funeral, getting tattoos, keeping images visible, and speaking to the deceased to remember positive experiences with their loved ones (Sharpe, 2015). Many African Americans rely on informal collective support systems to meet the emotional and utilitarian needs of survivors facing traumatic loss. Thereby, surviving members and friends are tasked with being present for themselves, peers, and fictive kin who are also impacted by the loss of loved ones. This can result in concealment. Concealment is a unique component that extends beyond emotional suppression; in which individuals may avoid reminders (people, places, and things) of their loved ones. They may also hide or suppress their emotions to circumvent burdening their surviving family members. Researchers have indicated positive and negative outcomes associated with concealment.

Overall, Sharpe normalizes the grieving behaviors of African American families while highlighting the cumulative impact of systemic and social structures on the grieving trajectory. Sharpe emphasized the importance of the impact of the context and type of death that shapes the surviving member's psychological processing (Sharpe, 2015). Due to cognitive and situational differences, discrepancies may exist regarding meanings assigned to homicide experiences and the impact of homicide-related deaths. Additionally, Perceptions of psychosocial resources and outcomes are impacted by individual experiences, structural differences, and cultural influences.

All three factors are entangled in the African American experience and contribute to one's appraisal and survival of traumatic events such as homicide loss.

Task-Based Approach for Counseling the Bereaved

Although the Task-Based Approach for Counseling the Bereaved is not an explicit theory, it serves as a useful framework for scholars and practitioners alike to reconsider the process of grief and loss. Worden & Winokuer, (2011) provide a series of case studies to illustrate grief as a task-based process for navigating bereavement after loss. The researchers posits that the first task, mental acceptance of losing a loved one, is necessary to more fully acknowledge the emotional reality of loss. The second task consists of addressing the pain associated with grief. People may acknowledge their pains differently due to a host of factors such as relationship to the victim (Worden & Winokuer, 2011) or cultural differences. Unaddressed pain can lead to prolonged grief when an individual remains in a stagnant emotional state. The third task involves adapting to life after death, and it incorporates three components (internal, external, and spiritual adjustments). Internal adjustments consist of abstract impacts of loss (eg., self-esteem), while external adjustments are more noticeable, such as living alone. Lastly, spiritual adjustment involves shifting an individual's worldview as they strive to find meaning after loss. The fourth counseling task mirrors one of the components of Model of Coping for African American Survivors of Homicide Victims (Sharpe, 2015) framework, in which individuals engage in maintaining connections with their deceased loved one. Although continuing connections were previously considered maladaptive (Doka, 2007; Worden & Winokeur, 2011), maintaining healthy relations can be beneficial as long as it does not hinder individuals from moving forward.

The second task of Worden and Winokeur (2011) theorizing about grief will be highlighted by focusing on the necessary emotional aspects of dealing with grief. Worden and Winokeur (2011) assert cognitive constraints are not as limiting in instances of violent death as the emotional bonds. The second task considers the emotional aspects of grief for Black men while considering how racial identity and masculinity contribute to emotional resources. Worden & Winokuer, (2011) argue that the task-based approach is necessary as time may not heal all wounds. Similar to grief, healing is nonlinear, and individuals may pivot back and forth between the stages.

Summary

The theories previously discussed inform our understanding of the findings by providing a more comprehensive outlook instead of blaming the individual or the individual's family for the unexpected outcomes of homicide-related loss. Life course theory situates outcomes with broader support for the implications of history and different rhythms and timing. For African Americans, there is an expected resiliency based on American history (Sharpe, 2015). People of African descent were subjected to harsh conditions and environments during pivotal times, such as slavery and the civil rights era. The reality is African American individuals must anticipate hardships and overcome them. In a sense, there is an unspoken collective strength from their predecessor's experience of prevailing despite harsh conditions (Sharpe, 2015). Life course theory, MCAASHV model, and the Task-Based Approach for Counseling the Bereaved are beneficial for scholars and practitioners to avoid pathologizing African American communities and reconsider normative grieving patterns and various forms of grief expression.

Current Study

Although the health disparity of homicide is well documented in the literature, there is a lack of scholarship on the emotional impact of such traumatic loss on Black boys and young men, and the ways in which they cope (Smith, 2015; Sharpe, 2015). Less is known about these survivors or secondary victims of homicide that are forced to engage in meaning-making as they process through stigmas and shame surrounding the traumatic homicide loss (Bailey et al., 2013; Englebrecht et al., 2016; Sharpe, 2008; Sharpe, 2015; Smith Lee et al., 2020; Smith Lee & Patton, 2016; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019). Specifically, the coping process and emotional support for the bereaved. This study seeks to explore the emotion coping experience of Black males dealing with homicide-related loss informed by the previously discussed theory and models (Glen Elder's life course theory, Tanya Sharpe's Model of Coping for African American Survivors of Homicide Victims (MCAASHV), and Worden and Winokeur's task-basked model for counseling the bereaved) to speak to the following questions:

- How do young Black men express, process, and cope with the emotional impact of homicide loss?
- How do notions of masculinity influence emotion coping and emotion expressivity during bereavement related to traumatic loss?
- What activities, resources, relationships, and support exist to assist with emotion coping during the grieving process?

Figure 1. Theories Comparison Chart

Theories Comparison Chart			
Theories	**Theoretical Frameworks/Tenets**	**Research Question**	**Relevance/Significance**
Life Course Theory	Five pivotal components: 1. Time and place 2. Development across the lifespan 3. Timing 4. Agency 5. Interconnected lives	How do young Black men express, process, and cope with the emotional impact of homicide loss? How do notions of masculinity influence emotion coping and emotion expressivity during bereavement related to traumatic loss?	-Allows room to assess the dynamic impact of multiple factors on individuals from birth to death while considering social, developmental, and economic influence on the individual as a whole (psychological and physical).
Model of Coping for African American Survivors of Homicide Victims	Grief management is primarily rooted in expectations of survival from cultural trauma. Many African American victims of homicide loss experience a series of coping mechanism to foster survival from concealment to spiritual coping and meaning making.	What activities, resources, relationships, and support exist to assist with emotion coping during the grieving process? How do notions of masculinity influence emotion coping and emotion expressivity during bereavement	-Conceptual model intended to inform our understanding of how African American families cope during homicide-related bereavement. -Provides a framework specifically for African American populations when assessing the homicide niche that considers sociohistorical influence

		related to traumatic loss?	
Task-Based Approach for Counseling the Bereaved	Considers the emotional, social, and mental toll of bereavement through four stages. 1. Mental acceptance 2. Processing pain culturally and emotionally 3. Internal, external, and spiritual adjustments 4. Maintaining connection	What activities, resources, relationships, and support exist to assist with emotion coping during the grieving process? How do notions of masculinity influence emotion coping and emotion expressivity during bereavement related to traumatic loss?	-Explores contemporary notions of bereavement

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Data Set

This study used data from an original Homicide Bereavement and Healing Dataset rooted in Baltimore, Maryland. The researcher conducted a secondary data analysis of semi-structured in-depth interviews of Wave 1 (N=40; 2012-13; ages 18-24) data. The semi-structured interviews were used to understand emerging patterns and themes (Daly, 2007). The Homicide Bereavement and Healing Dataset assessed the impacts of traumatic loss associated with homicide, including mental well-being and developmental outcomes of Black young men (Smith, 2013; 2015). The present study used this dataset to explore and identify how Black men describe the impact of traumatic homicide loss, the frequency of such experiences, behavioral and emotional coping during the aftermath, and the developmental consequences for the traumatic loss of homicide (Smith, 2013; 2015). Additionally, the researcher explored typical reactions, behaviors, and masculine scripts in response to homicide for young Black men in economically disadvantaged and urban contexts. The researcher used the Homicide Bereavement and Healing Dataset to analyze Black male emotional responses while navigating grief and loss.

Participants

The sample for the present study includes 40 young Black men, ages 18-24, who participated in a larger qualitative study in 2011-2013. As shown in Figure 2, the participants experienced an average of three homicide deaths, usually in adolescence (Smith, 2015). The participants were all located in East Baltimore, where 2021 marks the city's sixth year of experiencing at least 300 homicides and a surge in non-deadly shootings (Strickland, 2021). All participants were members of a local professional development program to earn their GED and seek employment. Participants were prompted to rate the impact of homicide loss on a scale from

one to ten. Although the researcher recognizes this may be an oversimplification of emotions, some of the participants reported a 10+ rating signifying pain that was too painful to be quantified (Smith & Robinson, 2019). The participants also constructed *Chronologies of Loss* (Smith, 2015), and they were encouraged to identify emotions associated with their loss timelines using a feelings chart poster provided by the PI (see Figure 3). The commonly used feelings chart, created by Jim Borgman, provided 30 emotions and images to assist participants in naming their emotions as an intentional strategy to address gendered socialization that may constrain emotion communication (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019). The homogenous racial sample highlights the heterogeneous experiences of young adults in the urban context.

Procedure

All participants were recruited from a local GED and job readiness center located in East Baltimore over the span of 18 months (Smith, 2015). Participants were recruited by the primary researcher through weekly grief and loss support groups (Smith, 2013; Smith, 2015; Smith & Patton, 2016; Smith & Robinson, 2019). All participants provided consent before the start of the interviews per IRB guidelines (Smith, 2013). The participants were given the option of choosing or being assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. The qualitative interviews lasted for an average of two hours, and participants were compensated $20 for their time (Smith & Robinson, 2019).

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Data Analysis

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A Modified Grounded Theory Approach (Charmaz, 2015; Daly, 2007) was used to collect the data and complete the secondary data analysis in this current study. All interview transcripts were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding (Larossa, 2005). During the first phase of coding, open coding (Cranmer et al., 2017; Larossa, 2005), the researcher

completed an initial line-by-line reading of each transcript stored in Dedoose, the preferred form

of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) in this project (Lieber &

Weisner, 2010). The researcher became immersed in the data through an initial reading of each

transcript and created analytical memos (Emerson et al., 1995) during the first pass of the

transcribed interviews. *A priori* codes related to the broad content areas of interest (e.g., emotion,

masculinity, bereavement support) were coded and emergent codes, such as hopefulness, were

named (Daly, 2007). In the second phase of coding, axial coding, similar categories were

combined into larger categorical groups (Cranmer et al., 2017). According to Charmaz (2015),

axial coding is helpful for the grounded theory approach as it intersects subcategories such as the

contexts, dimensions, and processes of circumstances. A codebook was developed using the

categories created through axial coding (Charmaz, 2015). In the final phase of coding, selective

coding (Larossa, 2005), participant quotes were identified that exemplify and help tell the story

of how young Black men process and cope with the emotional impact of homicide in their lives.

