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THE LOUDEST VOICE IN THE ROOM IS OUR SILENCE: NARRATIVE POSSIBILITIES OF SILENCED ADULTS

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THE LOUDEST VOICE IN THE ROOM IS OUR SILENCE: NARRATIVE

POSSIBILITIES OF SILENCED ADULTS

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A Thesis

Presented to the

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by

Rebeccah M. Avila

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ABSTRACT

Using muted group theory and communication privacy management theory as the theoretical framework, a deeper examination of adults who have experienced a childhood traumatic experience who now exhibit silencing behaviors as adults will be reviewed. Adults who were victims of childhood trauma were interviewed to listen for the themes in their narratives and how they make sense of why they participate in self-silencing behaviors. For this study, I am interested in examining two main ideas revolving around the phenomena of silence: (1) how do childhood traumatic experiences affect adults; and (2) how do adults make sense of how and why they manage to disclose private information after having experienced a trauma in relation to their engagement in silencing behaviors? The three types of childhood trauma analyzed in this research include: abuse of a child; trauma in a child's household environment; and neglect of a child. Through an analysis of the three types of childhood traumatic experiences, silencing behaviors that adults currently exhibit was examined.

A narrative methodological approach was used to capture the entirety of the participants experiences with both childhood traumatic experiences, as well as self-silencing behaviors they now exhibit as adults. The purpose of using retrospective accounts is to understand what silencing behaviors participants engage in and how do they manage those silencing behaviors as adults (RQ1), as well as how silence can be characterized though a muted group

theoretical lens (RQ2), followed by how can silence be characterized through a CPM theoretical lens (RQ3). The analysis of participant interviews in this study reported two major categories and nine themes relating to how participants explain and make sense of their silencing behaviors including: (1) Constructive Means of Silencing Experiences with themes of Revealing Private Information, Trust, Acceptance, and Silence as Empowerment; (2) Destructive Means of Silencing Experiences with themes of Judgement, Victim Blaming, Minimizing Trauma, and Harmful Expressions of Pain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

As I sit in silence, writing about silence, I wonder, why in this moment am I okay with complete silence? Am I really sitting in silence, though, if I am speaking to myself aloud in my mind? Do my past experiences have anything to do with why I feel okay with sitting in silence all by myself? Before the young age of 16, I was loud and always spoke my mind. Something broke me, though. It was as if my voice, the words I once spoke freely, just completely vanished, and I turned to alternate ways of speaking what was on my mind. As a teen, I was in an abusive relationship for three years. I never said a word to anyone about it.

There were times where my abuser's cousin, who was 28 years old at the time, would be right there, about ten feet away, and would not do or say a thing about the abuse. One incident in particular, I was thrown to the ground multiple times, choked against the door, verbally berated, and chased through an apartment complex. No one helped. What I thought was much worse at the time, I did not help myself. I allowed the abuse to continue for three years. Why? Was I not strong enough? I certainly did not believe I was strong enough, mentally or physically. I felt feelings of worthlessness; I felt that I had no value or purpose in this life. How did I get there? Did growing up without a strong father figure impact my desire to be around older, stronger men?

Unfortunately, the abuse that I was subjected to led me to have an eating disorder for ten years. Both physical and psychological abuse in dating relationships has been associated with symptomatic dieting as well as bulimic

symptoms (Skomorovsky, Matheson, & Anisman, 2006). I did not feel that I had worth as a person, that anyone should value me, including myself, and that I did not deserve any better than the path I was walking down in life. This became my way of speaking, my own silence. I know now that was a false view of myself.

As a mother now, I have a dire need to understand why people are silenced in hopes that I can help others. It is important to note that both the victim and those who witness a victimization can be silenced, however, my focus is on those who are self-silenced and have been subjected to a childhood traumatic experience, such as abuse of a child, trauma in a child's household environment, and neglect of a child. Familiar with self-silencing behavior through personal experiences, I have chosen to interview adults who were victims of childhood trauma to listen for the themes in their narratives and how they have made sense of why they participate in self-silencing behaviors.

Silence can take many forms, whether through the actual act of not saying a word, or by other forms of direct expressions of silence. Individuals can become self-silenced or can be culturally silenced as well. Reasons why individuals become silenced are quantitatively present in the literature, however, qualitative research on the topic of the silenced adult are scant (Acheson, 2008; Ardener, 2005; Cloitre, Stolbach, Herman, van der Kolk, Pynoos, Wang, & Petkova, 2009; Grella, Stein, & Greenwell, 2005). Furthermore, investigations involving the longitudinal effects of childhood traumatic experiences on adults is even more sparse.

For this study, I am interested in examining two main ideas revolving around the phenomena of silence: (1) how do childhood traumatic experiences affect adults; and (2) how do adults make sense of how and why they manage disclosing private information after having experienced a trauma in relation to their engagement in silencing behaviors? Three types of childhood trauma were analyzed in this research: abuse of a child; trauma in a child's household environment; and neglect of a child. Through an analysis of the three types of childhood traumatic experiences, silencing behaviors that adults currently exhibit have been examined using participant narratives. Seeking answers to questions that other researchers have yet to do may open doors that others have been fearful of. Why do adults fear speaking out, and if it is not fear holding them back, what is? Has society played a role in this answer? Are there other factors, such as parents and peers?

Muted group theory and communication privacy management (CPM) theory were used as frameworks to better understand how and why individuals in society feel they must remain silent, due to trauma they have been subjected to in the past. Although discussions of the reasons people fear speaking out are present in the literature, investigations involving where this fear stems from are scant. Behavior is learned and what children observe can be reflected throughout their life. If individuals began participating in self-silencing as a child due to a traumatic experience, when does the silencing end? The purpose of this research was to seek an explanation as to why adults may still be silenced, what social norms they were taught in adolescence that have led to this phenomenon,

and whether some experience(s) occurred that have silenced adults either by self or others.

Furthermore, I was able to see how the participants make sense of their experiences with silencing through narrative analysis of their retrospective reports. The paper first defines and identifies childhood trauma categories, explains silencing behaviors, the phenomenon of snitching as a way to induce silencing in adolescence through nonreporting of crimes, and, lastly, muted group theory as well as CPM theory are used as the lens' to have a better understanding of how and why silencing has occurred over time, followed by research questions, methodology, data analysis, a discussion of found themes, and lastly, a conclusion where limitations and future research on the topic is discussed.

My intent was not to examine the difference between child abuse survivors and silencing behaviors, but to offer an analysis of retrospective experiences adults believe to be the reason(s) they remain silenced today and to consider these experiences in light of what previous research has suggested.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Limited research has been done on why people have become silenced to begin with, if it begins in childhood, and why it follows them into adulthood. Silencing a child by adults either telling them not to tattle, peers telling each other not to snitch, and abusers manipulating children by telling them to stay quiet or something bad will happen to them or a loved one, may be the reasons adults still fear speaking out forcing them into self-silencing behaviors. Did societal implications have a significant role or an event in a person's life, or possibly both? First, I will discuss and define childhood trauma including the three types focused for this paper including abuse of a child, trauma in a child's household environment, and neglect of a child, followed by a discussion of how silence can be communicated over a prolonged period, from childhood into adulthood. Using muted group theory and CPM theory as frameworks for this research, a deeper examination of why adults may still participate in silencing behaviors and where self-silencing begins have been   investigated.

Childhood Trauma

For the purposes of this study, childhood trauma is defined as "exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence," which also includes an individual directly experiencing the trauma, witnessing the trauma, or experiencing repeated exposure to aversive details of the trauma (APA, 2013, p. 271). Herman (1992) argued that victims of lengthy, recurrent traumatic experiences experience a multitude of symptoms including physiological,

disassociation, as well as affective symptoms such as guilt and hopelessness. Victims can also experience extreme fluctuations in their relationships such as intense attachment to withdrawal, changes in their identity such as feeling "contaminated" or "evil," as well as a repetition of harm (Herman, 1992).

There are three main categories of childhood trauma that should be considered: abuse of a child; trauma in a child's household environment; and neglect of a child. Abuse of a child can be defined as emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; trauma in a child's household environment can be defined as substance abuse, parental separation and/or divorce, mentally ill or suicidal household member, violence to mother, or imprisoned household member; and lastly, neglect of a child can be defined as abandonment, child's basic physical and/or emotional needs were unmet (Cloitre et al., 2009). Research has demonstrated that childhood abuse and other adversities (i.e., neglect, emotional abuse, absent parent(s), mentally ill parent(s)) can lead to a lack of effective interpersonal skills (Cloitre et al., 2009). However, humans are resilient. Our bodies can rebuild and heal when faced with a traumatic experience; nevertheless, sometimes there are lasting mental and physical effects from having experienced trauma as a child that may lead to self-silencing behaviors (Caprioli & Crenshaw, 2017; Jack, 2011; Middleton et al., 2014; O'Leary & Barber, 2008; Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996).

