

Life After Homicide: Towards Broader Understandings of Successful Mourning

Alison Whittmire

Alison Whittmire completed a Master of Arts in Integrated Studies from Athabasca University in 2013 with a specialization in Community Studies. She also holds a Bachelor of Arts honours degree from the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, SK.

Whittmire lives in central Alberta where she focuses on raising her young children, writing, and continuing to be committed to issues of social justice and community building.

Abstract

Prevalent psychological theories of grief focus on “letting go” of a deceased loved one. This can lead to a narrow understanding of successful mourning and can falsely pathologize some of the positive actions of people who have lost a loved one to murder. Utilizing secondary sources and insights written by homicide survivors, this paper specifically explores *active* homicide survivorship — that is, people who have become personally, socially and/or politically motivated by both their loss *and* by an intense and continuing commitment to their lost loved one. The paper argues that we need to examine the topic of mourning not only from an individual and psychological perspective, but as actions that occur within, and are influenced by, broader cultural, social, historical and gendered contexts. By taking an interdisciplinary approach to bereavement that considers broader contexts, a more complex and inclusive understanding of successful mourning can be attained. When such a comprehensive approach is taken, it becomes possible to see the decision to “hold on” to a lost loved one as life-affirming, rational, and resilient, rather than pathological.

Keywords: homicide survivor, grief, mourning, bereavement, resilience, continuing bonds

Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability...If we stay with the sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless, as some might fear? Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another? (Butler, 2003, p. 19)

The loss of a loved one to murder, and the bereavement that follows, is undoubtedly one of the most difficult experiences anybody can face. Homicide bereavement is not a journey that somebody merely experiences, but rather survives. This recognition has led to extensive use of the term “homicide survivor” in academic literature to refer to people (and particularly immediate family members) who have lost a loved one to murder. Yet, despite the plethora of challenges that homicide survivors face, some people come out of this experience resilient and *active*. Some homicide survivors are personally, socially, and/or politically motivated through ongoing engagement with their loss. Making a conscious decision to refuse to “let go” of their lost loved one, many active homicide survivors have chosen to rely on a “fierce commitment to their loved one” (Armour, 2003, p. 531) to “propel them in directions that provide purpose and create meaning out of a senseless act” (Armour, 2003, p. 531). As a result of such efforts, laws, policies, support groups, and a myriad of other resources have been developed that benefit both victims of crime and broader society. While these actions are commendable, actively choosing to remain attached to a lost loved one appears inconsistent with some theoretical perspectives of grief psychology, which purport that “in normal bereavement, the goal of recovery is the relinquishment of the mourner’s ties to the lost object” (Shapiro, as quoted in Sadinsky, 2009, p. 6).

The purpose of this paper is two-part. First, I examine one aspect of grief psychology that focuses on the importance of “letting go” of a lost loved one. I argue that this is a narrow interpretation of successful mourning that does not accurately reflect many of the lived experiences of active homicide survivors. Next, I explore the question: “How can an interdisciplinary analysis lead to a more comprehensive understanding of what can constitute successful mourning for homicide survivors?” I rely on secondary sources to

explore this question that include academic literature as well as testimonials and insights provided directly by homicide survivors. My thesis is that re-conceptualizing successful mourning among homicide survivors can be achieved by broadening the scope of analysis beyond the realm of the individual and the discipline of psychology. Integrating broader cultural, social, historical and gendered perspectives reveals a complex web of factors that influence meaning-making actions. When examined through an interdisciplinary lens, the decision to “hold on” to a lost loved one can be re-conceptualized as rational and life-affirming, rather than pathological.

Theorizing Mourning and “Letting Go”

Emphasis on the perceived need to “let go” of a lost loved one can be understood as an interpretation of the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud. Freud defined and examined two terms — mourning and melancholy — and made clear distinctions between these concepts.