These quotes served as the spine of study findings, grounding the articulation and interpretation

of study results. The researcher generated 14 codes that were relevant to the research

topic. Member checking was utilized as a strategy to enhance the credibility of the findings in

the original project (Daly, 2007), as participants are currently in active communication with the

P.I. of this original study. Triangulation of researchers was leveraged via second and third coding

by two research assistants, one undergraduate and one post-baccalaureate. The second and third

coders blind coded 20 interviews, eleven (27.5%) of which overlapped. The interviews were

discussed during weekly coding meeting to report insight and points of considerations.

Disagreements were resolved among the three coders after engaging in discussions. The

researchers also engaged in the iterative process of reflexivity through memoing (Emerson et al., 1995) for each of the 40 transcripts.

Positionality Statement

Milner (2007) encourages scholars to engage in the research process by identifying their positionality to undertake cultural awareness and reflexivity. My research praxis is influenced by my experience growing up in urban environments and my work in inner-city after-school programs. My positionality as a Caribbean young Black woman, graduate student, and researcher has shaped my academic and professional identity. My age and race mirror the participants. Hence, I am painfully aware of the polarized racial state of America. I am a daughter, sister, and niece to many Black men and aunt to Black boys. Emotion is a particular interest of mine as my personal experiences of Black males often contradicted mainstream perceptions. I have always known there is more to Black men than the media portrays, and empirical research presents, but I did not always know how to express my disdain for the oversimplification of the developmental experiences of Black boys, men, and families. Emotions are often overlooked as there is a misconception of Black men as devoid of emotions.

As a Caribbean young Black woman, graduate student, and researcher, I acknowledge my privileges, and I do not take them for granted. I used to aspire to be a voice to the voiceless. However, I no longer wish to be a "voice for the voiceless." The "voiceless," or habitually disenfranchised, have voices, and they have been speaking. Society chooses not to listen as they are systemically barred from decision-making tables. I aim to use my privileges to create a platform for marginalized experiences to amplify the voices of Black men and families who lack a platform. This is my way of uplifting their voices and providing a platform to be heard and seen. I will use my privilege as leverage to create counter stories as I dive deep to uncover

mainstream narratives. Through culturally responsive pedagogy and Afrocentric epistemology, I

seek to peel back the layers of misperceptions by continuing the meaningful work of other Black

scholars. My work is dedicated to my nephews, brothers, dad, and lest I forget, the countless

Black men who have died prematurely to gun violence. May their stories live on.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The young Black men in this sample reported experiencing a broad range of emotions in response to the homicide deaths of their friends and family members that were expressed differently in multifaceted ways. Participant interviews illuminated the emotional experience of young Black men navigating the emotional and mental toll of homicide-related loss. In considering the impact of homicide exposure, one must also consider the inception of such experiences. Of the 40 participants, three (7.5%) did not experience any homicide losses, 33 (82.5%) experienced a homicide death at the age of 18 or younger, and four (10%) experienced their first homicide after the age of 18. The majority (88%) of the homicide losses incurred were of their peers (Smith, 2013; 2015), as indicated in Figure 2.

Closeness or the strength of the relational bond was a crucial piece in assessing the impact of homicide loss. For example, the emotional coping of the young Black men varied depending on how deep of an impact they faced. Closer relationships typically resulted in a stronger impact of the traumatic loss on the individuals. Some of the young men experienced short-term and prolonged biopsychosocial reactions in response to the traumatic features of homicide grief (Smith & Patton, 2016), such as nightmares, shaking, or insomnia. Additionally, emotion processing was impacted by many factors, such as whether the participants expected the outcome. Many of the participants expressed shock when learning of their loved one's passing while others were not surprised if they regarded the victim as living a risky lifestyle. Lastly, meaning making was another instrumental factor in processing loss and helping the participants to maintain and move forward. Constructing meaning allowed the participants to make sense of loss or allow it to serve a purpose, in a way. For some participants, that meant moving forward with the understanding that their deceased oved one was in a better place. For other, it meant

honoring the deceased through their accomplishments. Many participants expressed learning from loss so that their loved one's death would not be in vain. Across the narratives of this sample of young Black men in Baltimore, three core processes related to the emotional toll of homicide emerged: 1. Naming and expressing emotion, 2. Processing and coping with emotion, and 3. Constructing meaning regarding the emotional toll of homicide.

Naming and Expressing Emotion in Response to Homicide Death

The young Black men in this sample named and expressed varied emotions in response to the homicide deaths of their friends and family members. Many of their initial reactions were shock or disbelief that later transformed into confusion and acceptance. At times, notions of masculinity influenced the young men to conceal their emotions, which limited their ability to express their grief. The most commonly named emotions were sadness, shock, and anger. Fewer participants experienced numbness, like Andre (18 years old), who disclosed he has not expressed his emotions since the age of his first traumatic loss at nine years old, and Charles (18 years old), who appeared numb due to his environmental context (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). Participants would express their emotions through tears, like Chris (18 years old) who cried after losing his 22 year old brother as a child.

> I cried when I found out. That's the only time I cried. Well, during that time cause I cried afterwards. But when I found out, that's when I cried and then after that, I didn't say anything to anybody. I flipped out. Didn't say anything to anybody for 2 weeks.

Chris cried in response to losing his brother and mourned the losses experiences of growing up without his older brother. Similar to Chris, Cassius (22 years old). Cassius communicated his emotions through tears. Cassius expressed crying on his own and regrouping with friends afterward as they lost someone they looked up to in their community.

Um like, all of us shed tears a little bit you know and yeah. (Yeah, yeah um with each

other or kind of on your own or both?) On our own. (Mhmm, yeah and then um, you

talked about it after, afterwards or not really?) We talked about it.

Cassius revealed although everyone in his friend group become emotional, they felt more

comfortable crying alone, which might be an indicator of their masculine socialization.

Masculine socialization also influenced Mekhi (21 years old). When asked if he grieved

the loss of his friend, Mekhi responded, "Yes. Yes, I did. {sharp exhale} (How did you grieve?)

Well, I was, I was, you know, little less masculine back then, you know, crying, but I mean, I

mean he was a good friend." Mekhi disclosed grieving the loss of his friend through crying,

while almost shaming himself in the process in describing his behavior as "less masculine".

As in intentional methodological strategy, the P.I. encouraged participants to explicitly

name emotions they experienced in response to homicide death (Smith, 2013). Some were able

to do this on their own, and others with the support of the feelings chart (Borgman, n.d), while

communicating their thoughts and behaviors during bereavement (See Figure 3). This was easier

for some participants than others as they were not necessarily used to this activity. Participants

expressed a broad range of emotions and some disclosed experiencing anxiety, depression,

paranoia, among other implications of experiencing a traumatic loss. Mekhi (21 years old)

mentioned,

But, I was, I was fearful, I was a lot of things. Then, then, I was, I was, like what is it

anxiety? Like I was paranoid a lot after the situation happened. Like, like cause I didn't

know right then the cause of why he died cause I know I used to be with him all the time

so would they call for me next or? It was a lot of feelings… Um, I would say at that

point, it would be, it would be, it was, it was, it was more so the frustration, anger, like

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because at that point I was like fed up, like when is enough, enough? Like, he's not, he's

not a bad young guy. Like what was the purpose of that?

Carl (20 years old) experienced a wave of emotions after losing his father at the age of 13 at the

hands of his step mother. While referencing the feelings chart, shown in Figure 3, he

remembered feeling an abundance of emotions. He says,

> [Yeah. If you had to, looking at this, pick like emotions you felt, at that time when you
>
> were 13 about your dad's death, which ones would you?] It's a lot on here. [Pick as many
>
> as you need] Guilty, sad, frightened, ashamed, depressed, lonely, shocked.

Carl explained experienced guilt for not spending as much time with his father when he was

alive. He felt lonely because he could no longer create new memories nor share milestones with

his father such as major holidays and pivotal events during his lifespan. Lastly, he felt ashamed

he did not have his father around anymore.

Some participants revealed difficulty in processing their emotions. Rashawn, a 21 year

old young man who lost five friends and family members to homicide shared his struggles to

emotionally process both the reality and emotional impact of the homicide deaths of his loved

ones.

> I still aint deal with it like to this day like that sh—it still eat me up in the inside, for real.
>
> It's gonna make me feel some type of way… But I still didn't deal with it. I'm still trying
>
> to accept the fact that they gone, but, I just can't

Similarly, Marshall (18 years old) expressed never fully dealing with his emotions resulting from

the loss of a friend from his group home. In assessing his emotional bandwidth, he decided he

did not have the capacity to deal with the emotional impact of loss due to unresolved personal

trauma from his past. Marshall also reveals deliberately trying to work towards not becoming an angry person. When asked why he's never dealt with the loss of his friend, Marshall reveals,

Cause I was still holding in just some other things, just my past, my whole past. I was like I can't really let that other situation really make me an angry person to where as though that's just my life…meet me, talk to me, I'm just always angry. And I still haven't let some things go from the past but I'm working on that so…Yeah, I can never forget him.

Although the memory of his friend will remain, it is difficult for him to juggle new pain with the previous hurts and losses that he's experienced

When asked about his emotions, Andre (18 years old) shared

I don't know. I wouldn't really know, I ain't got no feelings since like nine years ago (Since about nine years ago, huh?) Yeah but you think it was closer as far as I can remember. (Mhmm) Yeah. (Mhmm. So you were about nine when it happened?) Yeah.

Because Andre previously struggled with the natural death of his Godmother, who was more of a maternal figure, it made it difficult to process the loss of his father and consequent deaths that followed, such as the more recent homicide losses of two of his peers. His assertion of "it was closer as far as I can remember" when referring to a loss that occurred nine years prior points to his experience of prolonged grief. Some of the participants, like Rashawn, Marshall, and Andre, avoided addressing their pain to shield themselves from experiencing the compounding effect of additional pain resulting from previously unmanaged experiences of loss.

The emotional impact of traumatic loss is largely related to the closeness of one's relationship with the deceased. After experiencing four homicides, Tony (18 years old) explained that although he lost his uncle to homicide, the losses of his classmate, friend, and cousin had a

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stronger impact on him. "My uncle was less of an impact because I did not know much about my uncle. We never really engaged in too much conversation so. I didn't really any have too much feeling about it." Distant relationships affected individuals to a lesser degree because grievers may have less to mourn. In Tony's case, he shared more memories and experiences with his cousin and peers than his uncle, who he did not know much about. Thereby, the loss is felt to a great extent because he would "lose" more due to stronger bonds that were built prior to losing the deceased.

Like Tony, Chris (18 years old) experienced the loss of his friend more strongly than the loss of his family member. While referring to the experience of losing his older brother who died in a drive-by shooting when Chris was a baby, Chris shared:

> I mean, my brother, I love my brother, but I don't really know him. But Tavon, that hurt me a lot, for real. Like, I done—I seen people die and get shot but not, not my homeboys that I seen everyday. Like or like that I'm always used to being around or that I'm just close with. Just to know that he's gone like that. I just think like, man!

