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African American Sibling Survivors of Homicide Victims: A Phenomenological Study

Terra Natia Brown
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Terra Natia Brown

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Review Committee

Dr. David Milen, Committee Chairperson,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Clarence Williamson, Committee Member,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Tamara Mouras, University Reviewer,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

African American Sibling Survivors of Homicide Victims:

A Phenomenological Study

by

Terra Natia Brown

MA, Lamar University, 2015

BS, Lamar University, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Criminal Justice

Walden University

August 2020

Abstract

African American bereavement experiences are underrepresented in the literature in comparison to Caucasian experiences. Due to cultural differences, the available literature may be misleading and unhelpful to African Americans dealing with grief. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to fill the void in the literature regarding African American bereavement. Guided by attachment theory and social constructivism as the theoretical frameworks, this study explored the lived bereavement and grief experiences of 12 African American siblings bereaved by homicide. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to gain firsthand knowledge of the siblings' bereavement experiences via semi-structured interviews, which allowed the participants to emerge from being the *forgotten mourner* and added survivor voice to the literature. The information obtained was manually transcribed and analyzed to identify themes to highlight the siblings' bereavement experiences. The findings identified commonalities in the siblings' experiences with coping, support, and the post homicide interactions. Implications for positive social change include the potential for the development of new approaches to the treatment of bereaved siblings. Recommendations include continuing the research on African American sibling survivors, as well as suggestions for mental health professionals, religious entities, law enforcement, lawmakers, family, and friends to aide in the support of sibling survivors.

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to the memory of all victims of senseless homicide and the survivors forced to put the pieces of their lives back together. I especially want to dedicate this project to the 12 brave siblings who trusted me enough to tell their stories.

I also want to dedicate this project to my grandparents, Gentry and Mary Richardson, Sr. and Archie Lee Wilson, Sr.—you are missed beyond words.

Finally, to the inspiration behind this project; this project is dedicated to my brother, Jermaine Anthony Malone, who was taken from the world prematurely in 2015.

Acknowledgments

First, I give all honor to God for the strength to complete this project. I am thankful to be able to turn my pain into purpose, but hate the circumstances behind the motivation.

To my parents, thank you for always believing in me and standing by my decisions. You have always been my biggest cheerleaders and I am so blessed to have you.

To my committee—Dr. Milen, Dr. Williamson, and Dr. Mouras—I thank you for your feedback to ensure this project exceeded even my own expectations.

To my coach and soror, Dr. Dawn Sherman, I thank you for going back and forth with me to ensure my vision came to life. I am truly thankful for your guidance and support throughout this process. You are truly the epitome of the Sigma woman our founders envisioned! Thank you for pushing me to the “finish line.”

To my husband, my soulmate, my friend—I thank you for the countless nights you motivated me to achieve my goals, for the nights you wiped my tears, and for the nights you reminded me that I am capable of anything. Thank you for always reminding me that it is okay to take a break and that everything is going to be okay as long as we have each other. As we get ready to welcome our child into this world, I cannot imagine having anyone else by my side. Thank you for everything you are and continue to be. I love you, Mr. Brown!

Finally, to my brother—if I had known this experience would be the motivation behind doing good in the world, I probably would have reconsidered it. Your death has

not been in vain. There is so much I wish I could say to you and there are so many things that I wish you were here to see, but I am so glad that you are at peace and no harm can ever come to you again! I miss you, Jermaine, and I hope you are proud of me. Please continue to watch over us and be the angel we know you to be.

Forever in our hearts.

J.A.M.

August 15, 1977 – February 22, 2015

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Death is one life's most stressful events (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Paris, Carter, Day, & Armsworth, 2009). "Death ends a life; it does not end the relationship" (Bank & Kahn, 1982, p. 271). Death is an unfortunate part of life that can affect an individual at any age. For some, death is immediate, and other times can be slow and painful. Death does not always wait for a person to graduate from college, get married, have children, or allow the family to say their goodbyes. Death leaves behind family, friends, and coworkers to mourn the loss, and since there is no predetermined way to grieve, the bereavement experience will vary (Clements, DeRanieri, Vigil, & Benasutti, 2004; Drescher & Foy, 2010).

Bereavement is the experience of losing a loved one by death, and grief is the emotional response to death is a universal human experience, and survivor reactions will vary by individual (Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Shear, 2015a; Worden, 2009). Grief has no time limit and often comes in waves, spasms, and sudden anxieties (Didion, 2006). The loss of a loved one can result in broken hearts, uncertainty, and loneliness, even if strong support is available (Stroebe, Schut, & Fenkenauer, 2001). Grief reactions can include staying in bed, closing the blinds, or repetitiously playing a sad song or they can be as intense as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideations (Stroebe, Schut, Stroebe, 2007). Most bereaved individuals grieve successfully, and will likely return to normal daily functions, and accept the finality of death (Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001; Hall et al., 2014; Neimeyer, Burke, Mackay, & van Dyke-Stringer, 2010).

Approximately 10-20% of bereaved individuals will not grieve in the manner society would consider normal and may suffer from lingering grief reactions known as complicated grief (Cruz et al., 2007; Hardt, Jobe-Shields, & Williams, 2018; Lundorff, Holmgren, Zachariae, Farver-Vestergaard, & O'Connor, 2017). Complicated grief can be triggered when the cause of death is unnatural such as homicide, suicide, accident, or the untimely death of a child (Neimeyer et al., 2010). A bereaved person's grief response may not always be the acceptable societal reaction, and society may expect the bereaved to move on rather quickly, usually within a few weeks of the loss (Costa, Hall, & Stewart, 2007; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013).

Bereavement research has predominantly focused on bereaved parents, children, spouses (Halliwell & Franken, 2016). On the other hand, sibling bereavement research has been neglected in the literature (Bolton et al., 2016; Crehan, 2004; Fletcher, Mailick, Song, & Wolf, 2013; Horsley & Patterson, 2006). The insufficient attention focused on bereaved siblings can contribute to complications in their bereavement process by clouding their ability to make sense of their loss (Halliwell & Franken, 2016). Parents, educators, or clinicians usually narrate the available sibling bereavement literature, and there is a lack of research from the sibling survivors' perspective (Fletcher et al., 2013; Lohan & Murphy, 2002). Research addressing unnatural sibling death from violent death such as suicide or homicide is scarce and is needed to understand the bereavement process (Lohan & Murphy, 2002; Pretorius, Halstead-Cleak, & Morgan, 2010). Additionally, the majority of the available research focuses on the bereavement experience of children and adolescents, and not adult siblings bereavement responses

(Cohen & Katz, 2015; Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Osterweis, Solomon, & Green, 1984; Rostila, Saarela, & Kawachi, 2012; Wright, 2016).

Studies on how different cultural groups express their grief are underrepresented in the literature. African American bereavement experiences have been neglected in the literature comparison to Caucasian bereavement responses (Burke, Neimeyer, McDevitt-Murphy, 2010; Eisenbruch, 1984; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; McDevitt-Murphy, Neimeyer, Burke, Williams, & Lawson, 2012; Rosenblatt, 1988; Schoulte, 2011; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011). Most bereavement research intends to define grief in a general sense; however, the available literature may be misleading and unhelpful to African Americans based on the cultural differences between African Americans and Caucasians, and it is essential to understand relevant cultural beliefs and practices (Burke et al., 2010; Dowdney, 2005; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008). Lastly, research that highlights how African American homicide survivors cope with their loss is scarce (Sharpe, 2008; Sharpe, Joe, & Taylor, 2013; Sharpe, Osteen, Jacobson-Frey, & Michalopoulos, 2014).

Death is an undeniably painful experience felt by many, and it would be insensitive to place homicide on a higher pedestal than any other cause of death; however, the nature of murder intensifies grief reactions (Pretorius et al., 2010). Murder has been described as a savage and purposeful attack unwillingly forced upon a victim and defined as the ultimate violation inflicted on to another person (Miller, 2009). Unlike forms of anticipated death such as old age or illness, murder robs the family of any opportunity to prepare for the loss, as well as the chance to say goodbye (Miller, 2009). Murder rates all over the country have painfully left many to grieve their loved ones, and

homicide victims leave behind at least seven to ten survivors to mourn (Redmond, 1989; Sharpe, 2015).

Homicide can intensify grief reactions because the nature of murder is intentional, illegal, and abnormal in comparison to other violent deaths (Michalowski, 1976).

Survivors of murder victims not only suffer the tragic and sudden loss but they also struggle with the anger and confusion of the homicide as well as the support or lack of (Asaro, 2001a; Burke et al., 2010). Adverse psychological outcomes and trauma are increased following the murder, which can complicate and intensify the bereavement process (McDevitt-Murphy et al., 2012; Sharpe, 2015). Homicide survivors are likely to suffer from heightened grief reactions such as complicated grief, anger, vulnerability, avoidance, disenfranchised grief, and fear (Asaro, 2001a; Holland, Neimeyer, Boelen, & Prigerson, 2009; Miller, 2009; Piazza-Bonni, Neimeyer, Burke, McDevitt-Murphy, & Young, 2015; Pretorius et al., 2010; Redmond, 1989).

This study explored the lived bereavement and grief experiences of 12 African American sibling homicide survivors using a qualitative phenomenological to focus on their first-hand bereavement experiences. The terms murder and homicide are used interchangeably throughout this study, and African American sibling homicide survivor bereavement experiences is the primary focus. Furthermore, the literature that directly highlights how African American homicide survivors are affected by this tragedy is limited, and the effects sibling homicide on the surviving siblings warrant attention; this validates why it was essential to conduct a study on African American sibling homicide survivors to gain insight into how the bereaved adapt to their trauma (see Burke et al.,

2010; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; McDevitt-Murphy et al., 2012; Sharpe, 2008; Sharpe et al., 2014; Sharpe, 2015; Vigil & Clements, 2003). Additionally, the use of an African American sample bereaved by homicide was necessary as that population is likely to be bereaved by homicide (see Sharpe & Boyas, 2011).

A study that addresses the bereavement experience from the survivors' perspective can provide for greater understanding into how the death has directly affected the survivor. This research not only allowed the sibling survivor to provide information, but it also enabled them to reflect on their bereavement experience and to emerge from being the forgotten mourner (Cohen & Katz, 2015; Halliwell & Franken, 2016).

Background of the Study

The United States reported 2,744,248 deaths in 2016, suggesting a death rate of 849.3 per 100,000 residents (Xu, Murphy, Kochanek, Bastian, & Arias, 2018). Over two million Caucasians passed away in comparison to the 326,810 African Americans. The 2016 death rate was 31,618 more deaths than the previous year (Xu et al., 2018). Death rates in 2016 increased for individuals between the ages of 15-24 and 25-35, and the rate of death for males was 1.4 times the rate for female death in comparison to 2015 (Xu et al., 2018). Additionally, there were 19,362 African American homicides in 2016 (Xu et al., 2018).

An estimated 24 million Americans will experience the death of a sibling before the age of 25 (Fletcher et al., 2013). Although bereavement similarities are visible in forms of death, research suggests sibling bereavement is distinctive (Packman, Horsley, Davies, & Kramer, 2006; Pretorius et al., 2010; Robinson & Mahon, 1997). Siblings lose

their playmate, friend, and role model and this loss will symbolize the end of the longest and most intimate relationship (Cohen & Katz, 2015; Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Robinson & Mahon, 1997). Bereaved siblings face unique challenges, and bereavement-related coping strategies may be particularly challenging for the survivor (McKay & Tighe, 2013).

Sibling grief is linked to severe mental and physical outcomes; yet is the least researched of all family bereavement (Funk, Jenkins, Schafer-Astroth, Braswell, & Kerber, 2018). Several studies have focused on parental loss, and although a parent has lost their child, a sibling has also been lost yet the sibling survivors' grief is often overshadowed by their parents' grief leaving the bereaved sibling to grieve alone because their parents are emotionally unavailable (Asaro & Clements, 2005; Dowdney 2005, 2008; McIntosh & Wroblewski, 1988). Sibling loss has been referred to as a double loss because of the loss of a sibling and parental support simultaneously (Devita-Raeburn, 2004; Hardt et al., 2018).

Sibling death can also cause the surviving sibling to renegotiate their role in the family whether that may include their relationships with the parents, family members, or other living siblings (Bank & Kahn, 1982; White, 2006). The deceased sibling may have been the protector, provider, or the peacekeeper, and this can cause challenges if the surviving sibling is learning to take on new roles that could potentially include being the only living child (Asaro & Clements, 2005). Notably, adult bereaved siblings may delay their mourning and become the parental protector or the protector of the deceased spouse or children (White, 2006). Taking on this role can potentially result in difficulties such as

pessimism, over-reacting, and over-protecting future relationships with their offspring or other family members (Pretorius et al., 2010; White, 2006).

African Americans have a higher probability of undergoing the premature loss of a family member, and ten times more likely to experience death by homicide than Caucasians, therefore, research is needed on their adaptation to the death (Burke et al., 2010; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Papachristos & Wildeman, 2014; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011; Sharpe et al., 2014). The exact number of sibling survivors or survivors in general following these murders are unknown as that data is not recorded (Freeman, Shaffer, & Smith, 1996; Sharpe et al., 2013).

Complicated grief reactions are more prominent in African Americans in comparison to Caucasians (Burke et al., 2010; Goldsmith, Morrison, Vanderwerker, & Prigerson, 2008; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008). One reason for this is because they spend less time speaking to others about their grief experiences whether personally or professionally (Kochanek, Murphy, Anderson, & Scott, 2004; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008). Despite the psychological benefit, African Americans prefer reliance on family and friends, and resist professional mental health services such as counseling following the loss due to cultural suspicion and distrust of institutionalized treatment; partly because of the historical traumatic experiences faced by African Americans such as slavery, unequal housing, education, and the absence of available supports in their environments (Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; McDevitt-Murphy et al., 2012; Rosenblatt & Wallace, 2005; Schoulte, 2011).

The research relating to African American homicide survivors is scarce (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015; Sharpe et al., 2013; Sharpe, 2015), and an insight into how African American sibling homicide survivors managed to cope with the murder would be beneficial to the research. The information obtained from this study can be of benefit to individuals, law enforcement, families, churches, educators, mental health professionals contributing to the overall goal of positive social change by allowing for new approaches to the treatment of bereaved siblings.

Problem Statement

Sibling death may cause the survivor to experience a profound sense of personal loss that may increase when the passing is abrupt or unexpected, such as the murder of a sibling (Devita-Raeburn, 2004; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013). Despite the bereavement research available, the bereavement experiences of sibling survivors have received minimal scholarly attention (Bolton et al., 2016; Fletcher et al., 2013; Paris et al., 2009). Siblings have been cited as the forgotten mourner, considering research has previously focused on bereaved parents, spouses, or children (Baliko & Tuck, 2008; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011; Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Osterweis et al., 1984).

African American bereavement experiences have also been neglected in the literature resulting in limited African American sibling bereavement literature specifically in reference to homicide (Burke, et al., 2010; Burke, Neimeyer, McDevitt-Murphy, Ippolito, & Roberts, 2011; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011; Sharpe et al., 2014; Sharpe, 2015). Violent deaths such as homicide can result in long term grief reactions, and additional studies on sibling bereavement following violent deaths can assist in

understanding how the changes in the grief processes may occur over time (Lohan & Murphy, 2002). This problem negatively impacts the availability of resources and support interventions for African American bereaved siblings.

In order to address this problem, it was necessary to conduct an in-depth study that explored the first-hand lived bereavement and grief experiences of African American homicide sibling survivors; the research is crucial in identifying and developing interventions in support of the bereaved, as currently, there is a lack of services offered specifically to bereaved siblings (Lohan & Murphy, 2002; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011; Sharpe, 2015). The use of a phenomenological qualitative approach was used to address the research gap and assist in the development of resources and support interventions for this overlooked population.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived bereavement and grief experiences of African American sibling homicide survivors by reporting on their experiences following the murder of a sibling. A goal of this study was to gain an understanding into the bereavement process following sibling homicide while exploring the roles of family, friends, and community resources. The intent was not to highlight the variances between the participant's bereavement and cultural experiences, but to gain an understanding of the African American sibling homicide experience directly from the survivors' points of view.

A phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 1985, 1997; Kafle, 2011) was used to explore and understand the lived bereavement experience of 12 African American sibling

homicide survivors identified using various social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews, which allowed for a thorough depiction of their bereavement experience (see Giorgi, 2009).

Research Question

Research questions are pertinent in guiding the research process (Hancock, Windridge, & Ockleford, 2007). Well-formed research questions are essential in defining the appropriate methods and purpose of the research, and research questions are also critical in framing the analysis (Yale, 2015). The goal of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the surviving siblings' personal bereavement experience following the murder of their sibling.

This study explored how the sibling survivors were affected by sibling homicide to include their coping mechanisms and support during the bereavement process. Research on how African American bereaved siblings, a population that has a high probability of experiencing homicide, will cope with the murder of their sibling is essential in understanding the specific challenges faced as well as allowing a platform for them to express their experiences (Burke et al., 2010; Sharpe et al., 2013; Sharpe, 2015). The primary research question was: What are the lived bereavement and grief experiences of African American sibling homicide survivors?

Through this qualitative inquiry, the research encouraged the participants to elaborate on their bereavement experience following the murder of a sibling (Giorgi, 2009). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to share their grief experiences to include grief management and support. The open-ended approach allowed

me to probe when necessary to discuss some topics in greater detail and enabled the participants to elaborate on their responses.

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative research utilizes a variety of theories; however, there is no controlling theory in understanding sibling bereavement experiences and outcomes (Creswell, 2014; Hardt et al., 2018). The theoretical framework is one of the most critical components of the research process serving as a dissertation blueprint, and the foundation from which knowledge is constructed for research studies (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). This qualitative study utilized attachment theory and social constructivism to guide the research into the lived bereavement and grief experiences of African American sibling homicide survivors. Attachment theory focuses on understanding the bereaved siblings' grief based on their individual loss experiences (see Bowlby, 1969). Social constructivism was also used and suggested that meanings are formed from experiences and are co-constructed from human experiences and communicative interactions (see Armour, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Gergen, 1994).

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory suggests there are lasting emotional ties between people, and intense emotional bonds are formed with those trusted for comfort and protection (Bowlby, 1969, 1980). Attachment theorists acknowledge that children react to parental or caregiver separation by acts of kicking or screaming, and adults have displayed similar behaviors during the bereavement process (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). Many siblings

will experience separation and loss throughout their lifespan, and grief can be such an agonizing process that making sense of loss can be challenging. Trauma and stress-related issues, along with various emotionally induced behaviors, may emerge during the bereavement process (Bowlby, 1980). Attachment theory assisted in understanding the relationships among human beings and the response to separation as well as conceptualizing the relationship of grief to core biological issues (Bowlby 1980; Schoenfelder, Sandler, Wolchik, & MacKinnon, 2011).

Social Constructivism

Constructivists view bereavement as the process of reconstructing the meaning of their world that has since been tested by death and further believes the loss can result in the bereaved questioning previously instilled core beliefs that can potentially undermine the coherence of a self-narrative (Neimeyer et al., 2010). Furthermore, in cases of violent or sudden deaths such as homicides or accidents the loss can cause the survivors' world to seem unpredictable, dangerous, or unjust (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Neimeyer et al., 2010; Park & Folkman, 1997).

Constructivists further suggest that following loss survivors may engage in two meaning-making processes known as assimilation and accommodation (Neimeyer, 2006a, 2006b; Neimeyer et al., 2010). The bereaved can assimilate the loss into their own pre-loss beliefs (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Park & Folkman, 1997; Neimeyer et al., 2010) meaning they often reconstruct their understanding of the loss, and confirm essential beliefs about themselves and the world (Park & Folkman, 1997; Neimeyer et al., 2010). On the other hand, bereaved individuals accommodate their loss by expanding or

reorganizing their beliefs to accept the actuality of their loss (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Neimeyer et al., 2010). Accommodation usually results in the need for validation for a new identity, and the bereaved will appreciate the hidden growth and benefits these experiences may bring (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Neimeyer et al., 2010).

Nature of the Study

The nature of this research is a qualitative phenomenological study that aimed to understand the bereavement experiences of African American surviving siblings of homicide victims. Qualitative analysis utilizes a non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations to discover essential meanings and relational patterns and is considered to be more detailed than quantitative research by describing in narrative form what individuals do on a daily basis, and what those actions mean to them (Babbie, 2017; Creswell, 2013; Erickson, 2011). The research participants used in qualitative research were selected with the presumption individuals would be the expert on the topic and of assistance to the researcher (see Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Khoshnava-Fomani, Shoghi, & Ali-Cheraghi, 2014).

Phenomenology (Giorgi, 1985, 1997; Kafle, 2011) is a term that encompasses a plethora of research methodologies. A qualitative phenomenological approach focuses on an individuals' perception of the world, and it is the recommended method when the goal of the study is to understand the meaning of human experiences or the exploration of concepts from the individuals' perceptions (Langdrige, 2007; Lin, 2013). The meaning of the individuals' experience is what makes the phenomena what it is by using the

participant's experience as the primary focus and concentrating on the meaning of the experience (Langdridge, 2007; Kafle, 2011; Patton, 2002).

Phenomenological approaches aim to understand what it means to have lived through an experience (Creswell, 2013; Crist & Tanner, 2003). The qualitative researcher in phenomenological studies focuses on the way things appear through the lens of the participant and provides a rich and detailed description of the participants' experience allowing the researcher to reveal the essence of things (Finlay, 2009; Lin, 2013).

According to van Manen (1990),

a good phenomenological description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in an unseen way. (p. 39)

The goal of this study was to explore how the traumatic loss of sibling homicide affected the sibling survivor to gain insight into how they were able to cope, or still in the process of dealing with their grief following their sibling's murder. A qualitative approach was suitable for this research because it provided a detailed description of the survivors' bereavement experience (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology was appropriate for this study because it focuses on the individuals' views of the world and what their world means to them (Creswell, 1998; Sharpe et al., 2013). The participants in this study reflected on their sibling homicide experience as lived by the survivor. To achieve this tailored description of mourning, I conducted semi-structured interviews by asking open-

ended questions allowing for the exploration and understanding of the phenomenon; furthermore, probing was used when necessary (Creswell, 2009).

Definitions

Attachment theory: Suggests individuals create strong emotional bonds with those that provide support, protection, and comfort (Bowlby, 1980).

Bereavement: The experience of losing a loved one to death (Shear, 2015a).

Complicated grief: Severe grief reactions that become abnormally persistent and increasingly debilitating over time (Jordan & Litz, 2014; Lundorff et al., 2017; Shear, 2015a).

Disenfranchised grief: Occurs when a mourner's grief response is socially invalidated, unacknowledged, or discouraged (Piazza-Bonni et al., 2015).

Grief: The response to bereavement (Shear, 2015a). The process of experiencing the psychological, behavioral, social, physical reactions to the perceptions of loss (Rando, 1993).

Grief work: This term is used to describe the psychological process from being preoccupied with the loss to settling the trauma (Miller, 2009; Parkes, 1975; Parkes & Brown, 1972).

Homicide: A manner in which a person kills someone with an intention (Parveen, Naeem, Inam-Pal, Iqbal, & Hussain, 2018). The willful killing of one human being by another (Morales, 1995).

Mourning: Term used to describe culture-based practices of demonstrative sorrow observed by people emotionally connected to a person who has died (Schoulte, 2011).

Murder: The willful, non-negligent killing of one human being by another (Asaro & Clements, 2005).

Normal grief: Absence of intense or prolonged bereavement reactions (Drescher & Foy, 2010).

Phenomenology: The interpretation of human meaning and experience (Kafle, 2011). The reflective analysis of life-world experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Von Eckartsberg, 1986).

Prolonged grief disorder (PGD): Previously termed complicated grief, a debilitating mental illness occurring secondary to bereavement. This condition is associated with poor psychological and physical health outcomes as with as impairment within social, familial, and occupation domains (Goldsmith et al., 2008).

Sibling: A brother or sister (Halliwell & Franken, 2016).

Social constructivism: Suggests meanings are formed from experiences and are co-constructed from human experiences and communicative interactions (Armour, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Gergen, 1994).

Survivor: Family, friends, or significant others that have experienced the death of a loved one by homicide or suicide (Vessier-Batchen & Douglas, 2006).

Traumatic grief: Bereavement reactions following an unusually troubling event that can create anxiety, stress, horror, and an overwhelming feeling of helplessness (Abi-Hashem, 2017).

Traumatic loss: A sudden and violent mode of death characterized by one of three causes: suicide, homicide, or a fatal accident (Currier, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2006).

Unnatural death: Death that appears to be suspicious or unexpected, and occurs suddenly, and the cause of death results in an investigation (Hassan-Lotfi, Javad-Amirian, Dehghani, Falahzadeh, & Emami, 2016). Death following social and psychological factors such as violence or crime (Malik, 2017; Parveen et al., 2018).

Victimology: The study of the physical, emotional, and financial harm suffered by people following criminal acts (Karmen, 2004).

Violent death: Death that is caused by intentional physical forces or power, that is threatened against a person, community, or group (Nakajima, Ito, Shirai, & Konishi, 2012; Norris, 1992).

Assumptions

According to Creswell (2007), the researcher is to be able to identify and have knowledge of philosophical assumptions to utilize a phenomenological approach. I assumed the participants and their mourning and grief experiences varied. For example, their reaction to the loss, attachment level to the deceased, social and familial support, and the amount of time since the murder varied. Additionally, I assumed all participants were honest and accurate in their interpretation of their grief experiences.

The use of qualitative research allows for the participant to be the expert on the subject. Therefore, I was dependent on the information obtained from the survivor, and I assumed that only the bereaved sibling could accurately describe their grief experience. Lastly, I assumed the use of social media platforms would allow for the identification of a wide range of sibling homicide survivors.

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on the bereavement experiences of 12 African American sibling homicide survivors. While other bereavement experiences are significant, to include but not limited to spousal, parental, childhood, and other causes of sibling death; these bereavement experiences were acknowledged briefly in the literature review section. Due to the limited availability of the proposed research interest, African American sibling homicide was the primary research focus. The participants involved in this study identified as African American, over the age of 18, and the murder occurred within the past 5 years. Participants were excluded if they have experienced other causes of sibling death, under the age of 18, the murder did not occur within 5 years, and did not identify as African American.

Limitations

Sample size was a limitation of this study. Although sample size can vary per study, Creswell (1998), as cited in Mason (2010) suggested that sample size in a qualitative phenomenological study should be between five to twenty-five individuals that have experienced a specific phenomenon. Morse (1994) recommended a minimum of six participants for phenomenological studies. The sample used for this study was a small percentage of African American bereaved siblings and should not be used as a generalized representation.

Baker, Edwards, and Doidge (2012) concluded that although qualitative studies may focus on fewer participants, the methodology concentrates on the individuals, experiences, and subcultures with the intent on generating a personal understanding into

how and why people reflect and interpret specific experiences. There were variations in the current stages of the participants' grief, and depending on how long following the death, the interview takes place memory reliability was a potential limitation. Some of the participants had recent bereavement experiences, and for some, it had been years since the murder.

Credibility and validity threats can potentially surface at any time. According to Burkholder, Cox, and Crawford (2016), being aware of the potential risks as well as the selection of the research design can influence the validity of the data, analysis, and findings. To ensure the credibility of the research, I maintained an unbiased tone to refrain from guiding the participant in any way. Despite my personal experience as an African American sibling homicide survivor, that information was not disclosed and the only information reported is what was obtained from the participants to ensure the research focus is on the participants, not the researcher. Additionally, the interview protocol was reviewed by the dissertation panel as well as Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Furthermore, the full interview transcripts were provided to the participants for review to ensure accuracy; a process known as member checking. The use of the peer-review process can assist in pointing out any instances of bias.

Significance

Unavoidably, death will affect all-aged individuals; however, the research available has focused on the bereavement experiences of parents, spouses, children, and adolescents (Osterweis et al., 1984). Sibling bereavement is a unique challenge and is assumed to be a different bereavement experience from other forms of loss, and little is

known about the sibling bereavement process following the murder of a sibling (Bolton et al., 2016; Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Hardt et al., 2018; Packman et al., 2006; Robinson & Mahon, 1997; Vigil & Clements, 2003). Additionally, the grief literature available has focused on the dominant European culture's bereavement experiences; therefore, little focus has been placed on African American bereavement (Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Schoulte, 2011). African Americans comprise of over 13% of the United States population, and this population is ten times more likely to experience death by homicide; therefore, sibling bereavement literature following the death by homicide is essential (Burke et al., 2010; Schoulte, 2011). Increased scholarly attention on African American sibling bereavement following homicide is needed to address the unique challenges of coping with this type of loss (Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Sharpe et al., 2013; Sharpe, 2015).

The participants used in this study provided firsthand information into how the murder of their sibling has affected them. An examination into the personal methods of dealing with the loss of a loved one is vital to understand the components of healing to minimize complications and maximize the effectiveness of support (Paris et al., 2009). This study used a phenomenological approach to gain firsthand in-depth knowledge into the bereavement experiences of African American sibling homicide survivors.

The implications for social change can occur at the individual and societal level. Individually, the bereaved sibling could benefit from a study of this magnitude because of the stigma already placed on murder victims on top of the neglect faced by siblings often by their own family and friends. Siblings can benefit from knowing how other siblings

made it through their experience, and that although others move on quickly there is no predetermined way or time to grieve, and they should allow themselves to go through the process. Additionally, by contributing to the research on African American sibling homicide, it is with great hope that the results of this study will bring attention to the issue of sibling bereavement following homicide, and information on how the bereaved coped can assist in developing culturally appropriate services to allow the sibling to emerge from being the forgotten griever (Sharpe & Boyas, 2011; White, 2006).

Studies that focus on sibling grief experience can provide insight to family and friends in understanding how the death has affected the surviving sibling and how to provide support. Siblings are often told to “be strong” for their parents; however, little attention is placed on how the sibling may be feeling. It is important to remember that the sibling is also experiencing loss as well as the new emotions that murder can cause. Siblings should be allowed to express how the murder of a sibling is or has affected them without feelings of shame and guilt. By doing this, it may cause a sense of relief and allow for the sibling to heal. Additionally, the feelings of being “forgotten” or “ignored” may result in negative coping skills and allowing the bereaved sibling to articulate their emotions could assist in a successful bereavement experience. The results obtained from this study can also offer suggestions to bereaved siblings, clinicians, educators, families, churches, law enforcement, and friends on how to effectively support bereaved siblings of murder victims in the African American community.

This study’s findings can also assist in the development of clinical treatment plans, counseling resources, programs, as well as pertinent information to be provided to

the families to treat African American sibling homicide survivors efficiently, competently, and compassionately (Miller, 2009). After a review of various resources, it was discovered there were no specific services offered for sibling homicide survivors. The Save our Streets program in Crown Heights, New York resources are provided for the families of homicide victims however, none of the programs were discovered to be specifically focused on bereaved siblings, families were placed into a generic category (Save our Streets, n.d.).

The city of Los Angeles also provides similar services, and through the use of the California Victim Compensation Board (CalVCB) will cover the expenses associated with violent crime (CalVCB, n.d.). Lastly, bereavement groups in Austin, TX were reviewed, and most of the groups identified placed siblings in general grief groups that also consisted of people grieving the loss of grandparents, aunts, and cousins. Through this project, it is my hope that sibling bereavement groups and programs are increased throughout the country. The groups currently offered beneficial; however, as later discussed, the sibling bereavement experience carries its own unique experience and speaking with like-minded individuals is necessary.

