

A Trisonance: Identities of Women Whose Mothers Were Murdered by Their Fathers

Violence Against Women

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Abstract

The current qualitative study aimed to examine the narrative identities of women bereaved to intimate partner femicide. Eleven adult Israeli female offspring whose biological mothers were murdered by their biological fathers were interviewed for the purpose of this study. Due to the uniqueness of their loss experience and circumstances, participants' identity is narrated as a "trisonance": They are not like their fathers, their mothers, nor as society perceives them. This very particular route for identity reconstruction as a means of psychological survival is discussed in light of the literature on identity construction and bereavement and derives recommendations for practice.

Keywords

bereavement, domestic violence, femicide, narrative identity, traumatic loss

Introduction

Homicide changes a survivor's world forever. The violent, sudden, and deliberate nature of death breeds meaninglessness and indelible experience of suffering (Rynearson, 2013). Indeed, research has documented the harmful psychological, academic, social, spiritual, occupational, and familial effects of homicide on the surviving family members, also in comparison with other types of bereavement and interpersonal violence (see Caman et al., 2017; Rheingold & Williams, 2015).

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In contrast to bereavement by other causes, homicide survivors are often confronted and sometimes revictimised, by lengthy court trials, negative media retrospectives on their murdered loved one, and the offender's parole hearings. This repetition makes it almost impossible to reach a sense of closure (Armour, 2005) and turns the bereaved's personal, private loss into a public matter (Sharpe, 2015). Moreover, homicide often stigmatizes both victim and survivor: society tends to assume that victims were most likely involved in activities that led to their murder, and the bereaved may be stigmatized as well, facing avoidance and blame from family, friends, and community (Pitcho-Prelorentzos & Mahat-Shamir, 2020; Sharpe, 2015). Under these circumstances, the homicide survivors' loss experience lacks much-needed social validation and support, and their grief is often disenfranchised (Doka, 2002; Mahat-Shamir & Leichtenritt, 2016).

Considering the harmful, long-lasting effects of exposure to interparental violence (Gonzales et al., 2012; Smith Slep & O'Leary, 2005), the traumatic aspects of homicide losses are likely to be compounded when the person responsible for the murder is the survivor's family member, especially one's parent. It is estimated that over 55,000 children worldwide are bereaved by intimate partner homicide (IPH), usually femicide, every year, and that these left-behind children suffer grave effects (Stöckl et al., 2013). Nevertheless, only a relatively small number of studies have directly addressed such effects (see Alisic, Groot, et al., 2015; Alisic, Krishna, et al., 2015; Alisic, Groot, Snetselaar, Stroeken, & van de Putte, 2017; Stöckl et al., 2013), and an even smaller number of studies have attempted to gain an in-depth understanding the loss experience of IPH offspring from a qualitative standpoint (see Alisic, Groot, Snetselaar, Stroeken, Hehenkamp, & van de Putte, 2017; Hardesty et al., 2008; Steeves & Parker, 2007; Steeves et al., 2011). Both are the aims of the current study.

Offspring of Intimate Partner Femicide

Losing a parent to intimate partner femicide (IPF) poses a unique challenge, combining loss, trauma, and hardship, especially when children are exposed to the murder or to the crime scene (Alisic, Groot, Snetselaar, Stroeken, & van de Putte, 2017). Being the child of both murderer and victim, offspring survivors of IPF are confronted with multiple losses, as one parent is deceased and the other is incarcerated, has fled, or has committed suicide (Steeves & Parker, 2007). Underaged children often lose their familiar living environment, as they are placed with relatives or in other living arrangements, away from their friends or school (Alisic, Groot, et al., 2015). Offspring survivors of IPH were documented to suffer from strong grief reactions, post traumatic stress disorder, and developmental difficulties (Hardesty et al., 2008). Furthermore, when asked to reflect on their childhood, many adult offspring of IPH victims reported a history of child abuse before and after the homicide, as well as difficulties with intimate relationships, legal problems, and substance use in their adult lives (Steeves et al., 2011).

Grieving in cases of loss due to violence usually involves active attempts to make sense of the loss, to find benefit in the loss, and to reorganize one's identity as a survivor (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). Over the past two decades, the role of meaning reconstruction, in terms of sense-making and benefit-finding in bereavement has been well

established, especially in cases of violent death bereavement, and continues to evolve (Neimeyer, 2011). Meaning reconstruction involves rewriting the life story of the individual. The bereaved must relearn themselves and the world, negotiating between the personal psychological system and the external social system (Lichtenthal et al., 2013). Nevertheless, scholars have given minimal attention to the ways in which bereavement processes affect the survivors' identity. The findings usually portray a short description of the survivors' personality traits, or how they have changed, rather than who they are in light of their loss. For example, Englebrecht et al. (2016) documented the homicidally bereaved family members' perception of themselves only as "not the same person" or "having a completely different personality" (p. 361).