Chris experienced deep pain after witnessing the shooting death of his friend, Tavon, on the basketball court. Chris forged a stronger bond with his friend, Tavon, compared to his brother because his brother passed away when he was very young. The pain of losing Tavon was felt more strongly than losing his brother as he had not yet cultivated a relationship with him as he was an infant when his brother passed away and Chris witnessed Tavon's death on the basketball court. Chris has a unique experience in which family members informed him he was there when his brother was murdered, while others told him that he was not present. Chris, however, does not recall.

In Cassius' (22 years old) case, experiencing the loss of his God-brother proved to be difficult because of the closeness of their relationship. The dynamics of this close relationship made it difficult to process the loss. When asked to rate his loss, he stated it was a ten plus to illustrate the severity of the loss. " I was, I was mad, I was angry, I was sad and that's all that I could think about, you know, it hurt me real bad." The emotions associated with loss were so intense that they consumed his mind, as it was the only thing he could think about.

> Alright, um he was my god-brother and like we was real close and I looked up to him like brother, a little brother and we did everything together, just like how me and my big brother, and one night, he, he got killed and I didn't know and his mother told me and I thought she was talking about somebody else and I found out it was him and it hurt me real bad… I just couldn't believe it, you know, it took me a long time, it took me some years to get over it. Um, it was hard, I couldn't get it off my mind.

Cassius was on house arrest when his brother was killed, so he was unable to attend his funeral service. Instead, his God-brother's mother later brought him a funeral program as a memento to remember his God-brother.

When asked to describe his emotions, Redz (19 years old), narrates how he carried his best friend on his back, whom he considers a brother, in an attempt to get him to a safe location in time to call the ambulance. Redz recounts,

> I had to face his mother and tell her and tell her cause I was, I was with him when it happened. {deep inhale and then he speaks} I had to face his mother and tell his mother what happened, I drug his body about eight blocks to his mom's house on my back. He was still alive for about five of the blocks, but…I felt his heartbeat on my back the whole

time…and after…it started slowing down about five blocks into it…and I had to try to run with him on my back.

Redz was unsuccessful as his best friend passed away on the fifth block of carrying his friend. In his narration, Redz articulates rage, frustration, and anger as primary emotions that were evident.

It was a whole lot of rage and frustration and anger, cause I'm sitting there like, how you gonna shoot the dude and…it's just like, why—how you just gonna shoot my mans, like, like he was—you aint have to shoot him all them times! I mean like, you really didn't even have to shoot him, but…I can't explain it, I can't, I can't. I just can't… We was born in the same hospital and everything. We was—our birthdays is on the same day! The 29th of January. We the same age. That's that was my other half, for real. And you can't do nothing but be mad, for real, I guess

Anger, unsurprisingly, was present as he lost an intimate friend. However, beyond the anger Redz experienced despair and confusion after losing someone who he considered his "other half". He lists several dynamics of his best friend's life that mirrored his own life. After that experience, he expressed, "my whole life changed". This pivotal turning point indicates he was deeply impacted to the point of perceiving that nothing in his life remaining the same after that traumatic loss.

Like Redz, Samir (18 years old) experienced rage and anger after losing his father to gun violence at five years old. He expressed having lots of unanswered questions that led to feelings of anger and loneliness.

(lots of unanswered questions, mhmm, so you felt angry, you felt lonely, are there other things that you felt?) Um…. (No? No sadness?) I mean I did feel sad at first but then it just like stop like real quick like, the sadness just went away like the sadness became

rage, the rage became anger, and then it was just like I just started fighting all the time so

I just left that part alone and the sadness it was like over like the sadness just stopped as

soon as the rage started.

For Samir, his anger manifested physically as fighting and emotionally as anger. This was the case for some of the other participants. After losing his father, it was difficult for Samir to endure questions from peers or if they would bring up his father as the memories would resort to fighting. Similarly, Shawn (23 years old), resorted to fighting after experiencing others be disrespectful to his deceased great grandmother, Sheila, who was murdered by her boyfriend with a hammer.

I remembered one time, when I was in middle school, a guy he said, bleep your

grandmother, and It made me want to fight, I felt raged, I always felt that you could say

something about me, cool, but if you say something about my grandmother, you going

over the line because, that's my grandmother, you feel me, that's somebody I care about

deeply, I would never nobody to ever say anything about it because she's not even here

to even defend herself. My great grandmother always used to tell me, well he don't know

your grandmother, or he don't know you, so don't even get mad about it, but I always felt

that it's disrespect, and I've tried to learn, you know deal with my anger certain ways,

that's why I write poetry and play basketball, when I was mad or angry, I used to play

sports, to put all my energy into that, and that's something that I really love to do.

Something, that I always loved to do. Like I love bowling, I haven't gone bowling in a

while, but I enjoy it and I love it. [yea] I don't know like.

For participants, externalizing their emotions provided some relief from the pain of losing their loved one, even if it was only temporary. In Shawn's case, he understood that fighting was not

the best way to cope with his emotions, but he also regarded speaking ill of the deceased as the ultimate form of disrespect. After receiving advice from his great grandmother, he learned to rely on other means of managing his emotions, such as playing sports and writing poetry to release his emotions.

In addition to anger, some participants recalled experiencing grief-related depression and suicide ideation after loss, like Luther (20 years old).

I'm trying not to feel depressed. [Trying not to feel depressed?] I keep myself, I try to uh, I try to keep myself, yeah like hopeful, meaning like, I try to, I try to stay like {inaudible} up! I try not to be down. I keep telling myself there's something better. I know it is. So yeah. Yeah. I don't see it though... [What are some of the things you do? You said you're trying not to feel depressed] Yeah. Things that I don't to try not to feel depressed? [Yeah] Like, I try be around people. Like when you're by yourself your feelings is overwhelming when you're by yourself. So, I try, I try to be around people. I smoke. I talk most stuff. Cause he aint talk about a lot of stuff. He left a lot of people in the dark. So now, I'm learning like if anything, if anything of that nature were to happen to me I want people to know stuff. So I kinda, I'm trying to talk about what I do by myself now. But yeah, that's the stuff I really to do to try not to be depressed. Yeah.

Many of the participants, like Luther recognized hopefulness as a powerful tool to combat depression. Additionally, Luther was aware that his cousin, James, did not open up to others before he passed away, so that motivated him to "talk most stuff" out and rely on social support so he will be remembered. James' passing forced Luther to confront his thoughts and forge stronger connections so that he will be remembered when the time comes. Luther also understood that it is generally easier to magnify situations when one is alone in their thoughts.

Hence, he tries to surround himself with people when he experiences strong feelings, such as becoming overwhelmed.

Shaped by previous traumatic experiences, some participants, like Shawn (23 years old) disclosed experiencing some suicide ideation in cases when anger or guilt consumed them. Shawn disclosed this by stating,

> And you know I used to think, I used to have angry thoughts, like you know I used to you know, I used to you know have suicidal thoughts, thinking about wanting to harm myself and do things, like I mean, I never did anything, but I used to think, like, I used to think I shouldn't live, I shouldn't do this, I shouldn't do that, and I was like, I really felt that way. I mean I was in a bad place in my life I was like, I didn't care what nobody said, I didn't care what nobody thought about me, I was all angry, I didn't want to talk to nobody about anything

After his grandmother, who raised him since infancy, was murdered by her boyfriend and he struggled to properly process her loss, he later states, "I wished God would of took me instead of my grandmother."

Feelings of injustice would also be present when perpetrators were not identified or when participants felt like law enforcement officials did not put in enough effort to find their loved one's murderer. Some participants experienced a desire for revenge usually after experiencing the loss of their close friends or family members. Mekhi (21 years old) wrestled with his desire to retaliate after witnessing the shooting of his close friend, Keon, and the perpetrator faced no consequences afterwards. He stated, "I mean nothing was done. Broad daylight, in front of a store camera. To this day, he's still walking around a free, a free man." While understandably

disappointed, Mekhi was well aware of the repercussions of taking matters into his own hands, so he chose to stay focused on bettering himself. He explains these sentiments by stating,

> when my friend [Keon] had passed, that's why I said it's hard trying to maintain in both because my friend just got killed and I want to do something and all, but, I still gotta stay focused and I know where I wanna be, I don't wanna be in jail cause I can't retaliate by nobody getting killed. So, it's, it's just hard trying to be both but ultimately you gotta gotta choose one. And either you end up like those people or you end up better than those people.

Like Mekhi, Luther (20 years old) felt overlooked by the police because the police did not do enough. Luther describes learning more information about the incident than the police, but choosing not to retaliate to keep himself out of harm's way.

> Like the police, like, I done found out more than what they found out. {he waves his arm} [Is that frustration in the wave of your arm or what is it?] Umm, like most people would try to avenge it, avenge his death. Like, it's crazy because what I know, I still don't want to do nothing about. [mmmhmm] It wasn't right for them to take my cousin [mmmhmm] {he makes the sound like, I don't know} that, it's just crazy. Like I could go and do that to yo, I could do the same thing to him. But I don't feel that.

In cases when the perpetrators were identified and sentenced, some participants felt it was not proportionate to the amount of pain that resulted from losing a loved one, such as Carl (20 years old) who lost his father at the hands of hist stepmother and Dennis who lost his cousin to a known man in the street. Carl expressed that her minute sentencing was not proportionate to taking the life of his father.

She went to jail but it wasn't for a long period of time. It was only for like a year and some months. Had to do probation and anger management and all that but if you take somebody life you should be doing life-long, you know.

Dennis (24 years old) also felt disappointed in the criminal justice system after his cousin's murderer faced no ramifications for taking another's life.

Uh, definitely sad, definitely angry but I was frustrated. Um, I was frustrated at um, at how at how you could that to somebody who's, who's not, who hasn't done a thing to you. (Mhmm) And I was frustrated at how, at our, at our justice system as how y'all can let some guy walk from shooting my cousin and now because of, because of your indecisiveness or the justice system's technicality or whatever loopholes or gray areas that y'all had, to allow this man to walk the street, now he's the reason why a, why a young girl is growing up without a father.

Dennis revealed that he felt frustrated with the legal system while managing his feelings of sadness and anger. While the perpetrator was caught, Dennis was frustrated that all he received as "a slap on the wrist" after causing insurmountable pain to family members and friends.

In addition to feeling like perpetrators were not sentenced to enough time, some participants struggled to forgive the perpetrator as they were robbed of experiencing pivotal moments with their loved ones. It was difficult to forgive as participants mourned lost experiences along with the person. Some participants felt relieved or vindicated when their suspect was captured while others received peace from informal enforcements from the streets. Shawn (23 years old) experienced difficulty forgiving his grandmother's murderer.