Zembylas (2009) explains:

Mourning, on Sigmund Freud’s account, is work and constitutes a psychic response to loss that reaches a conclusion — the mourner is able to work through grief, relinquish past attachments, and make new ones. Melancholia, by contrast, designates that mourning is an unfinished process in which the mourner has an open wound, incorporates the lost other into the self, and becomes perpetually attached to the absence of the lost one. For Freud, melancholia differs from mourning in that its work is never done; melancholia is, in a sense, unsuccessful mourning. (p. 85)

According to this interpretation, successful mourning involves individual, psychological work that, if done correctly, will at some point come to an end. Pathological mourning — or melancholia — is considered crippling because a person is stuck in a process that is without end because they cannot detach from the person they lost.

Other scholars have expanded upon this interpretation of successful mourning. Kübler-Ross (1969) developed a five-stage model of grief that not only culminates in a relinquishment of attachments, but further attempts to paint a roadmap of the exact processes through which this end goal is achieved. Sadinsky (2009) contends that Kübler-Ross’ stages-of-grief theory is profoundly influenced by the Freudian interpretation that “the resolution of grief through decathexis [letting go] was the normal endpoint to mourning” (p. 7). Sadinsky goes on to state that although the focus of Kübler-Ross’ theory was “primarily on the terminally ill and their awareness of and grief responses to impending death...[it] was later extended to a broader range of bereavement experiences” (2009, p. 7). Presently, Sadinsky asserts, the Kübler-Ross stages-of-grief theory continues to be recognized as the “standard theoretical model of loss” (2009, p. 7).

Emphasis on the need to “let go” of lost loved ones is prominent in popular stages-of-grief theoretical frameworks because this notion likely resonates with some peoples’ lived bereavement experiences. This paper does not set out to discount the appropriateness of mourning through detachment, within certain contexts. However, it would be imprudent to extrapolate the relevance of this process to *all* situations of grief without further examination. Compelling evidence suggests that when some of the lived experiences of homicide survivors are examined against dominant conceptualizations of successful mourning, cracks in the theoretical underpinnings of the need for decathexis begin to appear. First-hand experiences of many homicide survivors indicate that it is unrealistic to expect that their mourning could *ever* have an end point, or that it could possibly result in detachment from their lost loved one. Judie Bucholz, a homicide survivor herself, conducted a qualitative study regarding the mourning processes of 13 other homicide survivors. Bucholz concluded the following:

Not one of the participants, some of whose loved one had been murdered as long as 21 years ago felt the bereavement process would end. It was not a matter of holding on in order to remember and not to forget, but a matter of holding on and continuing that love in spite of the physical absence. (2002, p. 128)

This sentiment is echoed by Jane Orydzuk, who speaks of the stigmatization and marginalization that homicide survivors face when they fail to “move on” from their pain and their attachment to the deceased. Orydzuk states:

People’s behaviour varies from sympathetic, to blame, to unjustified avoidance and **efforts to ‘fix us’ so we don’t hurt anymore. All of these add to the load of grief** [emphasis added] that every parent suffers over the violent death of

their child.” (2007, p. 7)

These comments allude to the possibility that rather than being a healthy and adaptive endeavor, the goal of seeking an endpoint for bereavement may in some instances be unrealistic, emotionally damaging, and/or overlook positive opportunities for growth that can emerge from ongoing connection to the deceased.

“Continuing bonds” is a term utilized in academic literature to refer to a range of beliefs and actions bereaved individuals engage in to remain connected to a deceased loved one (Hall 2014; Root & Exline 2014; Sochos & Bone, 2012). Within a stages-of-grief theoretical perspective, maintaining continuing bonds with the deceased can be interpreted as mal-adaptive. However, Bucholz’s (2002) research finding that it is common for homicide survivors to maintain continuing bonds with the deceased raises an important question: “Are all homicide survivors who maintain continuing bonds with their deceased loved ones mal-adapted mourners, as can be concluded when examined within a stages-of-grief theoretical framework?” I believe that they are not, and understanding why they are not requires a broad analysis that delves into the realm of interdisciplinary studies. For, as Hall (2014) asserts, “[s]tage models [of grief] do not address the multiplicity of physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs experienced by bereaved people, their families and intimate networks” (p.8).