The question of identity in cases of IPF losses is even more intriguing and complex, as offspring are simultaneously the children of a murderer and a victim of the same crime, and are subjected to societal stigmas connected to homicide (Sharpe, 2015) and domestic violence (Felson & Palmore, 2018; Gillespie et al., 2013). Nevertheless, only one study focused, in part, on the self-perception of bereaved offspring, most of whom were under the age of 18 at the time of the interview (Alisic, Groot, Snetselaar, Stroeken, Hehenkamp, & van de Putte, 2017). Some children in that study described themselves as "nice, strong, and friendly ... someone who makes the most of things, has stable friendships, is down-to-earth, or is normal, just like other kids." Other children described themselves as "easily irritated, naughty, and impulsive ... as wearing a mask, feeling stupid, being full of uncertainty, or as that girl whose dad killed her mom" (Alisic, Groot, Snetselaar, Stroeken, Hehenkamp, & van de Putte, 2017, p. 4). Nonetheless, the literature has yet to thoroughly address the meanings of being "that girl whose dad killed her mom," and the processes through which such an identity is constructed. Therefore, complementing our publication describing the meanings adult daughters of IPF victims reconstruct in their loss (Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al., 2021), the current study aims to voice and document participants' narration of identity in light of their loss, using McAdams' concept of narrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Narrative Identity

As people reconstruct meanings in their loss experience, they also reconstruct meanings about who they are (Neimeyer, 2011). Such meanings of episodic particulars of autobiographical memory, including memories of loss events, are narrated in storytelling terms, which form an evolving and integrative story of one's life (McAdams & McLean, 2013). This synthesis yields a story of identity or a *narrative identity*. Narrative identity reconstructs one's autobiographical past and imagines the future in such a way as to provide a person's life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In fact, it unfolds a life story of how one came to be the person one is becoming. Moreover, the formation of one's narrative identity is subjected to a wide range of social and cultural influences. Indeed, socio-cultural contexts were found to have deep effects on one's autobiographical memories and identities (McLean et al., 2007). Specifically, it is through interactions with others that

we learn what thoughts and ideas we may or may not share, and the acceptable ways to tell them (McLean et al., 2007). These communications are known to be extremely critical in experiences of grief (Doka, 2002). Identity narration is a circular, collaborative, process whereby selves in relation to others create stories, which in turn, create selves. Eventually, we are and become the stories we tell, and the stories told about us (McLean et al., 2007). Therefore, when trying to understand identity formation or narrative identities, one must examine identity constructions from a gendered perspective within particular social, cultural, and historical contexts (McLean et al., 2007).

In a gendered society, people of all genders construct their sense of themselves as individuals through their experiences as gendered beings. This claim is emphasized by feminist researchers, arguing that women's identity formation is forged by strong socio cultural forces, as women usually define themselves in connection or "relatedness" to others; through, for example, being someone's wife or someone's daughter (Chodorow, 2001; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1996). The importance of relatedness for women is partly due to socialization and maternal experiences, which implicitly encourage females to maintain an emotional attachment to their mothers throughout adolescence as they grow into womanhood (Gilligan, 1982). Female identity is dependent on the mother–daughter bond; girls form their identities in similarities to their mothers, as they re create the mother–infant symbiosis and thereby identify with and develop capacities for empathy, nurturance, and dependence (Chodorow, 2001). Nevertheless, issues of relatedness in various social relationships and close interpersonal bonds, including with one's father, also impact identity formation in females (Gilligan, 1982). In IPF cases, offspring are both the daughters of a murderer and the daughters of a murder victim (Steeves & Parker, 2007). This raises an intriguing question regarding how fusions and merger processes with each attachment figure impact identity work.

Israeli society is diverse in nature and comprised of different cultures, ethnic origins, and religiosity levels, which blend together (Kaplan & Herbst, 2015). Regardless of these differences, the majority of Israelis consider family and family relationships of great importance, while marital disputes and domestic violence are highly stigmatized (Adelman, 2000; Kaplan & Herbst, 2015). Moreover, Israel is characterized by a clear hierarchy of death; at the top are army reservists and at the bottom are homicide victims (Levy, 2013; Mahat-Shamir et al., 2020). These cultural and social perceptions constitute IPF losses as extremely negative and stigmatic, as they reflect a taboo of homicide within the domestic praxis (Felson & Palmore, 2018; Gillespie et al., 2013; Sharpe, 2015). Within this cultural and social space, which has significant effects on individual narratives (McLean et al., 2007), offspring bereaved to IPF are ought to engage in one of the main tasks in bereavement: a revision of one's identity as a survivor (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). Therefore, the current study will provide an in-depth account of the narrative identities of adult Israeli female offspring of IPF victims.

Method

The current qualitative study implemented Gadamer's (1976) hermeneutic philosophy, which focuses primarily on the concept of understanding and how understanding can

be achieved. This interpretive form of inquiry has been previously used in research on sensitive areas of bereavement (Barak & Leichtentritt, 2015; Leichtentritt & Mahat-Shamir, 2017) and victims of domestic violence (Watt & Scrandis, 2013), which lack sufficient examination. According to Gergen (1994), Gadamer suggested that understanding of the research participants can be achieved when researchers use their own pre understanding of the world and of the researched phenomenon. The essential acknowledgment of the researcher's prejudgments (also referred to as prejudice or horizon of understanding) begins a circular process of open, participatory, and dialogic engagement with the subject (Plamer, 1969). A true dialogue allows for understanding to be achieved through what Gadamer identified as a "fusion of horizons," when the researcher's horizon intersects or fuses with the horizon, context, or standpoint of the object under inquiry (Gadamer, 1976). Nevertheless, such fusion is possible only if these horizons are expanded, so that new knowledge can be formed. The vehicle that facilitates this process is an open and participatory dialogue with participants (Pascoe, 1996).

Participants

The participants in this study were 11 adult women whose biological mothers were murdered by their biological fathers. In light of the literature reports regarding difficulties in recruiting this population (e.g., Stanley et al., 2019), the current research used two recruitment strategies: three women were recruited with the help of a nonprofit organization known as "Families of Murder Victims" whose aim is to assist and support Israeli co victims of manslaughter and homicide. The remaining nine participants were enlisted via referrals from acquaintances, as well as by snowball sampling strategy. None of the researchers had previous acquaintance with any of the participants. Participants ranged in age, familial status, level of religiosity, academic background and profession, time since loss, memories of and exposure to the actual event of the murder, as well as their ethnicity (Jewish women of various descents). Table 1 provides a brief summary of participants' demographics. Some of the names are pseudonyms, as requested by each participant.