I mean, you took somebody that care about and love so much, Like I know you support people you love and you know forgive and forget, but that's something that I just can't be

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able t forgive personally because, you can't bring that person back. I mean you can forgive somebody if you they was trying to wash the dishes or didn't clean them, you can always go back and do them, but you can't bring my grandmother back, if you could then maybe I could forgive them, but you can't never bring my grandmother back. You can't ever cash {inaudible} bring her back to life. I mean there's life after death and I know she's in a better place, but I wasn't ready for her to leave at that moment. I mean, I was 11 years old, I only lived, 11 years, and I mean there's a lot of things that I wanted her to see that I've done, that I can't visually look in her eyes and see that she's happy for me. And I mean, like, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and holidays, they not as special for me as they used to be. Cus I mean, it's like, I never, you know experience, and have conversations with her like how you do when you get older, and that's always something, it made me angry cus it's like the guy who did it is supposed to be up for parole or something.

At times, as men, participants were encouraged to "get over it" when dealing with homicide losses and discouraged from crying by others. When asked if he communicated his emotions with his parents, J.R. (23 years old) reported he could not process the loss of his younger brother with his parents because he was told he "just gotta get over it." Because of this, J.R. managed his emotions on his own. He states, "I just dealt with it in my own little way".

Carl, (20 years old) was encouraged to release his emotions by his mother. She gave her son permission to express his emotions beyond anger while affirming his masculinity. When asked if he cried after his father was murdered, Carl responds,

A whole lot. A whole lot. I went through two boxes of tissues in a whole week.{Sigh}

My mother like 'boy you going at it again?' I say 'yea, is it a problem?' She said 'nope,

you got to let it out.' So that's what I did, I let it out.

Dennis (24 years old), demonstrated that there is strength in weakness when he

challenged notions of toxic masculinity in which men are expected to be strong at all times,

regardless of the circumstances. Dennis managed his emotions by remaining emotionally

connected to his loved ones through his expressed care for them and hopefulness in seeing them

again. Dennis states:

There's just a feeling of comfort in knowing that, that knowing that, that I still care for

them, that I still, you know, believe that I will see them sometime again. And, and a lot of

men believe that you know in being a man, you can't show these emotions, you can't,

you know, cry you have to suck it up and be strong, you got to be tough. But sometimes,

you know, and you know, sometimes you got to have somebody to lean on and not all not

in every situation, you're meant to be strong. There's some, there's some instances where

breaking down is a good option because it helps you build back up and it help and it helps

you heal. When you continuously hold onto something like that, with you know, not you

know, not venting or not, not taking it how it's supposed to be, that can, that can be hurt,

that can be greatly hurtful 'cause that's something that you never let go. 'Cause like if I

could, I wasn't as the person I am shaped now, if I was still holding on right now I would

be a completely different person in front of you right now

Dennis recognized that healing after homicide loss can be messy as it might involve

"breaking down" sometimes. Ultimately, he believes you are "built back up". He also credits

becoming a better person to his ability to release his emotions through venting.

Like Dennis, BJ (21 years old) recognized certain expectations of how young men should cope with loss. When asked his thoughts on unwritten rules of grief coping for young men, BJ responded:

> I think um, all men, like young men and stuff we should all react accordingly to how your emotions are, but now me being older, I know, um even if it's a death, it might grip me very hard, I try to still, be cool, because I don't want to add more grief to anybody else whose around even though we're all grieving. It's just I try to be as strong as I can. You know, hang in there. Like, you know, like I said, if I, I, lose like a close family member, like my grandma or something, like, yes it will grip me, but I probably won't be so mopy for so long, even though they'll always stick in the back of my mind, and always felt like that day is that day.

Despite recognizing these unspoken expectations, BJ might suppress his emotions by remaining strong to avoid becoming an additional stressor to his family during an especially challenging time. He was less concerned about honoring emotional expectations more about easing his family's pain; which was his way of ascribing to another masculine script of familial responsibility. BJ illustrates this by saying,

> As far as I'm concerned, when I was growing up, you'd express yourself the way you want to, and don't change for nobody, but just like how I can't really speak for everyone else, but the, the common misconceptions I like to call it is that African Americans, especially males, we, you know, we can grieve, but we can't be overly emotional like the females, how they would say it, but I don't see it like that. Um, But again, me being older and mature, I know I can shed some tears

BJ extended his previous narrative by discussing his perception of culturally specific masculine expectations. He speaks on cultural expectations while introducing his personal experience of coping with his emotions.

Masculine influences were not always explicitly expressed, however they were evident in some of the participant's rationale for avoiding their emotions. In certain cases, they used the homicide losses to mobilize them. Masculine socialization were helpful in encouraging action, such as participants stepping up as the head of the household after losing a father or mentoring their peers. However, masculinity prevented emotion expression in an attempt to continue with daily activities to be present for family. Rashawn (21 years old) mentioned seeing his friend Cannon's grandfather drive Cannon's car after Cannon died in a shooting elicited emotions. He expressed this by saying " I aint gonna lie, I wanted to cry. Knowing that's his car, for real, he's not in here or not no where around, for real. Like it was getting to me but I had to man up about it." He later describes the cumulative impact of losing both Stanley and Cannon at 15 years old.

> Yeah, it broke me down. It definitely broke me down. [In what ways?] Every ways. I aint know what to do, how to think, none of that, so…I ain't have nobody to go to for leadership, guidance, none of that. [It created an empty space.] Yeah. But like after, I got over it, I still haven't accepted the fact that they gone…aint nothing, ain't nothing I can do to bring them back…but they still here with me though.

Rashawn mentions losing Stanley and Cannon in the same year "broke" him down. At the time of his interview, seven years had passed, indicating he has gone seven years without accepting the reality of their losses.

Processing and Coping with the Emotional Toll of Homicide Death

Participants in this study processed and coped with the emotional toll of homicide death through various means. The findings suggest processing emotions was both an individual and collective process among participants. Some participants would retreat or withdraw from friends and family to process their emotions alone, while others would look to social support after losing members of their social circle (e.g., peers). While coping rituals, such as funerals, are important events to solidify loss, some participants revealed evading such events as it would be too difficult for them.

Participants reported funerals and candlelight vigils as the most common coping ritual. Funerals provided an essential environment for young men to confront the reality of the losses of loved ones to homicide (Worden & Winokuer, 2011). For many, it also marked a formal beginning of their personal processing of the emotional impact of the loss. Many discussed the funeral as a pivotal moment in which it started to "sink in" that their loved one was no longer physically present. Mekhi (21 years old) describes his experience attending a funeral below.

> At the funeral, when I saw him laying in the casket, it sunk in there, and I believe that a lot of people that, that it didn't sink in for, at the funeral it was real then when you see him laying there, it was real, we knew he wasn't coming back. Like he was young but he was loved. A lot of people loved him.

Similar to Mekhi, Andrew (22 years old) discloses his experience of attending "a big funeral" for his cousin, Evan. Along with the funeral, Andrew discussed the emotions that were present during the funeral as funerals can trigger many different emotions.

> Were there any kind of memorials or things like that, that happened for Evan?] Yeah we had a big funeral. [A big funeral] A big funeral. The church was packed. People had to

stand up on the wall. All the seats were filled. The front door from outside, it had people

just listen to the Pastor preach from outside. It was packed. His friends from school came,

teachers, everyone came

While people from all over attended the funeral to collectively pay their respects, Andrew

described it as uniquely difficult compared to the other guests since he had a close bond with

Evan and he would never see Evan again. Although he was depressed, he was comforted by the

notion of his friend being in a better place.

Candlelight vigils typically occurred after the death and before the funeral service of a

loved one. It serves as a means of acknowledging the loss and provide a space for cathartic

release prior to the funeral. Many of the young men disclosed attending the candlelight vigils in

place of the funeral. Coping rituals, such as candlelight vigils, often fostered a commemorative

grieving environment, except for a few cases in which there was a sense of injustice that might

present tension for friends and family in attendance. These moments were generally the

exception, rather than the norm. For the most part, there was often a celebratory undertone as

individuals memorialized the life of their slain loved one, that would often provide a safe coping

space to release grief related emotions. Chris (18 years old) shared that attending a candlelight

vigil did in fact make him feel better. Chris expressed how the event allowed him to congregate

with individuals and experience collective coping while conveying their love for the deceased.

You said there was a candlelight for him?] It was a candlelight the next day. [At the

basketball courts. Did you participate in that? What was that like?] It…it made me feel

better cause a lot of people getting together that loved him and like cared about him, for

real, and celebrating that even though he gone, he still got love. All these out here,

everybody came here to celebrate you, for real {taps for emphasis}. Telling you that we

miss you, for real, we gonna miss you, basically. [Yeah, yeah. Each candlelight is a little different. How was his in terms of what happened and…] Well his mother talked and people talked and cried and got pumped and cried some more and…[What do you mean about got pumped?] We'll talk about stuff that happened and stuff like that. I dunno, people get excited and stuff. Then a thought come again like dang, he gone! Making me cry again. Making me want to be down again.

Making customized clothing and getting tattoos were additional coping rituals that helped participants to cope while maintaining connections with their loved ones. Celebration of life events before or after funerals to honor the deceased were also common. It is usually a joyous occasion with food, friends, and family to supplement the usually somber funeral. After the funeral, some families may hold annual memorial celebrations to remember their loved one. For, J.R. (23 years old), his mother, and father, that one article of clothing became a source of strength each year during the anniversary of his deceased brother's death. He explains by stating, "Like, I wear my brother's shirt and my mother and my father. [Like a shirt that used to be his or a shirt with picture?] Like a shirt with our picture on it, together." As was the case for Marshall (18 years old) "every time I look at the shirt we got made for him and stuff it just brings back memories."

Some of the participants' grief and coping experiences were shaped by feelings of injustice and feelings of vindication. Feelings of injustice arose in instances that involved law enforcement, which was the case for Antoine (18 years old) who experienced the loss of his close friend who was killed by the police. Antoine describes the day he found out about his friend, Ace's, shooting as indescribable.

[Ace] was one of the closest out of all of them to me, for real. And the way how he went, it just really took me off the edge 'cause, the way how he died, it was around ten o'clock for real, it was over here, like he was walking, walk on Monument and the knockers they seen him and I don't know the reason for why they was hopping on him but they hopped out and they shot him in his head, yeah, and they try to say that he shot himself in the back of his head. How can you shoot yourself in the back of your head while you running? (Mhmm) Like what sense does that make, but the law, I hate the law, I hate police. (Yeah) I do, with a passion. (Mhmm) I can't stand them. They supposed to be for the good but they, they destroy more than they protect.

Out of all the losses that he experienced, Ace's death was the most difficult for him to process because it involved police officers (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019) and he suspected they were not forthcoming with the details of the incident. Antoine commemorated Ace's death by naming his child's middle name after Ace.