Rationale for an Interdisciplinary Analysis

The purpose of theory is to reflect upon and explain reality. When this does not occur, at least two avenues can be pursued, both of which may be appropriate at different times and in different contexts. One approach perceives that lived experiences that do not fit into an existing theoretical framework are deviant, faulty, or pathological in some manner. The response to this conclusion is to search for remedies for the deviant experiences. Solutions include providing those afflicted with pathological behaviours with the tools they need to adapt and progress in more healthy ways. An alternative approach is to critically examine whether or not the existing theoretical analysis is somehow flawed or limited in scope. This approach seeks to uncover a more comprehensive framework that better explains the supposed problematic experiences. I am employing the latter approach to the subject of active homicide survivorship, drawing upon interdisciplinary research criteria to provide a rationale for why this is an appropriate course of action for the issue at hand.

Repko (2008) identifies specific criteria that need to be met before a research topic can benefit from a more comprehensive, interdisciplinary analysis. Repko specifies that the research topic should represent a complex problem in which important insights have already been made by more than one discipline, and yet no single discipline has been able to provide a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon (2008, p. 151). Repko further states that an opportunity needs to exist to integrate the findings of different disciplines because of their underlying “common interest in a particular problem” (2008, p. 153). Finally, Repko emphasizes the pragmatic element of interdisciplinary analysis, stating that it “focuses on unresolved societal needs and practical problem solving” (2008, p. 154).

The subject of homicide bereavement meets Repko’s (2008) abovementioned criteria for interdisciplinary analysis. While a great deal of research on mourning is located within the discipline of psychology, the specific topic of bereavement *as a result of homicide* has been studied by other disciplines, including social work (e.g., Armour, 2003; Sadinsky, 2009; Eliseeva, 2007), and health care studies (e.g., Asaro, 2001; Feldman, Prothow-Stith & Chery, 2005; Gross, 2007). Despite this varied scholarship that shares a common underlying interest in being able to effectively assist homicide survivors, a holistic understanding of successful homicide bereavement is yet to be achieved. Moser (2012) tells us that, “[a]lthough the premise that people are capable of transforming tragic or traumatic experiences into an acquisition of strength, wisdom, empathy, and positive changes is ancient...social science investigation of this phenomenon is in its infancy” (p. 4). As a result, homicide survivors are often left feeling misunderstood, and “disenfranchised or isolated by family or society” (Bucholz, 2002, p. 1).

One homicide survivor in Bucholz’s study stated that they were looking for a comprehensive understanding of themselves “as whole persons, in all facets of our lives all at once” (2002, p. 8). The search for such an understanding is a pragmatic quest for far-reaching insights that could result in tangible and widespread applications that benefit survivors’ daily lives. This quest recognizes that homicide bereavement is not only a psychological phenomenon, nor is it only a social phenomenon or a healthcare-related phenomenon. Homicide bereavement is a complex, comprehensive phenomenon that permeates all aspects of life. Metaphorically,

there exists a need to develop a theoretical understanding of the forest, and not only of each individual tree. By pulling back the kaleidoscope of disciplinary analysis, it becomes possible to better address homicide survivors' self-identified need for broad understanding. In the remainder of this paper, I seek to provide a vision for what an interdisciplinary approach to homicide bereavement could entail, and how it could lead to a more comprehensive and helpful understanding of what can constitute successful mourning.

Towards an Interdisciplinary Vision

Van Sluytman reminds us that:

Saying what a word or concept means and writing definitions and theories is not the same as living those definitions and theories. It is not words and theories about loss that define us. It is how we deal with loss that does. (2012, p.31)

Evidence presented thus far has demonstrated how predominant, stages-of-grief interpretations of what constitutes successful mourning do not accurately reflect how all active homicide survivors deal with loss. This insight presents a challenge to move beyond an analysis of critique of existing perspectives towards the development of an alternative, broader understanding. I will now focus on presenting at least some of the wide-ranging areas of analysis that can contribute to developing an interdisciplinary vision of homicide bereavement. I purport that understanding successful mourning *requires* the recognition that homicide bereavement is not only an individual, psychological/emotional phenomenon. Rather, homicide bereavement is simultaneously also a cultural, social, historical and gendered phenomenon. By attaining an understanding of how all of these elements intersect, it becomes possible to reinterpret once pathologized choices about how to mourn and how to live in the aftermath of homicide.