Summary

A person will experience death at some point in their life, whether it be the loss of a parent, grandparent, aunt, or sibling considering the relationship to the deceased the grief response will vary. Chapter one introduced my desire to conduct a research study that focuses on the bereavement experience of African American siblings of homicide victims. Despite the literature available, bereavement research primarily focuses on

parents, spouses, and children; with very little focus on sibling grief. Additionally, most of the bereavement literature focuses on the Caucasian grief experience; therefore, African Americans have been neglected in the literature, and based on the cultural differences African American grief responses will vary. The two theories, attachment theory and social constructivism assisted in validating the survivors' understanding of their loss.

This research utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach to gain insight into the bereavement experience of African American sibling homicide survivors with hopes of addressing the lack of research and assist in the development of bereavement resources and support interventions for all bereaved siblings. However, this study focused on the African American bereaved siblings of homicide victims. To obtain the necessary information, I used semi-structured interviews to attain firsthand knowledge of sibling bereavement experiences. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on parental and childhood bereavement. The following section primarily focuses on the relevant research on theoretical frameworks, grief, homicide, homicide survivors, sibling bereavement, and African American bereavement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Despite the importance of sibling bereavement literature, the primary focus has been on other bereavement experiences to include spousal, parental, and childhood bereavement (Baliko & Tuck, 2008; Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Osterweis et al., 1984; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011). Sibling bereavement, as well as African American bereavement literature, is limited (Bolton et al., 2016; Burke, et al., 2010; Burke et al., 2011; Packman et al., 2006; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015; Pretorius et al., 2010; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011; Sharpe et al., 2014; Sharpe, 2015). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the bereavement experiences of 12 African American sibling homicide survivors in an effort to gain an understanding of their loss experiences from the survivors' perspective.

Chapter 2 includes a review of several areas of literature based on the research question. The chapter begins with information on literature search strategies to include the databases examined along with the terms utilized to identify pertinent bereavement research. The chapter transitions into the discussion of the two theoretical suggestions for this study, attachment theory, and social constructivism. The research on bereavement and grief to include intensified grief reactions, known as complicated grief, is also discussed. Bereavement experiences such as parental, spousal, childhood bereavement is briefly highlighted before thoroughly discussing the literature on sibling bereavement, African American bereavement, homicide, and homicide survivors. The chapter

concludes with a review of support, meaning-making experiences, and the identification of the research gap.

Literature Search Strategy

Walden's library was beneficial in accessing electronic databases such as Science Citation Index, PsycINFO, Thoreau, Google Scholar, Ebscohost, PYSCArticles, Education Source, and Expanded Academic ASAP to identify relevant bereavement research. The search terms utilized were *bereavement, siblings, sibling bereavement, grief, sibling grief, death, sibling death, homicide, sibling homicide, murder, parental bereavement, spousal bereavement, African American bereavement, African American homicide, African American, sibling loss, attachment theory, and social constructivism.*

These search terms allowed for the identification of 103 articles published between 1991 and 2018, but only 97 articles were beneficial to the study. Two articles discussed sibling homicide, 27 articles referenced sibling grief, and 17 articles focused on homicide survivors, and 16 focused on African American homicide survivors. Furthermore, in addition to the database searches, supplementary literature was identified through the reference lists of the reviewed articles and books. Lastly, despite the available bereavement research, sibling homicide literature was limited, and articles specifically focusing on African American sibling homicide were not available.

Theoretical Framework

Currently, no guiding theory that focuses on the experiences and outcomes of bereaved siblings exists (Hardt et al., 2018). However, this qualitative phenomenological study was shaped by the works of attachment theory and social constructivism to guide

the research on the lived bereavement and grief experiences of African American sibling homicide survivors. Attachment theory was appropriate for this study because the method is enriched by understanding how people respond to the idea of being separated from a secure attachment figure and, in this case, understanding a bereaved sibling's grief based on their loss experience (Bowlby, 1960, 1969). Additionally, social constructivism was appropriate based on the idea that meanings are formed from experiences, and focuses on the voices of the participants and not of statistics (Armour, 2002; Babbie, 2017; Creswell, 2013; Gergen, 1994; Gilbert, 2002).

Attachment Theory

John Bowlby (1907-1990) was named the founder of the attachment theory that significantly contributed to bereavement research gaining notoriety following the publication of his series (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). This theory focuses on the forming, maintaining, and dissolution of relationships, as well as the process of adjusting to being separated from a secure figure (Bowlby, 1980; Cohen & Katz, 2015; Main, 1996; Van der Horst, LeRoy, & Van der Veer, 2008; Van Rosmalen, Van der Veer, & Van der Horst, 2015). Mary Ainsworth was named the theory's co-founder with her introduction of the strange situation procedure (SSP) and collaborated with Bowlby for several years until his death (Van Rosmalen et al., 2015). Attachment theory is considered to be similar to Freud's grief work model, which suggested the bereavement process consists of the survivor initially attempting to maintain connections to the deceased and eventually withdrawing, and that a relationship does not end just because someone has died (Bennett

& Bennett, 2000; Conant, 1996; Freud 1917, 1953; Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996; Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe, 1996).

Attachment theory derives from an infants' response to being separated from their mothers or trusted caregivers (Bowlby, 1980). Additionally, Bowlby understood that if the infants developed a secure attachment to others, they would survive longer than those that did not (Nesse, 2005). During wartime with males out of the home, Bowlby proposed that children require a stable and consistent relationship with a motherly figure as child-rearing was deemed a maternal obligation (Riley, 1983; Wootton, 1959). Infants require a consistent and nurturing relationship with caregivers to assist in developing into healthy individuals, and bonding between the mother and child are essential in developing and supporting emotions and behaviors (Cohen & Katz, 2015; Van Rosmalen et al., 2015). During a child's first year of life, the interactions between the infant and primary caregiver are crucial in establishing internal working models regarding the caregivers' behaviors and infant attachment requirements (Bowlby, 1988; Thomson, 2010).

Individuals create lasting bonds with those they trust for protection, support, and comfort, and emotions such as betrayal, disappointment, and abandonment may arise when they are separated from one another (Bowlby 1969, 1980). Furthermore, repeated interactions between the child and caregiver assist in shaping coping mechanisms in high stressed situations (Thomson, 2010). When dangerous situations arise or when parents are separated from their children, they instinctively become protectors and do whatever it takes to locate and protect their child, and on the other hand, the child yearns for the parent to return (Bowlby, 1988; Thomson, 2010).

Bowlby's research on the adverse effects of the subpar mother-child relationship was tedious and time-consuming; therefore, Ainsworth's Strange Situation Procedure (SSP), a laboratory-based method that assisted in the understanding of caregiver and child attachment within twenty minutes (Holmes, 1993; Van Rosmalen et al., 2015). The SSP contains eight episodes that observe child, caregiver, and stranger interactions. The SSP is a prominent, valid, and commonly used tool that has since been used to evaluate the relationship between dogs and their owners as well (Rehn, McGowan, & Keeling, 2013; Solomon & George, 2008).

When separated from a trusted caregiver, children may display indicators of separation response syndrome that includes three phases protest, despair, and detachment by kicking and screaming, and similar acts have been evident in bereaved adults (Bowlby, 1973, 1980; Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Miles & Demi, 1994; Neimeyer, Prigerson, & Davies, 2002). For a bereaved individual, the loss of a secure figure in addition to the level of closeness or a pending conflict with the deceased at the time of death can alter the survivors' sense of self and may also trigger complicated grief reactions (Bowlby, 1980; Holland & Neimeyer, 2011; Neimeyer et al., 2002; Packman et al., 2006; Parkes, 1986; Servaty-Seib & Pistole, 2006).

Following the loss, the survivor is tasked with adjusting from a physical relationship to the deceased to depending solely on an emotional or mental connection (Horowitz, 1990). Furthermore, it has been suggested that recovering from the loss is not an indication of successful mourning, as most individuals never go back to what life was before losing their loved one (Arnold & Buschman-Gemma, 2008; Malkinson, Rubin, &

Witztum, 2006; Paletti, 2008). Bowlby (1980), as cited in Thomson (2010), described four stages of mourning, numbness, yearning and searching, disorganization and disorientation, and lastly, “the phase of greater or less degree of reorganization” (p. 85). Numbness and yearning refer to the initial shock and poor comprehension of the loss. Disorganization is when the pre-programmed feelings of attachments are compromised. Finally, the bereaved will reorganize their life into a life without the deceased, and all of these phases ultimately are ways to bereaved attempts to comprehend and accept the loss (Thomson, 2010).

Bowlby’s research stressed the importance of the survivors’ ability to resolve their grief successfully to avoid challenging behaviors; however, the idea that successful mourning is based on a speedy recovery is contradictory as the grief experience varies by the individual (Bowlby, 1973; Woods, 2006). A successful and healthy mourning experience as suggested by Bowlby (1973) involves the completion of grief tasks such as accepting the permanence of the loss, understanding the cause of death, and positive relationships are essential in resolving grief, and traumatic loss by affecting the bereavement process (Cohen, Mannarino, & Staron, 2006; Dowdney, 2008; Klass et al., 1996; Pfeffer et al., 1997). The bereaved must accept that their world has changed by the loss, and they must make the necessary changes to their lives to ensure they adapt to the loss successfully (Bowlby, 1980). Generally speaking, if the survivor understands that loss is a process of transforming or reorganizing instead of focusing on being detached from a loved one, the bereavement experience is considered successful (Field, 2006).

Processing the loss takes time and can be a painful journey, and complicated mourning may occur if the survivor struggles with accepting the reality of a physical loss (Field, 2006; Horowitz, 1990, 1991). Following the notification of the loss, the survivor's goal is to reunite with the deceased carried out by acts such as hallucinating and visiting places that remind the survivor of their loved one (Bowlby, 1980; Field, Gao, & Paderna, 2005). Furthermore, survivors may engage in negative grief responses, one example being mummification an ancient Egyptian practice (Bowlby, 1980; Field, 2006; Gorer, 1965). Bereaved parents may take years or choose not to change the siblings' room which may ultimately cause the surviving sibling to feel as if they do not have their own identity (Bowlby, 1980; Field, 2006).

Few studies have explored attachment and bereavement. However, researchers have suggested that an ongoing attachment with the deceased is vital in accepting the loss although some may never get over the loss (Cohen & Katz, 2015; Field, 2006; Klass et al., 1996; Tait & Silver, 1989). Attachment theory is also tied to social constructivism based on the idea that negative bereavement responses may arise if the survivor struggles with accepting the loss, creating meaning, and moving forward (Field et al., 2005; Neimeyer, 2006c; Stroebe & Schut, 2005).

Social Constructivism Theory

Traditional grief theories such as Kübler-Ross' (1969) five stages of grief acknowledge that grief must occur in steps, and once those steps conclude, then grief is expected to be resolved (Kempson, Conley, & Murdock, 2008; Valentine, 2006). In a modern sense, grief is viewed from a social constructivism perspective, because it is

based on the idea that grief experiences are not universal and is defined by the individuals' ability to make sense of loss as well as factors such as culture and relationship (Johnson, 2010; Neimeyer, 1999, 2009; Neimeyer & Levitt, 2001).

Bereaved individuals are tasked with reaffirming and reconstructing their world that has been challenged by a loss all while attempting to move forward through life with a new sense of meaning (Doka, 1989; Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Klass et al., 1996; Neimeyer, 1999, 2002; Neimeyer et al., 2002; Neimeyer, Holland, Currier, & Mehta, 2008). Finding a sense of meaning from the loss is a critical part of the bereavement process, and it can assist the bereaved in restoring control in their life (Braun & Berg, 1994; Lichtenthal, Currier, Neimeyer, & Keesee, 2010; Neimeyer, 1999, 2000, 2001; Pakenham, 2008; Park & Folkman, 1997; Riches & Dawson, 1998; Schoulte, 2011; Sharpe, 2015).

Sense-making, benefit finding, and identity change are essential in reconstructing the meaning of a loss (Drescher & Foy, 2010; Neimeyer, 2001; Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002). The process of sense-making recommends that painful losses may cause the survivor to struggle with making sense of loss and causing the survivor to question everything previously known as well as being dedicated to finding out the reasoning behind the loss (Folkman, 2001; Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Thompson & Janigian, 1988). Benefit finding, although not evident in most survivors until months or years following the loss can assist the survivor in adapting to the loss by creating a sense of maturity and personal growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Drescher & Foy, 2010; Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002). Lastly, like benefit finding a survivors' identity

can be altered positively as a survivor's posttraumatic growth is established when they respond to the loss in progressive ways such as resilience, independence, and social relationships; the survivors may often grow spiritually and emotionally (Drescher & Foy, 2010; Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998).

Individuals who cope with the loss and transition back to their regular routines are said to successfully engage in meaning-making (Neimeyer et al., 2010). Survivors can also participate in one of two meaning-making processes known as assimilation and accommodation (Neimeyer, 2006a; 2006b; Neimeyer et al., 2010). The bereaved can assimilate the loss into their own pre-loss beliefs, and confirm essential beliefs about themselves and the world, and they will ultimately reconstruct their understanding of the loss (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Neimeyer et al., 2010; Park & Folkman, 1997). On the other hand, bereaved individuals may also accommodate their loss by expanding or reorganizing their beliefs to embrace the reality of their loss (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Neimeyer et al., 2010). This form of meaning-making usually results in the survivor requiring validation for a new identity, and the bereaved may appreciate the hidden growth and benefits these experiences may bring (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Neimeyer et al., 2010).

To the contrary, in cases of violent or sudden deaths, to include homicides or accidents the loss can alter previously instilled beliefs, and cause the survivors' world to seem unpredictable, dangerous, or unjust (Currier et al., 2006; Drescher & Foy, 2010; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Berg, 1998; Neimeyer et al., 2010; Park & Folkman, 1997; Sharpe, 2015). However, traumatically bereaved individuals such as

those suffering losses by homicide may struggle with finding meaning in the experience because the nature of the death is considered to be unreasonable (Currier et al., 2006; Davis, Wortman, Lehman, & Silver, 2000; Drescher & Foy, 2010; Rynearson, 2001). On the other hand, a survivors' ability to make sense of a violent tragedy is essential in adapting to the loss, and once the survivor found meaning they were able to move forward (Armour 2002, 2003; Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998). Sense-making is vital for accepting death as a part of life, and also determines the seriousness of complicated grief the survivor will experience (Currier et al., 2006).

The belief that grief experiences for different cultures will vary is an extension of the social constructivist perspective (Rosenblatt, 2001, 2008; Schoulte, 2011). The research by Rosenblatt and Wallace (2005) focused on the grief responses in the African American community and suggested that factors such as family, faith, racism, and oppression should be taken to account to create a culturally sensitive grief model. African Americans have been known to rely on religion and family members to cope with the homicide of a loved one (Armour 2002, 2003; Wong & Wong, 2006). African Americans have also been found to maintain connected to the deceased through acts such as photos, memories, and videos (Sharpe & Boyas, 2011).

Bereavement and Grief

Bereavement is the experience of losing a loved one to death that has been characterized as a permanent severance of an attached relationship with another person. Bereavement experiences are universal and critical life events that require significant readjustment (Burke et al., 2011; Currier, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2007; Shear, 2015a;

Stroebe, Abakoumin, Stroebe, 2010; Stroebe, Zech, Stroebe, & Abakoumin, 2005).

Although individuals will likely mourn the death of a loved one or friend at some point in their life bereavement-related difficulties will likely vary per individual, there should be no general expectation of an individuals' mourning experience, and bereavement interventions should be custom to the individual (Shear, 2015a; Thompson et al., 2011). Bereavement sufferers experience physical responses known as grief.

Grief is a response following the death of loved one and is an individualized and universal response to loss (Clements & Burgess, 2002; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015; Shear, 2015a; Stroebe & Schut, 1998). Grief is a combination of the psychological, behavioral, social, and physical reactions to loss can be complicated and is considered to be a stressful and traumatic event, and responses can be as intense as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideations as well as health-related concerns such as smoking, drinking, and poor diets (Fujisawa et al., 2010; Hall et al., 2014; Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Li, Precht, Mortensen, & Olsen, 2003; Lohan & Murphy, 2002; Rando, 1993; Rostila et al., 2012; Shear, 2015a; Torbic, 2011; Wright, 2016).

Acute grief refers to the survivors' separation, and stress response arises once the survivor receives notification that their loved one has passed (Shear, 2015a). Acute grief can trigger an abundance of sadness, recurring thoughts of the deceased, and hallucinations (Grimby, 1993; Shear, 2015a). Psychological and physiological responses to acute grief include anxiety, depression, health concerns, insomnia, and substance abuse (Boelen & Lancee, 2013; Buckley, Sunari, Marshall, Bartrop, McKinley, & Tofler, 2012;

Keyes, Pratt, Galca, McLaughlin, Koenen, Shear, 2014; Shear & Skritskaya, 2012; Zisook & Kendler, 2007).

Grief reactions are typical within the first few weeks to a year of the loss, and despite the common misconception, emotions may intensify as the first-year anniversary approaches as the survivor is reminded of their loved one's death but in most cases the symptoms will likely recede (Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001; Bonnano & Mancini, 2006; Clements et al., 2004). Grief can emerge and submerge in waves, and emotions can arise at unpredictable moments such as driving, working, and eating, as well as predictable moments such as holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, and other celebrations (Aldrich & Kallivayalil, 2016; Auman, 2007; Shear, 2015a; Stroebe et al., 2007).

Grief can also be intrapersonal, where the bereaved cope privately as well as interpersonal where the bereaved and their loved one deal with the loss together (Corr, 2002; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015). Most bereaved individuals will likely be resilient during their grief experience, and return to normal daily functions without the presence of intense grief reactions; however, adapting to the loss can be lengthy and wavering, despite society's expectation that the bereaved should move on quickly (Burke et al., 2010; Drescher & Foy, 2010; Fujisawa et al., 2010; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014; Shear, 2015a).

Mourning is the outward expressions of grief through crying, talking, and yearning and varies amongst various cultures, age, gender, and race (Granek & Peleg-Sagy, 2017; Torbic, 2011; Wolfelt, 2003). Grief work is said to be required to adapt to the loss and includes actively mourning the loss, medication consumption, and attending

therapy sessions to assist in ultimately moving on (Granek 2010, 2013; Parkes, 1975; Parkes & Brown, 1972; Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, Stroebe, 1992). The expectation is the bereaved individual needs to express their emotions as well as resolving the relational issues between the survivor and the deceased; however, death is not something that you simply get over, and the loss becomes a part of your story (Drescher & Foy, 2010; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Torbic, 2011).

Survivors may yearn for the deceased. Yearning is distinct from other emotional responses because it echoes the extent to which the survivor is missing their loved one (Stroebe et al., 2010). Examples of yearning include longing sadness and hallucinations of seeing and hearing the deceased; although there may be a negative connotation associated with auditory and visual illusions in this case hallucinations may be non-threatening (Grimby, 1993; Shear, 2015a). Additionally, although surrounded by a reliable support system, yearning is closely related to emotional loneliness, suggesting the survivor is still alone even when others may be present because the support cannot ease the loss. (Stroebe et al., 2010).

Normal and Traumatic Grief

Two grief categories that may surface following the loss: normative and traumatic grief and unexpected or violent loss can complicate the bereavement process in comparison to expected or non-violent death (Currier, Holland, Coleman, & Neimeyer, 2007; Paris et al., 2009). Grief responses to both types of loss may include guilt, anger, depression, confusion, loneliness, and anxiety (Clements & Burgess, 2002; Mahon & Page, 1995). Normal grief reactions occur when the death is anticipated such as illness or

natural causes, and the bereaved can adjust to the loss and progress (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Miller, 2008; Paris et al., 2009). Normal grief experiences may include denial and distress following the loss, and reactions such as depression, sadness, insomnia, and difficulty concentrating are a normal part of the grieving process that may later subside (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Miller, 2008).

To the contrary, when death disrupts the natural order of events, and are traumatic events such as homicides, suicides, or horrific accidents traumatic grief may arise, and interfere with the grief process (Green, 2000; Hoyert, & Xu, 2012; Nakajima et al., 2012; Neimeyer et al., 2002; Paris et al., 2009; Rando, 1993; Raphael & Martinek, 1997; Rynearson & McCreery, 1993; Sharpe, 2015). Violent death is sudden, intense, and robs the survivor(s) of any preparation (Nakajima et al., 2012). Traumatic loss is evolving in bereavement research, and traumatic events are not as rare as society would like them to be and occur in an estimated 50% of adults, and have been described as dangerous, scary, uncontrollable, and unpredictable events (Currier et al., 2006; Drescher & Foy, 2010; Kilpatrick et al., 2013).

Traumatic grief destroys the world as the survivor knows it, as well as their emotional and physical response to the loss (Spungen, 1998; Wellman, 2018). Traumatic grief can also be heightened if there is a lack of support, or there were unresolved issues between the survivor and victim at the time of death (Wellman, 2018). Some individuals may suffer from lingering grief reactions and may remain in a chronic grief state known as complicated grief commonly triggered by sudden or traumatic deaths including

homicide, accident, or an untimely death of a child (Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001; Drescher & Foy, 2010; Nakajima et al., 2012; Neimeyer, et al., 2010).

Researchers have discovered that grief reactions to include complicated grief and PTSD were reportedly higher in those experiencing violent death (Amick-McMullan, Kilpatrick, & Resnick, 1991; Brent, Melhem, Donohoe, & Walker, 2009; Currier et al., 2006; Dyregrov, Nordanger, & Dyregrov, 2003; Kaltman & Bonanno, 2003; Murphy, Johnson, Wu, Fan, & Lohan, 2003; Zinzow, Rheingold, Hawkins, Saunders, & Kilpatrick, 2009; Zisook, Chentsova-Dutton, & Shuchter, 1998). Suicide and accident survivors were discovered to be 52% more likely to experience PTSD, and 78% likely to experience complicated grief (Dyregrov et al., 2003). Additionally, PTSD and complicated grief were evident in those suffering from violent death in comparison to sudden infant death (Dyregrov et al., 2003).

Complicated & Disenfranchised Grief

Grief tends to resolve within the first year of the loss, and people can go back to their lives; however, for some individuals that may not be the case. Complicated grief, also known as prolonged grief disorder affects approximately 10-20% of the population, and arises when the grief reactions occur for at least six months or more and potentially impair the survivor causing them to struggle with moving past the loss (Cruz et al., 2007; Currier et al., 2006; Drescher & Foy, 2010; Fujisawa et al., 2010; Hardt et al., 2018; Lundorff et al., 2017; Prigerson et al., 2009; Shear, Frank, Houck, & Reynolds, 2005). Complicated grief may emerge following the loss of a romantic partner, child, or violent or sudden death and deemed unlikely if the survivor loses a parent, grandparent or sibling

(Currier et al., 2007b; Drescher & Foy, 2010; Shear, 2015a). On the contrary, Hardt et al., (2018) discovered complicated grief and other psychological disorders such as depression and substance abuse were evident in bereaved siblings.

Complicated grief differentiates from normal reactions because of the intense and prolonged grief responses that leave the bereaved in a chronic mourning state and resemble depression, but depression-related treatment may not be sufficient (Drescher & Foy, 2010; Fujisawa et al., 2010; Fundukian & Wilson, 2008; Heberman Mash, Fullerton, & Ursano, 2013; Shear, 2015a). Complicated grief sufferers may experience shock, numbness, isolation, insomnia, substance abuse, suicidal ideations, and an increase in health concerns (Buckley et al., 2012; Fujisawa et al., 2010; Holland & Neimeyer, 2011; Shear, 2015a).

Survivors may yearn for the deceased, experience recurring thoughts, and avoid reminders of the deceased (Shear, 2015a). Complicated grief survivors may be in a state of shocked or numbness and may ultimately distance themselves from others based on the idea that their happiness died with their loved one (Shear, 2015a). Furthermore, it is not uncommon for friends, coworkers, or family members to become frustrated with the survivor because they cannot be of assistance, and may essentially pull away (Shear, 2015a).

Several factors are said to cause complicated grief including the survivor having a history of substance abuse, depression, anxiety, religion, support, socioeconomic factors, education, cause of death, relationship to the deceased, loss history, criminal justice process, and media coverage (Allen, Haley, Small, Schonwetter, & McMillan, 2013;

Fujisawa et al., 2010; Guldin, O'Connor, Sokolowski, Jensen, & Vedsted, 2011; Kersting, Braehler, Glaesmar, & Wagner, 2011; Kirwin & Hamrin, 2005; Nakajima et al., 2012; Riches & Dawson, 1998; Shear, 2015a; Stroebe et al., 2007). Complicated grief treatment has emerged to resolve grief-related complications and to assist the survivor in adapting to the loss, and the intended treatment focuses on restoration and loss to create an avenue where the bereaved can think about the loss without initiating feelings of anger and anxiety (Shear et al., 2005; Shear, Wang, Skritskaya, Duan, Mauro, & Ghesquiere, 2014; Shear, 2015b).

Due to the amplified chances of violent death such as homicide, African Americans are at an increased risk of experiencing complicated grief reactions (Doka, 2002a; Goldsmith et al., 2008; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015; Sharpe et al., 2014; Spungen, 1998). Researchers discovered that the ethnicity of the bereaved factored into the level of complicated grief experience and that African Americans were at an increased rate of experiencing complicated grief (Burke & Neimeyer, 2012; Goldsmith et al., 2008; Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gilles, 2006). Specifically, Goldsmith et al., (2008), found that factors such as support, religious coping, and exposure to sudden death increased complicated grief in African Americans and that support and religion did not prevent complicated grief from occurring.

Disenfranchised grief. Occurs when a mourner's bereavement is unacknowledged or invalidated by society usually depending on the circumstances of the death (Attig, 2004; Hagman, 2001; Neimeyer & Jordan, 2002; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015; Sharpe et al., 2014). "The failure of one part of the system to understand the meaning and

experience of another” is essential to disenfranchised grief’s concept, and interacting with others does not always mean they will be supported (Knight, Elfenbein, & Messina-Soares, 1998; Neimeyer & Jordan, 2002, p. 96). According to Martin (2005), disenfranchised grief is known as the “social construction of blame,” which suggested that conversations between survivors and the public blame and devalue the victim (p. 162).

Grief is a typical human experience; however, some grieverers and their expression of grief may violate society’s expectations resulting in the bereaved feeling unrecognized or unsupported, and factors such as cultural expectations or intense emotional reactions may contradict societal norms (Attig, 2004; Corr, 2002; Fujisawa et al., 2010; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015; Sharpe et al., 2014). In cases of homicide, the survivor may detach from the community or be shunned especially if the deceased was involved in criminal activities, gangs, or drugs (Armour, 2006; Doka, 1989, 2002a; Jones & Beck, 2007; Miller, 2009; Neimeyer & Jordan, 2002).

Not only may the community overlook the family, but the criminal justice system and media may violate the family as well with unwanted attention that can ultimately alter the meaning of the tragedy for the family (Armour, 2003; Miller, 2009; Neimeyer & Jordan, 2002). African American homicide survivors are likely to suffer from disenfranchised grief and may receive minimal community support resulting in secondary victimization due to the negative commentary by society and effecting the survivors’ adjustment to the loss (Hatton, 2003; Martin, 2005; Miller, 2009; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015). To assist in the prevention of disenfranchised grief from occurring understanding

and empathy needs to be present, and the interventions that allow the bereaved to speak out and express themselves are necessary (Neimeyer & Jordan, 2002; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015).

African American Bereavement and Grief

African Americans account for about 13% of the United States population, yet an under-researched population in psychology and bereavement research (Granek & Peleg-Sagy, 2015, 2017; Hall, 1997; Rosenblatt & Wallace, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). African Americans have a diverse ancestry, and not only refers to those of African descent but also those immigrants from the Caribbean, West Indies, and South American (Brooks, Haskins, & Kehe, 2004; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008). Different cultures will vary in how they mourn the loss of a loved one, and often, the bereavement reactions may not be understood by those outside the culture (Schoulte, 2011).

African American bereavement has been ignored in the literature (Burke et al., 2010; Goldsmith et al., 2008; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Sharpe et al., 2014; Sharpe, 2015). According to Rosenblatt and Wallace (2013), “there are few works focused on African Americans that it seems to us that African American grief has been neglected to a remarkable event” (p. 11). Although outdated, yet relevant Hall (1997) wrote, “Research that does not include diverse populations, and that does not respect the cultures of these groups will be useless in developing and expanding theories of human behavior” (p. 650). Additionally, Graham (1992) requested for substantive accurate, and current African American psychological literature. Marshall and Batten (2004) also suggested that

placing favor on the dominant culture and inserting a specific viewpoint on other cultures can become an ethical problem.

Despite the call for increased minority literature, research indicates that not much has changed. Granek and Peleg- Sagy (2015), focused on the representation of African Americans in bereavement literature and discovered there was minimal literature published within the past 15 years, and the shared research interest was on homicide whereas other ethnic research focused on different bereavement types. Fifty-nine articles referenced African American grief, and of those articles, 31 articles exclusively focused on African American samples. More importantly, by not including diverse populations in bereavement research, inconclusive information may be presented (Granek & Peleg-Sagy, 2015).

The limited available African American research suggests that African American grief differs from bereavement experiences of Caucasian Americans, and cultural differences should be considered when dealing with this population (Granek & Peleg-Sagy, 2015, 2017; Kissane & Bloch, 2002; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Schoulte, 2011). African Americans present a higher risk of losing a family member such as a spouse, sibling, or parent prematurely in comparison to Caucasians as well as an increased risk of death by homicide partially because firearm accessibility and gang culture is prominent in minority communities (Burke et al., 2010; Fox & Zawitz, 2001; Kochanek et al., 2004; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Rosenblatt & Wallace, 2005).

Additionally, Kalish and Reynolds (1981), as cited in Laurie and Neimeyer (2008), discovered African Americans were more prone to homicide versus suicide but

experienced a greater sense of resilience in comparison to Caucasians, Hispanics, and Japanese Americans. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, racism, and oppression may be underlying stressors that can affect the bereavement outcomes as well especially following homicide (Holloway, 2003; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; McDevitt-Murphy et al., 2012; Rosenblatt & Wallace, 2005). Although it possible for these stressors to contribute to health-related concerns, African Americans often refrain from engaging in medical or mental health services (Diala et al., 2000; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008).

Bereavement outcomes vary by culture, and the differences in cultures can affect how the bereaved understand the world changes following the loss (Morgan & Laugani, 2002; Schoulte, 2011). Although all African Americans may not identify as Christian, many traditions used in Christianity are evident in the bereavement process (Schoulte, 2011). When a person dies, the African American community relies heavily on family, religion, social class, geographic location, and social support to cope with the loss (Barrett, 1995; Granek & Peleg- Sagy, 2017; Rosenblatt & Wallace, 2013; Van & Meleis, 2003). African Americans rely heavily on religion and the power of pray and inner strength to not only strengthen them but to assist the deceased in transitioning into the afterlife (Barrett, 1995, 1998; Granek & Peleg- Sagy, 2017; Hardy-Bougere, 2008; Taylor, Chatters, & Jackson, 2007).

In a previous study by Rosenblatt and Wallace (2013), the African American participants revealed their family, as well as the church including the dependence on a higher power, were essential in their bereavement process (Hardy-Bougere, 2008). The authors further suggested the reliance on the black church were deep-rooted in African

American history of turning to the church when being ostracized from Northern American institutions during segregation (Rosenblatt & Wallace, 2013). African Americans dependence on religion is rooted in the belief that death is the end of the physical presence, but the beginning of an afterlife and continued connectedness to the deceased (Barrett, 1998; Harrison, Kahn, & Hsu, 2005; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008).