Participants remained connected to their deceased loved one by several means. Some remembered them through music, while others honored them by living a life that would make the deceased proud. One participant, Shawn (23 years old), disclosed eating his grandmother's favorite food to remain connected to her. Overall, the participants maintained connections through fond memories. Meaning, although their loved one is not physically present on earth, they will always be near in their hearts through their previously shared experiences.

Social Support

Support from families, peers, and fictive kin was a commonly communicated asset that provided global assistance and emotion processing during bereavement. The participants described receiving multiple means of social support as an instrument to process and cope with

homicide related loss. Funerals were crucial meeting points of connection and reconnection for some participants to offer and receive social support. Some of the participants recalled receiving social support that explicitly discussed grief as a process of masculinity to validate many of the young men's emotional experiences. Carl describes how his peers were a valuable source of validation while navigating life after his father was murdered.

> I guess they was basically saying you not losing your manhood because your going through so much and you just don't want to be bothered or you just don't want to be around certain people, you, you just want to be by yourself, you just want to go through that moment, just for that moment and then you get yourself together so.

Even as adolescents, Carl's friends recognized the stigma associated with atypical deaths, such as homicide loss, and allowed Carl the space to cope with the loss of his father, however he saw fit. Even if that meant spending less time with his friends.

Some participants reported turning to fathers and other male figures in the community as anchors of social support during bereavement. Marshall (18 years old) credits his father for helping him to progress after losing his friend, Bobby. Despite not being physically present due to incarceration, Marshall's father provided distal social support.

> I had wrote a letter to my father, umm…letting him know everything that was going on and he sent me a letter back saying if I was out of jail right now, you would not be doing all this stuff you're doing, you feel me. He, he put it to me as blunt as possible. He was like, "get your life together. You don't want to end up like me. Do what you got to do. Get school over with so you can move onto the next stuff." He was telling me like I needed to act how I would act if he was like basically right in front of my face, just the whole time, if he was just right there pushing me to do what I had to do. Just was like

nobody else can do it for you, you gotta do it for yourself. You gotta strive, you gotta

have your own drive. I mean everybody can push you but, in the end, it's still your

decision to do what you gotta do

Marshall's letters from his father provided motivation to get his life back on track after losing his

friend to a shooting. Similarly, Samir's little sister's father provided masculine social support

after he lost his father. When asked about familial support, Samir remembered his sister's father

as being a source of support.

As far as my little sister father, I ain't want to hear nothing he had to say like, he kept

thinking like, he kept saying stuff like telling me to do stuff like he was my father and he

was telling me that he wasn't my father, my father dead. Stop trying to be him. 'Cause

when he was here you wasn't telling me what nothing to do. But at the same time he did

help me get over it like even when I was at the Sheppard Pratt group home and all that

like, I was still able to call him and ask him about anything. (Mhmm, mhmm. Where

there other ways that he helped you get over or move forward?) I mean, no he was just

like there when nobody else was. And like when my mother didn't have no way to come

up Sheppard's Pratt to see me on my visiting days, even though he was at work, he had

the truck but he was at work here like stopped wherever he was at, like when I called his

phone, like can he bring her up there, bring them up there.

Samir reluctantly received support from his sister's father as he perceived his assistance as an

attempt to take his father's place. His sister's father remained readily available when it seemed

like everyone else was absent in Samir's life after he was removed from his home and placed in

an inpatient mental health facility after his father died. To illustrate this, samir uses phrases such

as he could "ask him about anything" and "he stopped wherever he was at". His sister's father continued to prioritize Samir's needs as Samir grieved.

Social support manifested differently for participants. For some, simply extending one's condolences and offering words of encouragement would suffice. When asked what his family and friends did to help him to move forward after losing his cousin James to gun violence, Luther (20 years old) responds, "psssht…I mean, you know just telling me "he's in a better place" like "he's in a better place" "I'm sorry" and stuff like that." Luther's family offered comforting words to Luther as he grieved the loss of "little James" two months before James' 21st birthday. "I felt hollow," Luther said as he described his feelings after James' death.

Other participants relied on their support system for deeper support through their presence and conversations as individuals reflected during their grieving process. For Mekhi, (21 years old) talking through his emotions allowed him to deal with the loss of his friend V.A. Mekhi witnessed V.A. get shot in the early morning on his way to the store and he remained speechless from the initial incident to the police washing the blood away from his lifeless body. Mekhi reported feeling "tingly" or perhaps anxious and shaking uncontrollably after witnessing the ordeal and speaking to those that knew him regarding the incident.

> But that, that was a way of dealing with it for me because if I didn't have those people to talk to, I don't know, I probably don't know what I would have did. (Mhmm, mhmm. So you talked with a lot of people on the block about it?) Mhmm… (And what happened and about him?) Mhmm. 'Cause he was a well loved figure in the community. (Mhmm) You know, so young.

Mekhi expresses gratitude for those in his community who were willing to talk with him after witness a traumatic incident for an extended period of time. Becaused V.A. was a "well loved"

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member in his neighborhood, word traveled quickly and many of Mekhi's neighbors were aware of V.A.'s passing.

Similar to Mekhi's neighbors, Redz's (19 years old) basketball coach created room for him to vent and express his emotions. When asked if he spoke to anyone about his emotions, Redz disclosed,

Talked to my basketball coach about it and he really understood me too. He really did. Cause, I used have, I used have a little bit of uh, uh, kinda like suicidal like, I-I-I had, the simple fact of the matter I was like, it-it aint even worth it being here right now no more, for real. And then I thought to myself and shit for real I was like, nah, fuck it, I'd rather just go talk to somebody, I wanna go talk to my coach and he brought me back down to earth…so…yeah. [So your coach, you were able to talk to your coach about it?] Mhmm. Yeah, I can talk to my coach about anything, for real yo. He's a cool dude. He was as a, he was a father figure in my life, for real, for a loooong time. Still in my life til today. He call me son and everything.

Redz's coach was present beyond the game as Redz revealed feeling understood by his basketball coach. His coach was a safe space for Redz to disclose his emotions and suicide ideation after losing his cousin, affectionately known as Bird House. He communicated that his coach kept him grounded during that painful period and remains a significant figure in Redz's life.

Generativity, a construct of masculinity, allowed the men to glean from other men and motivated many of the young men to mentor other young men after losing their peers to gun violence. For example, Mekhi (21 years old) recalled knocking on his friend, Ricky's, door every day to ensure he attended his GED classes. Witnessing his friend, V.A.'s shooting motivated him

to "do something different" by helping Ricky to avoid a similar outcome as V.A. Kenneth (18 years old) mentions how the loss of his peers motivated him to become more "connected with the family"

> Um, how would you describe how you felt then, and, as the days went on?] … Say how I feel? [mm-hmm] As days went on? [In that moment when she was telling you, and then as – yeah, as it sunk in.] {inhales} Sad a little bit– [mm-hmm] –kind of. Cause it make me want to go talk to my other cousins, and cousins on my father's side, and all that stuff.
>
> It just make me want to get more connected- [mm] -with the family that I don't know.

Although the participants are usually on the receiving end of social support, generativity also allowed the participants to provide social support for their loved ones. The participants offered social support to the deceased's family as a means of maintaining connection with their loved one and to periodically check in on the grieving. Duane (22 years old) recalls regularly visiting his friend's baby mother and child after his friend, Shine, was killed. Although he was unable to physically visit family like Duane, Cassius (22 years old) recalls extending his condolences to his friend's family after being upset he missed the funeral. He says, "but I called his family and told them that um, that I um send my love out to them and you know."

Similarly, Raphael (22 years old) immediately went to his friend's mother's home when he found out that his friend passed away.

> When I arrived, his younger brother was sitting on the step with his head in his lap and I could hear him crying but he was like trying to keep it quiet that he was crying. I went to try to console him and him being him he pushed me off. "I'm alright!" like, walked off. Went in the house, everybody like, except for his father and stuff, they was holding up

but his mother and his sisters and stuff they was very, very hurt like crying and stuff and that's all you really heard like it was just a big crying party like everybody just hurt. Raphael mentioned that his friend was more like a brother and knew that his friend's family would be hurting after experiencing such a close loss. He decided to visit them to provide social support. In some cases, just being physically present is enough to communicate with the bereaved that you are with them during this intense period of grief.

Matt (18) reveals more detailed social support by going to the hospital when he learned his cousin was shot and remaining present for his family during the consecutive days after.

Then I went to the hospital (Mhmm. Was he already gone when you got to the hospital?) Mhmm. (Who all was there at the hospital?) Everybody, like all—I can't remember, that's how many people it was. (Mostly family or friends too?) Family and friends. (Mhmm. Did you go there by yourself? Who did you go with?) My friends. (Your friends? Yeah. What's that car ride like, with your friends to the hospital? What was that car ride like?) It was bad. (Bad how?) Everybody was just sitting. (Was your best friend with you? Yeah) Mhmm. (Mhmm. Did he know your cousin too?) Yeah. (Mhmm. So you all drove to the hospital together? And then like everybody was there? And what was going on?) They wouldn't let us know 'cause we was outside, they let us know afterwards. And then when they came downstairs, that's when they was telling us. (Mhmm and is they the doctors or is they…Who is they?) My aunts and my cousins. They was saying that he died. Did you stay at the hospital, what did you guys do?) We went to my aunt's house and was there for rest of the day.

Matt learned that his cousin succumbed to his gun injuries while in the hospital waiting room with other friends and family. Transitioned to aunt's house and remained there for the rest of the day and returned days after.

In addition to familial and peer support, spiritual support from clergy provided a sounding board for some participants to completely express the full range of their emotions without shame or judgment in most cases. Smith Lee et al. (2020) accounted of religious and spiritual coping as both a coping resource and strategy in the context of chronic vulnerability to violent injury and death. A snapshot of these processes are noted here. Carl (20 years old) recalled receiving support from family, but feeling more comfort from pastoral support.

> Just support it comes like my mom, grandmother, brothers, uncles, and aunts from both sides, pastor, my pastor was the first but people really, really I got more comfort and support from the spiritual side because all I did was pray, pray, pray, pray, pray he sat down and talked to me. They sat down and said just release yourself, just vent, just talk, you know they didn't cut me off and I just really said some stuff, stuff I said was probably out of order but they still letting me say some stuff, to get the stuff off my, my, my, my heart so I can be more open and more, more uhh more. I mean the stuff that I said was very out of order because it was a lot of stuff that I was going through so they just let me say it, I mean I know it was disrespectful but you know as they said it they say the stuff that you said you know you was going through something, and that's how you was feeling at the time so really I got both support from both spiritual side and my mothers side and my fathers side so it was really a relief.

Carl described how his pastor allowed him to express the unfiltered version of his emotions. He also mentioned that clergy was more effective for him because he grew closer to his spirituality as prayer was his main coping mechanism.