Cultural Dimensions to Homicide Bereavement:

Understandings of grief that are rooted in notions of linear progress or stages of progression and that culminate in a "letting go" are *prevalent* in Western societies. However, it is important to recognize that this perspective is not the *only* way to conceptualize processes of successful mourning. The belief in stages of grief that culminate in "letting go" or "moving on" from the deceased is a theoretical framework that was developed within, and influenced by, a specific culture. Walter (2007) reminds us that theories of grief are not developed in a vacuum and asserts that, "modernism provided the cultural context in which twentieth century grief psychology was plausible" (p. 131). From this perspective, the emphasis on "letting go" of a lost loved one is a development that occurred within a culture that is modern, Western, individualistic and, "promotes happiness, progress and the future, marginalizing narratives of loss" (Walter, 2010, p. 9). Other scholars support Walter's position by examining how theories of grief found within other cultures do not necessarily emphasize the need to "let go" of a deceased loved one.

Valentine (2009), for example, found that, contrary to the Western focus on "letting go," the Japanese actively encourage and cultivate a "sense of continuing bonds" (p. 9) with the deceased. Neimeyer, Klass and Dennis (2014) detail how maintaining continuing bonds with the deceased can impact some traditional Japanese child-rearing practices, where parents will ask misbehaving children to explain and justify their behaviours to their deceased ancestors (p. 494). Rather than being viewed as harmful, these traditional practices were implemented as a means of enabling the deceased to play an active and important role in developing self-reflection and regulation among youth.

Research regarding the varied cultural practices associated with maintaining continuing bonds with the deceased can help illustrate how Freudian understandings of mourning and melancholia are not the only ways to conceptualize grief. Such research helps demonstrate how a comprehensive study of mourning cannot be isolated from an analysis of the cultural mores in which any particular grief theory was developed. Yet, recognizing that predominant Western understandings of successful mourning were influenced by the cultural context in which they were developed (to the exclusion of alternative theory development) does not automatically mean these perspectives are problematic. Theories become problematic *if* these understandings do not genuinely reflect the experiences of the mourners to which they are supposed to apply. In the case of homicide bereavement, Bucholz's (2002) research strongly suggests that grief theory that focuses on the necessity of "letting go" of a lost loved one does not reflect the lived experiences of many homicide survivors' grief processes. In light of this data, dominant, Western theories of grief that "marginaliz[e] narratives of loss" (Walter, 2010, p. 9) can be seen as contributing to *social* injustice and disenfranchisement that

many homicide survivors experience. Keeping this interconnection between cultural and socio-political elements at the front of mind, I now move on to a discussion of the social dimensions of homicide bereavement.

Social Dimensions to Homicide Bereavement:

The words and motivations provided directly by socially active homicide survivors are invaluable in being able to grasp the social dimension to homicide bereavement. Homicide survivors' personal narratives lend support to the notion that refusal to "let go" of a lost loved one can be done for positive, socially transformative reasons, rather than as a result of being crippled by melancholy. Van Sluytman (2012), who has worked to redefine justice by living a concept called Sawbonna¹, states that: "I promised my Dad that his death would not be for nothing, therefore I continue to write and rewrite and speak in order to better clarify and articulate...my own relationship and responsibility to justice, to Sawbonna" (p. 44). Magnussen (2006), whose brother is a victim of homicide, writes that, "I hope that the telling of this story will inform, and inspire positive change and healing in a society where intimidation, bullying and violence are all too common" (p. ix). Venables (2005), who has worked diligently to end violence in neighbourhoods following her son's homicide, writes that "Devin's death was so tragic for our family, but we knew after the first year of grief and desperation that we must turn his death into something positive and productive" (para. 1). Orydzuk (2007), who has sought to expand and enhance awareness and resources for victims of crime following her son's death, argues that, "[a]s crime escalates in our society, it is important that victims' families be heard" (2007, p. 1).