Pre interview Research Process

The process of understanding began prior to the interviews with the study's participants. This pre interview research phase involved the recognition of our own prejudices as researchers (Plamer, 1969). Our prejudgments became discernible by acknowledging and confronting our own perspectives on IPF, on offspring of IPF, on narrative identity, and by considering the opinions of others with different understandings. Our understandings were used later on in the interview and interpretation stages in order to "fuse" our horizons (Gadamer, 1976) with the research participants' narratives. Long discussions regarding morals and ethics, among other relevant issues, were also held by our research team.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Characteristics.

| Name | Age in years | Occupation | Family status (+ children) | Time since loss in years |
|-------------|--------------|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Avia | 21 | Alternative civilian service in a kindergarten | In a relationship | 6 |
| Avital | 42 | Watsu (aquatic) therapist | Married + 2 | 9 |
| Carmel | 70 | Retired literature professor | Married + 3 | 50 |
| Emuna | 46 | Veterans' counsellor | Married + 8 | 40 |
| Mimi | 25 | Student | Single | 15 |
| Miri | 51 | Vice branch manager in a bank | Married + 3 | 31 |
| Orly | 36 | Online trader | Single | 1 |
| Rivka | 72 | Retired kindergarten assistant teacher | Widowed + 6 | 50 |
| Shira | 37 | Physiotherapist | Married + 3 | 28 |
| Talya | 48 | Psychotherapist | Married + 7 | 40 |
| Viola-Eilat | 50 | Medical massage therapist | Divorced + 1 | 47 |

The rapport-building process with potential participants was held either in person or by telephone and was on average half an hour long. This procedure served to briefly clarify the purpose of the study and assure participants that complete confidentiality would be maintained. The engagement process resulted in scheduling an individual in-depth interview.

Interviews

In-depth interviews were carried out in Hebrew, by the first author. The average interview duration was approximately 4.5 h (ranging from 3 to 6 h). The majority of interviews took place in the participants' homes, while others were held in the researchers' offices. The interviews were conducted over the course of one session, all of which were audiotaped and transcribed.

The interviews examined the meanings reconstructed by offspring of IPF of their loss, focusing, among other topics, on the narrative identities of the 11 adult Israeli female offspring of IPF victims. Questions were phrased in accordance with the six propositions for understanding bereavement and guidelines for revealing the meaning of reconstruction after loss (see Mahat-Shamir et al., 2021). Questions included, for example, "How do you perceive yourself in light of your mother's death?"; "How did your views of the world/yourself/people in the world change after the death of your mother?"; "How did your close family, friends, and others react to your mother's death?" The interview was characterized by an active, in-depth dialogue between the researcher and the participant, conducted in an open, authentic, participatory atmosphere (e.g., sharing the researcher's understandings, thoughts and experiences, asking for further clarifications and inconsistencies, etc.). This authentic involvement of the researchers and the participants in a dialogue

allowed for “true understanding” to be reached in which “the horizons of the interpreter and the interpreted are fused for a moment” (Matheson, 2009, p. 711).

Data Analysis

Gadamer did not provide a procedural method for interpretation; rather, his methodology was primarily founded on his key philosophical constructs, which provide general, yet dynamic, operational guidance for analysis (see Matheson, 2009). Analysis as per Gadamer’s hermeneutics is synonymous with understanding or interpretation. It begins with reflection and continues through the hermeneutic circle, a process that involves a dialectic movement between an understanding of the whole and of the parts of the text (Gadamer, 1976). The analysis involves a careful and detailed reading and rereading of the entire body of the text, moving from the parts to the whole, and back and forth repeatedly, to increase the depth of engagement with and the understanding of the participants’ narratives. In each rereading of the texts, attempts were made to search for similarities, differences, newness, and echoes of thoughts, feelings, or ideas that might expand our potential to understand their experience (Moules, 2002).

With Gadamer’s (1976) philosophical constructs and Moules’ (2002) interpretation of Gadamer in mind, the current analysis was conducted as a cycle of five steps, which were not exclusive and often occurred simultaneously. The analysis began in a process of immersion in and interaction with the data as a whole. Overall, interpretations of the interviews were summarized by each of the researchers. These three analyses of each researcher, yielded similar interpretations of the narratives, yet each was distinguished by the researcher’s personal prejudgments: the first author gave more attention to individualistic ideas such as “choice” and “rights,” whereas the second author emphasized socially-oriented concepts such as “Israeli death hierarchy,” and the third author tended to highlight family-oriented concepts such as “mirroring.” These perspectives complemented one another and were therefore easily integrated into a joint interpretation process. In the next phase, each interview was examined individually in an attempt to reveal each participant’s narrative identity. After the researchers met and reached a consensual analysis (the discussion contributed to the accuracy of the understanding of the findings and no major incongruencies emerged between researchers), the first author would write a second summary. The third phase involved the identification of single sentences or sections that revealed key meanings with which to understand the participants’ narrative identities. This stage facilitated the identification of the themes, which in turn led to a rich and detailed understanding of the participants’ experiences. The fourth phase involved an examination of the themes’ relationships to the meaning of the entire text, thereby expanding the sense of the text as a whole. This hermeneutic circle, a process that is essential for gaining understanding, is ongoing; as with the expanded understanding of the whole text, the meanings of the parts (themes) necessarily became broader (Fleming et al., 2003). The last step emphasized the identification of passages that were representative of the understandings gained in the analysis process. These passages were translated into English and incorporated into the research report in order to provide the foundation for the authors’ interpretations.

Lastly, the final interpretation of the texts was validated through “member check,” and confirmed the authors’ interpretations.