Like Carl, DeOnte (18 years old) turned God after experiencing a traumatic loss. When asked whole does he look to for emotional support when in need, DeOnte revealed,

> Umm….I just turn to God because that…somehow He aint never gonna let me down so he's the only one…So I can't turn to them. I mean I can turn to them for support and love…but ultimately, I can't. (Have you always been that way or has that changed over time?) Yeah…ever since I was 8 I always turned to Him for emotional support. Ever since I just turn to God instead of my mom or my sisters…and ever since my cousins have been gone, I really can because I don't know when my sisters or my mom are gonna be gone so I just turn to God and just put it all in His hands and just hope for the better.

DeOnte remained grounded and grew in his faith after experiencing three homicide deaths, all of which were his peers. Deonte held on to his faith and regarded God as a consistent figure in his life who will not leave like others who have tragically died from his social circle.
Similarly, Dennis (24 years old) revealed he was distraught after losing his cousin and friend. However, he credits his ability to move forward to "the guy upstairs".

> my uh, belief is steady and knowing so and that again the guy upstairs is up there to help heal 'cause it's um, it's like not really feeling, not really feeling as much pain but I can still remember them in memory, and our family does.

Dennis' faith helped to ease the pain of losing his cousin, Davon and his friend, Tyrone within a year of each other.

When asked what helped him to deal with his emotions, Shawn (23 years old) revealed that attending a spiritual retreat and sharing his grandmother's murder provided a safe space to release some of the emotional burden of experiencing traumatic loss.

I remember one time I went to a retreat, that's when I still used to go to church, I told them a story about my grandmother, and they was like, I think that's the hardest thing that I've talked about in my life, because I was talking and it was like, they heard me talking about and they could see a sense of what happened, like when I started talking about the feeling of it, it was like, it took me to a place, and they seen how difficult it was, and it was like, it was like a moment after that, like I spoke, and walked to the bathroom, but I you know, I don't like nobody seeing me crying. So I left and went there, and sitting in the bathroom, and there was this one guy, he wear like a tank top, he real buff and all that, and I don't think I locked the door or anything so I just sitting on the floor and I was crying, and was crying my heart brains, I was crying and crying, and then, heard the door open, and I'm looking through my tears, I'm just looking through them, and I see him, and I'm trying to wipe my tears off and he was like no, and he give me a tissue and it was like, it was kind of weird because it was like, I don't know, for me, it was like I don't want to another man to see my crying. Because I feel weak at that moment but I didn't really care because he cared for me in that moment. People gave me hugs and all that because I think they sensed it they could sense me talking because I was pausing and all that, like I couldn't really keep my composure but I kept enough to get to the bathroom and I was just crying in the bathroom.

Shawn disclosed the difficulty in sharing the details of his grandmother's homicide as it was his first experience. Shawn mentions speaking on his grandmother's death "took him to a place",

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meaning he relived that moment of intense pain. In that place of pain, a stranger went to console him in the restroom to reassure him that he is not alone.

Many participants, like Rashawn, experienced a disruption in their social circles after homicide loss Rashawn's life shifted after Stanley and Cannon were killed in a shooting. While Cannon was his peer, Stanley was an older male role model and consistent presence for Rashawn. Rashawn struggled to pick up the pieces after they died.

Emotion Concealment

While social support is a crucial aspect of collective coping, some participants withdrew from others to deal with their emotions on their own. Participants employed a host of coping mechanisms to manage their emotions, including emotion concealment. Like Reggie, some of the young men coped with their emotions through emotion concealment, which is a form of emotion suppression that goes beyond just avoiding their emotions. It is intentional avoidance in which individuals steer clear from physical locations, people, and things that reminded them of their deceased loved one (Sharpe, 2015). Emotion concealment has been found to have both positive and negative outcomes.

Ramel (22) recognized an annual pattern of breaking down between July and August, since losing his uncle eight years prior. Ramel describes the experience of losing his uncle at 14 as indescribable. "That was my father too and way more…He was my person that I could always tell whatever to, no matter what." he states.

(So you said around this time every year you kind of stay to yourself?) I breakdown. It just, I'd rather just be alone and think about stuff like even when I even when people around I'm still by myself. I block everything out, I block my surroundings out and everything like. It give me more time to think. But the more time I got to think, the worst

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things seemed. (What all do you think about?) If he was still here, how much weight

would be on my shoulders. When I need somebody to talk to I know he would be there to

talk to and actually listen and not be that person that just lets the words bounce off of

them and see what they got to say but actually listen. It's like now, I don't have nobody

to actually listen.

Ramel would rather be alone during the anniversary of his uncle's death to reflect on all that has transpired. As the eldest male in the family, he strives to fulfill his uncle's shoes after his passing.

I'm the oldest, the first nephew, first grandchild, first child, first great grandchild, I look

at myself like, I got to be the role model. I got to be the support, I got to be him. I got to

be that backbone Sometimes it become too much. Like now, it's too much. I got too

much going on right now. Like I want to be able to say no but it's like I can't 'cause I

think about every aspect of the situation.

Ramel later describes the burden of his responsibilities as weighty.

For some, emotion concealment would consist of avoiding certain rituals, such as

funerals, to bypass painful emotions or to maintain positive memories of their loved ones as

vibrant and active, rather than lying in a casket. Tony shares, "I didn't go to the funeral but I

went to the candlelight 'cause I didn't want to see him like that." Rather than attending his

friend's funeral, Tony chose to attend a celebration of life event to maintain fond

memories. Rashawn shared similar sentiments of it being too difficult to attend funerals when he

said , "I don't go to funerals. I can't stand there and look at somebody I'm close to laying in the

casket. It's gonna make me feel some type of way. But I still didn't deal with it. I'm still trying

to accept the fact that they gone, but, I just can't." For Rashawn (21 years old), attending the

funeral would be especially painful and it would force him to accept the reality of his loved one's passing.

One participant, Isaiah (19 years old), coped by moving out of the city or their neighborhoods to avoid negative memories associated with loss. Isaiah states "I ran away. I didn't, I didn't want to keep working at the same school. I didn't want to be in Baltimore City. So, I went down to Virginia." The pain of losing a student was unbearable for Isaiah, so he deserted his profession as a technology teacher and the state soon after experiencing the loss of one of his students who was also his mentee. Unlike many participants, Isaiah had the unique advantage of having economic capital to move provided by a willing mentor and another job which gave Isaiah some fiscal flexibility to explore other opportunities.

Some participants, such as Dennis (24 years old) revealed concealing their emotions to avoid burdening their loved ones and support system. He states, "I didn't really, I didn't really push that out towards anybody. Not even my own family." Dennis experienced two close losses of his cousins, but decided it would be best to deal with his emotions on his own.

For Raphael (22 years old) and many of the participants, their children were major sources of motivation to conceal their emotions or avoid discussing their loss. Families and children made participants more inclined to become focused on their familial needs. Although Raphael experienced four homicide relates losses, he describes how he learned to "brush it off" below,

> (Yeah and it sounds like you learned to um, you've used the words brush it off a couple of times, how did you learn to do that? How do you brush it off?) I just don't think about it. I think about me. What I want. I don't, pay attention to what revolve on going back to that day or anything I just move on. I got a little girl so I just look at her and see me and

that's all I see. So I don't worry about what I've been through and everything 'cause I

don't want her going through that so. I don't worry about it. My mind goes blank, it

doesn't actually go blank but when it goes to thinking about that, I don't discuss it or talk

about it. If I talk about it, that's when I see the picture but other than that, I don't see it.

It's the past.

Raphael, and some of the other participants, have learned to bury their memories of homicide-

related loss. In doing so, they are able to "move on" to care for their children and surviving loved

ones. Like Raphael, many participants disclosed not wanting their children to experience the pain

of homicide-related loss, like they did, so they avoided discussions on the topic at all costs.

For other participants, they concealed their emotions to brace themselves for future loss if

they believed it was a frequent occurrence. The participants disclosed that they were emotionally

impacted by the loss of their loved one, but some might bottle up those emotions as it is

emotionally taxing to continuously display emotions, such as sadness. For Charles (18 years old),

he has accepted that dying is a part of life, so he braces himself for future losses. He states,

Like if any member of my family get shot, or die, like I'll feel sad but, I won't show it. I

won't cry or nothing. Like I just figure that it's a part of life. Peoples die left and right so

ain't no point of me getting down about it if somebody else can turn around and die the

next day.

It is difficult for some participants to experience cycles of the same emotions as it is emotionally

taxing to repeatedly experience homicide deaths (Smith, 2015), which makes this experience

difficult for many of the participants and influences them to cope through emotion concealment.

Similar to emotion concealment, keeping to oneself is a helpful strategy for those in high

stress environments to survive. While often considered maladaptive, many of the participants

credited having a small circle as a common means to feeling safe and staying out of harm's way

after experiencing homicide loss. Many of the participants, like Matt (18 years old) learned that

"when you let more people into your circle that's when a lot of things start to happen" As a

consequence of traumatic loss, some participants distanced themselves from others to physically

and emotionally protect themselves. Antoine (18 years old) experienced a shift where he shut

down emotionally. He voices, "after people started passing, I just started seeing a difference in

people. Like stuff I didn't see before." Similar to the other participants, Antoine was motivated

to distance himself after experiencing multiple losses. He follows up his previous statement by

revealing "I distanced myself from a lot of people. People I used to be around twenty-four seven

like people I used to hang around. I distanced myself from a lot of them, all of them basically."

Many of the participants distanced themselves from others after experiencing a traumatic loss,

like Reggie disclosed after losing his two friends, Kev and Jamal, to a shooting right in front of

his steps. Kev and Jamal were visiting Reggie and as Reggie ran downstairs to let them in, he

heard gun fire. "Now, I-I-I cut every body off after that happened. I cut my girl off, that

destroyed that relationship," Reggie states. Reggie distanced himself from others after losing two

close friends on the other side of his front door, on the same day.

Tony (18 years old) shares those same sentiments with his assertion that homicide loss

resulted in his hesitancy to maintain and create close relationships after experiencing five

homicide losses, of which four were his peers.

It really changed because sometimes it makes me not want to get closer to many people

no more. 'Cause a lot of people now—I have times I don't trust people. I have trust

issues. I'm always thinking they are going to try to do something sometimes. 'Cause he

was somebody that I was close to, and it just seems like every time I get close to

somebody, something happens.

For Tony, distancing himself served as a viable option to avoid hurt and pain while validating his

desire for social support after losing five loved ones to homicide.

Andre (18 years old) describes balancing his desire to be around family and his need to

withdraw as an intricate dance in which he prefers to be alone, while honoring his need for

family; especially when seeking advice. Andre conveys his desires by stating:

I can't explain it (Mhmm) It just made me feel like I don't want to be around people, I

just wanted to be by myself. (Okay, alright and how do you maintain that desire to just

kind of be to yourself but still keep in touch with like your family back home and other

people around?) I don't know Um, it's my family for real. It's my family, I like being

around my family for advice. I try to see it like that but it just, I just keep to myself, right.