Van der Kolk et al. (1996) assert that trauma can suppress a victim's voice and can also deplete verbal memory, where the victim cannot find the words to speak out. Through a discussion of child abuse and the dynamics of silencing,

Middleton et al. (2014) assert that the more male-dominated societies have less interest in the well-being of women and children who are exploited and abused. According to the authors, the consequences of early trauma "…are too compelling to ignore, that societal silence has a strong tendency to be pervasive…we thus have to avoid passively opting for silence if we are to be part of the solution rather than an extension of the problem" (p. 581). The inescapable tendency to silence others must not be underestimated; however, if change is going to occur, we must bring to light where else children may be learning to be silenced. If they were taught before undergoing a traumatic experience, or because of a traumatic experience is why they became silenced, or perhaps both, is an important aspect to both study and understand.

Caprioli and Crenshaw (2017) describe the sinister impact of the cultural silencing of child victims of sexual abuse. Children exposed to sexual violence are forced to experience and respond to their victimization in silence. The children who are able to open up do so in the form of disclosure and are often shoved into a parallel process of silencing perpetuated in the United States by the existing strategy of our criminal justice and court systems. Prior to 2004, children who were called to testify against their perpetrator were given protection (i.e., closed-circuit television was used to film in a separate room and then played back in the courtroom, so the child was not forced to speak in front of their abuser) (Caprioli & Crenshaw, 2017). However, in a 2004 Supreme Court ruling of *Crawford v. Washington*, the U.S. Supreme Court deemed a taped statement of the victim to be inadmissible since the defendant (abuser) was being denied

the right to a face-to-face confrontation with the witness (victim) (Caprioli &

Crenshaw, 2017). Therefore, children are being denied an alternative means to

testify and have to face their abusers, if they feel they have the courage to. This

ruling has left many children who are unable to build courage to face their

abusers without due justice.

Furthermore, children are silenced in both   elusive and explicit ways.

For example, elusive forms of silence can occur between an abusive parent and

a child, where the parent may be overly nice to the child after abuse has taken

place as a reminder to the child that his/her life is not always awful. This may

also be a way for the parent to make the child feel guilty about seeking help.

Explicit forms of silence are a straightforward comment to the victim that they

must remain silent and may include threatening comments as well. Nevertheless,

there are several factors that create a culture of silencing involving child sexual

abuse: targeting of victims by their perpetrators (i.e., grooming); the imbalance of

power between the perpetrator and the child; the silent bond between the

perpetrator and the victim (i.e., by threatening the victim, or continuous

dependency on the perpetrator); sexualization of young children (i.e., child

pornography, sexualization through media images and advertising); and through

additional cultural factors (i.e., glorified sexual violence through film, television,

music) (Caprioli & Crenshaw, 2017). The authors assert:

The experience of being silenced places an inordinate amount of stress on

children and left unchecked, the effects can be devastating. However, when

children are able to break their silence and experience a supportive response

from caregivers and others in their environment, many of the short and long-term effects of the abuse may be mitigated or even eliminated. (p. 205)

Furthermore, when children can break the silence at a young age it is possible they will no longer underestimate how powerful their voices can be. The normative behavior that society has created on the act of silencing has had severe consequences, especially for those children who have been abused. As stated by the authors, child abuse does in fact contribute to long-term silencing behaviors.

Trauma in a child's household environment can also be detrimental for self-silencing behaviors. As stated previously, trauma in a child's household environment includes substance abuse, parental separation and/or divorce, mentally ill or suicidal household member, violence to mother, or imprisoned household member. Research does suggest that childhood traumatic experiences are associated with poor mental health outcomes in adults; however, it remains unclear what specific childhood traumatic events cause silencing behaviors in adults (Grella et al., 2005). Often professionals do not see children, for example, who live with a mentally ill parent to be at risk for being vulnerable to the long-term effects it may have on them (Pretis & Dimova, 2008). Reasons may include: they do not comply with traditional criteria for disability or neglect; or the professionals are focused on the treatment of the mentally ill parent. Children who have a traumatic household environment are at risk for psychological, societal, and academic difficulties.

Lastly, neglect of a child can also negatively impact individuals into adulthood. Neglect of a child includes: abandonment, child's basic physical and/or emotional needs were unmet, less expressive parents, and little exchange of affective interactions. Young and Widom (2014) studied whether child maltreatment has a long-term impact on emotion processing in adulthood. According to Young and Widom (2014) "child abuse and neglect has been associated with cognitive deficits in general and various forms of psychopathology that may lead to emotion processing deficits" (p. 1370). Therefore, leading individuals to not fully understand how to act in the world. Individuals may not learn to function in society as well as others who have not experienced a traumatic childhood experience. Silence is one of many ways' individuals cope with a traumatic childhood experience.

Interpreting Silence as Communication

Throughout history, there have been communication scholars and others who have studied silence from many different paradigmatic perspectives, such as functionalist, interpretivist, critical and postmodern (Acheson, 2007). Each scholar has conceptualized silence differently, yet similarly in the sense that they might define silence as "…the absence of speech, or speech as an addition to silence" (Acheson, 2007, p. 4). Thus, leading many scholars to recognize that silence and language are inseparable in communication research. However, one of the greatest differences in research on silence is how people perceive silence. Is silence good or bad? Constructive or destructive? Is silence a necessary strategy or forced upon by others? Is it a lack of speech or a symbol of speech?

Within each paradigm, a scholar would believe at least one of these to be true. For example, a functionalist scholar would agree that silence is a lack of speech; an interpretivist would agree that silence is the absence of speech, as well as both product and creator of cultural identity; a critical scholar would agree that silence is also the absence of speech as well as a communicative act; and lastly, a postmodern scholar would agree that silence and speech cannot be separated (Acheson, 2007).

There is a certain complexity about silence that has been intriguing enough for scholars around the world to want to study. Clair (1998) stated that "communication can be silencing, and silence can be expressive" (p. 157). Exploring and accepting different ideas about silence is critical to understand that silence can hold many different meanings. Silence can take many forms such as anger, frustration, shame, and self-blame. Silence can be caused by many factors such as childhood traumatic experiences, depression, oppression, as well as peer or perpetrator pressures (Ahrens, 2006; Arnold & Slusser, 2015; Caprioli & Crenshaw, 2017; Jack, 2011; Middleton et al., 2014; O'Leary, & Barber, 2008; Sorsoli et al., 2008; Van der Kolk et al., 1996). Harper, Dickson, and Welsh (2006) state that self-silencing individuals "suppress their personal voice and opinions…[and] can possibly have detrimental effects on the individual" (p. 460). Contrastingly, Jack (2011) describes silence as "a marker of oppression, yet not all silence results from oppression. Self-silencing can be a positive act. It can occur out of freedom, when one chooses not to speak or act in certain circumstances" (p. 527-528). Using silence as a choice allows individuals to gain

control over their personal experiences. Houston and Kramarae (1991) state that

"…silence is not only powerful but that it also can be positive" (p. 388). Giving

them the chance to control their self-discovery and possibly even embracing it

can be crucial for individuals who have experienced a traumatic childhood. This

form of silence can be a happy and healthy form of silence (Spender, 1990). In

another point of view, silence can also be negatively represented.

Many who have faced a traumatic experience in their childhood do not

believe they have a choice to speak out, either because of resistance or coercion

(Spender, 1990), fear (Bruneau, 1973), embarrassment/shame (Bruneau, 1973),

or grief (Bruneau, 1973). This idea is reinforced in the minds of young children

repeatedly (Caprioli & Crenshaw, 2017; Middleton et al., 2014; O'Brien, Cohen,

Pooley, & Taylor, 2013; O'Leary & Barber, 2008). Silence is a communicative act,

regardless of language being verbal, because language is an expression of

silence (Acheson, 2007; Taylor & Canary, 2017). It is important to understand

while studying silence that there are many directions that can be explored,

including both constructive and negative views of silence.

O'Leary and Barber (2008) studied gender differences in silencing

following childhood sexual abuse. Participants in their study were asked about

disclosure at the time of the abuse and the length of time it took them to discuss

the experience. The authors found that boys were significantly less likely than

girls to disclose the abuse at the time it occurred and took significantly longer to

discuss their childhood experiences later in life. Furthermore, O'Leary and Barber

(2008) found that research suggests "boys may be reluctant to disclose because

of factors related to male socialization, such as an overemphasis on self-reliance, contempt for victims and homosexuals, sexual prowess, and masculine obsession with heterosexuality and independence" (p. 135), also stating that some male victims may be confused as to what exactly constitutes as sexual abuse. The authors define silencing as sexual abuse during childhood that is often accompanied by an unwillingness to disclose. Additionally, using muted group theory, Pelias (2002) found that sons and fathers can feel silenced with regards to particular topics such as dugs, work and women.