Evaluation Criteria

In the current study, attention was further paid to processes that enhance theoretical, interpretive, and procedural rigor, as well as rigorous reflexivity (Patton, 2015). Theoretical rigor was achieved by adhering to the philosophical view outlined by Gadamer (1976). Maintaining careful documentation of the research process and establishing an audit trail allowed for procedural rigor. An analysis has interpretative rigor when one has reached a place of sensible meaning, free of most inner contradictions (Patton, 2015). The suggested interpretations were examined and approved by the three authors of the current study who had expertise in qualitative research and bereavement in the Israeli context. Readers are further encouraged to critically examine the interpretations, to question the understandings that were arrived at, and to start a new hermeneutic circle that will enhance the knowledge of how women whose mothers were murdered by their fathers narrate their identity.

Rigorous qualitative research that takes into account the role of the researcher in the research involves honest reflexivity (Patton, 2015). As an important process in this study, we documented our personal views, beliefs, and backgrounds, all of which impacted the collection and analysis of the data. We kept a log of all of this information, along with observations about our encounters (in person or by hearing the interviews on audiotape) with participants and our experiences throughout the analysis process.

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning this research, the study was approved by the authors’ university’s Institutional Review Board. Ethical issues were addressed and discussed throughout the research process, starting from the research planning stage and continuing until publication. We provided detailed information to all participants concerning the research process, the interviews, and how the narratives were likely to be used. All of the participants signed an informed consent form. Careful attention was given to issues of confidentiality as well as to protecting participants’ well-being. Participants were given information about the psychological support available to them should they feel emotional distress at any point during the research project; none of the participants made use of this service.

Findings

Participants’ narrative identities are constructed and reconstructed over time in the context of their relatedness to each of their parents: specifically, relatedness to a father perpetrator and a mother victim to IPF. The murder became an integral part

of their story of identity and along with it, the fear that the murder might engulf their entire being.

I wouldn't like to consider myself merely a result of a tragedy. It is a terrible story ... I want to know who I am, as a person. Not just a person who'd experienced a murder in one's family. And ... um, it's a dissonance which doesn't let me be ... I can't escape it. (Emuna)

The "dissonance" in the quote above reflected the participants' challenge to reconcile the wish to not be defined by the family's tragic loss story with the magnitude of the tragedy; such a wish is impossible to fulfill. They project this fear outward onto their perceived societal image of them. As Shira described: "I'm very afraid of the stigma. That they'll think: man, the family that she came from ... they expect you to be no good, at the very least ... they don't know who we really are." Interestingly, the answer to the question of who the participants are, in light of their loss, was itself framed in a dissonant manner, or namely, as a "trisonance." Participants identified themselves in opposition to how they perceive their fathers, their mothers, and how they imagine society perceives them in relation to each of their parents. This study revealed the identification process to be saturated with fears: at its core, the fear of over identifying with one's parents:

The greatest fear of my life is to go mad or die. Both options. They are not the same, but they are the most frightening, each is on the other scary end. Yet, the fear of going mad is worse than the fear of dying. (Miri)

At each pole, in Miri's words, lies the participants' perception of each of their parents: a "mad" father and a "dead" mother. As they are genetically related to both parents, they are, as another participant described, "halved in two" (Mimi). We will therefore describe participants' narrative identities in regard to each half or each parent, set in the societal perception of their relatedness.

The Fathers: Being a Daughter of an IPF Perpetrator

As participants are their fathers' daughters, they carry half of their genes, both desirable and undesirable, and in these genes lies the potential for resemblance. Considering the fathers' acts which obliterated participants' mothers and tore down their familial structure, the possibility of being like the fathers provokes great anxiety among the study's participants, especially as they fear that society might expect them to become like them. Some could not bear this idea and insisted that although they are related to the fathers, this relationship is meaningless and projects nothing of who they are.

People are afraid. They tremble with fear from a daughter of someone who committed such a murder ... they think that I'm probably damaged from what he had done and that I am as disturbed as he is. I will never be like that ... I am also a daughter of a murderer. It says nothing about me. Because I am not, I didn't do it. I didn't hold this gun.

He's the one who did it. And although he's my biological father, I don't belong to him. I am not him. (Avia)

Participants are not their fathers. Yet, for some, this firm fact is threatened by external similarities to their fathers: they may not be him, but may look like him. This disconcerting reminder is in contradiction to the participants' wish to divorce themselves from their fathers and from the perceived "dangerous" genes they carry and are expected to express. Thus, in acknowledging this notion of external similarities, participants have actively attempted to restrict its meaning. Avia continued: "I know I maybe look a little bit like him on the outside, but on the inside, I've tried not to take anything from him." Avia's narrative of who she is and is not, in light of her father's act, seemed to change as she addressed the idea of being related to him; the more she acknowledged the similarities between them, the greater the threat to her self-perception. As a result, participants like Avia have tried to regain some control by deciding that although they may have inherited the father's external characteristics, they would not take on his personality.

My hair followed his footsteps (anxious giggle), and his character ... I don't think I knew [him] well enough, I mean, what is well enough? I don't think I knew [him] well enough and even if I did, I think I've erased it. So, I can't, I can't say that I'm like him (silence). (Mimi)

As can be interpreted from Mimi's giggle, the idea of following the father's footsteps, even if it's her hair only, causes anxiety. So much so, that some participants like Mimi managed this anxiety by erasing any memory of the father's character, so as to block the possibility of becoming the same person. However, this solution erodes over time. Sooner or later, participants are faced, to their dismay, with the fact that they may well share a few similar personality traits with their fathers.