Losing loved ones has influenced Andre to distance himself from others. However, Andre

recognized he enjoys being around his family while maintaining his own company.

Social support was welcomed from others who could relate to the participant's grief and

offer suggestions to process their emotions. As was the case for Chris (18 years old) and Ricky

(20 years old). Chris witnesses his friend, Tavon, get shot while playing basketball, but never

shared the shooting with his baby mother until the day of his funeral.

[What was the next day like?] I woke up, first thing that came into my head was what

happened. [Like seeing it?] Nah, just that yo gone. Just shook my head and pushed

through the day. That's it. [Was there anybody else in your life that you shared it with?]

My homeboys. We talked about it. Talked to his brothers. Yeah, but not as far as my

family or my baby mother. I don't like that. I told her but I aint tell her like the story. I

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aint tell no body the story, for real, except the people that was there and I aint have to tell

them the story they were there so they knew the story.

Chris was more comfortable receiving social support from individuals who were also at the

basketball court and witnessed the shooting. After Chris ran over to Tavon, he states "Once I got

right there, I just broke down. Couldn't help it but break down." Chris preferred to discuss the

shooting with those who were present to avoid reliving what happened by sharing the story.

Ricky's (20 years old) friend, Rico (11 years old) died when Ricky was 12 years old.

When asked if he ever disclosed his emotions regarding Rico's death to anyone, Ricky

responded,

Naahh. This one thing. I, I can let you know this one thing right now, like. All my life, I,

I don't talk to nobody. I don't talk to nobody, I don't, I don't say nothin' to nobody, like.

I just let it go through my head and stuff like that, like. I probably talk to my brother or

like my mans or one of my closest mans at the time if he know what I'm going through.

If he going through the same thing

Interestingly, Ricky disclosed refraining from opening up to others while also revealing that he

preferred to share his losses with those who have experienced a similar loss.

Coping Through Drinking and Drug Use

Some of the participants coped with their emotions by turning to drugs and alcohol use.

Reggie (22 years old) explains how after receiving the news of his friend's murder " I just, I had

to go to my cousin house, I had to do something, I couldn't be sober. I went to my cousin house,

we drank and all that." The loss of Reggie's friend was especially difficult because Reggie

witnessed his friend get shot earlier that day as he was visiting Reggie. Reggie suspected that his

friend would not survive because of the amount of times he was shot, however receiving

confirmation of his passing meant the end of the small token of hope that he held on to. It was difficult to accept, so he concealed his emotions by leaving his home and turning to drugs and alcohol use during the immediate aftermath of losing his friend/homeboy.

Other participants managed prolonged grief through drinking, like Marshall (18 years old) who honored his friend Bobby by drinking his favorite beer and writing. Through writing "Rest in Peace" everywhere, Marshall and his housemates made Bobby's death more visible to others and maintained a connection with him by allowing his name to live on.

> when it happened, we did a lot of drinking and like when we found out it happened and the day of the funeral really…grabbed his favorite beer, he always liked Budweiser and stuff like that so yeah we was drinking that and like I said, me and a couple of other people that lived in my house, we was just writing! Everywhere we went. Permanent marker so that nobody could erase it. Just Rest In Peace. It was hard…[So drinking and then writing.

Not only did Marshall and his housemates want to honor Bobby's namesake, but they wanted the memories and his spirit to live on so that "nobody could erase it". In Marshall's case, drinking served a two-fold purpose in not only allowing him to mourn his friend's death using drinking as a coping ritual, but it also served as a grief ritual known as libation. Libation occurs when individuals honor the deceased by pouring a drink on the ground as tribute to "pour one out for the homies".

For Tony, drug use and drinking alcohol helped him cope with the pain of five homicide losses. He makes the distinction that there is the presence of pain; however, he masks the pain with drugs and alcohol.

It blocks pain, I hold it in. (Mhmm, yeah, so it blocks it but you hold it in? Mhmm. Um,

so it's not pain doesn't exist, but you hold it?) Yeah, I do, sometimes I do stuff to deal

with it. (Mhmm) Stuff that I don't supposed to do. (Like what?) Drugs, drinking alcohol,

just, that's just how I cope sometimes.

There weren't many formal coping resources identified specifically intended to help

Black young men cope with the emotional toll of homicide-related loss. Instead, some

participants mentioned counselors at the job readiness center where they were recruited for the

interviews and other programs that helped managed similar trauma, like Narcotics Anonymous at

a local organization nearby. while others discussed hypothetical scenarios of where to go when

in need of grief resources. However, there were community resources that provided a haven for

participants to experience academic, professional, and emotional growth. For J.R. (23 years old),

the local professional development center helped him to move forward after losing his brother to

"Now I'm the only one left…but I'm dealing with it in my own little way though…That's why I

come to the Center, just like trying to stay out of trouble." Similarly, when asked where those in

need of grief support could go for help, Mekhi (21 years old) Honestly, me knowing now I

would say a mental health clinician but honestly, most people would say nowhere because they

don't know where to go."

Constructing Meaning Regarding the Emotional Toll of Homicide Death

Many participants reported they experienced an awakening or shift in their previous

conceptions of the world. Participants often revealed experiencing a shift in perspective or

reorientation with the world at large in which there is a change in their previous manner of

thinking and interacting with their community after loss. BJ (21 years old) expressed how

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homicide loss has provided a shift in perspective regarding dealing with loss and developing respect for those who have experienced loss.

It's a growing up experience for a lot of them…so it was um, definitely, made me become more like mature minded in terms of just how to deal with that subject of, um loss. And, and, grieving {scoffs} gave me a better understanding like sometimes people that pass away I might not understand the situation at all, I might not know who that person was, but you still have to have a, um, found respect for people who lose a loved one. Because they probably impacted that person so much that when you see a friend of yours sad that they lost a family member, you, you know the one thing you can do is kind of just like console them or something, just say, you know kind of give them encouraging words.

Similarly, many coped with their emotions by believing their loved one is in a better place or learning from the loss of a loved one, like Isaiah (19 years old).

I used it as motivation so it wouldn't go in vain [mmm-hmm] so that's how I used it, you know, that's the only thing I could do, I couldn't re-animate Monet. So I used it to, you know, benefit myself—which may sound selfish but it's the only thing I could do

Similar to Isaiah, J.R. (23 years old) did not allow his brother's death to be in vain. J.R. discloses that he used his brother's death to "keep on doing good" after witnessing his brother get shot in front of him as they sat on their porch.

But now, I just keep my little brother's picture like, in my room where I can see him. So, like in the morning, I might just look at him like, just keep it moving…at least I know he's okay now. Now I'm on the right path and I know that's what he would have wanted.

So that's why I'm trying to keep on doing good. I know that he's still on my side so…everywhere I go he's there with me.

J.R. reported that keeping the picture near his bedside kept him focused to attain his goals, as that is what his brother communicated with him the day he was gunned down. Although his brother has passed away, J.R. remains connected to his brother by believing that he is with him, which allowed him to refrain from fighting, which was his main coping mechanism soon after losing his brother. He's able to fill some of the void of absence by maintaining his brother's presence at all times. He states, "everywhere I go he's there with me."

Additionally, some of the participants revealed a desire to grown old to witness the expansion of subsequent generations and an aspiration to die of natural causes as emergent themes Many participants reflected on their proximity in age to many of the homicide victims as it highlighted the fragility of life. They commented on the possibility of being in the same position as their deceased peers. Lastly, hopefulness as a form of resilience and positive coping mechanism also emerged from the interviews. For many participants, they were motivated by their hope for the future to keep going after traumatic loss.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The current bereavement discourse acknowledges homicide as a traumatic loss, but largely overlooks the nuanced emotional experience of loss for young Black men. Informed by several frameworks (Elder's life course theory, Sharpe's Model of Coping for African American Survivors of Homicide Victims, and Worden and Winokuer's Task-Based Approach for Counseling the Bereaved), this thesis sought to explore how young Black men cope with their emotions in response to homicide-related loss in a high-risk environment. The researcher relied on qualitative methodology to learn, explore, and extract the participants' experiences to capture and transfer important aspects of their lived experiences of emotional expression, coping behaviors, and meaning-making after experiencing traumatic loss while considering the influence of masculinity. All insights were synthesized into three main themes: emotion expression, emotion coping and processing, and constructing meaning. The participants displayed various expressions in response to homicide loss across the life course from their youth, adolescence, and emerging adulthood. Namely, sadness, fear, and anger were a few of the commonly expressed emotions. The participants sought diverse means of coping and processing through social supports, spiritual coping and allowing their pain to serve as catalysts in their growth. Lastly, the participants employed meaning-making to make sense of life and continue living after loss.

This cohort of 40 young Black men ranging from 18-24 years old expressed their emotions differently depending on who they were engaging with. The emotional impacts of homicide loss largely depended on the individual's closeness to the deceased. Participants reported dealing with their emotions for varying timespans. Some participants immediately addressed their emotions, while others mentioned they had yet to confront feelings of grief and

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loss at the time of their interviews. Many participants revealed crying alone and in the presence

of others. Participants were generally more willing to fully express their emotions if they

regarded the person as a safe space. Redz's basketball coach became his safe space when he

needed a sounding board to vent after losing his cousin. The participant interactions, such as

Redz's exchange with his coach and Carl's disclosure with his pastor, in which both individuals

were allowed to communicate raw emotions, submits considerations for what is defined as a safe

space for young Black men and how should we cultivate these spaces that encourage more

emotional expression?

Participants found multiple means of sustaining their emotional wellbeing to simply

maintain and "live to see another day". Adaptive coping strategies, such as withdrawal or

avoidance, were largely related to the environmental context, rather than grief itself. For many of

the young men, they had unique stressors related to their environment that made it difficult to

process their emotions (Gaylord-Harden et al, 2018). Hence, some of the participants recalled

unresolved emotions due to their previously undealt with traumatic experiences. It is difficult to

express emotions of grief while simultaneously bracing oneself in anticipation for future loss in

an environment when violence is the normative occurrence.

The findings aligned with the literature in indicating mixed findings regarding spiritual

coping and social support (Bottomley et al., 2017; Burke et al., 2010; ; Englebrecht et al., 2016;

Sharpe, 2015; Stroebe & Schut, 2015). Generally, we understand social support to be positive,

but there can also be negative interactions within social networks if the person receiving support

feels pressured to behave in the same manner that they once were prior to experiencing a

traumatic loss. In that same vein, religion and spirituality is typically a positive asset in African

American communities, however, it was not a uniformly positive coping mechanism for all

participants. This implies that bereaved individuals need safe spaces to experience the full range of their emotions where they are not forced to think or feel one way on an emotional spectrum, both in that moment as well as in the future. Hence, we need a multi-pronged intervention that reaches the various contexts in which victims of homicide loss exist—including family, extended family, fictive kin, community, religious family—and help those spaces become places of healing.