According to Tyler (as cited in O'Leary & Barber, 2008) "Underlying the victim's silence can be feelings of shame, guilt, or confusion, and sometimes a false belief that the behavior is socially acceptable" (p. 134). Unfortunately, society has led victims to believe that staying quiet is a social norm. Furthermore, Jack (2011) states "…moral language reflects cultural values and judgments— that culture undergirds our very understanding of who we "should" be and how we "should" relate to others" (p. 524). Examples of moral language include "I'm not good enough," and "I'm worthless." Thus, creating the idea that because society glamorizes trauma and silence on film, television, and in advertising that others "should" follow the same pattern. Patterns of how we "should" act begin in childhood, when tattling suddenly turns into snitching. Peers, parents, authority figures, and parental figures often recite the phrase "stop tattling," where many young children tell on someone to get them into trouble. Children begin to view disclosing these acts as negative and may even be ridiculed by others for doing so. According to Ahrens (2006) "…to speak and be heard is to have power over

one's life. To be silenced is to have that power denied. Silence is thus emblematic of powerlessness in our society" (p. 263). Losing the ability to have a voice when something is wrong is an unfortunate truth for many children and adults today. However, "silence can be perceived as both positive and negative in each culture" (Acheson, 2007, p. 18).

Clampet-Lundquist, Carr, and Kefalas (2015) conducted in-depth interviews with 77 young men in three moderate-to-high crime neighborhoods in Philadelphia to hear their stories about community violence and relations with police. Contrary to widespread perception, talking to the police is not always negatively viewed in poor or high-crime neighborhoods. Participants argued that the policing they experience within underprivileged neighborhoods shapes their frame of legal disparagement, which then makes not cooperating with police more likely.

According to Clampet-Lundquist et al. (2015):

Defining "snitching" as it relates to the criminal justice system is complicated, as it can include someone caught with an illegal firearm giving police information on someone else, an individual not involved in criminal activity testifying as a witness in a trial, or a neighborhood resident calling the police about illegal activities on the block. Snitching can bring about a range of retribution—from "stitches" to "ditches." (p. 265)

The term snitching is a step further than tattling, where most "tattlers" would be verbally bullied, a snitch is in danger of serious bodily harm from others (i.e., "snitches to ditches"). Many of the individuals who come from low-income, or

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high-crime neighborhoods, are individuals who have experienced some sort of trauma in childhood, who have experienced silence in the form of self or others (Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2015).

If individuals do not follow the silent code of street ethics, they are susceptible to violence themselves. They are expected to stay silent on any matter they witness that is considered illegal unless they are unafraid of the consequences they may face if they decide to come forward. These are the same dynamics of silencing behaviors that children face when they have been abused. Caprioli and Crenshaw (2017) state that the literature "…consistently supports the view that children rarely lie to get someone in trouble, but if they lie, it is usually to protect others including the perpetrator" (p. 194). This supports the idea that societal influences on silencing behaviors can have a strong hold on an individual, especially those who have been victims of abuse. Arnold and Slusser (2015) investigated the nuisance laws that prohibited battered women from calling the police after so many times. Their option was to be evicted by their landlords if they continued to call or continue to be abused. These women were forced into silence by the police and their landlords. A call for help takes extraordinary courage and to be shut down by the people who should be protecting you further corroborates for these victims that calling the police is fruitless. "When we deny the complexity of its nature, we sentence silence to a passive state of being that can only communicate through a marked absence occurring in place of an expected presence" (Acheson, 2008, p. 537). Restricting

silence then creates a weight hung on the individuals who feel that they cannot break the culture of silence.

Kefalas, Carr, and Clampet-Lundquist (2011) tell the stories from participants who have engaged in snitching behavior and have seen the consequences that come with this behavior as well. Kefalas et al. (2011) state "Another reason young people say you don't snitch is that calling the police is futile" (p. 56). Being a part of a culture where you feel reporting to an authority figure, such as the police, will be pointless is less than unfortunate. Society, in this case, oversaw silencing. Individuals worry about who they would be sitting next to on the bus, and who would see them walking down the street if they snitched. Reporting violence for these participants was not an option, just as reporting a violent crime that occurs in our own homes (such as abuse or neglect) is not an option for many others either.

Each of the above conceptualizations of silence can be considered communicative tools. However, Houston and Kramarae (1991) also state that "Breaking out of silence means more than being empowered to speak or to write, it also means controlling the form as well as the content of one's own communication, the power to develop and to share one's own unique voice" (p. 389). The ability and choice to remain silent can be a power move, used to persuade or defy. The use of a deliberate silence would be noticeable to others when used, for example, in an argument. This, however, opens the door to "co-create meanings by interpreting the message in the silence for themselves" (Acheson, 2007, p. 23).

Overall, what this literature review provides is more than a binary view of silence of simply negative or positive, or good or bad. Silence can be dichotomized as a continuum that can be explained as oppressive, yet a positive act (Jack, 2011); occurring by choice, or forced due to fear, resistance, coercion, embarrassment, or grief (Bruneau, 1973; Spender, 1990); a communicative act (Acheson, 2007; Taylor & Canary, 2017); or culturally and/or societally influenced (Jack, 2011; Kefalas et al., 2011). It is important to note that although Jack takes an objective approach to silence, I have chosen as a researcher, to use her conceptualization with an inductive approach according to participant narratives.

Theoretical Background

Muted group theory explains the behavior(s) of groups who feel they are unable to communicate because their voices are often dominated. In a reflection of Edwin and Ardener's (1975) muted group theory, Ardener (2005), states that "while 'muting' may entail the suppression, or repression of speech, the theory, in its linguistic aspect, is concerned at least as much with what people say, and when they speak, and in what mode, as with how much" (p. 51). Both women and children are dominated by the hegemonic male power position in society, limiting their access to communicating freely. However, men can also fall victim to abuse and are silenced in different contexts, such as witnessing gang violence or those who are victims of violence themselves (Pelias, 2002). Kramarae (2005), who further elaborated on muted group theory after Edwin and Ardener (1975), defined muted-ness, not as low-power groups that are completely muted, but "whether people can say what they want to say when and where they want to

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say it" (p. 58). Having been in a controlling and abusive environment myself, being able to say what you want to say, when and where you want to say it, can be challenging. Furthermore, children who have been abused often fear retribution if they speak up because this is what they have been told by their abuser. Snitches, for example, are also risking their lives if they do not stay silent. Silence has become inescapable in our society, becoming a social norm for some, and forcing so many into isolation.

Burnett, Mattern, Herakova, Tobola, and Bornsen (2009) conducted a theoretical analysis of communication factors related to rape culture on a college campus. The study found attitudes and perspectives about rape communicated from cultural, social, and individual levels. Throughout the entire process, many females were 'muted', which potentially contributes to the formation and enactment of rape culture. Furthermore, Burnett et al. (2009) state that in the case of rape culture, where date rape is a silently accepted campus activity across universities around the world, muted group theory provides insight to how rape culture on university campuses is formed and enacted. To resist the process of censoring women's voices, muted group theory can be used as a tool to "encourage women to create meaning through their own language while acknowledging that they must do so because they are muted" (Burnett et al., 2009, p. 469). Using this theory will allow myself to better explain the participants silencing behaviors that may have been caused by childhood traumatic experiences. The research on rape culture on college campuses is an indication that muted groups continue to experience muted-ness by hegemonic societies, in

places where individuals should be encouraged to use their voices. However, at this point in an individual's life previous experiences with trauma could have also led to silencing behaviors and was only further exacerbated by another significant life trauma.

In the case of this research, the group of focus were individuals who have experienced a childhood trauma, who in some way felt unable to communicate because their voices have been dominated by self. In some instances, individuals may have experienced more than one form of childhood trauma at a time, or throughout their adolescent years. Experiencing multiple traumas can affect individuals in different ways and may encourage stronger tendencies to engage in self-silencing behaviors due to a lack of self-worth, shame, guilt, for fear of not being believed, or fear of being judged (O'Leary & Barber, 2008; Weiss, 2010). However, when individuals can understand that they have become silenced, and perhaps even where and when their silencing behaviors began, they can then begin to place meaning to why they may still be engaging in silencing behaviors. CPM theory will help give meaning to the private information individuals choose to disclose or conceal to others.

CPM theory can also help provide a framework for understanding how people regulate revealing and concealing private information. CPM views disclosure as the process of revealing private information, yet always in relation to concealing private information (Petronio & Durham, 2015). Furthermore, CPM conceptualizes how the management process works because the two concepts, revealing and concealing, are in a dialectical tension with each other (Petronio &

Durham, 2015). The idea of self-disclosure shifts to the view of private disclosure through this lens. Wheeless and Grotz (1976) define self-disclosure as "as message about the self that a person communicates to another" (p. 338). CPM can be thought of as a game of tug-of-war, or a push and pull, of wanting to reveal and conceal private information. In the case of individuals who have been silenced due to a traumatic childhood experience, individuals may feel this tug-of-war within themselves regarding what to conceal or reveal in adulthood to others.