First, I was born with a very rebellious personality. I mean, I have got some of his genes, after all, I do have it. Now, one of the things I do not like about myself is when I discover that I am like him. (Carmel)

While most of the participants actively tried to deny the possibility of being like the father in any way, some participants were more comfortable with this notion, which allowed us to delve deeper into the mechanisms shaping participants' identity reconstruction. When asked to elaborate on her last sentence quoted above Carmel answered:

Some things are similar. First, the love for books, he was a reader, a knowledgeable person. He transferred that to me. He used to be an amazing storyteller; I do that too. I give lectures everywhere. I also inherited his business abilities, although I don't handle money, that is my rebellion. Ask me about money, that's not me. I am not, I don't do that, although I can.

Why would a survivor allow some of the father's traits into her identity while rejecting or rebelling against other traits? The answer unfolded as participants continued to describe their understanding of the forces and motives behind the fathers' murderous acts. While the ability to handle money well is a desirable trait in western societies, Carmel, in the quote above, rejected being a person who handles money. Carmel perceived that her father, a wealthy man, saw money as a means to earn others' respect and elevate himself socially. She described the role of money in the escalating process leading to the point of the murder. In its beginning, she explains, are the father's financial difficulties.

Ever since his business had collapsed, he himself collapsed. His need to be honored and admired, the "look at me" way of being, the "I'm of significance." I tell you; you can take away my title and the house and everything, I won't be like that ... You won't find in me the need for honor and admiration.

Similar to Carmel, participants defined themselves as wholly lacking the crucial traits they ascribed to the motive behind the father's act. For example, participants like Viola-Eilat described themselves as not jealous, when jealousy, to their understanding, was the reason behind the murder.

My mother wanted to get a divorce ... a friend of my father had told him that he saw a man leaving my mother's room, both men were drunk. And you know, men's need for respect, jealousy, so, he did it ... I am not a jealous person. I never had problems with jealousy.

Other participants' emphasized traits such as impulsiveness and inclination to rage. The more potentially violent the trait was, the more participants clarified specifically why and in what ways they are not like their fathers, or if they do resemble the father, in what way they are still different.

I've inherited some bad traits from him. Be it his impatience or nervousness, his impulsiveness ... but at least I'm aware of these parts within me, and you learn to control it, as much as you can ... I don't think I can kill someone; most chances are that I won't, and I've been through some rough things in my life. I did lose control and other things I'm not proud of but never have I thought of it. I will hurt myself before I will hurt anyone else. That's the difference between us. (Orly)

Some participants avoid being an enraged or angry person, and refuse to accept these feelings within them. Although they rationally understand that these are "normal" reactions that are experienced by all human beings, they fear its consequences. Accepting feelings of anger turns even more difficult in light of their perception that society conceives their anger as dangerous. As Orly continues:

They are scared. Let's say that I got angry with someone on the phone ... [they think] "she's the daughter of a murderer, now she's angry, she might have it in her. Maybe if

I anger her, she will kill me.” You see? They are frightened by this thought; they are afraid of the aggressive part.

Participants perceived that it was the fathers’ anger that escalated into a murderous rage; thus, they learned to fear their own anger. Some participants described their apprehension that “normal” anger, in them, may quickly turn into a murderous rage.

I’m afraid of my own aggression. Very, very, very much so. And sometimes it explodes because there’s no regulation there. My husband always tells me: for you, anger leads to murder. It’s as if I’m not allowed to get angry, and it’s not true, but I can’t contain violence or aggression. I can’t accept that it exists. Even in myself . . . we are my mothers’ children; we prefer being that over the DNA of someone who’s a murderer. (Emuna)

Participants actively avoid being like their fathers as they deny and control any signs of resemblances to him, as much as they can. Naturally, and as described in the quote above, the extreme end represented by the father (violence, murder, etc.) pushes participants to dissonant themselves from him and identify with their mothers. Nevertheless, the mothers represent the polar opposite of the same continuum of violence and death as they are its victims. The following theme will present participants’ reconstruction of narrative identity through being their mothers’ daughters, and the way they perceive the social gaze on them.

The Mothers: Being a Daughter of an IPF Victim

Participants’ relatedness to their mothers played a significant role in their narratives of identity. As evidenced by the earlier quotes, the participants preferred to identify as their mothers’ daughters rather than identify as (and with) their fathers who committed the murder. Nevertheless, when examining participants’ narrative identities, a few positive rich descriptions of similarities in relation to their mothers were found. In one such account, the participant stated: “We are similar in our hearts. Our laughs. I probably took on her cooking genes, although she never really taught me how to cook” (Orly). One possible explanation for the lack of positive descriptions may be that in many families there was an unspoken agreement of silence, to not talk about the murder, and along with it, the mothers. As many of the participants were young children at the time, it is possible that they did not have any memories of the mothers’ characteristics to use for identification. As Talya explained:

For 20 years we didn’t carry any memorial ceremonies for my mother. And once we did, even once in a few years, it was as if we had to create a new language of talking about her, who and what she was.

Interestingly, when participants naturally told the story of who they are in relation to their mothers based on their autobiographical memories, they did so in a manner much like their description of being their fathers’ daughters: with similar dissonance. It seemed that here, participants’ narrative identities were shaped by another fear, the

fear of being a victim, like their mothers. The narratives showed that the more the participants reconstruct an identity similar to their mother's the higher their perception of the risk of sharing the mothers' tragic fate.

It always frightens me to become my mother. My mothers' incident has hurt me mentally; wherever I go, I'm afraid to be like her. To become a number in the collection [of IPF victims]. I've always promised myself that it won't happen to me. (Avia)

Like Avia, other participants had to actively manage this fear and take control of their own future. In order to do so, and in a similar process of dissonating themselves from their fathers, they reconstructed an identity opposite to their mothers'. For example, Talya's father had threatened many times to murder her mother. Her community was involved, but didn't do enough to prevent the murder. As Talya perceived her mother as helpless in the face of both the father's threats and her community's inaction, she became the person to fight her mother's lost fight.