The African American community believes in mourning customs to include a successful transition into the afterlife (Granek & Peleg- Sagy, 2017; Moore, 2003). As the funeral approaches, family and friends supply the bereaved with food, singing, and prayers of support (Granek & Peleg- Sagy, 2017; Moore, 2003). It is not uncommon during the funeral services for family members, specifically women and children to cry loudly, fall out, and experience dizzy spells (Schoulte, 2011). Maintaining a connection to the deceased, such as celebrating passing anniversaries or birthdays, contradict the research (Bowlby, 1973; Freud, 1957) that suggest the bereaved must let the deceased go to move forward, and Smith (2002) discovered maintaining a connection may be beneficial rather than obsessive.

Laurie and Neimeyer (2008) discovered the loss of extended family members such as aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents caused anguish in the African American community, and this response was not as evident in Caucasian families. In some cases, the loss of extended family members may cause a more significant hurt because of the relationship with that person, and in the African American community, the term *family* is not automatically defined by blood and may include a good friend of the family, that may be just as important as the nuclear family (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Hines, 1991; Laurie &

Neimeyer, 2008; Piazza- Bonin et al., 2015; Schoulte, 2011). This family dynamic can result in the flexibility of roles, and most often the African American female will often fulfill whatever role the family needs them to fill, and according to Salahu-Din (1996), as cited in Laurie and Neimeyer (2008), noticed that Caucasian women also relied on others during the bereavement process.

The underrepresentation of African American homicide survivors can affect their mental health, potentially causing a serious health concern (Sharpe, 2015). Traditionally, African Americans do not seek professional mental health services for grief support, and some may suggest the basis is centered on the idea of institutional mistrust with the healthcare system originating from a history of racism and oppression toward the African American community such as slavery, as well as the preference to depend on family, friends, and religion (Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser, & Sztompka, 2001; Barrett, 1998; Boyd-Franklin & Lockwood, 1999; Cruz et al., 2007; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Moore & Constantine, 2005; Myers & Speight, 2010; Parham, White, & Ajamu, 2000; Sharpe, 2008; Washington, 1997; Wong & Wong, 2006).

Furthermore, African Americans may simply prefer to keep their issues in-home or utilize religious avenues to avoid formal mental health services because of the stigma of being “crazy” when referencing counseling within the black community, often resulting in the bereaved handling it themselves rather than seek treatment (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008, p. 179; Sharpe, 2008). Moreover, African Americans have been coined strong individuals, suffering is a part of life, and trouble is to be expected. Furthermore, situations are often tolerated instead of obtaining

assistance, and the expectation is to continue to move forward (Black, 1999; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Sharpe, 2015; Sullivan, 1995).

Additionally, there is a notion that if African Americans were able to survive slavery by using prayer and comfort, then they would be able to use those same coping mechanisms to withstand a murder (Sharpe, 2015).

Emotional suppression has also been discovered to be evident in African American homicide survivors centered around the stigma of murder on this population, and the suppression can also be associated with complicated grief in positive or negative aspects; for example, survivors can suffer memory lapses and nervous system impairments (Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, & Hoffman, 2006; Gupta & Bonanno, 2011; Taylor, Lasky, & Weist, 2013). On the other hand, researchers discovered that unfortunate incidents could predict long-term positive functioning (Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001; Kring & Sloan, 2009).

Similarly, Latinos also consider close non-blood relationships to be family, and extended family is just as important as the immediate family members (Schoulte, 2011). Latinos prefer to allow the deceased to pass on in the home, surrounded by friends and family as well as ensuring the family congregates for one last time, and also prefer to depend on social support instead of seeking formal mental health services (Comas-Diaz, 2006; Kalish & Reynolds, 1981; McGoldrick et al., 2004; Schoulte, 2011; Sue, 1998). Latinos may also be at a disadvantage based on the lack of Spanish speaking therapist, financial burdens, and geographic locations (Cabassa, Zayas, & Hansen, 2006; Vega, Kolody, & Aguilar-Gaxiola, 2001); this research focused on bereavement experiences of

African Americans, and briefly for Latino Americans as well. As aforementioned, the African American community face a higher risk of homicide and have been ignored in the literature. The following section transitions into an in-depth explanation of the bereavement responses of parents and siblings.

Family Bereavement

Despite the primary focus being on sibling bereavement, it is important to highlight different aspects of familial bereavement to include parental bereavement and its effects on surviving siblings before focusing on sibling bereavement. I felt this was important, as siblings are often neglected by support systems to include their parents because they may be consumed with their grief often complicating the sibling survivors' bereavement process. The review of the literature also allowed for sibling bereavement responses by age and gender to be identified and explained to assist in formulating the study.

Parental Bereavement

When a woman is with child, the expecting parents form emotional connections to their unborn child (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999; Kempson et al., 2008). Parents should not bury their children; the child is supposed to bury the parent; however, this tragedy is a reality for many. Parents are forced to face the fact that their child is gone, and they can no longer continue with the plans the parent had for their child (Crehan, 2004). The grief associated with losing a child ranges from mental to physical torment, and the bereavement experience has been described as empty and full of sorrow (Leon, 1990; Wheeler, 2001). Parents not only lose their child but a piece of themselves as well

potentially resulting in unresolved grief. According to Bank and Kahn (1982), as cited in Crehan (2004)

If a part of the parent has died with the child, that parent, who was narcissistically invested in the child, will be likely to mourn unhealthily and involve the other children in that pathological grief. It thus becomes an all too easy step for parents to center unresolved grief on surviving children, who are immediately at hand, and in whom they have already emotionally invested. (p. 273)

Many studies have studied parental bereavement and described it as the most painful, intense, and devastating experience a parent will endure (Denhup, 2017; Floyd, Mailick-Seltzer, Greenberg, & Song, 2012; Lichtenthal et al., 2010; Wheeler, 2001). Specifically, Wheeler (2001) discovered that parents struggled with accepting the reality of the loss, parents' responses included, "I thought someone was playing a trick on us" and "How could this be happening?" (p. 56). Parental emotional responses also included anger, pain, fear, and guilt as well as "feeling completely out of control and wishing to die" (Wheeler, 2001, p. 56). Bereavement reactions following the loss of child can linger for lengthier periods of time resulting in prolonged grief, and coping strategies can be particularly challenging in cases of sudden death, resulting in psychiatric hospitalizations, depression, or death (Hardt et al., 2018; Li et al., 2003; Li, Laursen, Precht, Olsen, & Mortenson, 2005; Lichtenthal, et al., 2010; Rogers, Floyd, Seltzer, Greenberg, & Hong, 2008; Wheeler, 2001).

Parental bereavement effects on surviving siblings. Consequently, parental bereavement responses affect the surviving siblings' functioning, and bereaved parents

may be so consumed with their grief they tend to neglect the parenting needs of the surviving children and other family members (Asaro & Clements, 2005; Barrera et al., 2007; Hardt et al., 2018; Horsley & Patterson, 2006; Kempson et al., 2008; Levay, Krasnoff, & Dohrenwend, 1981; Packman et al., 2006; Pretorius et al., 2010; Worden, Davies, & McCown, 1999).

Parental grief often overshadows sibling loss, creating what is known as a “double loss”, and leaving the sibling survivor to grieve alone, and it is vital to remember that although a parent has lost their child, a sibling has also died (Applebaum & Burns, 1991; Asaro & Clements, 2005; Crehan, 2004; Devita-Raeburn, 2004; Hardt et al., 2018; McIntosh & Wroblewski, 1988; Packman et al., 2006). In other contexts, a father that loses their son may attempt to conform their daughter into a son, and marital strain can also occur during the parental bereavement process (Christian, 2007; Kempson et al., 2008; Lieberman, 1979).

Sibling Bereavement

Siblings are 50% similar genetically bound by strong emotional ties that last a lifetime, spending roughly 80-100% of their lifespan together (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Packman et al., 2006; Pretorius et al., 2010; Robinson & Mahon, 1997; Zampitella, 2011). As children, siblings often share parents, meals, grow and play together, and share secrets; they also learn together, fight, and support each other through the ups and downs (Forward & Garlie, 2003; Wright, 2016). Undeniably, the sibling relationship is unlike other familial relationships, and this bond can impact personality, family experiences, and

social adjustments (Horsley & Patterson, 2006; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Packman et al., 2006).

Bereavement similarities arise in all types of death but sibling bereavement is a unique loss that results in the removal of a playmate, confidant, role model, and friend that can severely impact the sibling survivor (Cohen & Katz, 2015; Forward & Garlie, 2003; Kempson & Murdock, 2010; Packman et al., 2006; Pretorius et al., 2010; Robinson & Mahon, 1997). Furthermore, sibling death marks the loss of a stable figure and severs what is expected to be the longest and most intimate relationship of a lifetime, where the sibling not only loses a significant object but also a part of themselves, and nothing can prepare a sibling for this (Auman, 2007; Crehan, 2004; Fletcher et al., 2013; Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2008; Packman et al., 2006; Robinson & Mahon, 1997; Rostila et al., 2012; Rowe, 2007; Wright, 2016). Sibling loss is expected to affect the bereaved for a lifetime (Wright, 2016). A ten-year-old bereaved sibling stated, “Grief is like football. Sometimes you feel you can run forever. Other times you get tackled out of nowhere” (Torbic, 2011, p. 68).

Each siblings’ bereavement experience will be a unique journey (Machajewski & Kronk, 2013). Sibling survivors may experience a variety of feelings to include guilt, sadness, relief, shame, and anger (Auman, 2007; Christian, 2007; Crehan, 2004; Currier et al., 2007a; Packman et al., 2006). Siblings may experience what is known as survivor guilt for several reasons to include being alive especially if they were with the deceased at the time of death, guilt for past disagreements, or sibling jealousy (Crehan, 2004; Stikkelbroek, Boddien, Reitz, Vollebergh, & van Baar, 2016).

Additionally, sibling survivors have also been reported to experience higher levels of psychological reactions such as anxiety, depression, and substance abuse (Hardt et al., 2018). Applebaum and Burns (1991) revealed sibling homicide survivors in comparison to siblings bereaved by accidental death displayed no differences in PTSD related symptoms, and the study further concluded that the siblings struggled with differentiating between intentional and unintentional causes of death. Furthermore, Bolton et al. (2016) discovered that bereaved siblings were twice as likely to attempt suicide. However, despite the adverse reactions associated with loss, many sibling survivors experience a greater sense of resilience, self-worth, and maturity often enriched by the accessibility of prosocial resources in the home as well as in the community (Hardt et al., 2018; Hogan & DeSantis, 1994, 1996).

Sibling survivor needs are often overlooked causing the sibling to face their grief alone coining them the forgotten mourners (Auman, 2007; Crehan, 2004; Kempson & Murdock, 2010; McIntosh & Wroblewski, 1988; Pretorius et al., 2010; Rostila et al., 2012). Sibling grief is insufficiently acknowledged and often overshadowed by their parents' suffering, and because sibling grief is considered to be minimal in comparison to parental grief the siblings are expected to grieve quickly and quietly; however, sibling loss is described to be as intense as parental loss (Asaro & Clements, 2005; Devita-Raeburn, 2004; Kempson & Murdock, 2010; Kirwin & Hamrin, 2005; Lohan & Murphy, 2002; Robinson & Mahon, 1997; Rostila et al., 2012). Siblings may also attempt to protect their parents by refraining from discussions of the loss to avoid additional pain (Applebaum & Burns, 1991).

“Validation is in short supply when a sibling dies” (Devita-Raeburn, 2004, p. 31).

The lack of care and consideration on bereaved siblings can complicate their bereavement experience and cloud their ability to make sense of loss (Kempson & Murdock, 2010). Sibling survivors may experience a concurrent loss by losing not only their sibling but also the support and attention, even if temporary of their parents (Davidson, 2018; Kempson & Murdock, 2010; Packman et al., 2006). Parents may also feel that they failed to protect the deceased child from harm, and question if the surviving sibling is safe, and may not seek professional interventions to assist the sibling in coping with the loss because they may believe the child can adapt to the death (Clements & Weisser, 2003; Crehan, 2004).

Halliwell and Franken (2016), discovered sibling survivors felt obligated to support their parents and suppressed their grief reactions; by doing this they were never provided the opportunity to express their grief, and felt displaying their anguish was inappropriate. Additionally, some of the survivors conveyed a lack of support by family members, occurrences of judgment for their grief displays, and being ignored by others which support the notion that siblings fall into the category as disenfranchised mourners (Davidson, 2018).

Positive support is essential during the sibling bereavement process (Davies, 1999). When possible, support should be available before the loss to assist the sibling in their journey through the process (Machajewski & Kronk, 2013). If the child can prepare for the loss and have the chance to say goodbye, create final memories, or participate in the treatment then coping with the loss may be tolerable (Busch & Kimble, 2001;

Machajewski & Kronk, 2013). If the loss is relatively sudden or traumatic, siblings are at a heightened risk of posttraumatic stress and complicated grief (Clements & Weisser, 2003).

Sibling death can create a void within the family as the deceased is no longer physically present but remains psychologically present, which can ultimately create a problem for the surviving family members (Lohan & Murphy, 2002). The void that death creates may not resolve, and siblings reported “wishing it was different” and another sibling reported that he “lost his best friend” (Boss, 1988; Lohan & Murphy, 2002, p. 210). The critical milestones that the surviving siblings may reach, such as graduations and weddings may cause painful reminders of the deceased (Lohan & Murphy, 2002). The loss may also alter the surviving sibling's role within the family, and relationships with the parents, family members, or remaining siblings may change (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; White, 2006). The deceased sibling could have been the protector, provider, or the peacekeeper, and this role can be challenging especially if the survivor is taking on the role as the only living child (Asaro & Clements, 2005). The surviving sibling may be expected to carry on the legacy of the deceased sibling versus their dreams, and siblings have reported being “pained by comparisons with sister” or “challenged to excel in his memory” (Rando 1993; Lohan & Murphy, 2002, p. 210).

Sibling loss by gender. Gender may be a factor in determining a child's response to death (Paris et al., 2009). Research by McCown and Pratt (1985), as cited in Paris et al., (2009) discovered that the loss of a brother, whether the bereaved was male or female sparked behavioral issues. Worden et al., (1999), also found that when a young girl loses

a sibling, the loss can be more harmful than losing a parent. According to Abdelnoor and Hollins (2004), a bereaved sister scored lower on standardized tests in comparison to those suffering parental loss. According to Dowdney (2008), bereaved boys typically display aggressive behaviors, whereas females usually display depressive symptoms such as insomnia and bed wetting.

Impact of Sibling Loss by Survivor Age

A child's mental and developmental age will impact their understanding of loss, and bereavement interventions targeted towards adults may not be of benefit to children (Auman, 2007; Balk, 1990; Busch & Kimble, 2001; Dowdney, 2008; Forward & Garlie, 2003; Lohan & Murphy, 2002; McCown & Davies, 1995; Paris et al., 2009; Torbic, 2011). According to Davies (1999), as cited in Machajewski and Kronk (2013), a child's comprehension of grief is a 3-step process: understand, mourn, and return. The child will have to understand that death is final, actually, mourn the loss, and then the child will return to normal despite the disruption the loss has caused. Studies have suggested sibling survivors experience three tasks throughout their grief journey (Busch & Kimble, 2001; Davies, 1999; Gardner, 1990; Kirwin & Hamrin, 2005). The bereaved must understand and accept the idea of death, adjust to a world without the deceased, and form new relational bonds. Bowlby (1973) suggested the bereavement process in children varies from shock, yearning, disbelief once the reality of death is acknowledged.

Additionally, researchers suggested four concepts of death must be understood by children: universality, irreversibility, non-functionality, and causality (Christian, 1997; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Willis, 2002). Once the child understands that all living

things will die, universality is reached. Some children may see death in cartoons, and although the character dies, they come back to life; therefore, the child may be confused about losing a loved one and its irreversibility (Willis, 2002). Lastly, children must understand causes of death, because most children may believe their family members cannot die, and once they accept the finality of death, emotionally detaches, and creates new relationships grief is resolved (Bowlby, 1973; Reynolds, Miller, Jelalian, & Spirito, 1995).

Childhood Sibling Loss

Bereavement studies involving children continues to grow within the literature (Machajewski & Kronk, 2013). An estimated 73,000 children die each year in the United States from a variety of causes to include natural causes and violence (Torbic, 2011). One child in every seven will experience the death of an immediate family member by age ten, and roughly 5% of those children will experience a significant loss of a family member before age 15 (Currier et al., 2007a; Highmark Caring Place, 2010; Torbic, 2011). Bereaved children's grief may decrease within four months of the loss, but in some cases, emotional and behavioral responses can persist for up to 12 months after the death (Dowdney, 2000). It is important to remember that grief is a process, and despite society's' expectation for mourners to move on quickly, children cannot comprehend this abbreviated grief concept, and it should not be assumed that because the bereaved is a child that they will soon get over the loss (Calderwood, 2011; Clements et al., 2004; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Willis, 2002).

Most children have a sibling, and sibling loss is an immediate change to the survivors' world that can have lasting effects on the development of the surviving sibling, and their future is ultimately dependent on how they navigate throughout the grief process (Bolton et al., 2016; Christian, 2007; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; United Nations, 2013). Throughout the bereavement process, the sibling is tasked with accepting a life without the deceased, and if the bereaved is unable to do so emotional, behavioral, and psychiatric issues can arise, and linger into adulthood (Kirwin & Hamrin, 2005; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Torbic, 2011).

Children have been categorized as disadvantaged mourners based on the idea that they lack the emotional developments to comprehend the pain they are experiencing following the loss of their sibling (Torbic, 2011). Children will display their bereavement reactions that can range from outward responses to internalizing their feelings (Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Torbic, 2011). Grief responses in children can include sadness, confusion, numbness, loneliness, denial, guilt, depression, disbelief, anxiety, PTSD, shock, and behavioral or health concerns (Currier et al., 2007a; Dowdney, 2008; Forward & Garlie, 2003; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Mahon & Page, 1995; Osterweis et al., 1984; Rostila et al., 2012; Torbic, 2011; Webb, 2002). Guilt may emerge following sibling death if the sibling has wished their sibling dead, jealous, or had an argument that went unresolved (Kübler-Ross, 1983; Willis, 2002).

A previous study by McCown and Pratt (1985), as cited in Paris et al., (2009), discovered that behavioral concerns were common in children and that bereaved children were at an increased risk of behavioral issues in comparison to non-bereaved children.

Behavioral concerns may emerge in the school setting, and children may struggle in the classroom, become forgetful, aggressive, and act out because they cannot properly articulate their feelings or focus on assignments (Paris et al., 2009; Torbic, 2011).

Children may attempt to keep in touch with the deceased through acts such as keeping their siblings' possessions, pictures near their beds, incorporating them into special events, and communicating with their sibling (Forward & Garlie, 2003; Mahon & Page, 1995; Packman et al., 2006). Additionally, Mahon and Page (1995) discovered that funeral directors had witnessed outward responses such as bereaved siblings placing items such as toys, photos, or letters into the casket, as a way to let go of the sibling. Torbic (2011) discovered that younger siblings often engage in games such as hide and seek in efforts to locate their deceased sibling. Children may be dependent on others or withdraw from peers following the loss (Torbic, 2011).

Bereaved children may also suffer from complicated grief reactions if they do not receive the proper support from their parents if the parent is physically or emotionally unavailable due to their grief (Auman, 2007; Calderwood, 2011; Crehan, 2004; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013). Bereavement support is crucial for children to ensure they have psychological stability, and their needs are met (Auman, 2007). The grief process can also be complicated if the child is experiencing a traumatic loss, and those suffering from the murder of a sibling can experience anger, shame, and guilt for more extended periods (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004). Children experiencing death by homicide can be scared or confused about what may happen to them as well as feelings of anger and

distrust toward the world and themselves for any issues that may have been unresolved at the time of death (Vigil & Clements, 2003).

To the contrary, the bereavement experience in children can result in positive reactions such as resilience, education improvements, independence, empathy, and spiritual or relational growth (Dowdney 2000, 2008). A previous study by Worden (1996), as cited in Currier et al., (2007b), discovered that roughly 80% of the bereaved siblings will be resilient in adjusting to the loss, and an estimated 15%-20% are expected to display bereavement struggles (emotional and behavioral) more than 2 years following the loss.

Early Childhood

Infants under age 2 are unable to understand death; the research available on infants' understanding of death is centered on understanding loss and responses to separation or a change in their environment (Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Miller, 2009; Torbic, 2011). Sibling loss is not something that an infant comprehends, but they will notice the change or absence in their primary caregiver (Crehan, 2004; Miller, 2009). Infants have demonstrated behavioral and physical reactions to being separated from a caregiver during bereavement such as irritability, eating, and sleep changes; therefore, routines are vital for this age group (Hames, 2003; Kirwin & Hamrin, 2005; Torbic, 2011). Between infancy to age two, the primary caregiver is identified, and the stages of mourning may be evident (Bowlby, 1970; Parkes, 1996). According to Davies (1999), if an infant is not thriving during the bereavement process, it may result in the survivor

spending their lives to search for the deceased sibling. Throughout their lives, the survivors may often feel guilty about not knowing their sibling (Davies, 1999).

Children between ages 2-5 do not have any real understanding of time; therefore, any form a separation from loved ones can result in a loss of security (Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Willis, 2002). Since the concepts of death are not comprehensible at this age, the child may have a sense of magical thinking, and despite the cause the survivor may believe they caused the death of their sibling, as well as continual questions wondering when their sibling will return home (Crehan, 2004; Dowdney, 2008; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Torbic, 2011). Siblings at this age struggle with grasping death as an irreversible part of life (Crehan, 2004; Miller, 2009). Magical thinkers may make comments such as, "If I am good, Santa is sure to bring my brother back?" (Torbic, 2011, p. 71). Furthermore, at this age children may revert to previous behaviors, for example, a child may wet the bed even if toilet trained, become clingy, or have tantrums (Auman, 2007; Dowdney, 2005; Hames, 2003; Torbic, 2011; Willis, 2002).

McCown and Davies (1995), as cited in Machajewski and Kronk (2013), discovered that on the aggression subscale behaviors to include being argumentative, irritable, and disobedient were evident in over 50% of the bereaved male siblings between ages 4-5. On the depression subscale, self-consciousness and embarrassment were also apparent in the female siblings. Gibbons (1992), as cited in Machajewski and Kronk (2013), suggested children between ages 2-3 would benefit from preparation, if possible before the loss. Examples included allowing the sibling to participate in caring

for the sibling in the home or hospital and providing straightforward responses to the questions they may have.

Middle Childhood

Children between ages 5-9 understand that they did not directly cause the death of their sibling; however, there may be a sense of guilt based on previous thoughts of imagining life without the sibling (Machajewski & Kronk, 2013). If the child believes they were the cause of their siblings' death then guilt related behaviors may emerge to include aggression and regression; they may also feel alone in the world without their sibling (Machajewski & Kronk, 2013). Survivors may feel sad, depressed, anxiety, or fear (Nolbris & Hellström, 2005). Children may also experience nightmares, and wish they were dead to be reunited with the deceased, rather than a desire to end their life (Dowdney, 2005, 2008). Physical grief reactions may also emerge and can include headaches, stomachaches, and insomnia (Dowdney, 2008; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Torbic, 2011). As witnessed with the toddlers, males at this age also exhibit aggressive behaviors, and the females appear shy (McCown & Davies, 1995).

By age 9, children have an enhanced understanding of how permanent death is, however, they can still yearn for their sibling to return and believe they could have prevented the loss (Dowdney, 2005). Around age 11, children are comprehending that death ends bodily functions, and they may be concerned with if the deceased is going to be cold, hungry, scared, or alone (Dowdney, 2005; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Reynolds et al., 1995). For children of any age, parents should be open to any questions, and refrain from shielding the children from death, their grief, and the funeral; as well as

reminding them they had nothing to do with the death of their sibling and in cases of homicide telling them the assailant is not coming for them (Busch & Kimble, 2001; Miller, 2009).

Adolescents

Little is known about the bereavement process faced by adolescents following the death of a sibling (Forward & Garlie, 2003). Adolescence is a crucial time in a young person's life because they are forming their own identity and worldview, as well as developing their physical, cognitive, moral, and interpersonal attributes (Balk, 1990; Forward & Garlie, 2003; Lohan & Murphy, 2002). Additionally, as a teenager, peer relationships are essential as their self-esteem and identity are continuously developing (Torbic, 2011). Researchers consider adolescence to be a difficult time to experience the death of a sibling as it is a tragic, permanent, and poorly understood experience (Balk, 1990; Forward & Garlie, 2003; Hogan & DeSantis, 1994; Lohan & Murphy, 2002; Osterweis et al., 1984).

The sudden death of a sibling is a horrendous experience that creates a lifelong trauma that can trigger emotional and psychological reactions, bereaved adolescents may experience disbelief, shock, guilt, fear, sadness, panic, anger, behavioral concerns, insomnia, psychological distress, peer and family withdrawal, and numbness to attempt to escape from the actuality of loss (Dowdney, 2005, 2008; Forward & Garlie, 2003; Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Horsley & Patterson, 2006; Stikkelbroek et al., 2016; Torbic, 2011). Guilt can also be a debilitating reaction, especially if the sibling felt as if they did not appreciate their loved one enough (Dowdney, 2008; Torbic, 2011).

The presence of denial in bereaved adolescents is a predictable reaction to the death, and mental health concerns may arise in roughly 25% of bereaved adolescents (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014; Stikkelbroek et al., 2016). Adolescents may also view the loss to be unfair causing them to question life, mask their grief, grieve privately, and feel invincible to death which can result in placing themselves in dangerous situations such as drinking, promiscuity, and substance abuse (Balk, 1996; Dowdney, 2005, 2008; Horsley & Patterson, 2006; Miller, 2009; Torbic, 2011). To distract themselves from the loss, teens may overly engage in social activities, which may cause others to wonder if they are grieving, and potentially assume that they are alright (Dowdney, 2005).

On the other hand, Forward and Garlie (2003) discovered that bereaved adolescents displayed an increase in maturity, higher affection levels, and a greater sense of purpose in life. At this age, the bereaved may also inherit new roles within the family, such as increased responsibilities and protecting other family members; this may cause the bereaved to appear as if they are not particularly affected sending mixed signals to those around them (Dowdney, 2008). A previous study by Davies (1991) discovered that the bereavement experience resulted in positive psychological growth supporting the research by Bank and Kahn (1982) that adversity can be beneficial.

Adulthood

Death can affect individuals of all ages; however, the research has primarily focused on children and adolescent grief experiences, and very little is known regarding adult grief responses (Eaves, McQuiston, & Miles, 2005; Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2008; Osterweis et al., 1984; Rostila et al., 2012; Wright, 2016). Despite the frequency of

sibling loss in adulthood it is the least studied in family bereavement literature but is gradually emerging in bereavement literature, and it unclear whether the interventions geared toward children would be beneficial to the adult population (Balk, 1983; Reed & Greenwald, 1991; Rostila et al., 2012; Wright, 2016).

Researchers proposed that sibling loss in adulthood is not recognized by society in the same capacity as other bereavement experiences, and few resources acknowledge the topic (Wray, 2003; Zampitella, 2011). According to Robinson and Pickett (1996), as cited in Eaves et al. (2005), adult bereavement experiences are possibly ignored because of the assumption that sibling relationships are not as relevant post-childhood. On the other hand, life changes such as children, employment opportunities, and marriages may cause emotional and physical separations that can potentially affect the relationship and create feelings of guilt or regret (Eaves et al., 2005; Moss & Moss, 1986).

Adult siblings employ numerous roles following the loss that can intensify emotions, as they are often tasked with end of life care, assisting the aging parent if the deceased was a caregiver, and the funeral arrangements (Moss, Moss, & Hansson, 2001; Shanas, 1979; Walsh & McGoldrick, 2013; Wright, 2016). Siblings can provide social and emotional support, family reconnection assistance, and revisit warm memories from the past; therefore, when that sibling passes on the survivor(s) lose their pillar as well as the knowledge of memories that may die with them (Eaves et al., 2005; Moss & Moss, 1989; Wright, 2016). The family dynamic changes after the sibling death, as the survivors are not only grieving the loss of the sibling but also contributing to the reparation of family relationships (Wright, 2016).

Although adults are of age to express themselves and request assistance if needed, the effects of sibling loss in adulthood can include depression, complicated grief, regret, fear, self-blame, and stroke; additionally, if the bereavement experience is unresolved as a child, the adult survivor may engage in suicidal acts (Auman, 2007; Black, 1998; Mash, Fullerton, & Ursano, 2013; Pretorius et al., 2010; Rostila et al., 2012; Willis, 2002; Wright, 2016). According to Lobb et al., (2010), complicated grief is associated with traumatic loss to include feelings of revenge and confusion. To the contrary, adult siblings may find meaning, personal strength, resilience, and improved relationships with others (Mash et al., 2013; Pretorius et al., 2010; Taku, Tedeschi, & Cann, 2014; Wright, 2016).

A study by Hays, Gold, and Peiper (1997), as cited in Eaves et al., (2005) discovered the bereavement reactions between genders and discovered sisters that experienced the loss of their brother showed higher signs of depression in comparison to the loss of a sister. The study also discovered that bereaved brothers experienced health complications in contrast to bereaved sisters. Additionally, I found that female siblings displayed intensified grief reactions in comparison to bereaved male siblings (Arbuckle & de Vries, 1995; Fletcher et al., 2013; Rostila, Saarela, & Kawachi, 2013; Worden et al., 1999). Adult siblings of both genders may also struggle with their fear of mortality following the loss as well as suffering from survivor guilt following the loss (Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2008).

Sibling grief is said to be secondary to parental loss therefore the bereaved may not feel comfortable expressing themselves to parents ultimately suppressing their grief

(Robinson & Mahon, 1997; Robson & Walter, 2013; Wright, 2016). Adult sibling survivors may also become overprotective of their children, overreact to future losses, or provide emotional or financial support to the surviving spouse or child (Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2008; Walker, 1993; White, 2006). Additionally, adult sibling survivors may experience disenfranchised grief, if their grief is minimized, and comments such as “How awful! How are your parents doing?” or “You lived in different states, so you probably weren’t very close” can assist in invalidating the survivors’ feelings causing them to mask their grief (Cicirelli, 2009; Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2008, p. 6).

The literature suggests that sibling bereavement responses vary by age. Children were found to display behavioral reactions, and may also struggle with understanding the finality of death. Adolescents have also been discovered to struggle with survivors guilt and substance abuse, and to the contrary have also displayed great maturity and independence. Adult sibling grief was not seen to be as significant as most may grow up and grow apart. It is further suggested that sibling survivors’ at any age can struggle with disenfranchised grief. The following section will discuss the homicide rates as well as information on survivor reactions to homicide to include coping mechanisms that may vary by ethnicity and culture. Additionally, the section will highlight the effects of media coverage on homicide survivors.

Homicide

Categories of causes of death include homicide, suicide, accident, natural, and undetermined (DiMaio & DiMaio, 1993). Homicide is defined as the willful killing of one human being by another, and is a common tragedy that can occur almost anywhere

including grocery stores, parks, schools, and movie theatres to name a few, and is always violent and sudden (Aldrich & Kallivayalil, 2016; Armour, 2002; Clements & Burgess, 2002; Morales, 1995). Homicide, suicide, and accidents fall into the category of violent deaths because the death is caused by intentional physical forces or power threatened against a person, community, or group (Nakajima et al., 2012). Homicide falls into categories of degrees, based on the intent or premeditation, the perpetrator can be charged with first or second-degree murder; if the killing was unplanned, the assailant might encounter manslaughter charges (Duhaime Canadian Law Dictionary, 2004; Vessier-Batchen & Douglas, 2006).