Two types of privacy rule criteria are developed and applied: (1) core, and (2) catalyst (Petronio & Durham, 2015). Core criteria include culture, gender, and privacy orientation. Privacy can be defined as a societal or group value, which makes cultural criteria important (Petronio & Durham, 2015). Cultural beliefs on what should be open information, versus secret, can impact an individual's choice on concealing and revealing. Furthermore, men and women also differ in the kind of privacy rules they use. Men tend to focus on whether the situation is appropriate to disclose, whereas women need to feel confident in the people they choose to disclose to (Petronio, 2002). Lastly, family can also play an important role in the way individuals learn what are appropriate privacy orientations (Serewicz & Canary, 2008). Catalyst criteria explain for times when privacy rules are receptive to needed change. Changes occur within the rules when the risk-benefit ratios vary, when motivations for telling or concealing are changed, or when circumstances occur that call for different privacy rules, such as a separation or relational breakdown (i.e., having to tell family and friends you have an eating disorder). Both criteria are meant to guide the development and

application of privacy rules individuals use to manage their boundaries. A violation of our trust can also lead to rule change, such as the Crawford v. Washington case.

Along with the two types of privacy rule criteria, there are also five core principles of communication privacy management: (1) personal ownership of private information; (2) control of private information; (3) regulation of privacy rules; (4) co-ownership of private information; and (5) turbulence caused by violations of private information (Petronio, 2002). The first principle is that people believe they are the owners of their own private information and maintain the right to either disclose or withhold it from anyone (Petronio, 2002). Since people feel they own their private information, they have a right to control it according to the second principle. In the process of controlling their private information, people construct boundaries that guide and shape their rules for disclosure. The third principle involves individuals developing and employing a rule-based system to control the release of their private information (Wilbur, 2018). Once the decision is made to disclose, that person becomes co-owner of the information, according to the fourth principle. Lastly, when the person who has just been granted private information violates the privacy rules, boundary turbulence happens which can have consequences for the individual and their relationship with the person they chose to disclose to (Petronio, 2002). Wilbur (2018) states "When an individual is deciding how and with whom they will grant co-ownership of private information, they rely upon an internal decision-making process" (p. 74) which are influenced by the five core principles.

The implications of the effects on childhood traumatic experiences, as well as adolescent abusive relationships, regarding mental health has been minimally researched. Through narratives of the participants, as well as using muted group and CPM theory as frameworks, I have hopes that this research can open a new forum for individuals who have experienced trauma as a child and still feel silenced as an adult. Using these theories as framework for my research questions have given me a guide in the direction I am looking to follow, and I believe new research has been found from this study that can be added to existing literature on these two theories.

Research Questions

Drawing from muted group theory, as well as CPM theory, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: What silencing behaviors do participants engage in and how do they manage those silencing behaviors as adults?

RQ2: How can silence be characterized through a muted group theoretical lens?

RQ3: How can silence be characterized through a CPM lens?

Men, women, and children are being silenced across the nation every day and at different stages in their lives. To be able to have a better understanding of certain factors that may play a role in the silencing phenomenon could bring hope to future generations. Children and adolescents are learning at a young age that reporting certain crimes or abuse can have dire consequences due to several factors (i.e., abusers silencing, courtroom laws, self-silencing), as well as children

and adolescents who have been victims of a traumatic experience that may be leading these individuals to engage in self-silencing behaviors. The effects of not only traumatic experiences as children, but also the attachment styles formed in childhood, have long-lasting effects on individuals that lead into adulthood.

The research questions are going to be utilized in hopes to transcend across these barriers and answer the question of how adults make sense of their lost voices. What occurred or was said to them in childhood that hid their ability to have a voice? Using muted group theory and CPM theory as lens', these questions have guided my analysis of the participants behavior. Muted group theory will describe and emphasize how and why and by whom individuals have been silenced; whereas CPM Theory will describe and explain how childhood traumatic experiences may have played a role in silencing behaviors (i.e., concealing and revealing personal information) in adulthood.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of using retrospective accounts was to understand what silencing behaviors participants engage in and how they manage those silencing behaviors as adults (RQ1), as well as how silence can be characterized though a muted group theoretical lens (RQ2), followed by how can silence be characterized through a CPM lens (RQ3). Understanding these past experiences will help determine reasons why they are silenced and to gain an in-depth understanding of the silenced adult phenomenon. Did societal pressures cause them to be silenced? Was it parents and peers? None of the above? Or, perhaps both? I expect that those who have experienced a childhood trauma will be less inclined to report violent behavior/crimes/abuse (through learning about the concept of snitching and/or tattling; an abuser threatening the victim; or self-silencing behaviors) as an adult and will be more likely to engage in self-silencing behaviors.

Research Design

Using a narrative methodological approach, participants were able to narrate their experiences, and how *they* make sense of them. By allowing individuals to tell their own story, they were given the opportunity to share their story using their own voice, which many participants expressed the importance of. According to Sikes and Piper (2011) "We make sense of the world and the things that happen to us by constructing narratives to explain and interpret our perceptions and experiences to ourselves and to other people" (p. 294).

Narrative allowed the participants to illuminate the complexity between social policy and their lived experiences. I believe that the stories of silenced individuals can help demonstrate the severity of childhood traumatic experiences in relation to their adult silencing behaviors. Tracy (2013) describes narrative life-story interviews as a method to allow participants to discuss their life, their memories, and what they want others to know about their story. This form of narrative interviews will be particularly beneficial and provide an understanding for those who may see the silenced as socially undesirable.

Using a narrative approach, the participants can represent their experiences of being silenced through their own frame of meaning, examining the complexities of silence as it is informed by societal pressures and fear (Boonzaier & Schalkwyk, 2011). Traditional approaches have been used to study childhood trauma, as well as silencing behavior; however, through narrative approach I am able to capture the complexities of the *when, how and why* individuals felt the need to succumb to silencing behaviors. According to Wood (as cited in Boonzaier & Schalkwyk, 2011):

> Narrative imposes coherence on experiences that do not necessarily make sense…a narrative approach acknowledges that narratives are not simply aimed at conveying meaning, but also at constructing subjectivity for the narrating individuals. Women therefore not only tell stories about their relationships and the violence but also they construct themselves (and significant others) in those stories. (p. 269)

Thus, the participants who were silenced, may be able to create meaning for themselves through narrative approach, but will allow myself to also better explain the participants silencing behaviors with Muted Group theory and CPM theory as frameworks. The participants can construct their identity through the telling of their experiences. Boonzaier and Schalkwyk (2011) assert that "narrative is an essential aspect of human nature and experience, and that we "naturally" make sense of our experiences in the world through narrative. We bring order and meaning to our realities and actively construct the world through narrative" (p. 270). Therefore, their world of silence will be able to be accurately represented the way they know it to be. Events in the participants lives that they feel are important are selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful to *them* (Riessman, 2008).

Hall (2011) utilized a narrative methodological approach in her study to better help describe the trauma recovery process. The study was focused on women who have survived childhood maltreatment using a critical feminist standpoint. The analysis focused on key relationships in the individual's lives, life trajectories, self-strategies, and perceptual changes. Hall (2011) chose a narrative approach to "capture the complexities of experience" (p. 3) that individuals may not know how to communicate. In relation to my study, taking a narrative approach will allow myself to pattern and identify themes from the stories told by the participants. It is crucial to understand why participants have been silenced and no one can tell their stories better than through their own

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words, nor can we view their true, complex experiences without their perspective in a rich manner.

Using a narrative approach allows for me to have the participants expand, refute, or defend their stories at any point in the interview; contrastingly, quantitative approaches do not allow for much beyond data collection, interpreting, and analyzing of information from a researcher's point of view. The interview process also allowed myself to critically reflect on my role and identity as a researcher. My intent is not to examine the difference between child abuse survivors and silencing behaviors, but to offer an analysis of experiences adults have in relation to their silencing behaviors and to consider these experiences in light of what previous research has suggested.

Through a constructivist-interpretivist approach, I am interested in the "lived experiences of participants," and I am "open to a variety of valid meanings and interpretations" (Sorsoli et al., 2008, p. 335). Through these lived experiences we can bring forth true meaning behind the societal implications of the phenomenon of silencing. Being open to interpretation allows me as a researcher to focus on the personal beliefs of the participants as well as on the social contributions of the silenced adult.

Sampling and Recruitment

The types of individuals I was interested in interviewing were those who had experienced a childhood traumatic experience and participate in silencing behaviors as adults. Age nor gender played a role in my decision in who to include in the study. I was hoping to include both male and female participants to

look more into how males might be affected by silencing behaviors. The participants included a variety of ages to ensure a variety of perspectives. Participant ages ranged from 18-54 and included both male and female respondents. Participants were selected if they met the following criterion: (a) they have experienced a childhood trauma as defined earlier; and (b) they feel that they have been silenced at some point in their life *or* engaged in self-silencing behaviors.