One common denominator underlying all of these comments is their recognition that the "work of mourning" (Derrida, 1989) includes *social* dimensions, and it is not only internal, psychological work. Each of these homicide survivors articulate how grief and mourning occur within, and are deeply influenced by, the broader society. Unfortunately, these homicide survivors (all of whom are Canadian) have found the society in which their bereavement is situated to be at times unjust, violent, silencing and/or dominated by bullying.

Cavell asserts that "massive depression has, whatever else, a political basis" (as quoted in Eng, 2000, p. 1278). In this sense, homicide survivors are not only mourning the loss of their loved one, but they are also coping with a social context that often marginalizes and stigmatizes their loss. However, is it possible that there can also be a positive side to this dismal situation? If, as Cavell contends, melancholy contains a social or political basis, then is it also reasonable to consider that successful mourning does as well? The testimonials above suggest that perhaps successful mourning involves more than internal, psychological work. Perhaps successful mourning involves trying to work in public ways to change society, trying to create spaces for victims to be validated, heard, respected, accepted and valued in more just ways. In order to understand how it is that homicide survivors have come to be socially disenfranchised and feel compelled to work to overhaul existing structural inequities, a historical perspective is imperative.

¹ *The term Sawbonna is derived from a Zulu word meaning "I see you" (Van Sluytman 2012, p. 12). Van Sluytman has developed this concept to refer to a series of experiences that are connected to restorative justice, but are "not contingent upon face-to-face meeting of victim and offender" (2012, p.12). Van Sluytman explains that Sawbonna is a broad term that includes "an ongoing process wherein the empowering of relationships is informed by designing content, such as talks, workshops, courses, and lectures that make it possible to address how we can live with each other daily" (2012, p. 12). Sawbonna encompasses encounters that take place anytime people, and particularly those who have been harmed and those who have committed the harming, come together in an environment of trust that is "situated upon a belief in being seen and seeing other, and in being heard, and hearing other" (Van Sluytman, 2012, p. 12). Van Sluytman contends that through such processes of seeing and hearing each other, binary categories such as victim and offender are deconstructed and dismantled, resulting in an understanding of those involved as "whole beings...and not merely the crime we have committed or the crime committed against us" (2012, p. 13).*

Historical Dimensions to Homicide Bereavement:

Gaaker (2009) tells us that the medieval English legal system, upon which the Canadian Criminal Justice System was based, viewed the quest for formal justice as "the personal responsibility of the injured person, or, if he has been killed, the responsibility of the next of kin" (p. 124). Justice by means of retribution by those who were harmed brings many disadvantages, including that those with little power or resources have no course of action against criminal victimization. This practice changed when the "notion of the

'King's peace' emerged in the twelfth century whereby the King or state took responsibility for enforcing breaches of the King's Peace" (Policy Centre for Victims Issues, 2007a, p. 3). The notion of the King's Peace is a historical development that continues to lay the foundation for the present-day Canadian Criminal Justice System. In Canada, a crime is considered to be committed against the state and not against an individual victim. As a result, prosecuting crime is also the responsibility of the government. This cornerstone of the Canadian Criminal Justice system has been touted as providing opportunities for all victims to be recognized and seek justice, regardless of their socio-economic background or level of political influence. However, it is important to recognize that the notion of the King's Peace and state-led prosecutions is a historical development that created its own series of benefits and disadvantages. Several scholars have argued that there are inherent flaws to this historical development that have yet to be fully addressed. One of the most prevalent concerns is that this situation has "relegated the crime victim to a minor role in the legal process as a piece of physical evidence or as a witness against the accused" (Weed, 2005, p. 97). Young (2001) eloquently describes how the victim's role in the criminal justice system can result in a secondary victimization:

She or he is sort of a double loser; first, vis-a-vis the offender, but secondly and often in a more crippling manner by being denied rights of full participation in what might have been one of the most important ritual encounters in life. (p. 6)

It is within this context that victims can be further victimized by a system that places them at the periphery, and provides them with little to no control over a process to which they are intimately connected and invested.