I think that over the years I've developed quite a warring identity that countered my mother's helplessness. I've turned into a person that fights over things such as health, mental health, and resiliency, in every community I was a part of.

Talya's perception of her mother as helpless is similar to other participants' perception of their mothers as submissive. Some participants reluctantly identify themselves with the mothers' submissiveness. They reason that had she been stronger and unyielding, they too would have those characteristics. Nevertheless, once they realized that their mothers' submissiveness resulted in her tragic death, they became her exact opposite. As Rivka describes:

My mother was a very modest and submissive woman. I'm angry at her for it until this day. It is possible that if she hadn't been so submissive, I wouldn't have been like that as well. So submissive and quiet, she had no demands at all, no opinion ... after the incident I've changed; I became more assertive, stubborn, demanding. Much stronger.

In the quote above, Rivka made use of the word "stronger." Similar to her, many participants' identities in regard to their mothers were narrated around issues related to their mothers' weaknesses. As the mothers were perceived as extremely weak, participants vow to never be as weak.

She was weak. If you compare between us, I am a totally different person. I don't think that there's strength in one's silence; if I keep silent about something then I'm weak ... I've always told myself that I won't be as weak as my mother. I think that it's because of the fact that she was so weak that I don't allow myself to be there at all. Even to the extreme. (Avital)

The fear of becoming as weak as their mothers is so prominent that other participants, like Avital, have gone to the other extreme and avoid showing others (and

perhaps even themselves) any sign of weakness. Participants justified their choice by what they perceived as society's expectations of them: not to represent IPF.

Society always said wow, look at how strong you are. How it didn't affect you. People think that they empower you but it incites an unconscious reaction. Looking back, I was a very dominant child on the outside, but inside, I was a wreck. It shaped my way in life of not being weak and showing no weakness, only strength. (Emuna)

As a result of the perceived societal demand to show no weakness, participants refrain from accepting or needing any help from other people, even the closest ones. Accepting or asking for help is a sign of weakness, and being weak is perceived as being a victim.

I don't ask for help from anyone. Not even from my own children. I don't want to be the needy one, and I won't be the poor, miserable wife. I never will be. I'm not a victim and I will never be a victim ... I mean, I am not a weak woman. I won't let anyone hurt me ... but I also do not demand anything for myself. I never feel that I deserve it. She [mother] didn't think that she did as well. (Carmel)

Once more, participants have reconstructed an identity dissonant from their mothers' perceived weakness: they must never allow themselves to be weak or to experience weakness at its extreme. Nonetheless, as Carmel's narrative illustrates, as much as they try to escape it, they find themselves like her in some ways. It seemed that participants constantly seek proof of success, dissonating themselves from their greatest fear of becoming their mothers, and from the perceived societal expectations of them.

My mother is a victim and I'm a victim. But no. If I had succeeded in creating such a home after all that I've been through; healthy, happy, even with some difficulties ... then I'm not a victim. I don't look like that person either. I am not. I'm the opposite of damaged. I'm a happy, life-loving person, who likes to have fun. People think "where is the bitterness, the depression, the sadness?" They expect it, so to say: "oh, now I know why she's like that." (Miri)

Once participants formulate a firm identity narrative sufficiently different from their mothers' identity, they can advance further into the reconstruction of their selves. They find more freedom to do so when they are less governed by fears. Therefore, they reconstruct an identity that is in some ways similar to their mothers', but at the same time, different. They must reconstruct their own meaning in relation to being a woman; one that is not helpless, submissive, or needy, a woman who can be demanding for herself, independent, and even one who can sometimes accept others' support. These traits are reconstructed anew into participants' narrative identities once they feel at ease with how different they are from their mothers.

All my life she [mother] used to tell me “you’re not a Libra, you’re a Scorpio, you can’t help it.” I hated it, as a child I wanted to be a Libra, I wanted to be like her. Around the age of 30 I told myself that I’m a Scorpio. Today I would still choose being a Scorpio. (Orly)

A Different Fate

Like Orly’s decision that the stars had written a fate for her different than that of her mother, participants insisted on creating an identity dissonant from their mothers, as well as from their fathers, in order to ensure a different fate. They fear the genetic potential that they carry, to become a murderer or a murder victim and that they might realize the perceived societal stigma of them, as the daughters of an IPF perpetrator and a victim. Although they have recognized some similarities to both parents, their narrative identities are guided primarily dissonantly from them. In other words, participants attempt to reconstruct an identity narrative of “otherness” as they wish to be radically different from their parents. Participants described the new route that they try to follow; one where they are not defined by their relatedness to their parents.

At some point as you grow into adulthood you are no longer defined by who your parents are and where you live. You build your own thing; we are no longer children having to say “my mother is ...” and you cannot say that because of what happened. You paint your own picture. Then you are supposedly a person like all the rest. Until then, you’re always different. (Shira)

Some participants have attempted to create a new route by abandoning their family’s legacy and giving themselves their own new birthright. Interestingly, many of the participants’ self-narratives addressed the issue of names, mostly last names. Participants talked about the meaning of carrying the family’s name and their wish to change the name to help ensure that their fate will indeed be different from that of their parents. Nevertheless, this was complex.