For each potential participant, the study was explained and included a list of the criteria that needed to be met in order to participate. To be a participant in this study, the individuals must have been involved in one of the three categories of childhood traumatic experiences: abuse of a child (i.e., emotional, physical, sexual abuse); trauma in a child's household environment (i.e., substance abuse, parental separation and/or divorce, mentally ill or suicidal household member, violence to mother, imprisoned household member); and neglect of a child (i.e., abandonment, child's basic physical and/or emotional needs unmet). However, participants were not required to disclose to me which category they fell under, or any of the circumstances surrounding their childhood traumatic experiences. As previously mentioned, my intent was not to revictimize the participants in anyway but if they chose to disclose their trauma, they were free to do so. The reason being is because there is a copious amount of research from multiple disciplines (i.e., psychology, criminology, psychiatry) on why people may fear speaking up or why they may be silenced; however, there is limited research dedicated to the narratives of the victims and how they make sense of when they were silenced

within the communication discipline and if this affected their silencing behaviors as adults.

Following an explanation of the study, willingness to participate was asked and each potential participant was also reminded that their participation is completely voluntary as well as confidential. Participants were constantly assured that their information would remain confidential throughout the entire process, from beginning to end. Following the interview, participants were also asked if they were able to refer other individuals who may fit the criteria. Once participants had completed their interviews, they were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that included questions about their age, gender, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, as well as the socioeconomic and educational backgrounds of their parents/guardians.

To recruit participants, flyers were placed across campus and in places with known areas of possible individuals who have experienced a childhood traumatic experience, such as Counseling and Psychological Services building (NOTE: campus location will not be disclosed due to confidentiality and anonymity), as well as in hallways in buildings located on campus. Previous connections to an off campus battered women's shelter were also contacted and asked for willingness to participate. Furthermore, Facebook groups that included adults (over 18) who had experienced trauma in their childhood were also contacted. Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board, participants were screened in-person to ensure they first and foremost met the criteria for participation upon initially responding to their interest in participating in the study.

Additionally, participants were provided informed consent and audio recording forms prior to beginning any interview.

The recruitment procedures described above produced a sample of 8 participants. In the case of this study, 8 participants were a sufficient amount due to the fact that I was interested in how individuals narrativize their lived experiences, rather than trying to generalize a larger group's attitudes or behaviors. The decision to only have 8 participants was made when a point of saturation was reached, such as when themes began to repeat themselves. This method was used to ensure that adequate and quality data were recorded to support the study and research questions. As previously mentioned, the purpose of this sampling was not to achieve generalizability, but to richly represent and understand people's lived experiences.

Interview Structure and Approach

Data was collected through loosely structured, in-depth, in-person interviews that had been recorded with participant consent, where the participants narrated their retrospective experiences. Participants were each interviewed to attain thoughts and experiences of their childhood traumatic experience and silencing that they have encountered over the duration of their childhood into adulthood, as well as what they viewed as private information, times in which they decide to disclose and to whom they chose to disclose to, what it meant to them to be silenced, as well as specific instances they could recall where they participated in silencing behaviors as an adult. The interviews were voice recorded with permission from the participants to ensure I was

capturing the entirety of the narrative. Furthermore, the questions used in the narrative methodological approach followed a funnel affect so the participants were able to feel comfortable disclosing to myself, the researcher, and participants could be given ample time to open up. For example, the first question consisted of topics surrounding what kind of information the participant considered as private information and ended with questions that consisted of topics surrounding participants participation in silencing behaviors as adults.

Prior to beginning each interview, I would set a context of care by acknowledging that their testimony was going to make a difference to others, acknowledging that the participant has been through trauma and I do not intend to re-victimize them by the retelling of their story, and that they have survived the experience. Furthermore, I explained that the aim was to hear about the effects of the trauma as an adult and ask how they would know if the conversation became too much. I would suggest options like take a break, have a cup of tea or glass of water, have a smoke, take a walk, have a moment's quiet, or if they would like to come back another day to finish the interview (Denborough, 2006).

Each interview was conducted face-to-face. This was the preferred method to interview participants due to the nature of the discussions that might have taken place. It is important to note that my intention was not to revictimize participants in any way; however, if a participant chose to disclose their traumatic experience, they were free to do so. Participants were given a research information statement which included hotlines such as the National Domestic Violence Hotline, National Child Abuse Hotline, National Alliance for Mental

Health Hotline, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Hotline, and the National

Eating Disorder Association Helpline. Local counseling center information was

also given, such as CARE Counselors and CSUSB Counseling & Psychological

Services. The telephone numbers were included on the research information

sheet if participants felt they needed to talk about anything following our

interview.

Although my intent was not to discuss traumatic experiences, participants

were, of course, thinking of their traumatic experiences throughout our interview.

The interviews were emotionally difficult for most of the participants. Some of the

participants who expressed emotional difficulties, showed nonverbal signs of

anger, sadness, anxiety, or even grief. Identifying information has remained

confidential and participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

According to Berry (1999), rapport can also be established by "…respecting the

informants' opinions, supporting their feelings, or recognizing their responses.

This can also be shown by the researchers' tone of voice, expressions or even

gestures" (p. 7).

As the interviewer, I was sure to engage in empathic listening because it is

important for the participants to feel their voices were being heard when no one

else would listen (Riessman, 2008). Furthermore, it was also my job as the

interviewer to guide the interview, even while using narrative analysis, to avoid

participants veering off topic (Riessman, 2008). Finally, participants were

screened "…in part to ensure participant safety but also to match prior studies"

that that have been conducted in this area of research (Sorsoli et al., 2008, p.

335). Safety of the researcher is also important, and by screening the participants I can ensure they are in a healthy state of mind.

What is interesting beyond the problem story, in other words, the traumatic experience the participants endured in childhood, is the "future narratives of possibility and change" (Lang, 2016). By beginning the conversation discussing what individuals hope to get out of the process helps pave the way for what direction the story can take. Instead of letting it all out, crying and saying, "Okay, now what?" the conversation begins with a sense of power and value and this is my intention. Participants were asked how they felt being in the interview, discussing their experiences with silencing behaviors in relation to what they had experienced as a child. Some participants felt a sense of importance, in regard to finally being heard as well as the importance of telling their stories in hopes of helping someone else who needs it. Other participants disclosed they felt nervous, or anxious. Out of eight participants, only one stated they were unaffected by the interview.

The following table is the data that was collected from each participant from the demographic questionnaire. The table contains: Participants' age, gender, ethnicity, and the highest level of school completed or received. Participants were also asked to answer questions regarding their parents/guardian's educational backgrounds. The parents/guardian's educational backgrounds included: trade/tech/vocational training; some high school but did not graduate; high school diploma/GED/equivalent; some college, no credit; Associate of Arts; Bachelor of Arts; and, Master of Arts. Lastly, participants were

also asked what their childhood household income status was. This included:

lower-middle class and upper-lower class. The demographic questionnaire can

be found in Appendix E., however, the data for participants is displayed below in

Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Data

	Participants Age	Participant Educational Background	Participant Gender	Participant Ethnicity
Selena	30	BS	F	White
Marie	27	College but no degree	F	White
Jackie	54	College but no degree	F	White
Leslie	25	BA	F	Latino/a
Violet	18	College but no degree	F	Latino/a
Ivy	24	MA	F	White
Michael	18	Some college but no degree	M	Latino/a
Rico	25	BA	M	Latino/a

Design and Procedure

Prior to each interview, I briefly explained to each participant my personal investment and interest in this particular topic. Each participant heard the same information from me to ensure that the data collected would not be skewed. This was done to not only build rapport, but to also allow each participant a chance to reciprocate their willingness to share their stories as well. After having the participant agree and sign the informed consent forms, disclosing about confidentiality rights, reminding participants that they at any point may stop the interview if they feel distressed, and introducing myself as the interviewer, I began by asking simple questions to test their emotional state at the time.

Although we were not discussing trauma, most participants were thinking of the trauma that brought them to the interview. Thinking of the trauma they experienced as a child can bring on a multitude of negative emotions and it was important participants understood my intention was not to revictimize. Finally, we would begin our interview with open-ended questions about their experiences of silence in adulthood (Riessman, 2008). Participants are also reminded of the categories of childhood trauma at the beginning of the interview to ensure they have met one or more of the criteria.

Employing a narrative methodological approach guided this research to allow the participants to make sense of where their silence has stemmed from, as well as bring forth new research and new ways of understanding for the communication discipline. Furthermore, utilizing storytelling through the narrative

approach "Stories are told to reconstitute the past, interpret the present, and hypothesize about the future of an individual's life and identity. Narrative identities, however, not only have personal connotations but also are constructed within dynamic personal and social contexts" (Boonzaier & Schalkwyk, 2011, p. 270). The questions that were asked were relatively unstructured and open-ended to encourage the participants to tell stories versus simply answering questions. Thus, the meaning behind the participant's narratives is erected with so much more than if anyone else were to have told their story, because it is just that, *their* story and no one can tell it better than the participants themselves. As the researcher, I was there to listen and make sense of their stories.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DATA ANALYSIS

This research study analyze data employing thematic analysis of the narratives given by the participants. According to Clarke and Braun (2017) thematic analysis "allows the researcher to see and makes sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences" (p. 57). Furthermore, thematic analysis is a way for a researcher to be able to identify and make sense of commonalities from the way a topic is written or talked about (Clark & Braun, 2017). In the case of this research study, my focus was on themes that dealt with anything that was said in a participant's childhood to them or an event that occurred that may have pushed them into self-silencing behaviors. However, my research was not limited to only these areas.