According to Spungen (1998), as cited in Asaro (2001a), homicide is described as “the blackest hell accompanied by a pain so intense that even breathing becomes an unendurable labor” (p. 95). Masters, Friedman, and Getzel (1988), as cited in Aldrich and Kallivayalil (2016) described “murder as a trauma that does not end” (p. 26). Homicide is the most severe and traumatic cause of death. Murder has been defined as the “ultimate violation” inflicted on a person because it is a brutal and deliberate assault on an unwilling victim (Miller, 2009, p. 68). Unlike other causes of death such as illness or old age, homicide robs the family of anticipation, the opportunity to say goodbye, and removes a loved one from the family (Aldrich & Kallivayalil, 2016; Armour, 2002; Clements et al., 2004; McKenzie, 2015; Miller, 2008, 2009; Vigil & Clements, 2003).

Homicide is an “untimely, unfair, and unnatural” cause of death, and can occur for a number of reasons such as domestic violence, financial gain, gang violence, mass murder, terrorist attacks, and war crimes (Asaro & Clements, 2005, p. 101; DeRanieri,

Clements, Clark, Kuhn, & Manno, 2004; Vigil & Clements, 2003). The victims of homicides range from spouses in domestic disputes, children involved in gang member crossfires, or elders killed during home invasions or robberies; victims can also be tortured or sexually assaulted before being murdered (Asaro, 2001a; Vigil & Clements, 2003). In 2017, a total of 15,129 homicides occurred, and 11,862 were male, and 3,222 were female victims (UCR, 2017).

Minorities in poverty-stricken areas are at a higher risk of homicide, teens are likely to be killed in comparison to adults, and gang members are at an increased risk in comparison to non-gang members (Freeman et al., 1996; Papachristos & Wildeman, 2014). The research relevant to African Americans homicide is scarce (Sharpe, 2008; Sharpe et al., 2014). African Americans account for about 68% of homicide victims, and are at an increased rate of 10 times more likely to experience homicide in comparison to Caucasian Americans; homicide is the leading cause of death in African Americans and Latinos between ages 15-34 (Burke et al., 2010; CDC, 2002, 2011; Hoyert & Xu, 2012; Kochanek et al., 2004; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; McDevitt-Murphy et al., 2012; Papachristos & Wildeman, 2014; Schoulte, 2011; Sharpe et al., 2013; Sharpe et al., 2014). Homicides in the African American community is almost an expected way to die; 10,205 of homicide victims in 2017 were African American and Latinos, and 6,579 were Caucasian victims (Sharpe et al., 2013; UCR, 2017). Factors such as firearm accessibility and gang involvements increase the risk of minority homicide (Fox & Zawitz, 2001).

Homicide Media Coverage

Many homicides receive extensive media coverage as “newsworthiness lies in the sensational nature of the death”; news of murders can allow for the public to empathize with the victim and their families at times (Clements & Burgess, 2002; Peelo, 2006; Riches & Dawson, 1998, p. 145; Walklate & Petrie, 2013; Wellman, 2018). The media is allowed to determine how and when the information will be provided to the public based on the amount of information available, audience needs, and interests (Fahmy, 2005; Kratzer & Kratzer, 2003; Tai & Chang, 2002; Wellman, 2018). The average person will often gain media notoriety especially following the murder as their names are plastered over local and national televisions striking the curiosity of society (Clements & Burgess, 2002; Riches & Dawson, 1998).

Media commentary is not always welcomed, the most sensitive, and the coverage ultimately strips the family of their privacy (Aldrich & Kallivayalil, 2016; Clements & Burgess, 2002; Wellman, 2018). Social activists have asked the media outlets to acknowledge the insensitivity displayed when portraying information on violent crimes resulting in an update on ethical journalism guidelines (Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, 2000; Levin, 1995; Rentschler, 2007; Simpson & Cote, 2006; Wellman, 2018).

Little to no consideration is taken regarding the family when a story is presented, and the media can often alter, reconstruct, slander, or inflate the family’s tragedy (Armour, 2002; Miller, 2009; Nakajima et al., 2012). Photos and videos of the victim are often replayed on news outlets, potentially causing anguish for the family as well as incorrect information being presented (Armour 2004, 2006; Wellman, 2018). Society can

read and watch the details of the murder and move forward; however, homicide survivors are impacted differently and may not be able to digest the information the same way (Brookes, Wilson, Yardley, Rahman, & Rowe, 2015; Peelo, 2006; Wellman, 2018).

Survivors also reported that media outlets focus on criminal backgrounds or lifestyles, potentially affecting grief reactions and investigations (Armour, 2003; Wellman, 2018).

A sibling survivor in Wellman (2018) revealed

I think because she had a criminal record, and that she was a prostitute and a drug user that they put her on the back burner. You know? That's one less crime happening today. That's how they made me feel, and that was pretty much the very first article I read in the newspaper. (p. 12)

Due to their vulnerable state, many survivors may not realize they have the right to deny media attention especially since the media is persistent and may want to discuss the case immediately following the loss, frequently, publish photos or videos without the family's permission, and reveal details the family may not have been aware of (Armour, 2002; Asaro, 2001a). The excessive media attention can make it difficult for closure to occur, create social distrust, hinder support, alter the meaning of the loss, and cause psychological distress (Armour, 2002; Miller, 2009; Nakajima et al., 2012; Peelo, 2006). Although initially following the murder, the family may be overwhelmed but willing to assist the media, research has suggested that including survivors in the development of stories can be helpful to the victims before airing incorrect or insensitive information (Breslin, 2003; Chermak, 1995; Wellman, 2018).

Several factors, such as race, gender, geography, and age, determine the newsworthiness of cases (Wellman, 2018). Minorities such as Latinos and African Americans are at a higher risk for homicide but are likely to receive minimal media coverage in comparison to Caucasians (USDOJ, 2014; Wellman, 2008). The stigmatized *black on black crime* receives scarce media coverage than a white victim and African American perpetrator (Lundman, 2003; Madison, 2001; Wellman, 2018). The bias of society, racism, and fear of crime by African Americans, frequency of are a few reasons why the media is selective with their attention (Capeci, 2015; Feagin, 1991; Lundman, 2003; Madison, 2001; USDOJ, 2014).

Female victims of homicide receive more media coverage than male homicide victims, especially if the offender and victim are both female; male perpetrators with female victims will likely make the front page (Lundman, 2003). In cases of minority women, they may be viewed as a “lesser” victim in comparison to their white counterparts (Wellman, 2018, p. 5). A study by Gilchrist (2010), discovered that race affected the amount of coverage on the missing and later murdered women in Canada. The study revealed that white women received 3.5 times more coverage than Aboriginal (native) women, and the published stories were often hidden in the news, impersonal, lacked empathy, and photos were of passport sizes.

On the other hand, white women were considered to be pure and more deserving of media coverage, and their stories were detailed and had larger pictures and provided details of on ongoing investigations (Collins 2000, 2013; Gilchrist, 2010; Wellman, 2018; Wilcox, 2005). White victims, regardless of their gender will be of interest because of

their high status and lack of criminal involvement, and since women in comparison to men are less likely to be killed, they are attractive to media outlets (Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; USDOJ, 2014; Wellman, 2018).

Children and the elderly will likely have recurring stories, front page notoriety, and pictures in comparison to middle-aged victims (Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Wellman, 2018). Additionally, homicides that occur in wealthy areas or suburbs are highly publicized, and when these incidents occur in close proxemics to the readers, interest is enhanced as people want to know what is going on around them (Blau, 1991; Greer, 2003; Simon, 1991). Sibling survivors are often forced to witness their siblings' murder on the news where the brother or sister they have always known is referred to as crime victim or a criminal that had it coming (Freeman et al., 1996).

Murder victims are often stigmatized to the media especially if their lifestyle is similar to the assailant suggesting that the deceased may have contributed to their death which can deter the public's willingness to empathize with the survivors often resulting in disenfranchised grief in the survivors (Doka, 2002b; Riches & Dawson, 1998; Spungen, 1998). Whereas, victims of terrorism, children, and elderly are viewed as "innocent victims" (Riches & Dawson, 1998, p. 145). The negative commentary can result in victimization stemming from judgment, which may cause the survivor to isolate potentially elongating the bereavement process (Armour, 2003; Rando, 1993; Rynearson, 1988, 1994; Wellman, 2018).

Homicide Survivors

Homicide survivors, also known as *co-victims* are the family members and friends left behind to mourn and speak for the deceased following a murder are a neglected population (Armour, 2002; Asaro, 2001a; Clements & Burgess, 2002; Spungen, 1998; Wellman, 2018). Despite the frequency of murder, the survivors were not considered to be co-victims until after World War II (Vessier-Batchen & Douglas, 2006). The process of surviving the murder of a loved one is more complex than those experiencing anticipated loss as bereavement reactions will vary, survivors are affected differently than those experiencing anticipated loss, and due to the suddenness of homicide the survivor may experience traumatic grief (Armour, 2002; Dyregrov, 2006; Riches, 2010; Sharpe, 2015; Vessier-Batchen & Douglas, 2006). The survivors' world as they know it has been altered, and they can spend days, weeks, or even months trying to cope with the loss, and their new view of life (Aldrich & Kallivayalil, 2013, 2016; Miller, 2008).

According to Redmond (1989), as cited in Sharpe (2015), victims of homicide leave behind 7-10 family members, friends, and coworkers to mourn the loss. Homicide survivors often depend on one another to get through the loss, suffer victimization, and serve as a point of contact with various events following the loss (Armour, 2002). Although the victim's suffering ends with the homicide, it is only the beginning for the survivors, and while the survivor is learning to live without the deceased intensified grief reactions may arise (Aldrich & Kallivayalil, 2013; Asaro, 2001a; Asaro & Clements, 2005; Pretorius et al., 2010; Redmond, 1989). Based on the unexpected and violent nature of homicide, survivors are at a higher risk of experiencing posttraumatic stress

disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, major depressive disorder, and complicated grief (Applebaum & Burns, 1991; Baliko & Tuck, 2008; Freeman et al., 1996; McKenzie, 2015; Rheingold, Zinzow, Hawkins, Saunders, & Kilpatrick, 2012; Sharpe et al., 2014; Sharpe, 2015; Zinzow et al., 2009).

Survivor reactions. Additionally, homicide survivors can experience anger, fear, yearning, shame, vulnerability, guilt, powerlessness as well as an increased risk of suicide and mental health concerns (Aldrich & Kallivayalil, 2013; Doka, 1996; McKenzie, 2015; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011). Research by Miller (2009) also found that surviving family members may die within a few years of the murder due to physical and mental health deterioration. Homicide survivors, as discovered by Riches (2010) are faced with a different type of bereavement experience in comparison to those experiencing normal grief. Factors such as media misinterpretation, criminal justice obligations, and outside judgments can cause the bereaved to feel lonely, powerless, horrified, and frustrated (Armour, 2003; Riches, 2010). The bereaved may struggle with unanswered questions, confusion as to why the event happened, and dwell on how they could have prevented the attack (Riches, 2010).

Once the survivor has been notified of the murder, survivors may experience shock and numbness as they struggle with comprehending the loss and rattle their brain by trying to make sense of the violent act and if they suffered (Asaro & Clements, 2005; Clements & Burgess, 2002; Clements et al., 2004; Miller, 2008; Pretorius et al., 2010). Asaro (2001a, 2001b) suggested survivors experience four types of loss following a homicide: relational, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extra-personal. Initially, the

survivor must deal with the relational loss of their loved one. The second loss is intrapersonal, where the survivors' world and their previous beliefs to include religious beliefs are put into question. Interpersonally, the homicide disrupts the family relational dynamic, and if there is a lack of community support feelings of isolation may arise. Finally, the extra-personal loss is associated with the financial stressors that arise, such as medical bills and funeral expenses.

Homicide survivor coping strategies will vary (Miller, 2009; Sharpe et al., 2013). Some may wear the victims' clothes, sleep in their bed, seek group or individual support, turn to illegal substances; however, on the contrary, some may distance themselves from the idea of the loss by overindulging in educational or professional obligations (Miller, 2009; Sharpe et al., 2013). Survivors were also discovered to have nightmares on how the murder occurred as well as dreams where they made attempts to save them (Miller, 2009).

African Americans, as found in Sharpe (2008), used spirituality, remaining connected to the deceased, caring for others, and hiding their emotions to cope with the murder. Additional research by Vale-Taylor (2009) discovered survivors visited the gravesite, preserving keepsakes, photos, videos, and praying with the deceased to maintain a connection with the deceased. It is suggested that these and other forms of bonding provided the survivor with great comfort as it allowed for the reflection of memories (Sharpe & Boyas, 2011; Vale-Taylor, 2009).

Vesper and Cohen (1999), as cited in Miller (2009), discussed five different family reactions likely to occur following trauma:

1. *The Contemptuous Family*: Copes negatively by being angry or blaming one another.
2. *The Brittle Family*: Struggles with depending on each other and prefers outside support.
3. *The Hierarchical Family*: Functions as a unit and usually leaves significant decisions to the elders.
4. *The Enduring Family*: Survives by their faith in God, and understands that adversities will occur.
5. *The Functional Family*: Provides support to family members that may need it more than others.

Bereavement reactions between males and females also varied, and due to the expectations imposed by society, males do not express their emotions as willingly as women (Cook, 1988; Granek, 2015; Martin & Doka, 2000; Sharpe et al., 2014). According to Kersting et al., (2011), complicated grief reactions were increased in females versus males. Additional studies such as Stillion and Noviello (2001), discovered that parents that lost their child to suicide or homicide displayed different coping skills; fathers handled their grief by being more hands-on, such as providing financial support, and women were dependent on support groups to be able to express themselves. Schwab (1990), also discovered that participating in support groups, reading, journal, and crying were more evident in mothers instead of fathers. Kenney (2003), as cited in Miller (2009), discovered that men suffered from heart-related complications as well as early deaths, and women experienced anxiety-related issues. The study concluded that the

differences were based on customary expectations that men suppress their emotions, and women express theirs.

The murder may result in the survivor experiencing a sense of vulnerability fearing they may be in danger, causing routine changes, increased security, and avoidance of people or places (Miller, 2009). On the other hand, the survivor may experience feelings of intense and justifiable rage and revenge toward the murderer that may linger well past the potential arrest, court hearing, and incarceration (Miller, 2009). Survivors often experience guilt due to unresolved fights or relational regrets at the time of the homicide; guilt may also arise if a family or friend was somehow connected to the murder, often believing they could have prevented the murder (Asaro, 2001a, 2001b; Asaro & Clements, 2005; Pretorius et al., 2010).

Religion. Religious coping is defined as “a dimension of religion or spirituality that refers to the use of religious or spiritual activities and beliefs to deal with stressful events” (Wortmann & Park, 2008, p. 717). Bereaved individuals may heavily rely on a higher power during their loss experience, as most Americans do consider themselves to be religious in some form, and African Americans may use spiritual resources to adapt to the loss (Barrett, 1995; Hill & Pargament, 2008; Wortmann & Park, 2008). Researchers discovered that religious dependence, concealing emotions, and remaining connected to the deceased were ways African Americans coped with homicide-related grief (Barrett, 2001; Sharpe, 2008; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011).

Most individuals turn to religious entities for meaning and comfort, and although it can and does assist many, some do not find religion to be helpful (Burke et al., 2011;

Gilbert, 1992; Hills, Paice, Cameron, & Shott, 2005; Lovell, Hemmings, & Hill, 1993; Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). Positive and negative religious coping mannerisms have been identified in the literature (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). Positive religious coping is based on maintaining a strong faith in God, and that life has meaning. Most funerals are grounded in religious traditions and often include scripture readings, songs of comfort, and prayer that can assist the family in creating meaning (Wortmann & Park, 2008). According to Asaro (1992), as cited in Asaro (2001b), survivors found their faith in God was strengthened following the loss. On the other hand, negative religious coping traits include a poor religious relationship and spiritual struggle where survivors may have felt abandoned by God, question religious beliefs including God's will, and being mad at God for "allowing" the murder to occur may arise (Asaro, 2001b, p. 115; Burke et al., 2011). It is not uncommon for survivors to experience both of these coping mechanisms interchangeably, and faith can be a source of strength and strife (Hills et al., 2005; Pargament et al., 1998).

Victim blame. The stigma attached to homicide nearly always shifts the culpability to the victim's death to suggest their illegal high-risk lifestyles increase their chances of being exposed to violent acts such as gang involvement, substance abuse, and prostitution (Armour, 2002; Doka, 2002a; Redmond, 1996; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011; Spungen, 1998; Vessier-Batchen & Douglas, 2006). If the victim was killed in instances such as during a robbery, home invasion, or was an innocent bystander, community support is likely to occur. However, if the victim was involved in criminal activities at the time of death, family members may be shunned (Redmond, 1996; Vessier-Batchen &

Douglas, 2006). The stigma faced by African Americans homicide victims suggests they were likely to be involved in criminal acts, and if the victim and murderer are African American feelings of marginalization may arise in the black community (McGuffey, 2013; Sharpe, 2008; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011). Moreover, the continued focus on this form of violent death may suggest that murder is the primary cause of death for this population (Granek & Peleg-Sagy, 2015).

Countless attempts were also likely to be made by the family to encourage the deceased to change their life, and feelings of helplessness and frustration may occur following the murder especially if the family feels they failed to protect the deceased (Asaro & Clements, 2005; Jones & Beck, 2007; Miller, 2009; Sharpe, 2015). Despite this, in some cases, the family may be relieved when the loved one passes on as they are finally in a safe place, and they no longer have to worry (Asaro & Clements, 2005; Rynearson, 2001). Additionally, Pearlman, Wortman, Feuer, Farber, and Rando (2014), revealed that supporters might ultimately feel anxiety about their wellbeing after being around bereaved individuals and writes

Supporters may be motivated to protect themselves from the belief that such an event might happen to them in order to maintain their own feelings of security, they are often inclined to view the death as preventable and attribute blame to the deceased and/or the survivors. (p. 86)

Criminal justice. Survivors may suffer psychological trauma including PTSD by having to engage in police interviews and court settings, mainly because the story is told several times, crime details are on the forefront, and victim blame (Herman, 2003;

Parsons & Bergin, 2010; Rothbaum, Foa, Riggs, Murdock, & Walsh, 1992). To obtain justice, survivors must work with the criminal justice system and endure lengthy murder investigations, criminal apprehension, trials, and sentencing that may create a distrust between the survivor and the legal system (Armour, 2002, 2003; Sharpe et al., 2014; Spungen, 1998).

Researchers discovered that homicide survivors have expressed their indignation toward the criminal justice system because of their belief that the system protects the rights of the offenders and disregards the rights of the family (Armour, 2002; Asaro & Clements, 2005; Baliko & Tuck, 2008; Miller, 2009; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011; Spungen, 1998). Survivors have also been discovered to be infatuated with the case by frequently requesting updates on the offender and case progression, details of the murder, and the autopsy report even though they are causing themselves to suffer each time (Aldrich & Kallivayalil, 2013; Armour, 2002). African Americans have also been found to feel the criminal justice system is roughly passive toward them based on the alarming number of the murdered minority (Sharpe, 2008).

The trial may be detrimental on the survivors' mental state, and during the trial, the victim is referred to as the State, and the deceased name is rarely mentioned which may cause the family to feel invisible (Armour, 2002; Asaro, 2001a; Nakajima et al., 2012). On some occasions survivors may not receive justice if there is a lack of evidence or the defendant agrees to a plea bargain which can hinder the bereaved in finding closure; additionally, homicide survivors may experience severe PTSD and depressive

disorders following their dissatisfaction with the courts (Amick-McMullan et al., 1991; Armour, 2002; Asaro, 2001a; Sprang, 1997).

Survivor support. There is no set timetable to grieve (Aldrich & Kallivayalil, 2016; Clements et al., 2004; Shear, 2015a), and many survivors will wonder why they have not gotten over the loss, and it is unfortunate that just as the bereaved are wondering family and friends may be wondering the same thing. Homicides can bridge gaps within families, and they can also cause rifts (Sharpe et al., 2013). “Bereavement becomes problematic when supporters fail to embrace the grief process alongside the bereaved (Burke et al., 2010, p. 2). Despite the common belief that the bereaved should feel better, it is likely for survivors to feel worse as the first anniversary of the passing approaches as well as the victims’ birthday or various holidays (Asaro, 2001a; Asaro & Clements, 2005).

Support from family and friends following a sudden loss is significantly vital during the bereavement process (Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 1997; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987; Stroebe et al., 2005). The attachment theory challenges the notion that a support system softens the loss, and that the deceased was the only one to feel a void that no one else could (Bowlby 1969; Weiss, 1975). Research by Malone (2007), as cited in Aldrich and Kallivayalil (2016), argued that initially following the loss there is an outpour of support from family and friends that will likely diminish as time progresses (Aldrich & Kallivayalil, 2016; Asaro & Clements, 2005; McKenzie, 2015). The relationships with family or friends may change following the murder, and family members have been found to display the worst support that may stress the bereaved out, and in some cases,

friends provided the best support. Despite the relational history, if the person was not helpful to the bereaved hostile emotions toward that person may arise (Asaro, 2001b; Bard, 1982; Burke et al., 2010; Coyne, Wortman, & Lehman, 1986; Crohan & Antonucci, 1989).

Survivors also reported that as time progressed, they were reminded of how strong they have been; additionally, there are instances where people unintentionally avoid the bereaved because they are uncomfortable or fail to meet the survivors' needs resulting in lack of support, and survivors understand that some people just do not know what to say (Clements & Burgess, 2002; Dyregrov, 2006; Malone, 2007). Survivors may also suppress their emotions if they feel as if they are a burden on others, isolate themselves, and think that speaking about their loved one is discouraged (Aldrich & Kallivayalil, 2016; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011). At the funeral, outward emotions are expected, but following the burial society expects the survivor to move on (Hines, 1991; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008). The research from Dyregrov (2006) suggested that the non-bereaved populations should understand the bereavement experiences of traumatized individuals and listen to their experience and requests on how to be approached.

Meaning in the loss. The murder may challenge previously instilled beliefs as well as their sense of purpose (Green, 2000). Survivors may also feel committed to their loved ones and find meaning in the homicide experience as discovered by Armour (2002, 2003). The study revealed homicide survivors experienced a whirlwind of emotions and chaos, but some survivors focused on moving forward positively. Family members in the

study decided that their loved one's death was not going to be in vain and vowed to educate others on their homicide experience. Finding a sense of importance in their life allows the survivor to take back the control the murder stole, take risks, and live again (Armour, 2002). The survivor has a new outlook on life, and values what their life stands for, and their pain may create a new sense of purpose (Armour, 2003). Others can benefit from the experience in knowing how a survivor traveled their grief, and survivors may convert their bitter experience into good as they evolve from their suffering and create positive meanings (Armour, 2003).

Research Gap

Although most of the population has a sibling, bereavement research involving siblings is the least researched, and additional studies are needed to understand the consequences of sibling loss (Bolton et al., 2016; Davidson, 2018; Funk et al., 2018). Minimal research is also available that discusses supports for African American bereaved by violent deaths such as homicide, as well as the impact the loss has on survivors (Granek & Peleg-Sagy, 2015; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015; Sharpe et al., 2013; Sharpe, 2015). There is a lack of research involving sibling homicide survivors, and data regarding the number of surviving siblings of homicide victims is unknown as that information has not been recorded (Armour, 2003; Freeman et al., 1996; Pretorius et al., 2010).

Freeman and colleagues (1996), focused on the bereavement experiences of children between the ages of 7-18 following the murder of their older sibling and concluded that additional research regarding a child's response to sibling homicide is

needed. Additionally, the study discovered the siblings of homicide victims experience various emotions related to the trauma, yet few services are available (Freeman et al., 1996). Research by Pretorius et al. (2010) explored bereavement experiences of three bereaved adult female siblings following the murder of their sibling and discovered there were no studies that focused on sibling homicide grief.

Additional studies are necessary to replicate findings as well as examining culturally diverse populations such as African American siblings, and their bereavement experiences to explore the impact of support and resources (Armour, 2003; Center for the Advancement of Health, 2004). This qualitative research can assist in exploring the experience of African American siblings that are bereaved by homicide as well as continuing the advancement of resources for this neglected population (Sharpe et al., 2013).

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter concentrated on various bereavement literature to include that of parents, siblings, as well as African Americans bereaved by homicide. The section also focused on two theoretical frameworks, the attachment theory, and social constructivism to assist in the explanation of the griever's relationship to the deceased. Regardless of the abundance of bereavement studies, there is a disparity in African American sibling literature. Bereavement reactions vary based on whether the death was unexpected, or sudden, and normal or traumatic responses can arise based on the nature of the loss. Consequently, loss responses come in waves, and it is not something that a person gets over despite the expectation that a bereaved person should move on quickly. Although

some individuals will move forward, some will experience lingering grief and suffer from complicated grief reactions.

Sibling bereavement is growing in the literature and deserves attention, and despite the seriousness of this form of loss, sibling grief is often overlooked, and focus remains on the parents. Parental grief may affect the surviving siblings in more ways than one, as parents frequently consume themselves in their grief that they may ignore the surviving siblings. Following instances of being ignored, siblings may experience traumatic responses to include disenfranchised grief or feelings of being forgotten. Sibling loss reactions vary by gender and age, and bereaved sisters were found to display symptoms of depressive versus aggressive brothers.

The sibling's age may also cause differences in how they understand and cope with the loss as well. Young children under age two struggle with comprehending death but based on the attachment theory know when they have been separated from a trusted caregiver. Older children to include adolescents understand the permanence of the loss and may also struggle with sibling guilt from previous fights with the deceased. Adult siblings employ a variety of roles such as social and emotional support to other family members, and often spearhead arrangements and become the surviving parents' caregiver.

Homicide creates a sense of confusion in survivors that are tasked with understanding why and how the murder happened, and survivors utilize various coping mechanisms. There was little information found on bereaved siblings of homicide. African Americans face an increased risk of homicide exposure, and this

underrepresented population often suffers from disenfranchised grief, especially if the victim was involved in illegal activities at the time of their death, as well as insight into how differently the media portrays information. African American grief differs from the traditional grief experienced by Caucasians, and this population is known to depend on religion, social support, and they often shy away from professional mental health treatment due to an untrusting history of oppression toward African Americans.

Despite the seriousness of sibling loss, it is the least researched in bereavement studies, and African Americans also fall into this category of limited research. Additionally, despite the frequency of homicide in the African American community, homicide research on this population is limited. Sibling homicide is a tragedy that affects many, and studies exploring how the sibling survivors work through their grief are necessary to provide insight on how to be of assistance to the bereaved siblings to ensure all populations are represented.

The information found in Chapter 3 provides in-depth information on the research methods to include the researcher's role, research design, population, methodology, and data analysis; all used to gain insight on the bereavement and grief experiences of African American sibling homicide survivors. Additionally, ethical concerns, sampling, and participant protections are discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived bereavement and grief experiences of 12 African American sibling homicide survivors by examining the effects of losing a sibling directly from the survivors' perspectives. The lack of research on African American sibling homicide survivors assists in the disparity of resources allotted to bereaved siblings as well as the acknowledgment of their grief. A goal of this study was to highlight the resources available to bereaved siblings with hopes of creating a better understanding of the African American sibling bereavement process following a homicide that can be a benefit to clinicians, family, and friends. Lastly, the intent of this study was not to build a comparison analysis in the bereavement process, but to provide the bereaved sibling a platform to freely express themselves.

Chapter 3 provides an in-depth explanation of the research method. The chapter revisits the research question while illuminating the research design and rationale. The researcher's role follows, and I elaborate on potential biases or ethical issues. The methodology section includes a discussion of information on participant selection, data collection, procedures, and data analysis. The chapter concludes with trustworthiness matters to include credibility, dependability, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design provides a blueprint for the study to include data collection and analysis (Ngozwana, 2018). Research designs fall into two categories qualitative and quantitative methods (Meadows, 2003). Quantitative research uses questionnaires to

collect and transform information into statistics; however, qualitative methods focus on answering those why questions, and uses words instead of numbers providing for an in-depth explanation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Meadows, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The derivative of the word qualitative stems from the Latin root “Qualis” meaning ‘what sort of’ (Barnham, 2015, p. 847). Qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding into research topics and real-world situations, and answers why and how questions using various research designs (Barnham, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2017; Polit & Beck, 2017; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Qualitative research involves understanding the subject matter in a natural versus an experimental setting to place the focus on participants’ feelings toward a particular experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hoinville et al., 1978; Pope & Mays, 1995).

Qualitative research utilizes five main approaches, known as narratives, case studies, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology (Creswell, 2007). Narratives provide the participants with the opportunity to tell their story often meeting with the subject multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of their story (Sandelowski, 1991; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Case studies are used to explore individuals or groups that have experienced a particular phenomenon (Robson, 2002; Yates & Leggett, 2016; Yin, 2003). Grounded theory, unlike the others, creates versus testing theory, and ethnography focuses on observing an entire culture (Patton, 2002; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Phenomenology is used to expound the meaning of a persons’ lived experience by exploring the experience from the participants’ perspective (Moustakas, 1994).

This research used qualitative phenomenological method to gain insight into the lived bereavement experiences of African American sibling homicide survivors.

Phenomenology is the preferred methodology when the researcher's goal is to gain an understanding into the meaning of a particular experience and aims to understand what it means to have experienced a specific incident (Creswell, 1998, 2013; Crist & Tanner, 2003; Lin, 2013; Moran, 2013).

Research Question

Formulating the research question is the primary step in the research to assist in framing the study's outline; researchers often have a broad, open-ended central research question followed by several sub-questions that focus on a specific research interest (Yates & Leggett, 2016). A general research question is necessary to allow for a plethora of information to be revealed (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). It is not uncommon for the research question to be revamped throughout the process, particularly when additional literature has been located, or when there is a paucity of research (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

The central research question for this study was: What are the lived bereavement and grief experiences of African American sibling homicide survivors?

The goal of this research was to allow the participant to describe how the murder of their sibling affected them. Questions referencing the siblings' relationships before the loss, support from family and friends, and coping strategies and relational changes following the murder were discussed, and I retrieved a detailed account of the siblings' bereavement experiences from their perspectives.

Research Tradition

A qualitative phenomenological approach was the basis for this study.

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method with a reflective approach that concentrates on an individuals' lived experiences in order to identify shared experiences, and to illuminate how someone sees the world from their perspective (Barnham, 2015; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Laverly, 2003; Lin, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Von Eckartsberg, 1986; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Primarily, this method is used to describe the essence of things that cannot be revealed solely through observations (Lin, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Sanders, 1982).

In phenomenological studies, the researcher locates a small population of individuals that have experienced a similar situation, ultimately producing an interpretation of the subjects' meaning of that experience (Patton, 2002). The research aims to find out what a phenomenon means, and during this process, the researcher can obtain knowledge on participants' experience (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000; McClelland, 1995). Data collection in phenomenological studies includes in-depth interviews, diaries, and open-ended surveys where the participant can expound on their personal experiences (Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Data analysis in phenomenological studies includes reviewing the collected data obtained through interviews and field notes, coding, and locating specific statements to identify themes (Pereira, 2012).

Rationale for Chosen Tradition

Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because of its link to social constructivism, that suggests multiple realities exist, and the goal is to understand how that reality is constructed through the lens of the individual (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Moser & Korstjens, 2017; Polit & Beck, 2017). The scarcity of African American bereavement-related literature, as well as sibling bereavement, highlights the necessity for this research. Additionally, qualitative research, in this case, was used to understand the meaning of the homicide survivors' experience from their perspective (Armour, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Sharpe et al., 2013).