Homicide survivors have spoken in their own words of how they have felt both powerless and voiceless within criminal justice proceedings. Orydzuk (2007) states that, "[w]e sat each day and listened to two high profile lawyers, the prosecutor and the defence attack each other in a vicious power struggle that had virtually nothing to do with our two dead boys" (2007, p. 3). Similarly, Magnussen (2006) relays that "[w]e learned quickly that our interests and the interests of our loved one were very much secondary to ensuring due process for [the accused]" (p. 77). Within this context, some homicide survivors' refusal to "let go" of their deceased loved one may be understood as an attempt to hold their loved one in the forefront of a system that effectively minimizes their role to a secondary status in which they hold very little power and authority.

For several decades, feminist movements have put forward many challenges to victims' secondary statuses within the Canadian criminal justice system. Feminist movements have fought tirelessly to "highlight the poor treatment by the justice system of women" (Policy Centre for Victims Issues, 2007a, p. 4). In this light, the possibility that there are feminist and gendered dimensions to homicide bereavement merits consideration. The possible role of feminism in socially active homicide bereavement will now be explored.

Feminist and Gendered Dimensions to Homicide Bereavement:

The interconnection between feminism and victim advocacy is powerful. Canada's Policy Centre for Victims' Issues states that, "the women's movement was critical in the emergence of victim's advocacy" (2007b, p.7) and that feminism created a "platform that began to articulate the situation of female victims, and then all victims" (2007b, p. 7). While the influence of feminism on active homicide survivorship has not yet been adequately researched, there are indications that it is a topic that merits further examination. Many of the actions of active homicide survivors connect to the feminist dictum that "the personal is political" in that survivors often utilize public platforms to express their personal and ongoing experiences with grief. Active homicide survivorship is also consistent with standpoint feminist perspectives that emphasize the importance of incorporating marginalized voices, including the voices of victims, into both academia and broader society.

The choices made by some homicide survivors to mourn actively and with continuing bonds to the deceased may also reflect the manner in which gender may influence grieving. Homicide survivor Jane Orydzuk hints at a gendered dimension to homicide bereavement when she explains that "I needed to connect with the kindred spirits who were hurting as much as I was. My husband was much more reserved and couldn't grieve publicly, but God had different plans for me" (2007, p. 4). Orydzuk's statement is supported by research that "there is some evidence that in the modern West men and women tend to grieve in different ways" (Walter, 1996, p. 21), and that, "[i]n regards to bereavement in general, women more frequently use emotion-focused coping than men" (Eliseeva, 2007, p. 8). Sochos and Bone (2012) assert that "the manner in which individuals mourn is strongly influenced by...sociocultural categories such as gender" (p. 262). Their research concluded that maintaining continuing bonds with the deceased

is a phenomenon that is more commonly experienced by women, "with males having higher scores for MtD [mourning through detachment] and females higher scores for MtA [mourning through attachment]" (Sochos & Bone 2012, p. 264).

Balfour (2006) tells us that feminist "standpoint epistemology was strategic in undermining the gender neutrality of early conventional criminology" (p. 472). I would argue that this is true beyond the realm of criminology, and that comprehensive understandings of mourning and homicide survivorship also require an analysis that does not assume gender neutrality in victims' experiences. Sochos and Bone's (2012) findings that female-identified individuals more frequently than male-identified individuals maintain continuing bonds with the deceased in their mourning processes helps demonstrate why gendered and feminist analyses are important considerations within the topic of what constitutes successful mourning. For, if pathologizing certain forms of bereavement (including mourning with continuing bonds) is both inaccurate and unduly impacts women, then challenges brought forward within feminist frameworks can be integral to developing a comprehensive solution to this problem.

When bereavement is recognized as being simultaneously a psychological, social, cultural, historical and gendered phenomenon, "integration comes in the recognition that the *form* the behaviour takes is shaped by 'specific social and cultural-historical contexts'" (Henry, 2012, p.74). In looking at homicide bereavement within a broad, interdisciplinary framework, it becomes possible to envision "a deeper understanding of the empirical reality of victimization, vulnerability and resilience *as it is actually experienced*, and a theoretical/conceptual framework that enables an appreciation of this" (Walklate, 2011, p. 188).