Cultivating a sense of safety and security is necessary for participants to fully experience their emotions (Stevenson, 1998). Although many participants reported sentiments of anger, Stevenson (1998) in his work with adolescents' emotional adjustments in an urban context connected the presence of anger to fear. This was especially the case when participants felt threatened or unsafe. Participants reported internalizing their emotions while others displayed their emotions externally through fighting at times. Those who reported externalizing their emotions resorted to fighting for relief from the pain of losing a loved one. Participants, like Shawn and Samir recognized that fighting was not a sustainable coping mechanism which influenced their decision to stop fighting after adolescence.

It is important to note that the participants did not respond uniformly in the ways they emotionally experienced and coped with the pain of homicide bereavement. Those that reported internalizing their emotions by not openly sharing with others would in fact express their emotions if they felt comfortable around someone after judging they are safe and if they believed that the individual would not invalidate their emotions and grief experiences. This was the case for those who desired to be alone while maintaining connections with friends and family (e.g., Rashawn). This would appear as a contradiction, but participants managed competing desires by

finding balance for themselves. For Rashawn, that balance meant initially processing his emotions alone and later seeking friends and family to get their perspectives.

Generativity has served as a critical foundation in many African American families for centuries (Hunter & Davis, 1992; Hunter & Davis, 1994). The generativity aspect of masculinity was beneficial for many of the participants who chose to take care of others while navigating their own grief. The participants reported serving as social support by consoling their families and families of their deceased peers as an extension of their own coping. The participant's narratives of caretaking during homicide loss largely mirrored those of many researchers. Most notably, Terry Martin and Kenneth Doka illuminates the gendered nature of grief and how gendered adaptation can situate men to more instrumental in their grief (Martin & Doka, 2000).

Some participants suppressed their grief to be present for their families and peers. Compartmentalizing their emotions appears to be helpful after participants assessed their emotional bandwidth and considered their masculine roles in their homes and in their communities. Many of the participants employed emotion concealment as their main technique to avoid dwelling on the homicide loss. Some participants reported avoiding funerals and vigils, as a function of emotion concealment., which Worden and Winokeur's (2011) second task described as a critical means of acknowledging pain related to loss. Similarly, Doka (2017) denoted funerals as a meaningful custom for mourners to grieve at various levels through symbolic rituals. The researchers detail this stage as a necessary step to accept the reality of death (Worden & Winokeur, 2011). Most strikingly, many of the participants who mentioned they had not fully accepted the loss of their loved ones, like Reggie and Rashawn, were also those who regarded funeral attendance as a difficult undertaking. For example, Rashawn disclosed he does not attend funerals as they are too difficult. However, Rashawn also maintains

that he's struggled to accept the losses of his friends. Perhaps, this supports the necessity of coping rituals as a viable means to emotional acceptance of loss and the many implications of not doing so, such as complicated and prolonged grief. These findings were largely consistent with the evidenced grief literature (Burke et al., 2010; Doka, 2017; Sharpe, 2015).

Comparably, many of the young men concealed their emotions in an attempt to be present for their families and at times, to avoid emotions, such as anger, to continue their day-to-day functions. Some participants, like Marshall, talked about actively working towards not becoming an angry person. Marshall offers counternarratives to the preconceived notion that Black males are consistently angry or hostile. It is worth noting that although emotions, such as anger, are generally discouraged, it is usually a useful indicator of deeper sentiments that participants may not yet be aware of. Antoine held his emotions in to avoid becoming angry. While anger might be considered an unpleasant emotion, anger is a useful index signaling Antoine to lean in and further investigate his emotions. Antoine expressed avoiding thoughts of the incident to keep anger at bay.

Many of the participants reported they were not aware of community resources specifically for homicide-related bereavement coping of young Black men. However, they recognized there were clinicians available in the job-readiness center where all interviews were conducted. Based on our findings, there is a great need for formal resources to facilitate sustainable bereavement efforts for young Black men to experience short-term and long-term support while exploring healthy coping mechanisms for dealing with homicide loss. Thereby, exposure to traumatic loss appears to be a collective experience, while perceptions of traumatic loss are largely personal. Since the experience of traumatic loss is filtered through perception, it

is necessary to employ integrated efforts from multiple systems and domains (Communities, schools, homes, peers, local and federal government).

As difficult as it is to lose a loved one, an added layer of complexity is introduced when the loss is violent, unexpected, and traumatic. African Americans are generally expected to survive under an umbrella of historical, familial, and relational resilience. While possible, this should not be the expectation as it can lead to further emotional trauma. Findings from this study demonstrate the need for variable resources for young Black men during grief, an especially vulnerable period for many. Equally important, young Black men deserve a safe space where they feel seen, heard, and understood during frequencies of joys, pains, and everything in between. The findings suggest emotions are not *just* emotions (Frijda, 1986). They have far-reaching consequences as they can potentially impact one's thoughts and behaviors, which can result in a cascading effect impacting their families, communities, and other relationships. Emotions are especially useful in facilitating adaptive coping responses related to one's contextual influences.

Limitations

Although this study offers valuable contributions to the literature regarding the emotional experience of homicide loss for young Black males, there are limitations in drawing conclusions from this study as all participants were recruited from the same local cohort and were of similar socioeconomic statuses. Additionally, the interviews were self-reported and relied on retrospective memories of loss and grief. It would be helpful to have multiple informants to incorporate different perspectives instead of solely relying on individual recollections. While there is rich information from the participants themselves, it would be beneficial to gain insight from family members and friends who were present during the traumatic loss and the years after.

Future Directions

The findings encourage culturally appropriate mental health support and interventions explicitly targeting African American bereaved families and individuals. Perhaps, more African Americans would be more inclined to seek professional help if more professionals were informed on cultural variability within African American culture and viewed from a strengths-based perspective. To be most effective, such interventions and approaches must be meaning to the target population (Anderson, 2019). The findings also underscore the importance of individualized social support, as individuals have varying needs.

Future researchers should assess the role of individualized social support in facilitating healing in historically excluded populations. In considering individuals who are healing through emotional coping, researchers should explore what beneficial social support looks like and how it is different from generalized support for not just the individuals, but families and communities involved as they are differentially impacted by loss. In considering the distinctive impacts of loss, future researchers should assess the usefulness or value of anger as a healthy response to grief and distinguish when it may become potentially dangerous, especially in high risk contexts as emotions are valuable.

Additionally, the issues discussed in this thesis far surpass community violence. I would argue that the high-risk community dynamics point to a greater issue of poverty since participants were located in an economically disadvantaged area. Many urban areas in America are also poverty-stricken communities. Many of the participants made the most of their physical and emotional assets provided by their community and broader environment. Hence, community violence is related to structural issues of poverty. Issues such as poverty should not be regarded as an individual problem. Rather, it is necessary to address these larger, structural issues to

promote resilience for those in high risk contexts (Anderson, 2019). Addressing social issues such as job loss and systemic racism could potentially serve as a proper start for mitigating homicide-related loss and community gun violence. I recognize this is no easy feat and demands dynamic systems involvement, such as the deployment of multiple sectors and agencies.

Knowledge of grief and coping are typically passed down from previous generations and may have differential impacts on individuals. This encourages the need for more research assessing transgenerational and intergenerational trauma through longitudinal and mixed-methods studies that assess different forms of trauma, vicarious trauma, and the transmission of such traumas. African American socialization typically relies on several modes from different relationships including families, peers, and fictive kin. Because each relationship dynamic is different, differing forms of support is central in the wake of trauma and can potentially communicate different messages of coping and processing during grief.

The majority of the homicide losses were of the participant's peers. This suggests there is a need for adolescent emotion socialization specifically addressing traumatic experiences. Many of the participants operated with the knowledge that they were previously taught or internalized. Perhaps, researchers and practitioners can use this information to equip marginalized youth with a trauma-informed toolkit that is useful in differing contexts. Overall, the findings highlight the need to explore cultural and gender specific socializations of grief and bereavement across cultures as they may differ across gender and cultures amongst individuals, families, and communities.

Conclusion

Grief is an unpredictable path that is an extension of one's connection to the deceased (Doka, 2017). Grief is further convoluted when the complexities of death occur during an

unexpected timeframe that is not normative when considering the global lifespan, but yet, an expected outcome within their particular environment for the participants. Findings from this study demonstrate some of the complexities involved in emotion expression and coping behaviors after traumatic loss for young Black men. Mainly, contextual factors such as closeness of relationships and gendered socialization can influence one's coping behaviors and emotion expressivity in response to traumatic loss. The impact of homicide can be different for every individual. However, it is understood that the effects of homicide are comprehensive across the board. Coping is different from person to person, even within the same community, age, race, and gender. When we look at the results, they are not mere statistics. They are people. They are real lives that are taken prematurely and leave behind a host of loved ones to make sense of the aftermath. Additional considerations to context should also be given, especially in cases when individuals witnessed the life of their loved one taken away in an instant. We should make room for the bereaved to grieve even if their grief does not ascribe to the social and cultural expectations that we are used to considering our definitions of normative cause of death or normative timing.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INDEX

Figure A2. Participant Index

Participant Pseudonym (N = 40)	Age (18 – 24)	Total Deaths (267)	Total Homicide Deaths (119)	Total Peer Homicide Deaths (105)	Age at First Homicide Death
Carl	20	10	2	1	13
Nasia	19	2	2	2	17
Andre	18	7	4	4	12
Andrew	22	6	3	3	20
Jesse	20	5	0	0	0
Luther	20	10	3	2	17
Gavin	21	5	3	3	17
Santana	20	5	3	3	11
Ramel	22	9	3	1	14
Antwon	18	6	4	4	18
John Doe	22	20	2	2	13
Howard	23	4	3	3	15
Celly	18	4	2	2	12
Shawn	23	3	2	1	11
J.R.	23	3	2	1	17
Reggie	22	4	2	2	22
Dennis	24	6	2	2	19
Ricky	20	16	10	8	12
Wayne	19	12	6	5	6
Mekhi	21	7	3	3	16
Jaysen	21	0	0	0	n/a
Rashawn	21	6	5	5	14
DeOnte	18	5	3	3	5
Samir	21	6	1	1	12
Marshall	18	1	1	1	18
Raphael	22	7	4	4	16
Matt	19	3	2	2	20
Redz	19	3	2	2	16
Adam	19	5	2	2	19
Tony	18	24	5	4	11
Myles	21	5	3	3	11
B.J.	21	11	1	0	18
Isaiah	19	2	2	2	15
Kenneth	18	8	5	5	18
Chris	18	5	2	2	4
Niko	18	6	4	4	15
Cassius	22	5	5	5	18
Jahad	22	10	5	4	14
Charles	18	2	0	0	0
Duane	22	9	6	4	10

Figure B3. Feelings Chart