The use of a phenomenological approach allows for the participant to provide an in-depth insight into the African American sibling homicide experience. This method allowed for the survivor to expand on their sibling homicide experience while pinpointing key patterns and meanings amongst the survivors following the loss (Armour, 2003; Neimeyer, 2000). The goal of this research was not to highlight the differences in the bereavement experiences, but to explore the commonalities in the participants' experiences.

Central Concepts

Central concepts for this study were bereavement and grief. Bereavement refers to the death of a loved one, and grief is the response to that loss (Shear, 2015a). Although death is considered to be a universal part of life, reactions will vary; therefore, it should not be assumed the survivor will recover quickly (Drescher & Foy, 2010). Grief, the response to bereavement will also vary to include, the relationship to the deceased,

support received, and the cause of death may affect how the survivor copes with the loss (Drescher & Foy, 2010; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015; Shear, 2015a). Acute grief refers to the initial feelings of separation once the survivor has been notified of the loss (Shear, 2015a). Survivors may also suffer from normal and or complicated grief reactions. Normal grief reactions are evident when death can be anticipated, such as old age or terminal illness; whereas survivors may also potentially suffer from traumatic grief reactions to include complicated grief when sudden death to include accidents or homicide occur (Paris et al., 2009; Sharpe, 2015). This study examined African American bereavement and grief following the death of a sibling due to homicide.

The majority of the existing bereavement literature focuses on parent and spouses (Baliko & Tuck, 2008; Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Sharpe & Boyas, 2011). Sibling bereavement has been neglected in the literature, and despite the information published the majority of the previous sibling bereavement studies have been reported from the perspective of parents and clinicians and not from the sibling survivor (Bolton et al., 2016; Halliwell & Franken, 2016). Additionally, there has not been any literature located on African American siblings of homicide survivors located. African Americans account for a large population in the United States, yet an underrepresented population in bereavement research (Burke et al., 2010; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Sharpe, 2015). Bereavement reactions vary by culture, and one should not assume that the bereavement reactions of African Americans will mirror the responses of Caucasians or any other cultures (Granek & Peleg- Sagy, 2015, 2017; Schoulte, 2011). Consequently, African Americans are at a higher risk for homicide, and employ a variety of coping mechanisms

to include religious and family dependence (Granek & Peleg- Sagy, 2017; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Rosenblatt & Wallace, 2013). Therefore, a study on African American siblings bereaved by homicide is essential to provide for a greater understanding of sibling grief.

Role of the Researcher

The researchers' responsibility is to be the interviewer, remain objective, and guide the research to ensure it is meaningful (Webb & Welsh, 2019). The researcher determines the research process through social interactions with the participants, and relationships that can also develop during data collection (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Due to the sensitivity of this topic, emotional distress or anxiety may arise, and it is essential to be empathetic to assist in building a relationship with the participant (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). I did not have any personal or professional relationships with any of the participants, and ensured consistent protocols were followed such as setting ground rules and expectations; as well as refraining from discussing any personal bereavement experience, and remaining objective throughout the interview process.

Researcher Bias

As suggested by Karagoziz (2018), researchers should be mindful of cultural bias to avoid unintentionally projecting personal values onto researcher participants and the research findings. However, it should also be noted that researchers studying different cultures that have limited knowledge of the culture can cause harm especially if the researcher assigns negative labels, triggers debates, and ignoring viewpoints which may

result in a poor relationship between the researcher and participant (Karagoizis, 2018; Sinclair, 2003; Swisher, 1993).

Given my background as an African American sibling homicide survivor, I did not discuss any personal bereavement experiences, and ensured all ethical guidelines later discussed were followed. Additionally, it is also vital for the researcher to avoid judgment, omit personal thoughts and beliefs, remain objective, and refrain from any participation in the interview except solely as the interviewer. Researcher influence occurs but can be controlled, and by doing so, the researcher can view the participant in their natural state to obtain a behind the scene understanding of their experience (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Furthermore, to ensure the information provided was accurate, the participant reviewed the completed interview transcripts for accuracy.

Methodology

Population

Although there is no predetermined population of bereaved siblings, the population used for this study were African American siblings bereaved by homicide sensibly selected to represent those that have experienced the loss of a sibling. The subjects were African American males or females over the age of 18 with the murder occurring within the last 5 years. The time frame of 5 years assisted in ensuring the participant could articulate their bereavement experience due to the recent nature. The bereaved siblings that experienced other causes of death, not within the allotted time frame, do not identify as African American, or are under the age of 18 were excluded.

Sampling Strategy

Qualitative studies focus on purposeful rather than probability samples to ensure rich information is obtained (Coyne, 1997; Marshall, 1996; Patton, 1990). This study used a purposive sampling strategy where the participants met a predetermined criteria; a method widely used in qualitative research to ensure rich cases directly related to the phenomenon are identified (Moser & Kortsjens, 2018; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015; Patton, 2002; Polit & Beck, 2017). Following the review of the prescreen questionnaire (see Appendix B) results, the participants were selected based on the assumption that they could provide insight, and have variety in their experiences.

Small sample sizes are not uncommon in qualitative research; however, the richness of the study depends on several factors such as data collection methods, sampling strategies, and broadness of the research question (Mason, 2010; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The number of interviews needed in qualitative phenomenological studies varies and can range between five and 25 (Creswell, 1998; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Mason, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morse, 1994; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This study identified and interviewed 12 African American siblings bereaved by homicide.

Participant Selection

The participants in this study were carefully selected to ensure they had expert knowledge on the topic of African American sibling homicide as well as ensuring the participant was willing to share the information with the researcher (Bernard, 2002;

Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Polit & Beck, 2017; Spradley, 1979). This study highlighted the bereavement experiences of 12 African American siblings bereaved by homicide within the past 5 years. I located a variety of sibling survivors with variations in locations, ages, law enforcement assistance, and support through various social media outlets.

Social media accounts such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were used to post the participant invitation and identify participants (see Appendix A). I intended to open the recruitment window for four weeks; however, I was able to identify the participants and conduct the interviews in 18 days. All interested participants were required to complete a prescreen questionnaire (see Appendix B) to determine if the participant fit the criteria. The prescreen questionnaire was accessed using a Google Doc link, and the participants' responses were submitted directly back to me. Once the participants met the criteria and selected to participate in the study; the participant was provided with a link to the informed consent via Google Doc. Participants agreed to the study by selecting "Yes" on the informed consent's link, as well as providing an electronic signature before submitting the Google Doc.

Procedures

Interviews are the most common form of data collection in qualitative research, and the types of interviews vary to include face to face, emails, telephones, and Skype; additionally, data collection methods can be combined (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Interviews can allow for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding, and an appropriate avenue when concentrating on sensitive topics (Gill, Stewart,

Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; Heath, Williamson, Williams, & Harcourt, 2018).

Telephone interviews can be viewed as a less attractive method, but it is beneficial for geographical reasons, and thankfully, data collection methods can include more than one method (Groves, 1990; Heath et al., 2018; Novick, 2008).

Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Gill et al., 2008; Meadows, 2003). Structured interviews limit the participants' responses, semi-structured utilize open-ended questions, and unstructured interviews where the interview questions are not prepared ahead of time, and the interview is more conversational (Gill et al., 2008; Meadows, 2003). This research utilized semi-structured interviews using a pre-developed interview protocol (see Appendix C). Semi-structured interviews are the preferred method for qualitative research and will allow the survivors to explore the bereavement experience from their perspective (Meadows, 2003).

The questions asked should be strategic, but it is not uncommon to go back and forth with the order of the questions to ensure the interview has dialogue like flow (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The information in interviews with, the consent of the subject, will be digitally recorded and transcribed along with field notes (Gill et al., 2008; Sharpe et al., 2013; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Field notes are often taken during the interview to capture reactions observed by the interviewer such as body language and nonverbal cues (Gill et al., 2008; Ngozwana, 2018; Sharpe et al., 2013). Most importantly, when taking field notes, the researcher should ensure the observation is accurate and without bias (Gill et al., 2008; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Lastly, direct quotes

from the participant will be used to ensure the data is interpreted from their words (Heath et al., 2018).

The interviews were expected to last between 60 to 90 minutes and allowed for as many breaks as the participant needed. All interviews were conducted by phone in my office, and each participant was asked to call from a quiet area free from distraction. Most importantly, all participants were reminded they could request the interview be stopped at any moment.

Data Collection Instruments

Methods of data collection vary in qualitative research to include numerous open-ended processes such as observations, interviews, case studies, and focus groups (Gill et al., 2008; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Focus groups use several participants where the participants answer open-ended questions and discuss amongst each other with little intervention from the researcher (Yates & Leggett, 2016). Observations involve observing people or groups over some time (Polit & Beck, 2017). Interviews are conversations with participants used to understanding the meaning of the participants' experience (Moser, Korstjens, van der Weijden, & Tange, 2010).

The prescreen questionnaire (see Appendix B) was provided to all participants to ensure the subject was appropriate for the study. I was able to locate a variety of subjects to include various ages, locations, and length of time since the murder. All the participants experienced the murder of a brother due to gun violence. The questionnaire was delivered to the participant electronically via a Google Doc link. The survey used also included necessary contact information as well as six questions designed to ensure

the participant met the study's requirements. The participants were asked to complete the prescreen questionnaire within a week of receipt.

Following official participant selection, I scheduled and conducted phone interviews. As discussed in the prescreen questionnaire and informed consent, I verbally obtained the participants' permission to record the interview as well as informing notes would be taken. A copy of the interview protocol (see Appendix C) was used to take notes during the interview. Information such as the participants' response time, engagement, and emotional state was noted. The audio recording was essential in ensuring the information transcribed was verbatim, and no critical details were overlooked.

By conducting semi-structured interviews, I divulged into the sibling bereavement process directly from the siblings' perspective. Although the interviews will be steered using an interview protocol (see Appendix C), containing 27 questions, the questions asked were open-ended to provide the survivor with an opportunity to express themselves freely. In cases where the participants' responses required additional information probing questions were asked (Meadows, 2003).

The interviews were expected to last between 60-90 minutes and were transcribed within a week. The completed transcripts were delivered to the participant via email for review to ensure the information is accurate. The participants were asked to return the reviewed transcript within a week, eleven of the 12 participants returned their transcripts with minor revisions. One participant did not return their transcript despite two follow up

emails, and it was assumed the participant had no corrections and proceeded with the analysis.

Data Analysis Plan

The process of data analysis is crucial in phenomenological research as critical aspects of the participants' experience is identified (Polkinghorne, 1989; Van Manen, 1990). The transcribed data was collected, reviewed, coded, and analyzed to reflect the participants' perception of their experience while allowing the researcher to understand their experience (Creswell, 2007). Coding is a significant piece of the analysis process and allows the researcher to arrange their data into feasible portions. (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For this study, the researcher reviewed the prescreen questionnaire responses (Appendix B), completed interview transcripts, and field notes. I initially planned to utilize qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo or Atlasti to examine the data and identify potential codes or themes within the data, but decided to analyze the data manually. Moreover, as the data continued to be reviewed, emergent themes arose, and it was hoped the results of the study would reveal the commonalities in the survivors' bereavement experience that will be supported with direct survivor quotes (see Chapter 4).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness focuses on whether the information can be trusted and is enhanced by credibility, dependability, and transferability in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rule & John, 2011). Trustworthiness is enriched by a variety of strategies to include informed consent, member checking, multiple resources, and ensuring the

information used is verbatim (Ngozwana, 2018; Patton, 1990, 2002). The informed consent was provided to the participant before beginning any interviews to confirm participation as well as providing insight on risks, benefits, and the overall goal of the study.

In cases of sensitive topics, the researcher should establish a rapport with the participant to ensure their comfort (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2009; Liamputtong, 2007). According to Lakeman and Fitzgerald (2009), sensitive topics can cause trauma to arise; however, participating in qualitative studies can be helpful to the subject. Furthermore, even if the participant expressed any shock, flashbacks, or anguish throughout the study, the experience was ultimately found to be helpful for the survivor (Jorm, Kelly, & Morgan, 2007).

Credibility

Every researcher wants to ensure the information they present is credible. Validity is guaranteeing the results of the study accurately answers the proposed question and lines up with the study's intent (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Credibility ensures the study's findings make sense and are consistent, and this concept is similar to internal validity used in quantitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Credibility strategies include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and member checking (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Prolonged engagement involves becoming familiar with the participant or setting, building trust, and keeping the subject engaged throughout the interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sim & Sharp, 1998). Persistent involvement comprises of identifying

elements most relevant to the study for the researcher to focus on; for example, I communicated with the participants through emails, social media postings, interviews, and phone contact.

Lastly, methods of triangulation to include member checking allows the data to be strengthened when the researcher provides the information to the participant for review and potential feedback as well as thorough verification of additional data sources such as obituaries, news articles, and police reports to ensure the data is accurate (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sim & Sharp, 1998). Throughout the process, I regularly debriefed with the dissertation committee to ensure any issues of bias are immediately addressed.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the study's findings to make sure the sample is diverse, transferable to other contexts, and how far the conclusions can be generalized (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The goal of the research in this instance is to ensure a full description is provided to allow the reader to be able to assess to whether the findings apply to the reader's setting (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). For this study, I ensured the participants, settings, and research design were described in detail to ensure the data identified can be transferred to future research.

Dependability

Dependability ensures the research is consistent and highlights the connection between the research question and design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, Shenton (2004) suggested when data analysis procedures have been

defined to the point where the study can be replicated dependability is reached. To ensure this, the researcher reviewed field notes, audio, and transcripts throughout the process to ensure the procedures and strategies remained consistent (Creswell, 2009).

Confirmability

Eliminating researcher bias is essential, and confirmability guarantees bias is not evident in the study, and the findings are neutral and come directly from the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), to ensure confirmability, the researcher should avoid making inferences, and stick to analyzing the transcripts verbatim. The information used in this study will be directly obtained from the participants, and interview transcripts, as well as the data analysis, will be provided to the participant for review; this method is known as member checking to ensure the information reported is accurate. Additionally, despite my personal experience with sibling loss, those experiences were not highlighted at any point in this study.

Ethical Procedures

The use of human subject requires approval from the ethics committee (Meadows, 2003). In this case, the subjects in this study were African American homicide bereaved siblings over the age of 18 that have experienced the murder of a sibling within the past 5 years. A request to conduct this study was submitted to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. Information such as the participants, data protection, confidentiality, and data collection were discussed; a copy of the interview protocol (see Appendix C) was also provided. Due to the nature of the study, the

bereaved had to relive the murder of their sibling, and depending on their current state, could have experienced emotional stress.

Ethical challenges, such as the participants withdrawing from the study, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring anonymity may arise during the research process (Ngozwana, 2018). Before beginning the interview, the informed consent was provided to each participant that explained the study's intent, confidentiality, and risks and benefits to ensure the participant wanted to continue. The informed consent also provided the participant with grief and mental health resources. If the participant agreed to be included in the study, the consent needed to be signed and returned so that an interview could be scheduled. The participants were reminded that the interview was going to be recorded, and notes would be taken throughout the interview. Additionally, the participants were notified the transcripts would be reviewed by the researcher and dissertation committee. Breaks were provided during the interview as needed, and participants were monitored for signs of distress. If signs of distress occurred, the interview was stopped until the participant was ready to continue. The participant was also informed they have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time, and the information obtained should they withdraw will not be published.

The participants were informed their information will remain confidential, and pseudonyms were used for anonymity. Following the completion of the interview, the audio recording was replayed and the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and provided to the participant for verification. The participant was asked to review and return the transcript within a week with any corrections. If the participant did not respond with any

corrections, then it was assumed there were no concerns and proceeded. The interviews were stored the research on a personal recorder and USB drive, and the printed transcripts were kept in a locked file cabinet to ensure confidentiality. The information saved to the computer was coded so it is not to have the participant's name on the file and will be destroyed following the completion of the study. Additionally, the participants were informed the information will be shared amongst the committee members.

Summary

Chapter three discussed qualitative phenomenological research, and the methodological approach needed to enhance the understanding of African American participants that experienced sibling homicide. An overview of the methodology was presented to include the research study's design, tradition, sampling, data collection, and analysis. Phenomenology was determined to be the appropriate method considering the focus on the human experience. The research question was also based on the phenomenological approach.

Central concepts to include bereavement, grief, sibling bereavement, African American bereavement, and homicide was discussed. Additionally, the researcher's role and ethical considerations were highlighted. Most importantly, despite my personal ties to such a tragedy, those views were suppressed to ensure the integrity of the study. The study's population and sampling strategy were identified, and it was determined a purposeful sample was essential for the study. Social media outlets were used to locate the participants, and following the completion of a prescreen questionnaire, the selected participants electronically received the informed consent. The participants agreed to the

study by electronically signing the informed consent provided to the subjects via Google Doc.

Following the final selection, the participants engaged in a 60-90-minute semi-structured interview based on a predetermined interview protocol (see Appendix C) to allow for pertinent information from sibling homicide survivors to be identified. I transcribed the interviews and provided the transcript to the participants for review within a week of receipt. I manually conducted data analysis to identify relevant themes and codes. Furthermore, I discussed issues of trustworthiness, such as member checking, informed consent, credibility, transferability, and dependability. Ethical challenges and solutions were also highlighted, participants will be able to pause or withdraw from the interview at any time, and confidentiality concerns were also addressed.

Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the study's results using the information obtained from the participants. The chapter contains the study's setting and each participant's narrative and demographics. The study's research question is addressed along with insight into data collection and analysis. The themes and categories are discussed, which led to the identification of pertinent quotes relevant to each theme.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived bereavement and grief experiences of 12 African American sibling homicide survivors by examining the effects of losing a sibling directly from the survivors' perspectives. The lack of research of African American sibling homicide survivors assists in the disparity of resources allotted to bereaved siblings as well as the acknowledgment of their grief. The resources available to bereaved siblings were highlighted with hopes of creating a better understanding of the African American sibling bereavement process following a homicide that can be of benefit to clinicians, family, and friends. Lastly, the intent of this study was not to build a comparison analysis in the bereavement process, but to provide the bereaved siblings a platform to express themselves. The following research question was explored: What are the lived bereavement and grief experiences of African American sibling homicide survivors?

In Chapter 4, presents the study's settings, participant demographics, data collection, findings, analysis, and the interpretation of the themes based on the participants' interviews and transcripts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and the study's results.

Setting

This study's setting consisted of the participants being interviewed by telephone in my office on a date and time that the participants were comfortable with. The interviews were conducted in a secluded room to ensure privacy, and all interviews were

recorded on an audio device, and transcribed by myself. The sibling survivors were at various time frames in the bereavement process; some murders were as recent as 2 months prior to the interview. When I was informed of the short time frame, I ensured that my tone and questioning remained sensitive to the siblings. This method was used on all participants but I wanted to ensure the siblings experiencing a more recent loss were comfortable to proceed. The siblings were from a range of states such as California and Mississippi, a full list of the participants and their demographics is listed in Table 1.

Demographics

Twelve participants consented to and participated in the interviews. The participants were selected based on the predetermined criteria of being over the age of 18, African American, and experiencing the murder of a sibling within the past 5 years. There was no specific requirement on the way the homicide occurred; however, all 12 deceased siblings were male victims of gun violence. I was able to identify 12 willing participants that consisted of 11 women, and one male; the lack of male inclusion impacted the male sibling voice in the study. None of the participants shared any relational or professional affiliation with one another nor myself. The participant's ages ranged from 21-41 at the time of death, and the deceased sibling's ages ranged from 20-46 at the time of their death. The time since the sibling was killed ranged between 2 months and 4 years at the time of the interview. Two of the participants experienced the loss of more than one sibling; one sibling lost her sister and nephew in a car accident just 15 months prior to her brothers' murder, and the other sibling tragically experienced the murder of two brothers on two different occasions. Table 1 illustrates the participants'

names, deceased siblings' names, and their ages at the time of death, geographic locations, and causes of death. Be advised, the participants and their siblings' names were not used in this study; I used pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant name	Age at time of siblings' death	Geographic location (state)	Deceased siblings' name	Deceased age at the time of death	Cause of death
Reagan	41	Mississippi	Josh	27	Shot
Tiffany	33	Indiana	Bradley	27	Shot
Katrina	21	Iowa	Johnathan	33	Shot
Teresa	35	Texas	Mark	36	Shot
Chloe	24	S. Carolina	Brandon	20	Shot
Ebony	33	Texas	Leo	29	Shot
Karl	31	Virginia	Kyle	28	Shot
Tasha	28	Indiana	Matthew	24	Shot
Rachel	38	California	David	41	Shot
Faith	27	Illinois	Calvin	26	Shot
Lisa	33	Texas	Leon	46	Shot
Jennifer	28	Indiana	Kevin	32	Shot

Note. Table 1 contains pseudonyms for the participants and their siblings to ensure anonymity.

Data Collection

Upon being informed of IRB approval on December 13, 2019, I immediately posted the participant invitation (see Appendix A) to various social media outlets containing a link to the prescreen questionnaire (see Appendix B). My posting was shared by numerous people, reaching a variety of potential participants in various states. I began reviewing the responses to ensure the participants met the criteria. Three participants were selected, and three were screened out because the murder did not occur within the past 5 years. The selected participants were emailed a copy of the consent form, which

included grief resources should mental anguish arise and was used to ensure the participants were willing to participate. I began to receive consent forms back and scheduled the first interview on December 16, 2019.

The recruitment process continued for 18 days, and I received a total of 31 responses. The screening process was based on the prescreen questionnaire responses in which 12 of the participants were screened out; 11 were screened because the murder did not occur within the past 5 years, and 2 of those participants were also unwilling to provide information on their siblings' death. Additionally, one participant was uncomfortable with having the interview recorded, and was screened out of the study. Nineteen of the participants were selected to participate and received the consent form. Sixteen consent forms were returned; however, one of the participants did not respond to schedule an interview. Two of the participants scheduled interviews and were screened out during the interview because the murder did not occur within 5 years. Additionally, 3 of the approved participants never completed the consent form despite a follow up email. Fortunately, I was able to interview 12 participants between December 16, 2019 and December 31, 2019; with the last interview being conducted on December 31, 2019. Following the final interview, the Google Doc containing the Prescreen Questionnaire and Consent Form was closed.

All interviews were conducted over the phone and varied in length. The shortest interview was 17:20 and the longest interview was 53:20. Despite some interviews being shorter than others, all participants were asked the same questions, and I was able to obtain great information although some of the participants elaborated more than others.

Some participants even experienced other forms of loss and compared the experiences. All the participants were only interviewed once, but I did request a follow up with one of the participants but did not hear back from the participant. Probing questions which varied by interview were asked if I needed the participant to elaborate in some of their responses. All interviews were recorded on an audio device, and I took notes throughout the interview. I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix C) on all participants to conduct open-ended interviews.

I initially planned to use a transcription and data analysis software system to transcribe and analyze the data but decided to do it manually to focus more on the essence of the research. In terms of transcription, by personally listening to and transcribing I was able to relive the emotion of the interview and add richness into the transcript based on the field notes and observations. By manually analyzing the data, especially with a small similar sample it was easier to make the connections within the data. Manually analyzing the data kept me connected to the data and the siblings' experiences.

I listened to the interviews several times and transcribed the interviews verbatim. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were reviewed once more, and were then sent to the participant by email for member checking to ensure the information was accurate. Eleven out of the 12 participants responded indicating either the transcripts were correct or needed changes, and despite 2 follow ups one participant never responded. One of the participants requested to omit one of her responses, and 2 of the other participants

recommended minor corrections. Once the participants confirmed the information was correct the data analysis process began.

All siblings were offered breaks should emotions arise during the interview; 2 siblings took brief breaks to regain their composure, and the other 10 declined. Several of the female participants became emotional throughout the interview, 3 of the ladies cried during the interview when discussing their deceased sibling. The remaining ladies were able to hold their composure but like all the participants had moments where they struggled with answering the questions. There was only one male participant, and he was not as vocal as the female participants, and I had to frequently repeat and probe questions for the male participant.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed by listening to the audio recordings several times to ensure they were transcribed verbatim. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were sent to the participant to be reviewed for accuracy, and once they were returned, I began reviewing the transcripts manually to identify various codes and themes.

Moustakas (1994) described a seven-step process to data analysis which included:

- Reviewing the statement for how well the experience is described
- Recording all the relevant statements
- Removing the redundant or overlapping statements
- Organizing the invariant meanings into themes
- Synthesizing the invariant meanings and themes into a description of the experience

- Reflect on your own textural description
- Construct a textural-structural description of meanings of the experience

The seven-step process was used on all 12 participant transcripts. The codes emerged based on the content within the transcripts and were grouped into various themes that were highlighted and separated by color to ensure they were easily identifiable. Eighteen themes were identified; each theme was accompanied by quotes that supported the themes and then they were grouped into categories. Several codes were identified and grouped into 18 themes which were then regrouped into 3 main categories along with supporting subthemes. The categories identified were coping, support, and post homicide interactions. Figure 1 outlines the identified categories and their associated themes.

Categories	Themes
Coping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotions • Parental Responses • Remembrance • Acceptance • Resilience
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survivor Support • Supporting Others • Forgotten Mourners • Closeness
Post-Homicide Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death • Law Enforcement • Media

Figure 1. Highlighted themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The participants were contacted through emails, phone calls, and in some cases text messages. The participants also responded to the initial social media postings as well by completing the prescreen questionnaire. All participants were asked to contact me using the Walden University email provided on the initial posting. All participants followed the required protocol by completing the prescreen questionnaire and then the consent form. All participants were informed they could email me with any questions, and none of them had additional questions prior to the interview. The initial contact with the participants known as prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Sim & Sharp, 1998) was solely through emails to provide the participant with the necessary forms as well as scheduling. Telephone contact was the primary form of contact, and in rare cases, text messages were sent to a few participants to remind them of email correspondence.

The participant responses were reviewed and screened out if they did not fit the criteria of the study. Once the participants were selected, completed, and returned the consent form, then interviews were scheduled. Prior to the interview beginning, the participants were verbally reminded that participation in this study was voluntary and they could withdraw from this study at any time; according to Shenton (2004) this assisted in ensuring the study remained credible. All participants agreed to continue, and open-ended questions were asked using an interview protocol to allow for the sibling participants to freely express their experience to losing a sibling to murder. Two of the

participants were screened out during the phone interview due to the homicide not occurring within the past 5 years.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim manually by listening to the audio recordings numerous times. The interviews were transcribed within a week of completing the interview, and I emailed transcripts of the interviews to each participant for review; a process known as member checking. Eleven of the 12 participants participated in the member checking process; 9 of them confirmed all the information was correct and 2 participants made minor changes. One of those participants also requested that one of her statements be omitted, and one participant never responded to the member checking process. Additionally, one participant was asked to complete a follow up interview, but never responded. The member checking process resulted in no major changes to the participants' responses.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the study's findings to make sure the sample is diverse, transferable to other contexts, and how far the conclusions can be generalized (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this study, thick descriptions of the participant demographics and settings were provided in as much detail as possible so that in future studies other researchers could duplicate or generalize to other populations. The participants used in this study were not specific to one location and were located all over the United States; additionally, the age range for all participants varied which assisted in being able to generalize the results.

Dependability

Dependability ensures the research is consistent and highlights the connection between the research question and design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure dependability, a predetermined interview protocol was used for all the participants. The interviews were all recorded and transcribed verbatim, and notes were also taken throughout the interview. Prior to having the transcript reviewed by the participant, and I listened and reviewed the transcript one final time for accuracy. I manually coded the interviews to ensure that meaning was highlighted, and identified categories and themes.

Confirmability

According to Moustakas (1994), to ensure confirmability, the researcher should avoid making inferences, and stick to analyzing the transcripts verbatim. I focused on ensuring there was no bias within the study and focused on the participants' experiences and did not engage as more than the interviewer. As an African American sibling homicide survivor, it was important to maintain the interviewer role at all times. The interview protocol was reviewed and approved by Walden's Institutional Review Board prior to being used on any participant. Lastly, once the interviews were completed the completed transcripts were sent to the participants and reviewed for accuracy.

Participant Narratives**Reagan**

Reagan was 41 years old at the time her younger brother Josh was kidnapped, shot, killed, and buried in a shallow grave in Mississippi. Josh was 27 years old at the

time of his death, and was missing for eight days prior to being found by law enforcement. 15 months prior to Josh's death, Reagan unexpectedly lost her sister and nephew in a car accident. It had only been about 5 months since Josh's death when Reagan completed the interview, and despite being asked several times if this was too soon she agreed to continue. Reagan reports being extremely close to her brother Josh, and she longs for answers. His case is unsolved at this time, and she feels that is because he was a black man that identified as LGBT. Reagan did not feel that she received the support she feels she deserved during the time of her bereavement by law enforcement and family. She informed the media failed to provide her brother with a newsworthy story instead he received 60 seconds on the 10 p.m. news. Reagan further reported struggles with family support, especially with her husband, and is going through a divorce. Lastly, she's struggled with coping with the loss and now chooses to work from home because she is uncomfortable around people, and she went to counseling but felt it hurt rather than helped.

Katrina

Katrina was 21 years old at the time her older brother Johnathan was shot and killed following an altercation outside of a club 4 years ago in Iowa. Katrina was not involved in the law enforcement proceedings but did inform that Johnathan's murder was solved, and the assailant was arrested but Katrina felt that 15 years was not enough. She also informed that while detained the assailant was also charged with the murder of a white tattoo artist that occurred a few years prior to Johnathan's death, and received an additional 55 years to be served consecutively. Katrina struggled with feeling the tattoo

artists' murder meant more to the courts than her brother because the assailant received more time for the artists' murder, and she felt that the victim's race played a part in his sentence. Katrina reported reviewing a few articles on the murder, but was unsure if Iowa news broadcasted any stories. Katrina dealt with the loss alone because she lived away from her family due to being away in college, and used marijuana to cope with the loss initially, but reports that counseling and her husband have been a tremendous help.

Tiffany

Tiffany was 33 years old at the time her younger brother Bradley was shot and killed 5 months prior to the interview in what she described as a mass shooting outside a club where 100 to 200 people were standing. Ten of the bystanders were shot, her brother was the only person killed outside of a pub in South Bend, Indiana. Tiffany struggles with her brother's murder not being solved, and feels his murder did not get the attention it deserved because the media's focus was on an officer involved shooting that occurred around the same time. Tiffany's journey has been pretty inspirational, and has turned her pain into purpose by doing her best to keep her family strong, and engaging in community activism such as working with families of gun violence.

Teresa

Teresa was 35 years old when her older brother Mark was sitting on his porch smoking a cigarette when two men approached him, attempted to rob him, and shot him a little over a year ago in Beaumont, Texas. Teresa was pregnant at the time of her brother's murder and went into labor a month early, and she also informed that her father had cancer and feels he was so heartbroken over the loss that he gave up and died a few

months after Mark died. Teresa did not seek counseling, she relied on prayer and reported prayer made her feel better. She reports trying to be closer to her surviving siblings, and speak with them daily because you never know what can happen.

Ebony

Ebony was 33 years old at the time her younger brother Leo was shot and killed leaving their mom's home in Fort Worth, Texas. Leo was 29 years old when he died. At this time, the murder has not been solved nearly 4 years later which she described as a cold case, and there were no news articles on the case. She and her brother were close even though they lived in two different cities at the time of his death. Ebony feels the coping process is ongoing, and some days are better or worse than others; she did not seek counseling but suggested her mother attend. Ebony still feels close to her sister, but she also fears the pain of losing another sibling, and feels the relationship is becoming distant.