Furthermore, analysis of the interviews also included listening to the recordings and transcribing them. During the initial recording of the interviews, I took notes on key words I heard that may be beneficial when it came to time to analyze the data. Shortly after each interview took place, I wrote a detailed transcription of the interviews that included the participants physical emotions at the time of the interview. Furthermore, key quotations that will later be used were set aside in a separate document. Both verbal and nonverbal cues were accounted for, such as pauses, emphasis, vocal noises such as laughter, crying, and more (Tracy, 2013). Ample time was given to transcribe each interview to ensure accuracy.

The interviews ranged from twenty-three minutes long to thirty-eight

minutes long. Each interview took approximately an hour and a half to two hours

to transcribe. The level of detail that went into the transcriptions was guided by

what is appropriate to my study's goals. Although my study was not about

physical emotions, they were recorded into transcriptions to show the depth of

impact regarding silencing behaviors. "Transcription facilitates the close

examination of data, which is so imperative for interpretation" (Tracy, 2013, p.

178); although some researchers choose to repeatedly listen to their interviews, I

feel it was in my best interest to put them onto paper. By reading the

transcriptions repeatedly, it allowed me to imagine each interview as if were

happening again. This also assisted me recognizing themes for the analysis.

Each interview that has been transcribed was also fact checked to ensure that I

am accessing the correct information to avoid error.

Additionally, it is also important to note once more that participants were

not asked to disclose about their childhood traumatic experiences, however,

most of the participants did. Since participants were asked not to disclose what

they had experienced, I have chosen that it would be best to not tie their

experiences to their pseudonyms as further protection of their identities. Although

the information that was disclosed is not fundamental to this research, the range

of traumatic experiences that were disclosed include: verbal abuse, physical and

emotional neglect, physical abuse, gang affiliation, molestation, rape, parent

divorce, adoption, absent parent(s), and drug addiction. As noted, the traumas

experienced can also be something the participants have witnessed, as well as something they had endured themselves.

Nevertheless, I was completely open to any themes that may begin to form a pattern during the participant's narratives, as well as during the transcription process. By listening to the interview recordings prior to transcription and reviewing notes on the interviews as well, I was able to develop ideas and patterns about the repeated themes throughout each interview. Both reading of interview notes and thinking about the interview observations were important forms of thematic narrative analysis that will help answer my research questions, as well as address any validity threats (Maxwell, 2005).

Thematic narrative analysis is a well-known qualitative approach that extracts themes from a personal relational encounter, in this case interviews, that were recorded to offer new opportunities and insights. For purposes of this research, the most recognizable themes that kept repeating throughout each interview will be analyzed. Immersing myself in the transcripts revealed a wealth of information about each participant's experiences and their experiences with silencing behaviors as adults. Although two categories were formed to organize the themes, it is important to note that silence is not intended to be viewed as binary, yet instead as a continuum. The themes have been categorized to organize the findings according to the themes that were formed during the analysis process. The two categories that were recognized during the analysis process, include: (1) Constructive Means of Silencing Experiences; and (2),

Destructive Means of Silencing Experiences. Within each of these categories, themes were recognized and will be discussed further: (1) Constructive Means of Silencing Experiences with themes of Revealing Private Information, Trust, Acceptance, and Silence as Empowerment; (2) Destructive Means of Silencing Experiences with themes of Judgement, Victim Blaming, Minimizing Trauma, and Harmful Expressions of Pain.

Each category and theme will include my thoughts on how it was decided to be named as such, as well as a description of how it is viewed through either a muted group or CPM theoretical lens. It is important to understand that the purpose of the analysis is to look for themes surrounding silencing behaviors that may have been caused by a childhood traumatic experience. Therefore, the focus is purposely drawn from themes that were repeated throughout the interviews that could be applied to the theoretical frameworks. However, each theme is also my interpretation of the interview data. Finally, when examining the data, it was also important for me to understand that what was there, is also just as important as what was not there. For example, was the participants' nonverbal communication throughout our interview just as important as their words being spoken?

When participants were asked the question "In what ways do you feel you have been silenced by self or others as an adult? Are there any particular instances you can recall?", their responses varied in the sense that some felt as if their silence was their choice, and some felt as though it was due to their

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childhood traumatic experiences. For many participants, the words "burden," "shame," and "blame" were brought up when discussing the ways in which participants felt they were silenced by self or others. In some cases, there are individuals who view silence as empowering. Individuals who view silence as empowering feel that they are in control of *their* story and no one else can tell it except themselves. We are experiencing a culture of silence that deserves a voice that is heard from the silenced themselves. Was it due to their childhood traumatic experience, or did it occur before or after? This study shed light on how victims who have experienced childhood trauma make sense of where their silencing behaviors stem from through interviews and narrative analysis.

<div align="center">Constructive Means of Silencing Experiences</div>

For this first category, Constructive Means of Silencing Experiences, it is important to note in what ways, to who, and how participants have constructively expressed their silencing behaviors. "One could argue that people who remain silent through strong emotions possess some degree of agency" (Acheson, 2007, p. 26). Silences that have been viewed as positive or constructive are silences of self-discovery, silences that individuals choose and control, silence as an expression of spirituality, and silence that has powerful communicative purposes (Houston & Kramarae, 1991). "Silences are interpreted differently depending upon the culture, the status of the people involved, and the particular situation" (Houston & Kramarae, 1991, p. 388). However, by breaking silence individuals can also reclaim their stories and their agency.

<div align="center">42</div>

To have a constructive means of silencing experiences means an individual is choosing to regulate, in a healthy or positive way, how their participation in silencing behaviors is controlled. The participants in this study reported to have an understanding that their silencing behaviors were in some way caused by the trauma they experienced as children and in turn, recognized the ways in which helped them navigate their communication with others as adults. What makes each of the following themes constructive for the individual is how they have chosen to participate in silencing behaviors, such as: how they have consciously decided to conceal or reveal information from others, how they have learned what it means to trust an individual, how they have either accepted their trauma in silence or seeks to be accepted by others in silence, and lastly, how silence is used as a tool of empowerment.

Upon coding the themes after transcribing the interview data, two major categories arose: Constructive Means of Silencing Experiences and Destructive Means of Silencing Experiences. Within each of the two categories, however, there are themes. The way the two major categories were decided on was based on my interpretation and understanding of silence using a constructive interpretivist approach and the literature review provided above. Through a constructive interpretivist paradigm, silence is conceptualized as an "absence of speech," or as an "active foundation of silence" (Acheson, 2007, p. 5). Using the experiences of the participants through the narrative interviews, I was able to generate a pattern of meanings behind their stories. Reasons why, as well as

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how, individuals may have chosen to participate in a constructive means of silencing behaviors from this study arose from the following themes: Revealing Private Information, Trust, Acceptance, and Silence as Empowerment.

Revealing Private Information

Having the choice to reveal or conceal private information to others can be viewed as a constructive means of expression for the adult participating in silencing behaviors. For many individuals who experience trauma, they ask themselves who, when, and how to reveal this information, or should they just conceal it? Some individuals may choose to disclose this information right away, and others may choose to never reveal their experiences. Everyone is different in the ways in which we deal with trauma. There are patterns, of course, but not everyone follows the same path (Wilbur, 2018).

During interviews, a few ideas in particular were constant when analyzing interview data in how individuals choose to reveal private information, including social and emotional support as well as disclosure. Choosing to self-disclose, or reveal information, to others can be seen as a positive communicative act. For example, the idea of attending therapy is to reveal information to the therapist so they can assist an individual in healing and growing through any prior trauma. Contrastingly, choosing to remain silent can also be a constructive means of expression depending on the particular situation, people involved, etc. As mentioned previously, the idea of self-disclosure shifts to the view of private disclosure through a CPM theoretical lens. Through an interpretation of silence,

social support seemed to be a familiar factor in individuals' decision to reveal private information to others.

One reason an individual may choose to reveal information is because they are seeking social support. Albrecht and Adelman (1987) defined social support as communication that truly helps individuals in distress and assists others through the ambiguity of trying life events. Albrecht and Adelman (1987) state that "such transactions enable people to cope independently with stress and perceive some personal control over their situations" (p. 14). Furthermore, Harber, Podolski, and Williams (2015) found that disclosure can help resolve negative emotions surrounding traumatic events.