When examined through an interdisciplinary lens, the litmus test for determining whether mourning is adaptive or mal-adaptive no longer becomes whether or not one has psychologically "let go" of their lost loved one. As Walter (1996) states:

It may be that some bereaved people work through feelings in order to detach themselves from the deceased, while...others...find an enduring place for the deceased in their lives, and it may be that both processes work effectively.
(p. 26)

From an interdisciplinary standpoint, the determination of healthy or pathological mourning includes analysis of whether or not the choices the bereaved are making within their specific context can be viewed as rational, life-affirming and positive. Haeri (2007) eloquently articulates the need for "a closer and more nuanced look at the relationship between interdependence of individuals and their social, political and cultural contexts" (p. 299). Haeri further contends that by "situating individuals' trauma, we are able to understand what is and is not resilient, what is and is not normal" (2007, p. 299).

Conclusion

In Canada, police reported 516 homicides in 2014 (Statistics Canada, 2015, p.3). In each of these cases, many friends and family members instantaneously became "ordinary people who belong to a club [they] never hoped to belong to" (Orydzuk, 2007, p. 7), adding to our country's thousands of homicide survivors who continue daily to navigate this complex and challenging experience. Homicide survivors are thrust into an exceedingly challenging and all-encompassing life journey. As a growing population, they need access to comprehensive knowledge, tools and resources that both reflect their lived experiences and are helpful to them. Such comprehensive knowledge and strategies have not yet been developed, and "cracks" in prominent stages-of-grief theories that focus on relinquishment of attachment to the lost loved one become apparent when analyzed against many of the lived experiences of many active homicide survivors. Many homicide survivors report maintaining continuing bonds with their deceased loved ones over the long term and in manners that are not physically, socially or psychologically crippling. These lived experiences demonstrate how it can be possible that "death ends a life, not necessarily a relationship" (Hall, 2014, p. 9). The lived experiences of homicide survivors who maintain continuing bonds with the deceased create a need for an understanding of mourning that is not rigid, and does not assert that mourners *must* move on, let go, or progress through stages of grief in a given order and timeframe. Homicide survivors' positive experiences with continuing bonds reinforce this sentiment and speak to the pressing need for a broader and more compassionate understanding of what mourning and resilience can look like, and how they are impacted by a person's broader context. By moving the discussion of mourning and resiliency beyond the realm of individual psychology and into the realm of interdisciplinary studies, it becomes possible to develop such a flexible and comprehensive framework, and to re-conceptualize the desire to "hold on" to a lost loved one in rational and non-pathological terms.

The ideas put forward in this paper offer a starting point for dialogue, not a final answer. There are many avenues of exploration that could be pursued through further research, including focusing on how varied demographic factors such as ethnic background, age, and mental health status impact homicide survivors' successful mourning processes. Future research that collects in-depth, first-hand insights from active homicide survivors will be invaluable in thoroughly fleshing out the many interconnected variables that shape bereavement practices, and revealing a comprehensive, alternative theoretical framework for mourning among active homicide survivors. Such research would be helpful in further integrating a broad range of knowledge into a comprehensive and compassionate understanding of the factors that shape homicide survivors' meaning-making actions. By focusing on the lived experiences of homicide survivors, expert knowledge can be re-engaged with experiential knowledge, resulting in more inclusive and helpful understandings of the differences between mourning and melancholia. It is, after all, experience that should develop and expand theory. Seal (2004) tells us that, in addition to unveiling indispensable knowledge, incorporating people's lived experiences into the research process can serve as a means of, "giving voice to otherwise silenced groups" (p. 107). With this goal in mind, let us continue to toil diligently to illustrate, uncover, reflect, respect and honour the voices of homicide survivors in order that one day a comprehensive narrative may be revealed. One by one, the previously voiceless can become transformed into part of a beautiful, necessary and resounding chorus. They deserve nothing less.

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