Chloe

Chloe experienced the murder of her brother at the young age of 24; her brother Brandon had just turned 20 a few weeks before he was killed. Brandon was killed 8 months prior to the interview in Hampton, South Carolina. Brandon was attempting to enter someone's home and when he kicked the door in the resident was armed and shot him twice. Unlike the other participants, Chloe's brother was considered to be the assailant therefore media outlets portrayed him in a negative light causing additional emotions for the family. Chloe chose to depend on her mother and sisters for support, and she is still angry at her father for refusing to attend Brandon's funeral. Chloe feels like

she failed Brandon because she did not get a place with him, and believes that caused him to do other things to survive.

Tasha

Tasha's brother Matthew was 24 when he was shot 2 years ago exiting his vehicle with friends in South Bend, Indiana; Tasha was 28. Matthew's case was ongoing at the time of the interview, and the detectives were at a dead end. Tasha struggles with the memories of her brother and views them as bittersweet. She also struggles with the unanswered questions to include what happened and has concerns about the afterlife. She did not seek counseling, but she depended on her boyfriend whose brother was also murdered in 2008. She feels that her mother serves as a constant reminder of her brother, and she frequently watches her cry. She also feels the support has died down, and she doesn't blame people for moving on with their lives.

Karl

Karl was the only male participant who unfortunately experienced the murder of 2 brothers on 2 different occasions. Karl focused on his brother Kyle who was shot and killed 2 years ago at the age of 28 in Hampton, Virginia. He informed the case received appropriate law enforcement support, and that someone was taken into custody, but the case was dismissed. He further informed that he did not have too much information on the case because he chose not to participate in the trial process. He expressed being very close to Kyle, and chose to cope with the loss on his own, and "counsel himself" because he considered himself to be an outsider in the family. Karl reports remaining close to his

other siblings; Karl was also disappointed with Kyle's lifestyle, but still considers the murder of a sibling to be a devastating experience.

Lisa

Lisa's older brother Leon was robbed for about \$300 around 3 a.m. leaving a check cashing place at the age of 46 in Dallas, Texas. She was 33 at the time of his death. Lisa participated in the interview 7 months after her brother's death. She explained that his case received proper media and law enforcement support, but the investigation remains ongoing. Lisa is involved in individual grief counseling every week, and then group grief counseling for homicide survivors monthly that is offered by the city of Dallas free of charge. Despite the growing pains of sibling relationships and lifestyle choices, the siblings remained close. Lisa reports experiencing a rollercoaster of feelings to include grief, anger, and hopelessness. She has managed her feelings with counseling and prayer. Her relationship with her mother and sister have been strained since the murder which she believes has to do with the insurance policy that she feels took priority. Lisa's father died from cancer 5 years prior to the death of her brother, and she decided to acknowledge her grief this time around. She reports getting frustrated when she is often asked about how her mother is doing.

Faith

Faith's brother Calvin was in his home when a year ago, 3 men kicked in his door, beat him up, and shot him. Calvin was 26 at the time, and Faith was 27. Calvin's case has not been solved and Faith feels law enforcement is giving them the runaround. She reports a small article was in the newspaper, and police arrived 5 hours after the murder;

and despite the camera footage outside the home the case has been swept under the rug. Law enforcement has frustrated Faith, because she feels they often assume African American murders are gang or drug related. Due to their closeness, Faith is coping with the reality of the loss, and with being the oldest it is hard to watch her other siblings grieve. Faith copes by writing in her diary and posting on Calvin's social media three times a day to feel like they are still communicating. She describes this experience as a hard pill to swallow. Faith chose not to go to counseling because of scheduling concerns, and she further reported that because she works with kids her job may feel that she is not fit to be around children.

Rachel

Rachel lost her older brother David 2 years ago when he was 41 years old. David's murder was considered to be a robbery gone bad, and he was shot in front of his apartment. His murder was solved, and received adequate media coverage, but the capture resulted in the assailant escaping, assaulting officers, and engaging in a week long manhunt. At this time, the assailant is awaiting trial. Rachel and David's father was also killed in a robbery when they were young children, and her mother passed away 21 years ago. Rachel feels closer to her twin sisters, but did not seek any formal counseling but feels she may need it. Rachel's support has died down quite a bit because people go back to their normal lives. She considers African American sibling loss to be normal as if it is bound to happen. She suggests that siblings should remember the good times and be around positivity.

Jennifer

Jennifer experienced the murder of her brother Kevin only 2 months before the interview. Kevin was 28 at the time of his death when someone opened fire on the vehicle he was in. Jennifer's cousin was also shot and killed, and her other brother was shot but survived. The murder had not been solved at the time of the interview because the assailant fled to another state. Jennifer did not feel there was adequate media coverage nor was law enforcement as supportive as she felt they should be. Jennifer was pregnant at the time of the murder and went into labor a month early. Jennifer is currently looking for a therapist and feels that talking these things out are necessary because she struggles with denial. Jennifer chose not to inform multiple people about the murder, so her support circle remained small. Jennifer wants her brother to know that she forgives him, and that she wished he took life more seriously.

Results

The information presented in this next section is based on the participants' responses. Be advised, to ensure confidentiality pseudonyms are being used for the participant and the deceased sibling. In this section, I identify and explain the categories and themes supported by participant quotes to assist in explaining the findings of the study. Lastly, the research question findings, and sibling survivor advice was highlighted.

Category 1: Coping

The participants spoke about the various ways they coped with the loss of their sibling. All the participants struggled with the loss and described the process as ongoing; some of which described the process as something they will never get over. Majority of

the participants revealed various coping mechanisms such as the use of counseling, prayer, drugs, and alcohol assisted in the process. Five themes were identified, emotions, parental responses, remembrance, acceptance, and resilience will be discussed in this section.

Theme 1: Emotions. The participants experienced a variety of emotions while coping with the loss of their sibling. Some of the emotions included being angry that the sibling was killed as well as the way they were killed. Additionally, guilt was also expressed by the survivors that they did not do more to be there for their sibling. Sadness was also evident in a lot of the participant interviews which was confirmed by tears and tones throughout the interview. Participants also described feelings of shock when notified of their siblings' murder.

Reagan lost her younger brother Johnathan after he was kidnapped and missing for eight days. He was discovered by law enforcement shot and buried in a shallow grave. She described the initial feelings of shock and disbelief when she was notified of her brother's death while at work just 15 short months after a car accident claimed the life of her sister and nephew. Reagan experienced 2 tragic sudden deaths but indicated the experiences were different because one was an accident and the other was intentional

You feel shattered as a person, because a sibling loss it's like they cannot be replaced... You feel empty... So, you just live to survive. I was angry, sad, I was not coping well at all. (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/2019)

Emotions such as crying is a common experience for those suffering from a loss. Karl experienced the murder of two brothers on different occasions, and in some instances struggled with expressing his emotions toward losing his brother Kyle

I cried the first time. I cried when I received the call, and I went to the scene...

(pause) I mean, sometimes I may have like an outburst crying. You know if I hear something like music or something, I know we listened to a lot... I cry for a little bit, I pray, talk, and just let it go. I just let it do its course at that moment. (Karl, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Guilt was another emotion that was revealed by the participants for various reasons. Older siblings felt a responsibility to be there and protect their younger siblings, and once the murder occurred felt as if they failed their sibling. Ebony's brother Leo was murdered leaving their mother's home, and she described the bereavement process as ongoing as some days are better than others, and she reported struggling with feelings of guilt

... As an older sibling your job is, or you feel like your job is to protect your younger siblings. And, I just felt like I failed my brother. I feel like it was something I should have done, I could have done, and so that is something I have to live with for the rest of my life. (Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Chloe also expressed feelings of guilt following the murder of her younger brother Brandon. Unlike the other siblings, Brandon was a suspect in the home invasion where he was killed by the homeowner at the young age of 20

I feel bad; I feel like I failed him as a sister, because a couple of months before it happened, he asked if we could get a house together... I told him that I couldn't because I had my three kids and my two little sisters staying with me, so I told him that it would have been too much. But I feel like I failed him, and if we would have gotten a house together then maybe this wouldn't have happened, and he wouldn't have had to do what he did to survive. (Chloe, Personal Communication, 12/28/19)

Lisa echoed Chloe's feelings of guilt because she also felt that she could have provided more assistance to her older brother Leon who was robbed and killed outside of a check cashing facility

...But I think I felt a little guilty at first because I felt maybe if I had been or if I offered more help he wouldn't be as resistant to seeking help from family or even being more open to it. So, I felt guilty. I felt guilty that we weren't as close as we were as we grew up, so I went through stages of guilt. (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Faith's brother Calvin was murdered during a home invasion almost two years ago; Faith acknowledged her guilt when she experienced feelings of happiness especially around the holidays

I catch myself or I will allow myself to have a happy moment without feeling guilty because I used to feel guilty when I was happy or felt some type of joy. (Faith, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Rachel reported struggling with her anger following the murder of her only brother David, who was shot in front of his apartment building. She elaborated by stating that she “sits in anger” (Rachel, Personal Communication, 12/30/19). Lisa, reported going through all the cycles of grief and echoed feeling angry and described her brother’s murder as “senseless”

Anger, because obviously his case is unsolved, and it was a very senseless crime the person robbed him, and I think only got like \$300 so I feel that was really senseless. (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Katrina expressed feelings of being stressed following the murder of her older brother Johnathan who was killed following an altercation with another peer outside of a club. She reported being notified of his death alone while in college in another state, and used marijuana to cope with the loss prior to deciding to go to counseling

... I have had difficulties with managing my stress like whenever I got stressed it was hard for me to deal. I definitely would say that I dealt with a lot of depression... Once I finished up the counseling process you know, I had learned ways to manage my stress and deal with stressful situations and different coping mechanisms for when I am feeling depressed. (Katrina, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

The participants described the various emotions experienced following the murder of their sibling. Emotions such as shock emerged following the initial notification of their siblings’ murder as well as anger based on the participants trying to wrap their mind around someone maliciously taking their brothers’ life. Some of the participants

experienced feelings of guilt because the sibling could have done more to help their sibling, which could have potentially prevented their death. The siblings expressed their own emotions, and also provided insight into how their parents coped with the loss.

Theme 2: Parental responses. During the bereavement process the siblings as well as the parents struggled with the loss of their child. However, many of the parents struggled with accepting the loss, and in some cases if the parents were still alive were almost crippled by the loss. Reagan and Johnathan shared the same parents who are Pastors of a Mississippi church, and she was extremely emotional when discussing her parents

Oh, not good. My dad is still struggling really bad. Really really hard! I mean he was just angry, and my dad is not an angry person he is really humble, and my dad just never asked why, and for the first time I heard my father say, you know he was just wondering if for whatever is he being punished for something that he does not know about...he says everything is "God's will" but the maliciousness and the intent behind his baby son's murder he just cannot comprehend. So, he (my father) is in a really bad space. And my mom, is very um, she is just broken, and she's sad, and she's hurt, because she was really close to my brother...she leaves work a lot, she cries at work... My parents were so lively before all of this, and um you can just see them being so worn down it is just so hard to watch them. (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/2019)

Reagan was asked toward the end of the interview how she felt about speaking on topic and reported that she noticed she did not get emotional until speaking about her

parents, and felt that was because she felt a responsibility to ensure they were okay because their hurt was greater and was asked to elaborate on why their grief was more significant

Because no parent should bury a child. Let alone two children within 15 months. One by accident. The second by at the hand of a murderer found in a decomposed state. Where a father has to identify his body and a mother cannot see her son one last time because he has to be cremated due to being exposed to the elements and being left in a shallow grave. Yeah, I think they are traumatized beyond compare. (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/19)

Tiffany felt despite their mother being in the picture she still considered her mother to be absent due to school and work obligations which she reports understanding but at the same time felt that she had to be the “mother figure” to her siblings. Tiffany understood that their mother was doing what she had to do but reported that her mom is taking the loss hard because she was not as involved in their lives. She further expressed being frustrated with her father due to his lack of involvement in their lives as well as the absence of assistance regarding the funeral services, but never mentioned how he felt about the loss

My dad, he left when Bradley was like 10, he might have been 9 or 10. I would have been about almost 15 so my dad has not really been there. He was there for the funeral ... My dad, I am kind of angry because he could have done more.

When we were planning the funeral, I did it on my own. From raising money and all, I did it. (Tiffany, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Ebony informed that her mother grieves daily to include crying frequently, insomnia, and keeping Leo's belongings out. Ebony further expressed that her father took the loss hard as well, and she did not witness her father cry for Leo until about two years after the murder randomly during a family gathering. Her father struggles with the loss of his only son and not understanding why something like this even happened. Furthermore, Ebony's father spends a lot of time at Leo's gravesite

Um, my mom took it really hard. My mom still deals with it now. My mom cries often... My mother grieves daily, she talks about my brother every day...My dad goes to my brother's grave every week and makes sure the area around him is clean and there is no grass growing up. My dad is like my brother's deceased caretaker, like he tries to make sure everything is perfect for my brother. (Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Since losing her brother, Ebony ensures she communicates with her parents more and has noticed that she is a lot closer to them; however, she did report concerns regarding her father's increased alcohol use but uses that as a reason to remain in constant communication with her father (Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19).

In another instance, Chloe's brother's death was already a stressful situation for her family and she informed during the interview that her mother struggled with the loss and had to take quite a bit of time off work, and she was also reported frustration with her father during that time for his absence at Brandon's funeral. The relationship was strained prior to the murder but she could not understand why he would not show up

My dad, we don't really talk he didn't even show up for my brother's funeral, so we don't even talk to him... I was angry, because my grandma she just died in August and he showed up to her funeral so when I saw him, I asked why he did not show up to his son's funeral and he didn't have anything to say. So, I was angry, and I wanted to tell him some stuff, but they told me to just let it go.

(Chloe, Personal Communication, 12/28/19)

Faith's brother Calvin's murder mended the estranged relationship between Faith and her parents. She reported her mother became distant and went into shock following the notification of Calvin's murder and then snapped out of it when she saw how Faith was coping with the loss. She described a strained relationship with her mother prior to the loss but was glad it improved because she needed her mother during that time. Due to issues with her father's wife Faith's relationship with her father was also estranged until Calvin's death. Faith was responsible for notifying her father about the loss while he was hospitalized for a minor heart attack, and he immediately released himself from the hospital. Faith reported fearing the loss would have killed her dad. (Faith, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Teresa's parents took Mark's passing extremely hard. Their father had cancer at the time, and she felt the cancer worsened after Mark died, and he [their father] was depressed, gave up, and she lost her father shortly after her brother passed. She preferred not to elaborate on her mother's bereavement response. (Teresa, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Some of the siblings shared the same father, and in most cases the sibling did not know how the unshared parent coped with the loss if they were still alive. Karl and his brother Kyle did not share the same mother but had the same father. Karl described his relationship with Kyle's mother as distant since the murder. Karl reports that he and his father communicate regularly but they do not talk about Kyle nor their feelings regarding the murder. Karl was asked about his closeness to his father, and described the relationship solely as a fatherly role, but not really a close relationship (Karl, Personal Communication, 12/29/19).

In Katrina's case, her brother's mother died 2 years prior to the murder, but they shared the same father. Katrina reported the murder was very difficult for him, and informed he had to fly to Davenport to identify her brother's body

... It was really stressful for him, and very emotional for him. I know he had a lot of difficulty sleeping, and he was very depressed after it happened. (Katrina, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Tasha informed that she and Matthew did not share the same father, and their mother was a single parent. Tasha reported not having a relationship with Matthew's father, so she was unsure how the murder personally affected him. Tasha is concerned about her mother's grief, and has suggested that she seek counseling, and she reports that she and her mother are still close, but she has limited her interactions because she is a constant reminder of her brother, and Tasha does not want to dwell in her grief

I feel like my mom is still battling, she is getting better but I told her she needs counseling because she doesn't really know how to deal with it like she struggles

with it the most... I just feel like there are certain things that she could do to help her, but she is just on like all his items, she keeps things out of his, it is just a constant every day. So, I feel like she is kind of hurting herself more, I think she could do better. And I am not putting a time on it or anything, but I just feel like some people die of broken hearts you know, and I just don't want that to be her case because she is basically just brokenhearted. I am seeing it taking a toll on her the most. (Tasha, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Lisa unfortunately experienced the death of her father 5 years prior to her brother's murder. She and Leon did not share the same father, but she informed that her father played a role in Leon's life as Leon's biological father struggled with drug use; she is also unsure how Leon's biological father dealt with the loss. She and her mother's relationship has become strained since the murder because she does not feel he was memorialized properly, and his death automatically became about the insurance money. She also reported frustration with assumptions being made that his lifestyle choices coincided with his murder

...So, I know they had their own unique relationship, and they would always get back on track but I think that she probably regrets the negative times that they've had....when my brother was younger he lived a very fast lifestyle as far as selling drugs...but because of the lifestyle or choices earlier in life he struggled with keeping a job and different things. So, my mom would throw that in his face a lot that's why they would have a conflicting relationship, and so I don't know I think

sometimes she makes remarks as this could have been a consequence of some of his prior decisions. (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Like the siblings the parents' responses also varied and feelings of sadness and depression was evident. Some of the siblings' shared both parents or just the same mother or father, and sadly, one of the participants experienced the murder of her father and death of her mother over 20 years ago. Some of the participants had estranged relationships with one of their parents and chose to focus on the present parent when discussing their responses. The participants mentioned ways the parents chose to remember the deceased, and the following section will discuss sibling remembrance.

Theme 3: Remembrance. Several of the siblings emphasized the importance of wanting to keep their siblings' memory alive; some of the participants struggle with the anniversary of their siblings' passing, birthdays, and the holidays. The time since their siblings' murder ranged from 2 months to 4 years, and the survivors remembered their siblings in various capacities. It has been a little over 4 years since Katrina's brother was murdered, and she reported the following

I remember like the one-year anniversary of his passing; I went with some friends and we released some balloons. And when I visit Seattle, I go to visit my brother's gravesite... I ended up getting a tattoo on my back in remembrance of him. (Katrina, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Ebony's brother Leo was killed 2016, and she described various ways that she keeps his memory alive

I still have my brother's funeral program on a mantle at my house, I still have a locket of his hair laminated on a mantle at my house. (emotional) Um, I still celebrate my brother's birthday, and I try to be positive and celebrate his death date. Um, you know my husband tells me to try to start putting some of your stuff away; I still have my brother's death certificate in my drawer, I haven't changed my screensaver on my phone in 3 years. (Ebony, Personal Communication 12/21/19)

Tasha reports struggling with the memories of her brother, she often thinks of him, but she also has people in the community that serve as a constant reminder of Matthew

It is kind of bittersweet though when you think about a memory you have with your brother and then it just dawns on you that he is not here, and he is not coming back so it is kind of bittersweet...I just deal with the fact that he was so loved by a lot of people, so I have to constantly see pictures of him because somebody is always bringing up a memory of him and somebody is always talking about him or sharing pictures. (Tasha, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Lisa expressed frustration with her family in the way her brother's memory has been honored and believes her family could have done better in acknowledging Leon's memory; she later described instances where Leon was not included in Christmas photos as well as frustration about the insurance money becoming a selfish priority, and not being used on his children. Lisa also felt that it was important to ensure that a loved one

was not forgotten and should be incorporated in the important things whether they were notable or not. She further

... So, one thing, I guess this would be another suggestion for people that may be struggling with this is to, for me at least, is to incorporate him in things that are important that will help me to keep his memory alive... So, I think that it is important no matter how insignificant you think it is or that it may not mean much to other people; creating some type of memory in something that you feel comfortable with has been helpful. (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Tiffany believes the best way to honor her brother is to keep his story relevant, because she feels that this mass shooting has not received the attention that other shootings have

I am working hard to keep the story out there. I want this story to be like the Columbine, Sandy Hook, the shooting at the bars in California. I want this to be known like that, and it didn't get that attention like that. I don't know if it was because one was just killed or what, but it was still a mass shooting I want it to be out there and for people to know about it. (Tiffany, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

The siblings remembered the deceased in their own ways, some gave back to their local community, and others used photos and tattoos to memorialize their sibling. On the contrary, a few of the participants did not mention ways they are keeping their siblings' memory alive but did express simply missing their sibling. A few of the participants

mentioned being in denial over the loss which may affect how they have accepted the death and chose to memorialize the sibling.

Theme 4: Acceptance. Grief contains many stages and emotions with acceptance being the final stage. Many of the participants reported struggling with accepting the murder of their sibling as well as the maliciousness of the murder. The siblings further struggled with the reality of the loss, denial, and believing their sibling has transitioned. Tiffany reported that believing Bradley is gone has been hard since she did not view her brother's body after he died

Belief. Believing that it is real, that is the hardest part. I try to place in my head and tell myself that my brother is not coming back. He's never coming back! He's gone, and he is gone for real. So, like I have to tell myself that over and over again to place it in my head that it is real. So, you just try to believe that it's real is the hard part for me and trying to cope with that part. (Tiffany, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Faith reiterated Tiffany's response when discussing her brother Calvin who she was extremely close to, and emphasized accepting the loss has been a challenge

I don't want to say I am in denial because I know he is gone, it is accepting that he is gone; accepting that I won't ever talk to him again, I won't ever see him again. The acceptance part, I am struggling with that...it's just a hard pill to swallow. (Faith, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Teresa's emotions were torn regarding her brother Mark, and she understood that her brother was gone but also felt that spiritually he was in a better place

The fact that you know he is not here...and the missing part just knowing that he is not here, and you can't see him anymore that is like the hardest part. But, deep down you know he is in a better place...but it is just the fact that he is not here with you, and you just miss him. (Teresa, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Ebony reported feeling that since she and Leo lived in two different cities that it almost feels as if she just has not seen him. She also informed that family gatherings are no longer the same, and described times when people would assume that they were not close because they lived in separate cities

I think more so like, okay I know that he is gone, but then there are times where I'm like no, this is a dream like he is not really gone, you know one day I am going to wake up from this, like honestly it is just struggling with the fact that he is gone; but trying to make myself understand that he is gone I think that's a struggle, and I think that's partially where I am kind of stuck at. (Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Accepting her brother's death has been a challenge for Tasha and some days are better than others, and losing Matthew at a young age is almost unfathomable. She was later asked what part of the bereavement process she continues to struggle with and her response indicated that accepting the loss has been hard

I have my days where I am like, okay my brother passed you know I am dealing with it and its okay, and then some days I break down and be like, my brother is gone... we were supposed to grow old together and so I am struggling with the

fact that my brother was taken at such a young age. (Tasha, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Karl echoed the other participants, when it came to the struggle of accepting the loss of his brother as described the experience as “unreal”. The struggles that Karl has faced since his brother Kyle was killed were questioned and he informed

Um, (extended pause). Just the part that he is not there, you know we pretty much grew up together so having someone who you tell your goals or your dreams to one another it is a struggle point at that time because I know how we pushed one another to be successful in whatever we decided to do in life. So, I guess that is like a struggle point there. I manage by trying not to think about it. (Karl, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

When discussing her brother David’s murder, Rachel reported that accepting the loss has been a challenge. Tragically, she mentions that her brother and father were killed in a similar manner

Um, I feel like I am still trying to cope with it. It is still unbelievable to me like he was my only brother and he was my oldest brother. And, it is crazy because our father was also killed the same way, but he was stabbed to death in front of his house, a robbery gone bad; so, I don’t think I have really coped with it, I think I just deal with it. (Rachel, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Jennifer’s brother Kevin along with her cousin was murdered just 2 months prior to the interview. Jennifer also informed that another one of her brothers was also shot but survived the incident, she also struggled with accepting her brother’s murder

Um, I don't want to say denial um, but I think that could still be a part of it. But I am not sure if it is just his situation or a series of events that happened because of it. Um, it definitely almost seems unreal that, that happened; then after that something else happened; then after that something else happened. So, it was like blow after blow after blow. But honestly right now I am just trying to adjust to it all. (Jennifer, Personal Communication, 12/31/19)

Chloe struggles with understanding and accepting the loss of her brother who was a suspect in a home invasion and killed by the residence owner 7 months prior to the interview

...(emotional) I really haven't coped yet; I feel like I think about him every day... So, I am still coping, like I still can't get over this... I still can't believe that he is really gone... It is hard for me to talk about it because we still can't believe that he is really gone. So, it is something I think about every day like my brother is gone, and he is not coming back. I don't think we will really get over it, he was our only brother, and I guess you will never expect for a loved one to die so early. You really won't know how it feels until it happens to you. (Chloe, Personal Communication, 12/28/19)

The siblings found accepting their siblings' murder to be challenging. Some of the participants reported not being in denial, but made comments suggesting that they were indeed in denial. The siblings described this portion of the grief experience in various ways such as unreal as unbelievable, and some of the participants admitted trying not to

think about the deceased as a way to make it through the day. Not all the participants struggled with accepting the loss and found ways to successfully get through the loss.

Theme 5: Resilience. Each of the participants have coped with the loss in their own way, and some of the participants found comfort in putting their broken heart to use and getting active in prayer as well as assisting others in their community. Other participants saw the loss as motivation to do something positive, and even chose to focus on the positive memories they shared with their sibling to cope with the loss. It is important to highlight that being resilient during a tragedy does not mean the survivor does not care, as they will likely have their moments but to remember that everyone grieves and copes differently. Teresa and Lisa found comfort in an active prayer life, and believes prayer is what has gotten her through the tough times

I just pray. I just keep myself prayed up to make everything better. Once I pray, I seem better. (Teresa, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Lisa echoed the use of prayer and meditation as a helpful tool during this time, she is also involved with group and individual counseling. The group sessions she has been attending have been focused on family members of murder victims, a service offered by the city free of charge

Counseling, pray, I have not gotten into meditation, but it is something that I am considering... But I would say mostly prayer, I have been spending a lot of alone but sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not. So, I would say the most useful tool has been counseling and being able to talk through not just this situation but underlying issues. (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Lisa also expressed a desire to get involved with her local community to assist families of homicide or other forms of violence and wants to turn that anger around and do something that is useful (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19). Since losing her brother Tiffany has been eagerly giving back to her local community, and has also taken over businesses and hobbies that her brother showed interest in. She has also been working with other bereaved siblings to put an end to gun violence

My brother wanted to do stuff for his local community, he wanted to do stuff for the youth. So, I have taken into that and I created a nonprofit called Changing the World in honor of him. We have the different events for our community, local community, and for South Bend, Indiana. We have done Christmas basket giveaways, Thanksgiving basket giveaways, and we also did a gun violence concert in September. We are working now on comfort kits for grieving families that lost somebody to gun violence. (Tiffany, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

I found it to be admirable and a sign of resilience that each of the participants agreed to participate in the study; some just a few months after the murder occurred. Various acts such as being involved in the community, prayer, and in some cases just trying to smile on a regular basis showed how the participants made it through this devastating experience. The following section discusses support an extremely significant part of the bereavement process which can influence how the participant copes with the loss.

Category 2: Support

The idea of support varied by participants. Some of the survivors expressed being the “strong sibling” and preferred to be there for other family members and push their own grief to the side. Unfortunately, some siblings expressed feeling completely neglected and forgotten, and felt like the support was nonexistent or diminished after the funeral services. The relationships between the sibling survivor and the deceased were discussed as well as the relationships between the siblings and the remaining surviving siblings. Changes are inevitable in death, and as Tasha stated in her interview, “death either brings you closer or breaks you apart.” (Tasha, Personal Communication, 12/29/19). Four themes were identified, survivor support, supporting others, forgotten mourners, and closeness will be discussed in this section.

Theme 1: Survivor support. The siblings discussed how support was present or nonexistent during their bereavement experience. There is no set timetable to grieve, however survivors acknowledged that their support decreased as time went on, and they often suppressed their own emotions. Homicide is a traumatic experience where survivors could benefit from support to assist with their recovery. Reagan reports unfortunately going through a divorce because she feels she is not getting the appropriate support from her husband. She informed that her husband’s support would be dramatically helpful during her grief

Yeah, I am getting a divorce. (Long pause). Yeah, death and grief is really hard on marriage when the other person does not understand a family dynamic such as mine... And, my husband does not seem to understand that, and it has just worn

me down to the point to where I just don't feel the support anymore, and I am tired of the arguing and the fighting...So, you know, that's just another loss and grief I will have to deal with. (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/2019)

In addition, she informed that her extended family returned to their everyday lives after the funeral services, and Reagans' immediate family continued to depend on one another. Reagan further informed that she appreciated the support from her friends for ensuring she was okay at all times (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/2019).

Katrina felt like there was not enough support provided for her, and that her family could have done more to ensure she was okay; she was pleased with the support her friends provided

Um, honestly, I don't feel like I received enough support from family during that time with me being all the way in Missouri I feel like a family member that was in Memphis (6 hours away) could have come to visit or stay with me for a little while. Um, yeah, I didn't really like I got enough support from my family. It was mainly me buying a plane ticket going to spend time with my family for a week... Some family members would call, but I didn't feel like that was enough... my friends were at my house almost every day, so I did get a lot of support from my friends during that time. (Katrina, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Chloe echoed a similar response regarding the support that she received after Brandon's murder, but emphasized that the only support that she needed was from her mother and sisters

I don't really feel like I received support, but right after the funeral that was it, I guess. They were there for that part, but like after... it kind of died down. (Chloe, Personal Communication, 12/28/19)

Rachel felt the support she received was not enough, and although family members showed up to the services, they went back to normal after the funeral. She indicated that the support rises again once the anniversary of his passing comes around (Rachel, Personal Communication, 12/30/19). Tasha appreciated the support of her boyfriend because he also unfortunately experienced the murder of a sibling about 12 years ago and believes that he has been a tremendous help for her during the bereavement process. The support that Tasha received resulted in her understanding what happens to other families when a loved one passes away. She was asked about the support she received and informed

...Well they did come around initially the first day. The first day it happened there was a lot of love and support, and I mean I get it I have seen other people's family passing, and it is the same thing. But no one can really grasp how you feel until it happens to them, so I do get that concept, and I don't blame people for not being around anymore, I just kind of fell back from everything... Sometimes family and friends call me and checked on me, but that type of stuff does not last long, and that is okay because I get it. You know, everyone else moves on and everyone who is affected by it doesn't necessarily. (Tasha, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Lisa experienced the loss of her father 5 years prior to her brother's murder, and informed that she was not open to support 5 years ago and preferred to remain in business mode, so this time around she was open to the assistance from others whether it was prayers or kind gestures. She also decided to seek group counseling for survivors of homicide for additional support but feels that the support should be coming from her family. When asked if she feels supported just seven months later, she stated

...I think people are doing as much as they probably could. I think what makes it the most difficult is that it is not coming from who I feel like it should be. So, like family... I do think that people are supportive as much as they know how to be with respecting boundaries and being understanding. But then I also think that its coming from friends for support, but not from my immediate family who I feel that it should be. (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Some of the other participants felt that the support from the family and the community was beneficial, and never felt their grief was overlooked. Others felt that the support from their family was all they needed, because they were all going through the same thing. Furthermore, a few of the participants learned to mask their grief and would put on a façade that everything was fine. Ebony described her grief as not being as evident as most people, and she often prefers to grieve alone therefore it may appear that everything is okay; when asked if the support she received was enough she responded

I think so, because for the most part like I said my grieving is not like I am sitting in front of my family and break down and cry in front of them or if I am feeling some type of way then I am sitting and telling them how I feel, or this is why I

feel this way. So, I don't necessarily think they know that I am still grieving about it because it is not something, I just sit in front of them and do it. I am off to myself and I get myself together, and then I go back and do what I need to do. (Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

She was also asked how often she was asked how she was doing, and informed that as time progressed the concern faded

Honestly, I think maybe like the first two weeks, the first few weeks while it was fresh of course I heard that a lot. Like, how are you doing? Do you need anything? How do you feel? But um, I think like after that it kind of got to the point where people were like okay, at this point you should be over it. And, that wasn't the case and it still isn't the case. Like I am not over it, we are not over it. (Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Although the loss of a sibling was a devastating experience, some of the participants felt alone in the process. In Jennifer's case, she did not receive much support because she chose not to involve others as well as social media in her grief, but rather preferred to only inform certain individuals of her brother's murder (Jennifer, Personal Communication, 12/31/19). Karl described himself as an outsider when asked about the support he received following the murder of his brother Kyle

I mean, as far as me, on my side, the support wasn't there really. Because everyone knew how close and me and him were, but after the fact, and everything happened everybody tried to play that role like they were really coping when they

weren't. So, like with my support side it was like I was by myself. Like I am an outsider. (Karl, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

The support the participants received or did not receive impacted their grief process whether it was positive or negative. Participants explained how the support was heightened immediately following the loss, and then eventually died down as people went back to their lives. Some of the participants felt the support of their immediate family was all that was needed to get through the bereavement process. On the contrary, some of the participants noticed that support was shown when it was convenient or when the anniversary of the siblings' passing came around. Although the support varied for everyone, some of the participants suspended their own grief by supporting other family members.