I still want to change my last name, but I don’t know what to. It’s still on “hold.” I want to change it. I don’t really want this last name, his or hers, you see? Not because of anything, I just can’t find any attachment to neither, so I must think what I want to put in my last name, but I don’t know what. I don’t have anything in my mind which is me. (Orly)

Summary

Participants’ narrative identities were constructed and reconstructed over time around the murder incident and its aftermath. Specifically, in relation to their parents as the two identification figures and main characters in participants’ tragedy. Due to the magnitude of the loss, the genetic and structural relation to each parent, and the perceived societal gaze on them, participants attempted to narrate an identity that is primarily based on disidentifications. Nonetheless, participants cannot totally dissonate

themselves from their parents; they still are their daughters. Yet, as is evident from the findings, they have attempted and impressively succeeded in being substantially different. Their route of becoming who they are has been and is strongly guided by who they fear becoming. Thus, participants narrate a trisonant story of identity, as they dissonate from each of the three forces involved in their journey of identity reconstruction; their fathers, their mothers, and the perceived societal expectations of them. In fact, they have become who they are through who and what they are not.

Discussion

As is evident in the findings and as suggested by previous studies of homicide losses and IPF trauma (Alisic, Groot, Snetselaar, Stroeken, Hehenkamp, & van de Putte, 2017; Alisic, Groot, Snetselaar, Stroeken, & van de Putte, 2017; Armour, 2005; Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al., 2021; Steeves & Parker, 2007), participants' loss experience (i.e., their autobiographical memory) played a pivotal role in their attempts to articulate a narrative of who they are (McAdams & McLean, 2013). As the bereaved in our study are survivors of homicide, and the biological daughters of both perpetrator and victim of the same crime, they are related to the event as its direct "co-victims," as well as the direct (genetic and structural) extensions of both murder victim and perpetrator.

In consonance with the feminist notion that women's identity is primarily reconstructed through aspects of "relatedness" (Chodorow, 2001; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1996), the findings reveal three parallel "relatedness" pathways through which participants reconstruct and narrate their identities. The three pathways consist of their "relatedness" to their mothers, their fathers, and to their perceived social image. Nevertheless, the actual process of composing a narrative identity through the function of relatedness is revealed in the current case as a mixture of negotiated identifications, mainly disidentifications, with each of the three components stated above.

The mental work of forming an identity through identifications has been well documented in the psychoanalytic literature. It is proposed that individuals constitute an identity by consciously and unconsciously examining differences and similarities in relation to their caretakers (Hook, 2006). This notion goes back to Freud's assertion that a child wants to be "like his parents ... big like his father and mother" (Freud, 1909/1959, p. 74), and the child grows away from the parents, to some extent, through criticism toward them, based on small events of dissatisfactions. In fact, although children grow to identify with some aspects of their internalized images of their parents, they must also be different in order to form an independent sense of self. Along this line, other theoreticians have conceptualized this process as "separation-individuation," which starts in infancy and continues throughout the life cycle, all the way to late adulthood (Colarusso, 2000). Especially in the first (early childhood; Mahler, 1963) and second (adolescence to emerging adulthood; Blos, 1967) phases of separation-individuation, children remain connected to their parents but gradually become less dependent on them. Eventually, an optimal balance

between psychological distance and closeness is achieved through selective identifications and internalizations of rules and demands (Mahler et al., 1975).

Nevertheless, the child's attempt to maintain closeness and connectedness can, in some cases, result in what researchers conceptualize as "pathological identification" (Foreman, 2018). In that sense, children with traumatic pasts that are associated with the parent's behavior, often identify with the parent as a way to form a sense of connectedness, and in order to preserve the "good parent" even at the cost of identifying with the parent's negative or problematic characteristics and behaviors (Foreman, 2018). Such negative identifications are defensive, as the child depends on his/her parents for survival, and they protect the child from the otherwise too painful realization that the parent was, or is, abusive or neglectful (Loewenstein, 2004).

Considering the participants' life stories, some aspects of this realization were forced upon them the moment their fathers ended their mothers' lives. The murder violently diminishes both parents from the participants' lives and annihilates their very existence. With regard to the murder, participants' needs were not put above the parents' needs or weaknesses, be it the fathers' impulsiveness, rage, or madness, or their mothers' submissiveness, helplessness, or fearfulness. Contradicting a prominent cultural tendency toward child-centrism (Kestler-Peleg & Lavenda, 2018), neither parent was able to prevent the murder and protect their children from the subsequent devastation. Therefore, as a result of the parents' weaknesses or flaws, participants demand to care for their own survival (Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al., 2021). Therefore, in order to ensure both physical and mental survival, participants reject and dissonate themselves from their parents' characteristics which are associated with the cause of their tragic loss.

From a psychoanalytic-feminist stance, boys must reject their mothers and identify with their fathers in order to formulate a male identity. Girls, on the other hand, face more difficulties in achieving separateness from their mothers, as they do not need to reject their mothers for the purpose of identity formation, but still include the fathers along with their mothers in the primary object world (Chodorow, 2001). When girls do reject the identifications with their mothers, for example, when the mothers are perceived as weak and vulnerable, they turn to identify with masculine characteristics (Di Ceglie et al., 1998), or what can be considered as the father's characteristics. Prior research on Israeli bereaved women survivors of maternal suicide demonstrated that due to the strong culturally inherent mother-daughter bond, women find it extremely difficult to reject identifications with their mothers, albeit the trauma (Leichtentritt et al., 2018). Nevertheless, as separation from each parent is perceived as requisite for one's survival, participants in the current study reconstruct an identity based on their rejection of the mothers' weak femininity, as well as the rejection of the father's murderous masculinity. In that sense, the current case reveals a unique route for identity formation, which is mainly based on a set of disidentifications. This understanding of the current results challenges the common psychoanalytic perception of gender binarism related to identity formation, as participants in the current study reject identifying fully with either parental figure. Nonetheless,

participants still must oblige the principle of relatedness if they are to create a feminine identity narrative; they cannot “unrelate” themselves from their parents or from all that relates to the homicide. Therefore, they extricate themselves from the danger of pathological identifications through the construction of an identity which is formed and defined through what it is not.