When individuals have social support from others, they may feel more receptive to the idea of disclosing. The following participants discussed the how, when, and who they might reveal private information to. The following theme in this section arose from the questions "Are there particular times you feel you are concealing private information to others as an adult? Can you give me an example?" and "When do you feel comfortable revealing private information with others as an adult?" (See Appendix A). The themes that followed Revealing Private Information include Trust, Acceptance, and Silence as Empowerment. Each individual response differed, however, were similar enough to create a pattern amongst each other's narratives. Jackie, for example, states:

It has to be somebody that I have spent time with that I feel that there's a connection, uh, almost a relationship with. Um, and it has to be pertinent I

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guess to the like, like I wouldn't just tell somebody that my grandfather

molested me, you know, there would have to be things that would lead up

to having that conversation, you know? (Jackie)

For many participants, the words "connection," "relationship," and "comfortable"

were brought up when discussing concealing and revealing of information to

others. For most individuals, these commonalities are similar when deciding on

who, how, or when to conceal or reveal private information that involves a

traumatic life experience. Although individuals are the owners of their own private

information and maintain the right to either disclose or withhold it from anyone

(Petronio, 2002), traumatic experiences cause individuals to take extra

precautions when deciding who to disclose their private information to. In this

case, Jackie is using a positive constructive means by carefully managing who

she chooses to reveal private information to. According to the second principle

of CPM theory, individuals own their private information and have a right to

control it; thus, can choose to disclose to whomever they want. In Jackie's

experience, she has chosen to only disclose to individuals she has felt she has

had a connection to.

Additionally, similar experiences can create an ideal comfort zone for

some individuals to disclose private information. Leslie states:

When I feel that others can look to me, like if I know or have a feeling that

others have gone through the same experience that I have, it makes me

more comfortable. If I were to touch upon that subject, for example with,

with my dad, let's say like sexual abuse with my dad, I wouldn't feel

comfortable with him just because I know we don't see eye to eye and

he's not someone I'd be able to have a conversation with. So, I think

finding someone who has the same experience as you, or at least as an

understanding is what makes it so much easier, I would say. Because you

have someone to lean on. (Leslie)

Leslie is stating that although she chooses to disclose private information to

others, she might have a connection with, she also withholds, or conceals,

private information from her father. As noted earlier, CPM can be thought of as a

game of tug-of-war, or a push and pull, of wanting to reveal and conceal private

information. In Leslie's case, she was silenced due to traumatic childhood

experiences, and is in a constant battle of tug-of-war within herself regarding

what to conceal or reveal to others. However, this can be viewed as a

constructive way to conceal information to due trying to save her relationship

between her father and her. Additionally, Leslie reportedly feels empowered to be

able to control her secrets, essentially holding the key to the five core principles

of CPM.

Although Leslie feels empowered by her silence, other individuals struggle

with the process of communication privacy management. For example,

participant five, who has been given the pseudonym Violet, is an 18-year-old

Latina female. Violet willingly disclosed what she had experienced as a child as

well. She states:

So, the very first time I ever spoke out about it was when I was around

seven. So, I spoke out about it, but it was with a group of like two of my

friends, but we were little. So, you know, when, um, we, we were saying,

we were talking about jokes and so I blurted it out and they looked at me

like, scared and surprised. And I was like, Oh, I'm just kidding. So, I took it

back because at that moment I was like, oh, like I can't talk about this with

them. So, I took it back. So then, um, the very first person I actually ever

told was my boyfriend because, um, he, when I was with him, I felt, I felt

loved and I felt protected and I felt that he would, he was the type of

person who would do anything for me and be there for me. (Violet)

Similar to Ivy's statement, Violet stated that she felt her trust was betrayed by

someone close to her. She trusted that if she disclosed her private information to

her boyfriend, he would take caution with how he communicated with her. This

falls back on the privacy rules created, violating the fourth principle of

communication privacy management, co-ownership of private information.

Furthermore, it is difficult for children to understand when and with whom it is

acceptable to share traumatic experiences.

Alisic, Bus, Dulack, Pennings, and Splinter (2012) found that many

traumatized children receive less than optimal support and are unsure how to

deal with their own thoughts and emotions surrounding their experience(s).

Wilbur (2018) states "When an individual is deciding how and with whom they will

grant co-ownership of private information, they rely upon an internal decision-

making process" (p. 74) which are influenced by the five criteria. Children are often unable to identify what a trusting relationship can look like. With age and experiences, individuals learn who and what they can reveal private information to.

Additionally, Violet also stated:

At home, with my family members… I try to hide it [depression] away and just put a smile on because then, you know, um, they get mad or angry that I feel that way. (Violet)

What Violet went through in her childhood reportedly caused a tremendous amount of emotional, damaging pain. Violet stated in her interview that she never realized how her trauma affected her silencing behaviors until now. She even said that she notices herself choosing not to say anything in her current romantic relationship, where her significant other will often verbally belittle her. According to core and catalyst criteria, which explain culture and gender differences in revealing and concealing private information, as well as for times when privacy rules are receptive to needed change, changes occur within the rules when the risk-benefit ratios vary. Both criteria are meant to guide the development and application of privacy rules individuals use to manage their boundaries. Violet's childhood experiences have proven to affect her silencing behaviors in many ways, including but is not limited to self-silencing, she does not stand up for herself, and she lacks self-confidence.

Furthermore, sharing private information may put an individual in an uncomfortable, vulnerable position. However, this also opens up a door for the receiver and they in turn, may decide to reciprocate the disclosure. For example, Michael states:

> After a while, after talking to people, you began to develop a connection with them. A relationship, and through time and, and communication, you generally start opening up. Not just you but them as well. So, you both show vulnerability and that kind of creates a sense of trust. (Michael)

Michael is able to feel a sense of connection and trust with those he develops a relationship with over time, which reportedly allows him to feel comfortable disclosing private information to others. In addition to social support, individuals desire emotional support to feel a sense of comfort when they are experiencing problems or distress. Cohen and Wills (1985) defined emotional support as expressions of concern, compassion, sympathy, and esteem for another individual. Giving emotional support to individuals requires a level of interpersonal competence and understanding. For individuals such as Michael, the process of disclosing private information to others requires emotional support from the receiving end.

Using a CPM theoretical lens, communication privacy management relies heavily on being able to trust the individual(s) he chooses to reveal information to, based on his past experiences of disclosing information to others and in turn reportedly made him feel awful for doing so. It can, however, be important to

share information with others who have similar views to avoid feeling judged or perhaps feeling like your trauma is minimized. Additionally, what was found during the data analysis process was that individuals have an attachment to the concept of trust when it comes to how they choose to reveal information to others. The following theme, trust, became a pattern that was observed during interviews. When discussing the topic of private information, losing trust for others as well as who participants felt they could trust with their traumatic experiences arose as a theme.

Trust

As stated previously, the interview questions took on a funnel effect to allow the participants to warm up to myself as well as the situation. To begin the interview, some of the questions asked dealt with concealing private information, including what participants considered as private information, as well as whom they choose to share private information with. Specifically, the questions "What do you consider private information?" "Are there particular times you feel you are concealing private information to others as an adult?" and "When do you feel comfortable revealing private information with others as an adult?" were asked (See Appendix A). From these three questions, trust became a pattern that I observed in participant responses. Common words that were said while participants were answering these questions were "burden," "shame," and "blame". According to Lewicki, Tomlinson, and Gillespie (2006), trust at an interpersonal level can be defined as "confident expectations and/or willingness

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to be vulnerable; includes cognitive, affective, behavioral intention elements" (p. 994).

Participants disclosed information about their decisions they have made in past relationships and conversations that have led them to reveal private information to others. For the participants, remaining silent about their traumatic experience(s) often involved how much trust the participant had for whomever they may be disclosing to. "Trust grows with increased evidence of trustee's qualities, relationship history, communication processes, and relationship type and structural factors. Trust declines when positive expectations are disconfirmed" (Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006, p. 994). Choosing to participate in silencing behaviors until an individual is sure they can trust the receiver is a constructive way to manage their private information. Weber, Johnson and Corrigan (2004) state:

When people have the sense that others understand them, they maintain their communication patterns and rules. However, when they do not feel understood, people search for new communication patterns and rules to increase their effectiveness in communicating in order to achieve understanding. (p. 318)

For some participants, this involved who they felt they could trust with their traumatic experiences; however, for others trust involved who they thought they could trust but let them down. Scant research has been done in the communication field examining individual's traumatic experiences and

communication privacy management. However, Wilbur (2018) found that individuals who have experienced trauma rely "upon internal rules that help them craft a disclosure that minimizes risk" (p. 71), and in doing so, individuals are constructively working through their silencing behaviors. As we will see below, trust is a necessary component for individuals who have experienced trauma when they decide who to disclose their private information to. Participants reported having dense privacy boundaries by default, especially towards their own family. Furthermore, there might also be important knowledge here that muted group nor CPM theories have developed further yet.

Participant one, who has been given the pseudonym Selena, is a 30-year-old White female. Although participants were told they did not have to disclose their childhood traumas, Selena also disclosed about multiple traumatic experiences that occurred in childhood. All her traumatic experiences combined, occurring within a few years of each other, reportedly impacted the effect of how difficult Selena's life would become for years to come. Selena described knowing when she could trust someone as an "…internal feeling, of if I feel this person, I can tell them these things and I guess not be judged or not feel like they're going to run away from me or I'm gonna lose them as a friend or more." For Selena, she reportedly wanted to make sure she had that feeling inside before revealing any private information because she had a fear of being judged as well as the fear of having someone walk away from their friendship.