Theme 2: Supporting others. Suppressing grief and being there for others is another common occurrence for bereaved individuals. Some of the participants found it to be inappropriate to break down in front of others as it may trigger another person's grief. Sibling found it necessary to be strong for their parents, because the parents were experiencing the loss of a child and felt that loss was greater. Others had children that they felt they had to be strong for. Reagan reported feeling responsible for her parents

Oh no! I just feel like I have to take care of them more. I feel like such a responsibility to them even when they tell me I don't have to but it's just on the inside of me I just do not want any more hurt to come to them because I just feel so bad... I just don't want to see them hurt anymore, so I just feel like I have a responsibility to make sure they are okay all the time... I started being the

daughter who helped my parents not fall apart. (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/2019)

Ebony echoed Reagans' response and mentioned that being she masked her grief to ensure she was strong for her child and mother, and since she is the oldest sibling, she was expected to handle everything

Um, you know I have a little one and he remembers my brother so you know it is just like I can't break down in front of him so I try to tell him about praying, and we talk about angels and then with my mother you know I can't break down in front of my mom because he was my mom's only son, and so you know, just trying to be strong for my mom. (Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Tiffany highlighted her focus on wanting to keep her family strong, she specifically wanted to make sure her older brother was okay because he was at the scene of Bradley's murder and suffered from nightmares regarding the incident. When asked how she is managing her struggles, she continued to discuss her priority to make sure her children are okay (Tiffany, Personal Communication, 12/20/19). Faith expressed wanting to ensure that she did not grieve around her mother so that she did not impact her mother's grief

I didn't want my mom to see me at that low point as I was because she needed to grieve too. I wanted her to grieve without having to worry about me. (Faith, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

The participants suppressed their grief to ensure they did not impact others mainly their parents and children were discussed. Additionally, some of the participants also

mentioned wanting to be strong for the deceased siblings' children and wanted to ensure they were always okay. Research has discussed disenfranchised grief where survivors' grief in some cases is not been acknowledged often causing survivors to feel ignored.

Theme 3: Forgotten mourners. The participants were asked how they felt during the bereavement process, and some of the survivors expressed feelings or expressed the sentiment of being a forgotten mourner during such a difficult time. The sibling survivors often felt neglected because their grief is overshadowed by the parents' grief. Not all the siblings felt neglected during this time, however, most of the participants expressed feelings of being forgotten. Katrina described feelings of neglect because she lived so far away and indicated this was "bound to happen." (Katrina, Personal Communication, 12/20/19). Reagan was asked how often she was asked how she was doing, and she expressed the following

(Laughs). Oh, that's rare, if I see somebody in the store that knows us as a family, they always ask how my parents are. Always ask how my parents are, and I guess it's because he is their son. So, people always forget the siblings. It is just a fact! I mean, you become so use to it, it doesn't even bother you. But it just comes along with the territory. It is very rare that they ask about you, and that is just the way it is. (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/2019)

Tasha was asked about feeling neglected as a sibling survivor, and she suggested that her mother's feelings were superior

Yes, at one point I did, which I just looked at it as well you know, that's the mom and I know it affects her the most because that was her child, he was our sibling.

That is how I looked at it. (Tasha, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Karl described the lack of support throughout his interview and described himself as an outsider that experienced neglect following the loss of his brother. He was asked how often he was asked how he was doing, and responded by stating

No days really, I mean nothing besides the funeral. Everyone asked that day how you feeling or whatever? Other than that, it just went back to normal. Nobody really cared how I felt. (Karl, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Tiffany was asked how often she was asked how she was doing regarding the loss of her brother, and informed that people see her as the strong sibling and because she works so much it is assumed that she is okay. Tiffany was later asked if she wished someone would check on her, and she responded, "sometimes yeah" (Tiffany, Personal Communication, 12/20/19). Lisa described feeling like an afterthought when asked about the support she received following her brother's murder

I think for me sometimes as an afterthought for most people and I have to be understanding that they are not living this; so, I try to, well I don't get angry about it; but I do sometimes feel as though I need more from, because I mean counseling is great but that's like a professional relationship. (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Furthermore, she expressed her frustration that when people do ask questions about her well-being that they ask how her mother was holding up. She indicated that

their strained relationship and her focus on the insurance money heightened that frustration. (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

On the other hand, when Faith was asked about feeling neglected, she felt that no one on this Earth could be there for her the way her brother Calvin was

Yes, I felt like Calvin passing made me feel vulnerable. Very vulnerable, I felt like my security blanket was taken away from me. So, just his passing period made me feel neglected because I feel like no one living on this Earth could ever truly care about me the way he did. (Faith, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

The siblings discussed how the loss caused them to feel neglected for numerous reasons. The survivors described how no one loved them as much as their siblings did and how at times they felt like an afterthought. Many siblings increased work and personal obligations to occupy their time. Some of the siblings did not report feeling neglected but did not elaborate as to what made them feel supported. The relationship with their sibling at the time of their death affected how the sibling ultimately coped with feeling forgotten.

Theme 4: Closeness. The siblings in this section shared their relationships with their deceased sibling prior to their death as well as their relationships with their other surviving siblings. Several of the siblings reported a close relationship with their sibling; however, some of the relationships were strained at the time of death for various reasons. Additionally, in some cases the murder has caused the surviving siblings to grow closer or drift apart.

Regan discussed her relationship with her brother Josh and one that was the life of the siblings, a jokester, and someone that she could never stay mad at. Since Josh's death she informed how the murder has impacted her relationship with her other siblings as well as the impact that her older sister's death 15 months prior had on her siblings

Um, well it has made us closer (pauses), I mean my brother (pauses) it is kind of hard because my brother, my other little brother he took it really hard (emotional responses). So, he is just devastated. They were best friends (emotional). And my sister, we were the older sisters, so we were always tight! And my little brother, he had never really recovered from our other sisters' passing so it feels like he has just gone further away from us, no matter what we try to do. So, it is just really difficult sometimes. We just try and try to continue to love him and just be there for him as best as we can. (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/2019)

Teresa was close to her brother, and at the time of his murder she was pregnant with her child and missed how excited Mark was to meet her daughter. She emphasized the importance of remaining close with her other seven siblings and speaking with them daily because you never know what can happen (Teresa, Personal Communication, 12/21/19). Brandon was Chloe's only brother, and she feels that her relationship with her sisters has gotten a lot closer since Brandon's murder, and they have depended on one another to get through this tragic time (Chloe, Personal Communication, 12/28/19). Karl also had a close relationship with his brother Kyle but expressed some concerns that he had with Kyle's lifestyle choices at the time of his passing; additionally, he remains close to his other siblings (Karl, Personal Communication, 12/29/19).

Ebony and her brother Leo had a close relationship despite living in two different cities, and she would ensure that when she went to Fort Worth to visit that she would ensure that Leo was her first and last stop. She described Leo as someone that would give you his last, and a gentle teddy bear. Following Leo's death, she and her sister became a lot closer and then noticed that their relationship started to become distant. She was asked to elaborate on her reasons for distancing herself from her sister

I think it is more so the fear of if something happens to you I don't want to feel the same way that I feel now, and it's like because we were both close to my brother we will text or she will call and say "hey, I just wanted to check on you", but it is not as often as we used to. And so, I think more so for me it is just the fear of like I don't want to lose another sibling, but I don't want to be so close that I feel the way that I feel now. So, I would rather just text or I will pick up the phone for a quick five-minute conversation and that will be it. (Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Faith and her brother Calvin were "attached at the hip", and they often lived in the same apartment, house, or same apartment complex where he was her neighbor. When discussing her other siblings, she reported a strain because the other siblings did not take the time to know Calvin like she did, and she often gets frustrated with them. She also feels that it is hard to identify with her other siblings, and reported that she often gets frustrated with her half siblings

... So, it is kind of weird with my other siblings because they ask me questions about Corey and it bothers me because you guys should know these things! I got

very angry once he was gone because they are all like what kind of things did, he like? And can you send pictures? And it's like you guys should have done this when he was alive, you guys should have had these pictures; and I am not going to go through all this to sooth your guilt of not being there when he was alive; and that is just how I felt. (Faith, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Lisa was younger than her brother Leon and described their relationship as one that was overprotective but close despite the different paths they took. She further reported a strain in her relationship with her sister that was present before Leon passed away based on her demanding attitude

He was always very supportive of me and I am a first-generation college student, and so he pursued college and didn't finish so he was always very supportive of my decision to continue my education. So, we were very close during my growing up, and I would say again that we took very different journeys, and I would say as I got older and wanted to hold him more accountable with the decisions he made, we probably grew apart a little bit; so I would say that we weren't as close as we were growing up upon his death but we have one other sibling and I would say that he and I had a very strong relationship. (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Rachel and her brother David were extremely close and were all each other had as their parents died over 20 years ago. She described David as a dad and a big brother that she could always count on to make her laugh and protect her; she also has half twin

sisters that were impacted by the loss and they remain close. (Rachel, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

To the contrary although the loss made siblings closer it also created rifts in some relationships. Katrina informed that she and her brother were close most of her life but leading up to her brother's death they had not spoken in about six months for no particular reason, and she simply felt that life just got in the way. She reported the willingness to stay in constant contact with her siblings and ensure that she visits when she goes to their cities. However, she described a change in her older sister

I know my older sister; she is about nine months older than me was my closest sister. But it seems like after my brother's passing, she became more distant. This is the second time she has experienced sibling loss, because when she was younger her little brother when he was four years old choked on a little ball. So, that was her second experience with having a sibling die. So, I spoke to her a lot but now she has moved to Alaska and has been very distant from the family.

(Katrina, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Tiffany described Bradley as her best friend, someone that she often confided in, and a joy to be around. She later mentioned feeling lost since he has been gone and has another brother that is struggling with his death as well. Tiffany revealed that her older brother was at the scene and held their brother in his arms, and described him as being distant

(deep breath). My other sibling. He has kind of spaced himself from us, and I think it is because he does not too much like to talk about it or it hurts him to talk

about it. He was away from Bradley for years, he was incarcerated for 3 years so he was away from Bradley for those 3 years, and he got to be around him for a year. So, in June when they took him away from us, and he was there to see it; he was there to witness it, so he is all messed up mentally. (Tiffany, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Closeness ranged for all the participants. Some siblings simply answered “we were close” when asked to describe their relationship with their sibling. One participant informed their father was in the process of trying to bring the siblings together when her brother was killed. Most of the participants expressed a good relationship with the deceased and the loss caused the surviving siblings to put things in perspective and remain close or mend any fences.

Category 3: Post-Homicide Interactions

The investigation process of any case can be a stressful situation, whether the case is solved or unsolved. Many of the homicides in this study were not solved at the time of the interview causing the participants to struggle with not having answers to their siblings’ death. The 3 themes discussed included death, law enforcement, and the media. The siblings felt the maliciousness behind the murder was incomprehensible, and not knowing who committed the murder has been a challenge. The siblings also expressed their frustration with law enforcement and the lack of seriousness taken into their cases. Furthermore, the sibling’s responses regarding the media support varied, as some felt that their siblings’ death was not important enough for the news and others felt the media attention was sufficient.

Theme 1: Death. The murder of the sibling caused the survivor to experience various unexplainable emotions. It is important to highlight that some of the murders occurred just 2 short months prior to the interview. Many of the siblings struggled with not having resolution about their siblings' murder at the time of their interview which makes it a lot harder to move on. Some of the siblings also discussed the challenges of body identification and the funeral process. Lastly, in some cases, the murder was solved and in one case the deceased was determined to be at fault.

Reagan's brother Josh was killed just 5 months before the interview, and she struggles with the unanswered questions

Um, well I think the hardest part for me is... I don't have resolution about my brother's murder, so I have a lot of anger still...Um, the not knowing, and just the feeling that I may never know... And, I just want to know what really happened, and who is responsible for this. And, even if I don't know why they did it, I just would like for something to be done about it. (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/19)

Ebony's brother Leo was killed about 3 and a half years ago, and his case remains unsolved at this time. Ebony refers to his case as a cold case

...And I think to know that the person is still out there, and I feel like his case and everything else is just put in a box and just like a cold case and put aside. I feel like that is where it's going to stay and it's never going to be resolved. (Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Tasha also agreed that not having justice has been an issue for her regarding Matthew's murder, she also struggles with not knowing the details of his autopsy

...There are a lot of things that are unanswered... And, I just want justice for him, and even though this person took my brother away I don't have hate in my heart toward this person... I just want him to do his time. I just want him to pay for the consequences. He will have a chance to seek salvation for what he did, but my brother's time is up someone took his life so that is different. (Tasha, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Some of the participants discussed the funeral process and how difficult it was for them. Katrina described the funeral as a traumatic experience because it was to view her brother's body and her fear of seeing him after being shot in the head. She further reports struggling for 2 years to get the image out her head

I was even regretting going in there and looking at the body because I don't know. I don't even know if I would even be able to do that again at a funeral of someone so close to me. So, that was kind of a traumatic experience for me, at the funeral, and viewing the body that stuck with me for a long time. (Katrina, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

A few of the murder cases had been resolved, and in Chloe's case her brother Brandon was killed during a home invasion in which he was the suspect. Chloe struggles with wondering why Brandon had to be shot and killed despite the circumstances, she further believes the incident was a set up. Brandon's case was ruled a case of self-defense and the resident owner received no penalty. (Chloe, Personal Communication, 12/28/19)

Karl also informed that someone was apprehended in his brother's murder case that was later dismissed; Karl did not have any details on the case because he informed that he chose not to participate in the trial process, and left that to his father (Karl, Personal Communication, 12/29/19). Rachel's brother's murder case was solved but the assailant is still awaiting trial therefore Rachel views the case as unresolved until a punishment is rendered (Rachel, Personal Communication, 12/30/19).

Most of the unsolved cases resulted in the siblings struggling with the unanswered questions as to who and why this crime was committed. A few of the survivors struggled with the funeral process, and preferred not to witness the body, and some regretted the sight of their lifeless sibling. The survivors expressed the desire that their sibling receive justice which could assist with obtaining closure. Homicides require law enforcement investigations and some of the siblings expressed frustration in how the case was handled.

Theme 2: Law enforcement. When it came down to law enforcement support there were mixed emotions. Various participants did not consider law enforcement to be helpful as they felt they should have been. At the time of interviews, several of the deceased cases were still ongoing and the survivors felt there was more that officials should be doing. There were a few participants that were satisfied with the support that law enforcement provided despite the case not being solved, and additionally some of the participants chose not to participate in the legalities of the case altogether.

Reagan recalled her experiences with the local police department, and she was still extremely frustrated with the way the officers handled her brother's case and did not

receive much assistance until her family decided to reach out to other agencies for answers. She also felt the lack of support display by law enforcement impacted her grief

...It was not on the news until that Friday when we reported it that Wednesday as well as they [law enforcement] did not reach out to any of the surrounding counties until myself and my family reached out to the Sheriff's department on that next Saturday... well because we have contacts in law enforcement and they said that there had not been anyone from the police department reaching out to them. So, until the Sheriff's office got involved no one had been contacted outside of the [local] police

Reagan also discussed her opinion on African American homicide and law enforcement support:

...And because we have a significant... issue with law enforcement not taking our [African American] homicides as seriously as other races our loved ones seem to just be murdered over and over and sit on piles of files on an investigator's desk while the family has no closure. (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/2019)

Tasha's brother Matthew was murdered in 2017, and at the time of the interview the case had not been solved. Tasha reported not initially being involved with the logistics of the case but has been working with the detectives, at this time they are at a dead end

...So, I have been checking back and forth with the detectives throughout these past couple of years, and they feel that people know more than they are telling but they are still at a dead-end right now. (Tasha, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Faith expressed extreme frustration when being asked about how her brother Calvin's case was handled. She informed that the officers did not arrive until 5 hours after the murder occurred, and then explained why she felt his case was not taken as seriously as it should have been

My biggest frustration especially when it comes to African American males is that they like to chalk it up as everything is gang related or drug related instead of just doing a thorough investigation. I personally feel that if it would have been a Caucasian male who was murdered in that way, then they would be on top of it, and the city wouldn't sleep until they got a lead and questioned somebody. (Faith, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Chloe reported not feeling supported by law enforcement as her brother Brandon was identified as a suspect in a home invasion. She informed that when she was informed of the murder that Brandon was simply laying in the street (Chloe, Personal Communication, 12/28/19). Tiffany described her frustration with law enforcement as well as the paramedics on the scene based on information that was reported to her from witnesses

That night I also heard that my brother was not treated fairly. I heard that came up to him with a stretcher, looked at him, and walked away to a girl that I think was shot in the arm. My brother laid there for 20-30 minutes, um, just lying there... My oldest brother went to the scene that night, and he held my brother in his arms, and was trying to get the police's attention and the paramedic and they didn't do anything. It was also some girls that were there that night I guess that

was at the party and they performed CPR, and she said that he had a pulse and he had started back breathing, and she told the paramedics and they pushed her off of him. And, then they walked away with the stretcher. (Tiffany, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

On the other hand, a few of the participants were satisfied with the way law enforcement handled the case, and some have received justice for their siblings' murder. Katrina indicated that law enforcement officials remained in contact with her father to provide him with updates on the case resulting in an arrest. While the assailant was detained, Katrina reports that she spent a lot of time reviewing articles to find out if the case had been resolved. After being convicted, the murderer received 15 years in prison but was later placed on trial for a separate 2013 murder, which caused additional emotions to arise when the new sentence was rendered

So, new evidence came back about that murder which he murdered a white guy that was like a tattoo artist, and he ended up getting charged and convicted with that, and when he ended up getting sentenced for that he was sentenced to 55 years in prison. So, I felt like he got a much steeper sentence for that crime than he did for my brother's crime. (Katrina, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

David, Rachel's brother's murder was also solved however at this time the assailant is awaiting trial. Rachel feels that although she is thankful the assailant has been apprehended also feels that the fact that he escaped from police custody, assaulted officers, and sent police on a week-long manhunt is the reason why his case was a priority. Rachel feels the case is still unresolved because no punishment has been

rendered at this time, and she only feels the reason why the case is still pending is because officers were injured. (Rachel, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Jennifer informed during her interview that law enforcement is aware of who murdered her brother Kevin, but the assailant was not immediately arrested and fled the state which has heightened her frustration with the case

Little to no effort I would say maybe from the police department...I would have preferred since they knew who was responsible for it that he be apprehended before being able to leave the state. (Jennifer, Personal Communication, 12/31/19)

Law enforcement officials were viewed as the ones that were supposed to get all the answers. The participants recalled watching police related shows and seeing how cases were handled, and felt the opposite was done for the siblings. Some felt their siblings' race and lifestyle choice played a part in how their cases were handled. At the time of the interviews most of the cases had not been solved, and that concerned many of the participants. In some cases, the participant felt that law enforcement did their job and supported the family. The siblings also expressed concerns in how the media supported their case.

Theme 3: Media. The media plays a tremendous role in getting the information to the public. Several of the participants voiced their concerns regarding the media, and some felt their siblings' death was not important enough to make the news for various reasons. On the contrary, some of the participants felt the media adequately depicted their siblings' story and simply answered "Yes" when asked if the case received adequate

attention. In one occasion, one of the deceased siblings was coined a suspect in the case and received negative media attention which added to the family's grief.

Reagan felt that Josh's race and sexual orientation played a part in her brother's case, and was further upset about the limited news coverage that her parents received

Because the media does not cover African American adult stories properly. If they are not a child or a senior citizen or someone that is Caucasian of any age, then they are not going to look for them. And my brother happens to be of the LGBT community, so he is even further down the list... the news story came out showing my parents, and what was a 20-minute interview was cut down to a one-minute snippet that aired on the 10 o'clock news. (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/2019)

Tiffany described an officer involved shooting taking priority over her brother's murder that she described as a mass shooting when asked if her brother received adequate media attention

No, I don't! So, a week prior to my brother's passing, a black man got shot by a white officer so it kind of took the media attention off the mass shooting. There were ten (people) shot and wounded. (Tiffany, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Ebony does not recall seeing anything on the news regarding her brother's murder and stated

Um, we don't recall ever seeing anything on the news. Um, it was just kind of like my brother died and that was it. Um, like nothing, we didn't hear anything.

(Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Katrina remembers reading a few articles about the murder but cannot recall whether it was on the local news in Davenport because she resided in a different state at the time (Katrina, Personal Communication, 12/20/19). Tasha also recalled seeing her brother's story on the news but also felt the media coverage was limited

It probably wasn't as much as I know someone else's murder would be, but he was on the news because he was not the only person shot that night. He was just the only one deceased. (Tasha, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Faith also discussed the lack of media attention that Calvin received, and considered the murder to be swept under the rug when asked if he received adequate media attention

No! There was a small article in the city of Danville about his passing and them supposedly doing an investigation, but other than that there was nothing about it. There was camera footage that was found because he had cameras, and it was kind of almost like it was swept under the rug. (Faith, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Since Brandon was a suspect in a home invasion, Chloe recalled a lot of negative news reports, and further informed that a lot of the Caucasian residents in Hampton stated that Brandon deserved to be killed. When she was asked if her brother's murder received adequate media coverage, she stated

Um, I really don't know how to answer that because they said he was the one in the wrong and was the suspect so...everything portrayed about him was negative.

(Chloe, Personal Communication, 12/28/19)

The media played an important role in the survivors' grief responses as some expressed frustration that their siblings' murder never made the news. The participants reported frustration in how African American cases are portrayed by the media and compared their siblings' murder to other cases involving other nationalities. Furthermore, some of the participants expressed how the commentary of everyday citizens on news reports affected them as well.

African American Lived Experience Following Sibling Homicide

Toward the conclusion of the interview, each of the participants were asked the research question what is the lived bereavement and grief experiences of African American sibling survivors of homicide victims? Each response varied by participant and provided insight into what the journey of being an African American sibling homicide survivor looked like. The responses revealed the participants were still adjusting to a new normal filled with confusion, anger, depression, and unanswered questions. Reagan described the experience as

...a walking mess of a shambled life that you just try to put back together the best way you can. Once your whole world has been flipped upside down you have to continue to move on because life goes on even though your loved one is no longer here. (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/2019)

Katrina reported struggling with her anger toward why the assailant felt the need to take her brother's life as well as the unanswered questions

It is a lot of anger stemming from why someone would feel the need to take my siblings' life. So, it's a lot of anger. Like why did this happen? What happened? A lot of unanswered questions, and then as the answers start coming in to the questions still like it's not adding up, it doesn't make sense. This should not have amounted to my brother's life being taken. For me, it was definitely a lot of anger and sadness. (Katrina, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Faith struggled with not having closure due to the case being unsolved. Unlike the other participants, Faith expressed feeling that this experience may have been easier had her brother been killed in an accident of some form

The experience is not having any closure especially with the case not being solved I don't have any closure... So, it is not a pretty picture right now because I am still going through my stages of grief. I don't know who did this to him, and I don't think I will ever be at peace until he has justice. (Faith, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Teresa echoed wanting to obtain justice for her brother's murder suggesting that would allow him to rest, as well as wishing that law enforcement would obtain answers Right now, because they haven't found out who actually committed the crime it's like you want to go and tell them (law enforcement) they need to get on their job and find out who did it... But I just wish that they would turn themselves in so

that we could have a peace of mind that my brother can rest well. (Teresa, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Ebony informed that the African American community tends to bottle their experiences up and “just deal with it.” She further described witnessing how law enforcement is portrayed television and could not understand why the same efforts were not being displayed in her brother’s case. She also reported struggling with the unanswered questions

...Oh my God! Unanswered questions, unfair treatment, and I say that because you see these shows and they show you how committed police officers are, you know all this time they are putting into research and looking, and like when you have to experience stuff like this first hand, things that you’ve watched you don’t get those things. You don’t see it. The experience I think as African Americans, I think we try to deal with it ourselves we don’t talk to people, you know? You kind of taught to bottle stuff up, and just deal with it that is what our experience is; you are taught to deal with it. (Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Tiffany echoed Ebony’s response by wishing the cases were handled like they are portrayed on television and stated

I have always seen stuff like this on tv, books, and magazines but I never thought it would be us. Bradley was not a gangster, a thug, or none of that so just for him to be taken, gone, and never coming back that just tells you that it can happen to anybody. So, it is kind of an eye opener that like wow, anybody can actually go. (Tiffany, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Tasha reiterated that feeling of wishing that more effort was taken into Matthew's case in describing her experience as an African American sibling homicide survivor

You are left behind, and I kind of feel like it is seen as not important. Kind of like forgotten...like other cases that I have seen where I feel like they are putting their all into it, and it is like your brother is kind of left behind. (Tasha, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Lisa felt that the unexpected nature of her brother's murder has been a painful experience

I think it is a journey of probably...pain. I think it's probably something that is unexpected. I think like when you think of death you may realistically know that it is possibility that your parents will leave before you, and although my siblings and I have a large gap between our age I just don't know that I ever imagined living life without them. I think that in itself is just kind of a rude awakening especially when it is unexpected...I just don't know how things could ever be normal again. (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Karl struggled with answering this question because he felt that each experience was going to vary by individual. However, after further elaboration described the experience as "devastating" particularly because when he arrived on the scene everything was cleared away, so he missed that opportunity to be there with Kyle one last time; he also found the experience of losing someone to violence devastating (Karl, Personal Communication, 12/29/19).

Chloe's experience was different from all the other participants as her brother was named a suspect in the crime, so she described a different point of view

Out here in Hampton there are a lot of racist, so on the news post when they said what happened there was a lot of negativity from most white people saying that is what he gets and all that. That he shouldn't have been doing what he was doing, and that he deserved it. So, it made me feel bad, but it is still a life lost I don't think that he deserved to get killed regardless if black or white. (Chloe, Personal Communication, 12/28/19)

Rachel described the experience as one that is familiar specifically in the African American community

It looks familiar. It looks like this is the regular, it is the norm. If it hasn't happened to you then you are lucky but it's going to happen to you. It feels regular like it is bound to happen to each and everybody. (Rachel, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

While each journey varied by individual the participants articulated some commonalities in their bereavement experience. Many of the subjects described struggling with the unanswered questions to their brothers' murder. Additionally, some stated that being African American homicide victim is a familiar experience, and one that is not taken as seriously by law enforcement. Furthermore, some siblings felt this experience created a rollercoaster of unexplainable emotions.

Participant Advice for Sibling Survivors

Although most of the survivors acknowledged this was a battle, they were still fighting all participants were asked what advice they would provide for siblings that experienced such a loss. The responses varied, and one participant felt they could not answer that question because the experience varied by individual. Other participants focused on the grief experience all together and made suggestions on how to cope with the loss. Reagan felt it was important to let other sibling survivors know that you should not let anyone tell you how to grieve, and to never think it is not okay not to be okay (Reagan, Personal Communication, 12/16/2019). Jennifer also suggested that survivors talk about the loss in their own time of course, and also wanted home environments to be improved so that people do not get involved in negative lifestyles and go down the wrong path (Jennifer, Personal Communication, 12/31/19).

Katrina felt that it was important for other survivors to seek counseling services to assist them in the process

I would tell them to seek counseling if they feel like they need it. Even if they don't feel like they need it I would definitely, you know, tell them to seek counseling services and to reach out to family members and friends when they are feeling down. (Katrina, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Tasha echoed the counseling response as well, and further highlighted the struggles that may arise within the family during this difficult time

Depending on their relationship I would tell them to seek counseling as soon as possible. It is very hard on the family especially when you guys are not used to

death; it is very hard, and it takes a toll on everybody. And, you are all looking for help and love, but no one can help each other, because everyone is going through their own thing. (Tasha, Personal Communication, 12/29/19)

Ebony suggested the survivors talk about their feelings as well as reminding them that expressing emotions is fine, and the death is not their fault

Don't be afraid to talk about it. Share with people. Um, I mean just know that it's not your fault, and I know that it is kind of easier said than done because I know I beat myself up about it, but it is okay to cry, it is okay to not feel like yourself it is okay. (Ebony, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Lisa struggled with this question because with the recent murder of her brother she felt this was something she was still trying to get through. However, Lisa encouraged the survivor to communicate and address their mental health

Oh man! That is kind of hard because I feel like I am still living it so probably to address all of the feelings that you are having... So, I would just say to get help in whatever that looks like for that person. Um, I am an advocate for addressing mental health and talking to someone, but that may not be what everyone prefers but whatever that looks like I would just say make sure you take care of yourself. (Lisa, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Tiffany highlighted that it would be helpful to be resilient during this time, and emphasized that at times that may be hard

Try to stay strong and try to turn a bad outcome into a good one. I know sometimes you may feel like you should go and get revenge or try to do the

police's job, but you just have to sit back and let God handle it. So, that's how I see it. Take the bad and make it good. I know it hurts; it hurts bad. (Tiffany, Personal Communication, 12/20/19)

Chloe suggested the survivor take it one day at a time even though it hurts and encouraged the survivor to strive to make your loved one happy (Chloe, Personal Communication, 12/28/19). Teresa echoed being resilient in a different way, and suggested the survivors rely on prayer to get them through the loss of their sibling

Just pray to the Lord for him to make you stronger. And just think of it as the person that you love is in a better place. And that they are looking down on you, and they are watching over you, and everything is going to be okay. (Teresa, Personal Communication, 12/21/19)

Rachel wanted to the survivors to seek counseling, and remain around positivity, as well as focusing on the positive memories shared with your sibling

I would tell them to get counseling and be around positive people that will give them positive energy. Don't hang around the situation that you lost your sibling in like, if it was gang violence or if it was selling drugs, or if it was just not doing the right thing then don't be around that. Be around positive people that are going to tell you positive things instead of dwelling on the negative all the time.

(Rachel, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

Faith focused on reminding the survivors to find as much information as they can on the case and not allowing law enforcement to give you the runaround

Never give up hope, you know, especially if; find out all the details of the case never be left in the dark about any of it. That is where my family was, we were left in the dark about a lot of things when it came to his case. Don't give up hope!
(Faith, Personal Communication, 12/30/19)

The participants were asked how they felt about speaking on this topic, and there were a variety of responses. Some of the participants reported nervousness about how this interview would go, and how they would handle their emotions. Others saw this interview as a therapy session where they were freely allowed to vent and express answers to questions that they have never been asked or things they have been waiting to get off their chest. The participants also reported hoping their responses would be used for a greater cause and able to help someone get through the loss of their sibling. On one occasion, a participant did not find the interview helpful, and it was assumed that it was due to the brief timeframe between the murder and the interview.