Nevertheless, fear of becoming their parents persists, as participants cannot escape the genetic potential and other physical or character-like similarities to them. As a means to manage this fear, they project it onto others. Indeed, the formation of one’s identity as a loss survivor is forever rooted and evolves in the social sphere (Neimeyer et al., 2014). A more general sociological perception of identity construction posits that individuals judge themselves as a reaction to the perceived evaluation of others (Cooley, 1922). Building on this notion, it is stressed that individuals’ fear of social degradation shapes their sense of self and influences their behaviors (Goffman, 1963). Specifically, shame is considered a significant component of one’s social identity (Lynd, 1961). Our findings demonstrate the strong influence of the social sphere on the study’s participant’s narrative identities. Participants felt that society evaluates them based on their relation to each of their parents (IPF perpetrators and victims), rather than based on other characteristics, they fear the shame of being devaluated by others. Indeed, murder and domestic violence, although unfortunately prevalent, are socially taboo, and those involved are often stigmatized (Felson & Palmore, 2018; Gillespie et al., 2013; Sharpe, 2015). Thus, participants fear becoming their parents, and they fear that society might identify and devalue them as such according to societal stigmas relating to their loss. Therefore, they narrate an identity that is dissonant with how they perceive their parents, but also with how they fear society might perceive them.

Study’s Implications and Limitations

Derived from the study’s findings are a few important practical implications. The first concerns terminology. The media, legal system, and social services tend to perceive the deceased mothers as the “direct” victims and IPF offspring are usually referred to as “secondary victims” or co-victims of homicide, typically defined as “individuals who have familial connections with the victim and thus are indirectly victimised” (Connolly & Gordon, 2015, p. 1). The findings of the current study and previous findings (Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al., 2021) contribute to the understanding of the experience of offspring survivorship following IPF as they portray a direct, full, and independent form of victimhood, which stands apart from the mothers’ victimhood. Thus, defining and referring to this traumatically bereaved population as co victims disregards their unique survivorship experience and symbolically couples their victimhood with the mothers in a way that endorses “pathological identification” with the mothers. Considering the importance of disidentifications in the participants’ route for identity reconstruction and adaptation processes, such connection may yield a rejection of the daughters’ own victimhood/survivorship and block other possible positive identification routes with the mothers. As Rock (1998) suggests the term “survivors” as a

means to empower and allow autonomy in adaptation processes, we advise using the term “survivors of parental IPF.”

The second implication concerns the need to raise social awareness of the phenomenon of IPF, and the experience of offspring bereaved by IPF. As participants projected their fears of resembling their parents onto the existing societal stigmas regarding IPF, raising awareness of the phenomenon in general society might lessen such stigmatization and therefore, help society be less restrictive in predefining the daughters’ narrative identities. The third implication concerns enriching health care professionals’ understanding of the possible route for identity reconstruction in daughters bereaved by IPF. These professionals must recognize that due to the magnitude of their loss, such daughters are required to narrate a dissonant identity that is different than both parents but still relates to them to maintain some sense of connectedness to one’s violated, but familiar roots and parental images. To widen this understanding, identities and identity paths must not be forced upon those whose routes were disrupted. Particularity is the key. It is important to note that regardless of the time since loss, or other identities relating to one’s social roles (motherhood, career, etc.), the IPF incident and its aftermath remained a core element in participants’ narrative identities. For some, it took years and decades before they were able to reflect inwards on their experience, nonetheless outwards with another human being. This understanding is advised to guide practitioners treating this population, sometimes years after the incident. It also highlights the complexity of this life-long process that calls for suitable psychological assistance, which is often provided by governments (if provided at all) in a restricted manner.

Notwithstanding the significance of the current results and the diverse nature of the sample, it is important to consider its findings and interpretations in light of several limitations. First, as participants were all women, it is probable that sons bereaved to IPF narrate their identities differently, as indicated by the literature on gender differences in identity formation (Chodorow, 2001; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1996). Therefore, it is crucial to examine the sons’ perspectives in order to fully comprehend the experience of both sexes. Another limitation concerns the participants’ cultural background. All of the study’s participants were secular to traditional Jewish, of middle to higher socio-economic class. Due to the difficulties in recruiting women from other religious and cultural backgrounds, the finding did not include the experience of ultra-orthodox Jewish backgrounds, or Arab, Christian, Druze, or Bedouin women. Further research should include such diversity of populations as well.

Conclusion

Although the literature suggests that bereavement and other traumatic events require a revision of one’s identity as a survivor (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006), it rarely provides a detailed account of such processes. Thus, the novelty of the present study stems from the fact that it informs the literature regarding the experience of survivorship among daughters whose mothers were murdered by their fathers. Specifically, this study sheds light on identity reconstruction and narration processes in female survivors of

parental IPF. The findings indicate that in an attempt to answer the question of “who am I” in light of their loss, participants narrated an identity based primarily on dissonances. They are not like their fathers, their mothers, or the perceived societal perception of them; in fact, they are a trisonance. Alluding to musical terminology, a dissonance is the lack of harmony among musical notes and is that which requires resolution to a consonance (Dowling, 1978). Similarly, participants made use of such dissonances in order to compose a narrative identity following their traumatic loss. In that sense, narrating their identities in the form of dissonant identifications is the only way to harmonize the fears of becoming the “mere results of this tragedy” (Emuna). It establishes an existence and ensures the survival of a self that has not been sufficiently acknowledged and defended at the moment of the murder. Participants’ identities emerge from this moment of annihilation, and it is through the narration of what they are not, that they become.

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