Summary

This study focused on the bereavement and grief experiences of 12 African American sibling homicide survivors. The participants were located all over the United States, and experienced the murder of a sibling, specifically their brother within the past 5 years through gun violence. The results of this study discovered the murder of a sibling is a devastating experience, and creates an unfillable void; however, each participant's experience varied. The survivors have displayed that a set timetable to grieve is nonexistent, and sometimes family members drift apart depending on how they cope with the loss.

The participants coped with the loss in various capacities to include counseling, drugs, alcohol. In addition, the participants' emotions ranged between anger, sadness, depression, shock, and guilt. Not only did the siblings' emotions fluctuate but the parents struggled with the loss and cope in many ways to include shutting down, becoming angry, and increased alcohol use. The survivors found ways to memorialize the deceased such as tattoos and photos which assisted in their paths to accepting the loss and becoming resilient in the process.

Survivors discussed the support received or lack of during their time of bereavement. Some of the siblings reported feeling neglected, and dedicating their time to ensure other family members were okay or handling business while pushing their grief to the side, and causing them to grieve alone. Siblings discussed their relationships with the deceased sibling and how the loss impacted their relationship with their surviving siblings. In some cases, the loss kept or mended relationships and in some cases siblings drifted apart.

The survivors also coped with the investigation process of the homicide. Siblings struggled with comprehending maliciousness of their siblings' murder and described the funeral process as traumatic if they chose to attend. Some of the siblings felt it was best not to attend the funeral for health reasons. Most of the survivors also expressed their frustration with law enforcement at the way the cases were handled and the fact that the case remained unsolved creating a plethora of unanswered questions. Furthermore, there was an issue with the media for not taking their siblings' murder as serious as other murders by either not publishing a story or improperly doing so.

Each participant addressed the research question and provided their own point of view. The lived experience of being an African American sibling homicide survivor as described by the participants in this study ranged. One of the participants describe this as one that is familiar, a common occurrence in the African American community and others found the experience to be painful and full of unanswered questions. Furthermore, the participants provided advice to other siblings that may experience sibling homicide. The participants acknowledged this experience would vary by individual by suggested speaking on the experience, counseling, and doing as much as you can to find answers on the case.

Chapter 5 includes the interpretation of the study's results, and a discussion of the potential limitations of the study. Additionally, the research will focus on avenues of social change and suggestions for future research going forward.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore bereavement and grief experiences of 12 African American siblings that experienced sibling homicide. The intent behind this study was to add the scarce literature on African American homicide as well as sibling bereavement research. The siblings' narratives described how they coped with the loss as well as the support of family, friends, and law enforcement. A phenomenological approach paired with open ended interviews were used to allow the participants to freely discuss their bereavement experience. The study was based on the experiences of 11 females and 1 male participant; there were no variations in the siblings' causes of death as all the siblings were male victims of gun violence.

Through the survivors' descriptions of their experiences, several codes emerged that assisted in the development of three categories and 18 themes. The categories identified were coping, support, and post homicide interactions. The siblings coped with the loss in various ways to include prayer and counseling; however, some siblings used drugs and alcohol. Other coping mechanisms such as displaying outward emotions and dealing with the loss alone were highlighted. Ultimately, feelings of resilience and putting their broken heart to use and using their brothers' deaths as motivation assisted the survivors in their grief. Support also varied between the survivors, factors such as supporting their parents and pushing their grief to side caused feelings of neglect. The survivors' closeness to their deceased siblings and surviving siblings were also highlighted. Finally, the investigation process following the homicide was an important

part of the survivors' bereavement. As 8 of the cases remained unsolved at the time of the interview, the siblings struggled with the unanswered questions; more specifically, who would commit such a maliciousness act? Additional factors such as the role law enforcement and the media played in the bereavement process are discussed. The results of this study include my interpretation of the findings, limitations, and recommendations, which are discussed in detail within this chapter.

Interpretation of the Findings

Bereavement studies provide an increased understanding on the unavoidable ambiguous experience that is known as death. This exploration into African American sibling homicide supports and advocates for the increased research into African American and sibling bereavement research. This information also bridges the gap in the literature that provides for sibling bereavement research from the perspective of the survivor. This section includes an elaboration on the study's findings while comparing information from previous literature.

Coping

The African American sibling survivors experienced the murder of a sibling within the past 5 years. The siblings experienced what is described as unexpected death where all the survivors struggled with the suddenness and maliciousness of the loss. Although the murders occurred between 2 months and 4 years prior to the interviews, the sibling survivors discussed various ways they coped with the loss to include counseling, prayer, drugs, and alcohol.

In the African American community, homicide occurs at an alarming rate and an experience one of the survivors described as familiar in their community (Burke et al., 2010). Researchers also discovered that African Americans shy away from mental health services and prefer to rely on religion, family, and other forms of support during the loss (Granek & Peleg-Sagy, 2017; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008). This was evident in the responses as only two of the 12 siblings participated in counseling services; the other siblings declined counseling for various reasons such as preferring to just deal with, prayer, and support from family. Although, the research points out the stigma in obtaining mental health support because of being coined “crazy” or “airing dirty laundry”, none of the participants highlighted that as the reason for refusing counseling services, but simply preferred to pray through it (Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Sharpe, 2008). As described by Rosenblatt and Wallace (2013), the African American community’s reliance on a higher power is essential in the bereavement process. One of the siblings is a Pastors’ daughter, and she attended grief counseling once with her parents but informed the session only upset her more, and she determined she was not ready for counseling. Four siblings mentioned needing to seek counseling, but had not made any steps toward obtaining treatment at the time of the interview. The remaining siblings declined counseling services and preferred the religious approach; the siblings highlighted prayer as the means to get through the loss.

The survivors maintained a connection to their deceased sibling, an idea known as continuing bonds (Packman et al., 2006). Continuing bonds was evident in the survivors and attempts were made keep the siblings’ memory alive such as recognizing important

events to include their siblings' birthday, death anniversary, and other special events. One of the siblings mentioned keeping her brother on her phone screensaver, having his death certificate, and keeping a lock of his hair; she further informed that her husband has suggested that it may be time to put those things away but she has not done so. Another sibling reported that it was tough to move on because she felt her mother was dwelling in the loss, and even suggested that it was time for her mother to put her brothers' things away and try to move on.

All the participants were in different stages in their grief. Four of the participants were interviewed just a few months after the murder occurred, and this experience was still sensitive as the women cried frequently through their interviews. Although some of the murders were as dated as 4 years, the siblings' expressed emotion throughout the interview. Moreover, as discovered in the research male and female bereavement reactions vary as males do not express their emotions as willingly as their female counterparts (Sharpe et al., 2014). Although there was only one male participant, he was not as vocal as the female siblings involved. The male sibling had to be probed frequently for additional information regarding his siblings' death.

Acceptance is one of the stages of grief and the siblings expressed their struggle with accepting the murder, and mentioned how much their sibling was loved and missed. Guilt was a recurring emotion highlighted by the survivors as they felt more could have been done to support the sibling, and possibly could have avoided the murder. Furthermore, things said or unsaid prior to the siblings' death also attributed to the guilty feelings. Two of the survivors discussed specific ways of turning their pain into strength.

One sibling started a nonprofit program in her brothers' honor to assist victims of gun violence, and is still actively advocating for her brothers' murder to be solved. Another survivor was actively working with a local bereavement group that provides free group counseling to victims of homicide, and plans on using her experience to support other bereaved siblings.

Support

Support was something all the siblings echoed however; the survivors' experience varied when it came to feelings of support. Positive support is essential during the sibling bereavement process, and support following a sudden loss such as homicide is significantly vital (Davies, 1999; Stroebe et al., 2005). The siblings were overwhelmed with support initially after the murder and funeral and as time progressed noticed the support dwindled. One of the siblings expressed frustration about the fact that people to include other family members went back to their normal lives while her immediate family was forced to deal with the loss. One sibling recalled how the love and support was evident initially, but did not last long because people cannot grasp how you feel if they have not experienced such a tragedy. On the other hand, 2 of the siblings felt family support was nonexistent. One sibling felt that she was did receive support from her family [mother and sister] because once they received the insurance money they moved on; she further suggested that having someone she could relate to has been one of the hardest challenges. The male sibling further indicated support was not present and he felt like an outsider, he even indicated that he wished that he received more support during that time.

One of the survivors experienced an intrapersonal form of grief where they choose to cope with the loss privately (Corr, 2002; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015). This sibling decided not to notify anyone about her brothers' death outside her family and close friends and felt that was all the support she needed. Furthermore, she decided not to use social media outlets to broadcast her brothers' death.

Disenfranchised grief occurs when a mourners' grief is unacknowledged or invalidated (Neimeyer & Jordan, 2002; Piazza- Bonin et al., 2015; Sharpe et al., 2014). Although none of the survivors specifically described their grief as disenfranchised many felt neglected in some form. One survivors' brother was killed while allegedly engaging in a home invasion, and the media backlash of the victims' actions affected the family's bereavement through negative press. This sibling relied on the support of her family to keep her strong during that time. The survivors also witnessed their parents struggle with the loss and felt their parents neglected their needs. Furthermore, the siblings felt their parents' grief was more important because the parent lost a child. As disenfranchised grief suggests the survivors' grief is unacknowledged, by choosing to suppress their own grief the siblings invalidated their own grief in order to support others. One survivor mentioned it was her responsibility to remain strong and take care of her parents because they have lost not one but two children in less than two years, and their grief was greater than hers.

Siblings have been described as forgotten mourners as their grief has been often overlooked (Pretorius et al., 2010; Rostila et al., 2012). Siblings reported being checked on initially, and then as time progressed felt that people assumed, they were over the

death. One sibling reported she was often asked how her parents were doing when they would see her in the grocery store, and felt that it was rare people asked about her. Another sibling felt neglected based on the fact that family did not reach out to her once she returned to school in another state. The male sibling referred to himself as an “outsider,” and reported that no one cared how he felt, and after the funeral no one checked on him. Two of the siblings never felt neglected as a sibling survivor, and felt that people showed concern regularly. Furthermore, siblings may also attempt to protect their parents’ emotions by refraining from discussing their siblings (Applebaum & Burns, 1991). This was evident as one sibling recalled that her mother was actively struggling with the loss at the time of the interview. She further informed that her mother serves as a constant reminder of her brother and always wants to talk about it, and she refrains from talking about her brother to protect her mothers’ feelings.

The relationships between the surviving siblings since the murder was also discussed. None of the murders caused any of the siblings to be only siblings; three of the siblings had one living sibling after the murder. The siblings expressed feelings of closeness and distance when describing their surviving sibling relationship at the time of the interview. Eight of the siblings expressed remaining close to their siblings by increasing communication because at any time they [the sibling] could be taken away. One of the siblings described her sisters’ response to the loss and although she remains close with her siblings, her sister began to spiral after their brothers’ death. Another sibling mentioned growing closer to her sister after their brothers’ death but feels the

relationship has grown distant because of her fear of losing another sibling and experiencing the pain felt when their brother was killed.

Two of the siblings informed their relationships with their surviving siblings were estranged prior to the murder, and the relationship continued to divide after the loss. One sibling reported she and her sibling were the only siblings that shared the same parents, and after the murder her fathers' other children began reaching out and asking about their brother. She reported frustration, and informed she refused to soothe their guilt. Another siblings' relationship with her sister was strained prior to the loss and she has since lost respect for her sister for the way she and their mother memorialized their brother, and focused on the insurance money.

Post-Homicide Interactions

The siblings' murder resulted in the introduction of important key players into the family's life such as law enforcement, courts, and media. The siblings struggled with the unanswered questions, for most of them being who did this and why? While the research indicated that survivors often feel the criminal justice system protects the rights of the offender and disregards the family the study could not confirm or deny this assumption as many of the cases remained unsolved at the time of the interview (Armour, 2002; Miller, 2009). Out of the 12 survivors, only 4 of the murders were solved. One case was determined to be self-defense because the sibling was the alleged assailant and was shot by the homeowner. One case included the capture, trial, and conviction of the suspect; the sibling in this case did not attend the trial due to living in another state. Another case was solved, but the case was dismissed; the sibling informed he did not attend the proceedings

and preferred not to elaborate as to why he made that decision nor his feelings related to the trial. Lastly, one case was pending at the time of the interview and the assailant was awaiting trial.

The investigation process for some of the siblings contributed to their grief, specifically by not having closure for their siblings' murder. Furthermore, African Americans have a longstanding history of distrust with law enforcement to include concerns of racial profiling (Kamalu, 2016). Law enforcement is often the first point of contact when an emergency occurs, and frustration with law enforcement was a commonality amongst the survivors. More than half of the siblings mentioned their frustration with how law enforcement handled their brothers' case. One of the siblings felt that her brothers' race and sexual orientation played a role in the police departments' inattentiveness to his case to include failing to properly investigate and displaying incorrect information. Another sibling mentioned that after notifying law enforcement they arrived 5 hours later, and despite having video surveillance failed to properly investigate. She further reported feeling that African American murders are assumed to be drug and gang related therefore causing feelings that her brothers' murder was not important as it would have been if he were white. On another note, one sibling was extremely frustrated that the assailant was allowed to flee the state despite law enforcement knowing who was responsible for her brothers' murder.

Updates on case progression was also a priority for few survivors, and they were actively seeking answers at the time of the interview. It is not uncommon for survivors to become infatuated with case progression and other updates (Aldrich & Kallivayalil,

2013). One of the siblings reported that her brothers' case is at a dead end at this time and she continues to check back and forth with detectives for answers.

While the media is a beneficial part of ensuring society is updated on the latest news, when it comes to homicide stories, the information presented may not be the most sensitive (Wellman, 2018). When asked about the media or lack of the survivors reported concerns about how African American homicide news is looked over. The research indicated African American homicides receive scarce media in comparison to white victims, and female victims receive more coverage than male victims; none of the victims in this study were female therefore this could not be verified (Lundman, 2003; Madison, 2001; Wellman, 2018). Two of the siblings specifically highlighted that their siblings' murder would have received more attention if they were not black.

Furthermore, if the victim's lifestyle contributed to their murder, the media will use that as well as the victims' background to guide their story, usually causing empathy for the victim to decrease (Doka, 2002; Spungen, 1998). This was evident for the survivor who lost her 20-year-old brother accused of breaking into someone's home and murdered by the owner. The media's goal is to present a story and little to no consideration for the family when presenting a news story. However, not all stories are going to be presented the same if presented at all. One of the siblings expressed their satisfaction with the media's portrayal of their siblings' story; however, at the same time the sibling indicated that her brother received a lot of attention because of the mitigating circumstances involving his arrest and escape from police custody.

Theoretical Framework Alignment

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory originated with observing the infant's response to being separated from their mothers or trusted caregivers (Bowlby, 1980). Moreover, the theory focuses on forming, maintaining, and dissolution of relationships along with processing being separated from a secure attachment and tied the reactions of infants to bereaved adults that are forced to transition from a physical connection to solely an emotional or mental connection (Bowlby, 1980; Horowitz, 1990; Packman et al., 2006). Further research (Bowlby, 1980) highlighted the fact that the survivors' lives never go back to what they were prior to the loss.

The survivors mentioned having to readjust to a new normal, and although they understand their lives have changed accepting the loss is challenging. As attachment theory highlights processing the loss can be a lengthy and painful journey, and the bereavement process is considered to be complicated if the survivor struggles with accepting the reality of the loss (Field, 2006; Horowitz, 1990, 1991). On the contrary, grief varies by individual, and the relationship with the sibling will definitely impact how long it takes the sibling to recover from the murder. Missing their sibling was an understatement and when the survivors were asked if you could say one more thing to your sibling, loving and missing their brother was echoed frequently. None of the participants narratives suggested they were struggling with complicated grief. Attachment theory also correlates with social constructivism in terms of the survivor finding meaning

in the loss and the negative bereavement results should the survivor struggle with accepting the loss and moving forward (Field et al., 2005; Neimeyer, 2006c).

Social Constructivism Theory

From a social constructivism perspective grief experiences are individualized and based on that person's ability to make sense of the loss (Johnson, 2010; Neimeyer, 1999, 2009). The survivors' world as they knew it prior to the murder of their sibling has been changed forever, and the survivors have experienced emotions they struggle to understand. Finding meaning in the experience is a critical competent to this theory and while meaning looks different to everyone the siblings were able to create a silver lining in this experience and put their broken heart to use; for example, one sibling became involved in community activism for victims of gun violence and another is inspired by her brother's death to be a voice for others in her community.

While the siblings' may not be able to comprehend why this happened to their sibling, and question previous beliefs; several of the siblings were able to make peace with the loss despite some days being more challenging than others. Benefit finding is one of the factors that is essential in making sense of the experience which can result in maturity and personal growth (Calhoun & Tedeshi, 2006; Drescher & Foy, 2010). Several of the siblings used this loss to step up and assist their parents through this experience as well as using their siblings' memory for good in the form of community activism.

The survivors may have gotten back into their routines but also understand that life is different now without their brothers. One of the siblings described being a lot more

cautious of their safety as well as the safety of their families, and is seeking her license to carry. Another sibling mentioned being used to her brother being her protector and is mindful of what she says to others to avoid trouble. Furthermore, the siblings' preference to cope with prayer instead of formal mental health services, visiting the grave sites, and maintaining photos and keepsakes are ways the sibling chooses to adapt to the loss in accordance with the social constructivism theory.

Limitations of the Study

Twelve African American bereaved siblings were used in this study and should not be used as a general representation of all African American sibling homicide survivors. There was an oversample of female participants, and only one male participant was involved; the male participant was not as vocal as the females. Future studies should encourage the participation of male participants by using forms of targeted outreach to identify male participants. For example, if the recruitment process was to continue due to an oversample of female participants then reposting the participant invitation solely inviting males may be helpful.

The time since the siblings' murder varied between 2 months and 4 years. There were concerns that the older deaths may result in memory lapse; however, none of the participants struggled with recalling their experiences, and even years later expressed emotion during their interview. On the contrary, it is possible that the survivors may have engaged in the study prematurely as the death could have been too fresh for the survivor to participate; in this case I found that the recent death allowed the survivor to provide exceptional information. Emotional stress was a potential risk when participating in this

study, and more emotion was noticed with the survivors with the recent murder. I also felt it was important to show concern for the sibling to ensure they had control over their participation in the study. It was important to ensure the sibling was comfortable with proceeding therefore breaks were often provided and they were also provided with bereavement and mental health resources.

I wanted to ensure the research was credible, and although I identify as an African American sibling homicide survivor that information was not disclosed to the participants. The approved interview protocol was followed for all participants and I maintained an unbiased tone throughout the interviews. In addition, copies of the transcripts were provided to each participant for review to ensure the information was correct.

Recommendations

The use of various social media platforms were used in this study which allowed for sibling survivors to be identified across the United States whether they participated in the study or were screened out. In the event of replicating a study of this magnitude it is recommended to continue the use of social media outlets to identify large samples. In addition to social media outlets participant recruitment should occur through churches, bereavement groups, and college campuses.

I intended to conduct a study on African American sibling homicide survivors, and most of the participants were female- with the exception of one male, which was not deliberate. Future studies are encouraged to continue working with the African American population, but should try to include male participants as they can provide a different

explanation of their bereavement experience. None of the participants were a part of the same family; however, a study on how sibling survivors within the same family coped with sibling loss may be beneficial to sibling bereavement research. Additional studies are necessary to explore the impact of support and resources for African American sibling homicide survivors.

Implications for Social Change

The exploration of the African American sibling homicide bereavement experiences contributes to social change at the individual and societal level. Individually, the siblings were offered the opportunity to voice their bereavement experience as well as use their experience to help others. Sibling survivors can benefit from knowing how other siblings made it through their experience. Siblings have also been known to suppress their grief to be strong for others; however, they should be allowed to express their emotions regarding their siblings' murder freely. Additionally, the feelings of being "forgotten" or "ignored" may result in negative coping skills and allowing the bereaved sibling to articulate their emotions could assist in a successful bereavement experience. The results obtained from this study can also offer suggestions to families and friends on how to effectively support African American bereaved siblings.

This study's findings can also assist mental health professionals in the development of clinical treatment plans, counseling resources, programs. One of the participants mentioned being involved in a community grief group for homicide survivors that is offered by the city of Dallas. Although this group has been beneficial to the sibling; additional services made specifically for siblings should be implemented. I intend

to reach out to local bereavement groups and church organizations that have a desire to assist this neglected population. Overall, it is my hope that sibling bereavement groups and programs are increased throughout the country as sibling death carries its own unique experience and speaking with like-minded individuals is necessary.

Furthermore, the media is a powerful outlet and can impact bereavement through their headlines and commentary. The media can also influence the perception of law enforcement and African American homicide especially since when it comes to the portrayal of those homicides the news can often focus on the victims' lifestyle and they can be coined "thugs." When promoting news stories, the media should ensure to remain unbiased in their depiction of African American victims. This study sheds lights on the impact the media or lack thereof has on sibling survivors.

Methodological and Theoretical Implications

Bereavement research is essential to the literature, and due to the increased risk of homicide in the African American community increased scholarly attention on African American sibling homicide is needed to address the unique challenges of coping with this form of loss (Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Sharpe et al., 2013; Sharpe, 2015). The use of a phenomenological approach is appropriate based on obtaining insight of a lived experience directly from the subject. Furthermore, this methodology adds the sibling survivor voice to research, allowing siblings to emerge from being forgotten mourners.

Two theoretical frameworks were used to guide this study: attachment theory and social constructivism. Attachment theory suggests that the bereaved struggle with being separated from a loved one or trusted caregiver (Bowlby, 1973). Grief is a devastating

experience which can result in traumatic reactions, and the siblings in this study verified the theory by their accounts of how they struggled to cope with the loss, and how much their sibling was missed. However, to the contrary the research suggested maintaining a connection to the deceased implies an unhealthy bereavement experience (Bowlby, 1973). None of the survivors' narratives suggested they were dangerously coping with the loss and keeping the siblings' memory alive appeared to be important to the sibling; but some survivors felt others wanted them to simply get over the loss. Most importantly, in some instances the survivors demonstrated strength and used their siblings' death as inspiration to continue with their lives and do positive work.

This coincided with the idea of social constructivism which suggests that the loss can cause the survivor to find meaning in the loss (Neimeyer et al., 2010). Many of the siblings struggled with understanding the purpose of the murder despite knowing the backstory or not but as time progressed let their pain be remodeled into strength. Furthermore, as the theory suggests the survivors may question the world previously known to them prior to the murder. Most of the siblings questioned the loss, struggled with understanding why the incident occurred, and tried their best to understand "God's will." Many of the siblings stopped attending church, relying on God, and even questioned the power of prayer, a practice many of them had done for years.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations for Mental Health Professionals

Ten of the 12 siblings mentioned choosing not to seek professional help; however, the siblings struggled with feeling supported through this experience. A few of the

siblings even mentioned the desire and need to seek help and suggested they would get around to it. Should a mental health professional review this study, it would be beneficial to familiarize oneself with knowledge on the African American community to provide for greater understanding of how to properly provide support to this population. I would also suggest familiarizing oneself with homicide in the African American community in comparison to the attention rendered by law enforcement and media outlets. Furthermore, by teaming up with bereavement and grief centers the increased development of sibling bereavement groups for victims of homicide would provide a safe space for siblings to discuss their experiences freely for this form of loss.

Recommendations for Religious Entities

As the siblings mentioned in their interviews, there was a high reliance on prayer instead of formal counseling services. I would suggest the church encourage the survivors within their membership that it is okay to have Jesus and a therapist. The African American community has a strong history of relying highly on the church, and often wants to pray things away to feel better. Although there is nothing wrong with having strong faith, secondary assistance to include mental health support is acceptable. Furthermore, I would recommend the church implement a bereavement ministry to include individual and group grief counseling for their members.

Recommendations for Law Makers

All siblings were victims of gun violence, and stricter gun laws especially on black market guns should be reviewed by law makers to include the illegal sales of unlicensed and semi-automatic firearms. The survivors may also benefit from receiving

monetary support and burial assistance. Furthermore, as one participant mentioned, the use of a homicide victim grief group was proven to be helpful; therefore, if not already established in all cities or nearby cities, law makers should ensure that all victim services departments provide free or low-cost counseling services for families of homicide victims. Additionally, it may be helpful to have a victim advocate occasionally check in on the survivors for supplementary support.

Recommendations for Law Enforcement

Law enforcement should be trained in victim sensitivity to ensure their presence does not heighten the trauma when notifying the family. Furthermore, it may also be helpful to the survivors by providing a victim advocate to the scene of every family notification. Law enforcement should ensure that all cases are given the same attention, to assist in ceasing the assumption that African American deaths are not as important as other races. Furthermore, as most of the cases remained unsolved at the time of the interview remaining in contact with the family with updates on the case could be helpful to the family. Media attention can be intrusive at times, it may benefit the family to have law enforcement offer protection and shield the family from media harassment.

Recommendations for the Media

The media can play a role in how the survivor deals with the loss. The lack of media support caused the survivors to feel their siblings' death was not important as other deaths. I suggest the media should acknowledge all deaths whether "breaking news" or not, and ensure their portrayal of the story be sensitive to the family. Furthermore, it is

important to highlight that the use of the victims' lifestyle and background to promote their story can negatively impact the siblings' grief.

Conclusion

This study was inspired by the murder of my older brother Jermaine Malone on February 22, 2015. Jermaine was my everything, and his death created a void in my life that will never be filled again. His death resulted in negative coping such as alcohol dependence and mental anguish. As a sibling survivor living in another state at the time of his death, I felt the support initially, then it dwindled as time progressed; and because he was "just my brother" I was expected to get over it and pray for strength. The majority of condolences I received began with "how's your mom?" and "did he have kids?;" no one really cared how I felt or at least that is how I felt about it. After finally deciding to attend grief counseling, I decided to put my broken heart to use.

Though this study had to be refined several times, I decided that focusing on the African American sibling voice was determined to be the most beneficial. This study had its emotional impact on me regularly from the literature review to the survivor stories. At times, the stories were refreshing to know that I was not the only one that struggled, and then some days I felt haunted. Nonetheless, the more I stayed the course the more I was reminded that this project was necessary; especially when the siblings' thanked me for giving them the opportunity to tell their stories because people hardly ever asked. Be advised, that during the recruitment process nor the interviews, my experience as a sibling survivor was not mentioned to the survivors at any time.

African American bereavement literature has been neglected in the literature, and sibling bereavement studies are also limited. Previous studies regarding sibling bereavement have been told from parent and clinician perspective; however, this study obtained information from the survivors which adds survivor voice to the literature, and provided direct insight how their siblings' murder impacted their life, and the lives of those around them.

It is my hope that African American sibling homicide research continues, as this population is at a great risk to experience this form of loss. As the survivors were asked if the interviews, the topic was deemed beneficial and provided the siblings with an outlet to speak on their experience as many felt that no one cared to hear them out. Additional light needs to be shed on the African American sibling homicide survivors' experience, and this work can assist future sibling survivors and potentially survivors in general in walking through their grief.

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Appendix A: Participant Invitation

Would you like to share your story about being an African American sibling homicide survivor?

***I am currently recruiting participants for the following study:
African American sibling homicide survivors: A phenomenological study.***

This research is a part of a dissertation study by Terra Brown, a Walden University doctoral candidate, and could assist sibling survivors, families, mental health professionals, and others in understanding the impact of sibling homicide in the African American community. The purpose of this study is to examine the bereavement and grief experiences of African American surviving siblings of murder victims to gain insight on the bereavement experience, and how the loss impacted their lives. If you have experienced the loss of a sibling through murder, and would like to participate in the study please review the criteria below:

Eligibility Criteria

- ❖ Be over the age of 18
- ❖ Identify as an African American male or female
- ❖ Be a victim of sibling homicide occurring within the past five years
- ❖ Be willing to discuss the circumstances of the murder, and your personal experiences following the loss
- ❖ Be fluent in English
- ❖ Be willing to participate in an audio-recorded face to face or telephone interview for 60-90 minutes

If you feel that you meet the qualifications of this study, please complete the following survey at:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/19fR0JSizRdyuHWPbd0xzGU85WJ_IaLoJ8q1Ti1GtMbc/edit

ALL INFORMATION WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL AND USED SOLELY FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY.

Be advised, this is a voluntary study, and I will not pressure anyone to attend nor hold it against you if you choose not to participate. There will not be any compensation for your participation, and the goal of the study is to simply bring awareness to the neglected topic of African American sibling homicide.

Appendix B: Participant Screening Guide

Thank you for contacting me with your interest in the study on African American sibling homicide victims. I have a few questions to ask you to ensure your experience is a match for this study. This will take about 10 minutes to complete.

Contact Information:

1. Name:
2. Phone Number:
3. E-mail Address:

Screening Information:

1. Are you over the age of 18?
2. Do you identify as African American?
3. Have you experienced the murder of a sibling within the past five years?
4. Are you willing to provide information regarding the death of your sibling?
5. Are you comfortable with having your interview recorded?
6. Will you be willing to review and return your interview transcript to the researcher to ensure the information is accurate?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you _____ for agreeing to be a part of my doctoral journey and sharing your story about the loss of your _____. Let me first start by offering my condolences to you and your family. I want to inform you that the nature of the questions may be a bit difficult to answer so take your time and answer to the best of your knowledge. This study is completely voluntary, you are welcome to take breaks as needed, and I also wanted to remind you that you can withdraw from this interview at any time without penalty. Additionally, this interview will be confidential; however, this interview will be recorded, and I will be taking notes throughout the interview.

I want to remind you that the purpose of this study focuses on the bereavement/grief process and coping mechanisms following the murder of a sibling. This project will address the research question “What is the lived bereavement and grief experiences of African American surviving siblings of homicide or murder victims?”

I would like to take this time to go over the informed consent that you were previously provided. I want to confirm you are still consenting to this recorded interview. Would you still like to participate? Yes/No, okay great! Let’s get started... or thank you for your time!

Questions

1. Who did you lose?
2. When did you lose your sibling? (Year)
3. How old were you?
4. How old was he/she?
5. What was the cause of death (stabbing, shooting, etc.)?
6. Where did the murder occur (city/state)?
7. Was his/her murder solved?
8. Was there adequate media coverage?
9. Was there adequate law enforcement support?
10. How did you cope with the murder?
11. How would you describe your relationship with your sibling?
12. Was that relationship different at the time of death?
13. What struggles that you have faced since he/she has passed?
14. How have you managed those struggles that you’ve dealt with?
15. Did you seek counseling? Why or why not?
16. What part of your bereavement process are you still struggling with, and how are you coping with those struggles?
17. How did your parents take the loss? How did that change your relationship with your parents?
18. How has the loss impacted your relationship with your surviving siblings?

19. What support did you receive from family and friends? Was it enough?
20. After _____ years. Do you still feel supported now?
21. How often were you asked how you were doing?
22. What do you miss most about your sibling?
23. If you could say one more thing to your sibling what would it be?
24. What advice would you provide for someone that has lost a sibling?
25. What is lived experience of African American surviving siblings of murder victims?
26. How do you feel about speaking on this topic? Was it beneficial?
27. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Ending: Those are all the questions I have for you _____. Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to participate in this study and thank you for reliving your experience in regard to the loss of your _____. Just a brief reminder that this interview will be transcribed and forwarded to you, so I just ask that you return it within a week of receipt to confirm that the information is correct. Additionally, the information obtained will be confidential however, your interview will assist in answering the research question: What is the lived bereavement and grief experiences of African American sibling survivors of homicide victims? Are there any questions that you may have for me?