Zak, Gold, Ryckman, and Lenney (1998) state that "people in trusting relationships expect their partners to care and respond to their needs, both present and future" (p. 217). This form of trust reportedly allows Selena to feel secure and comfortable within her current personal relationships. According to Petronio's (2002) third privacy rule, privacy rule development, Selena constructs boundaries while deciding who and how to disclose private information to. The involvement of trust before deciding to disclose is a strong factor in the decision-making process, as well as a constructive way to cope with silencing behaviors. Individual's may also seek trust in people they feel should be automatically given, however, still absent.

Participant two, who has been given the pseudonym Marie, is a 27-year-old white female. Marie was also told as part of the interview protocol that she did not have to disclose anything about her childhood trauma; however, she did decide to share a piece of it. Marie's experiences reportedly left her with feelings of confusion, anxiety, anger, betrayal, guilt and depression. Although Marie stated that she does not want to burden anyone else with her issues, she very much would like to communicate her feelings and her experiences. Marie reported she knows that remaining silent only sends her down a spiral of anxiety and depression, which will later be discussed when it comes to silence and mental health. However, Marie reported that she is very fearful as well, that sharing her experiences might scare people she loves away. According to communication privacy management theory, Marie strictly regulates who she

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decides to reveal and conceal private information from which is due in part to her not wanting to 'burden' anyone else with her pain. This can be considered a constructive way to cope with her choice to participate in silencing behaviors by wanting to spare the loss of a relationship based on her past trauma.

Marie stated she could trust her parents and thought that feeling of trust for them was reliable. According to Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna (1985), "trust is seen to evolve out of past experience and prior interaction; thus, it develops as the relationship matures" (p. 96). However, Marie had this to say:

> My mom was my best friend…when I was younger, one of the times that I thought I hated her, I asked to move with my grandma and she told me, yeah. But she said yeah, because she thought I wouldn't go. And so, when I went, I was mad at her because I wanted her to tell me not to go. And when I was there, I would see how long she would go without contacting me. And each time it got longer and longer and longer. And that hurt, you know? And if your best friend or your parent or your mom hurt you, like how come some stranger or a friend wouldn't? So, like, to put down my wall, it's hard because I don't want to let someone in and be hurt or hurt them in return. (Marie)

Marie built an idea of what trust was to her as a child. She thought she could trust her mother to not hurt her, but her mother hurt her in more ways than one. When someone such as a parent hinders our ability to trust anyone else, it becomes difficult and terrifying all at the same time to want to trust anyone again

(Gobin & Freyd, 2013). Not only did Marie state she did not want to be hurt, but she also stated that she did not want to hurt anyone in return. According to Gobin and Freyd (2013), they found that "Early experiences of violation perpetrated by close others, or betrayal traumas, may interfere with developing social capabilities, including the ability to make healthy decisions about whom to trust" (p. 505). Trust is a key component in any relationship that includes but is not limited to parent-child, coworkers, friends, law enforcement, etc. Without trust in a relationship, many relationships can fail to thrive and could potentially end. Furthermore, ensuring there is trust in a relationship prior to revealing private information is a constructive way to manage silencing behaviors which could assist in avoiding relational turbulence down the road.

Communication privacy management theory can be used to explain individual's behavior surrounding our style of how we choose to disclose private information. Marie chooses to seldom disclose private information based on the principle that she does not want to create turbulence within a relationship by doing so. Relational turbulence can disrupt the exchange of messages between people. Depending on how turbulence might be created, the extent to which a relationship can be affected varies. For example, Marie's level of trust upon entering a relationship is already hindered due to her past relationship with her mother. Essentially, turbulence is already there, therefore, trusting a new relationship becomes difficult and may fail to thrive.

According to Oswald and Clark (2003), boundary turbulence can end relationships, especially friendships, which can be more fragile than other types of close relationships. Furthermore, if an individual may have previously cheated on a partner and told their new partner for the sake of being honest, this information could potentially create turbulence between the two and hinder the trust they once had for each other. Although Marie could potentially recover from turbulence and preserve her relationships, there will always be a need to adjust privacy management rules and boundaries within each specific relationship.

Violet was similarly let down by her parents. Not in the same sense, however, but by the people she felt she could trust to be there for her in her greatest time of need. As stated previously, Violet told her parents of her traumatic experience's multiple times. Each time, Violet was found in the same situation not long after her parents had taken action. Violet states:

> I wanted them [parents] to take action for me because I couldn't do it
> myself. But they didn't…So, I felt they never really did anything. And when
> I ever did mention it to my family members about it, they would just say
> everything will be fine. (Violet)

Violet reported that the trust she had in her parents was repeatedly tarnished over the years, causing her to eventually not speak up at all about her ongoing traumatic experiences. Among Violet's silence, the constant disregard for her wellbeing reportedly made her feel shame, guilt, and depression. According to

Violet, she believed she could trust her parents to keep her safe once she told them what was happening to her but was continuously let down.

CPM theory can explain Violet's communication behavior using each of the five privacy management principles, ending up in the fifth principle, boundary turbulence. Which, as a reminder, are: (1) personal ownership of private information; (2) control of private information; (3) regulation of privacy rules; (4) co-ownership of private information; and (5) turbulence caused by violations of private information (Petronio, 2002). First and foremost, Violet has ownership over her private information which in turn gives her control and the choice over regulation of her private information. Multiple times Violet chose to disclose to her parents about her trauma (granting them co-ownership) and each time she felt her words had no power. Over time Violet's relationship with her parents dissolved due to turbulence created.

Participant six, who has been given the pseudonym Ivy, is a 24-year-old white female. Ivy also had a similar answer regarding trust, stating:

> I don't trust anybody. I don't count on anybody because growing up I can never count on anybody in my house…I always felt like I didn't matter.
>
> (Ivy)

The impact of Ivy's experience reportedly led her to feeling as though she could not count on anyone. Not being able to count on or trust close family members can also affect future relationships. For example, Ivy stated:

I'm scared to build relationships, intimate relationships with people

because of the fact of trusting someone enough to, every time I've trusted

someone, they've hurt me. And so, it scares me to trust someone as an

adult. So, I usually just hang out by myself because I don't trust anyone.

(Ivy)

Deep hurt and neglect that Ivy experienced as a child in relation to her ability to

trust, show us the longitudinal impact her trauma still has on her now as an adult.

Gobin and Freyd (2013) found that "It is possible that survivors of early

interpersonal trauma never fully develop the capacity to make accurate trust

judgments or they lose faith in the reliability of their trust judgments, and, as a

result, are unwilling to trust anyone" (p. 509). When communicating with Ivy,

there is an imaginary wall surrounding her, which is to protect herself as she has

stated, so she does not get hurt. Ivy's issues with trust that stem from her

childhood trauma were absolutely evident during this interview. Ivy was the only

participant who genuinely seemed uncomfortable, as though she were struggling

with the idea of sharing information with me for purposes of research. Visually,

Ivy was tense with her posture and tone of voice, sat with her arm and legs

crossed and was seemingly uncomfortable with the interview overall.

Building relationships involves depth and breadth of disclosure, which also

means being able to trust the person we are choosing to disclose to as we get

into deeper, more private information about ourselves. According to Petronio

(2010), it is a fundamental assumption that individuals feel the need to both

disclose and withhold private information from others. CPM suggests that we

disclose private information as a need for connection with others; however, the

choice to disclose can become complex while individuals want to retain a sense

of autonomy apart from having a close connection (Petronio, 2010).

For Ivy, her wall that I have described above, is a privacy management

boundary. Ivy has her wall up for those who maybe she feels she cannot disclose

her private information to, for fears that are unknown to me. Previous research

has found that general mistrust among participants were higher than normal with

experiences of childhood trauma (Gobin & Freyd, 2013), which lead to me to the

conclusion as to why trust emerged as theme among the participants in this

study in relation to silencing behaviors. Learning to trust again after a traumatic

experience is a part of the healing process (Herman, 1997), along with learning

to understand and accept our memories of our traumatic experiences. In this

study, some participants stated that this is learning to accept what happened to

them; however, for others, it may be that they are seeking acceptance from

others to learn to accept themselves. The following theme, acceptance, grew out

of a pattern after each interview was conducted and transcribed.

<u>Acceptance</u>

When individuals experience trauma, there is a process that humans go

through to understand the experience. For example, psychiatrist Judith Herman

(1997) believes that in order to begin the process of constructively healing, the

traumatized must first work through their memories, even if they may be

unsettling or distressing. However, individuals who have experienced trauma can also explore cognitive or narrative therapies as a means to begin the healing process (Mailloux, 2014). According to Beshai and Parmar (2019), acceptance is defined as "being experientially open to and curious about one's experiences" (p. 28). Furthermore, each individual who has experienced trauma must also be assessed in their readiness to heal and begin processing their trauma which the therapist will decide. Brown (2008) stated that trauma can be understood as a "bad thing happening to the good person…because it explodes the neat equation between good deeds and a safe, happy life and leaves the person with a frightening sense of life being out of control" (p. 100). Life after experiencing trauma can be challenging, however, learning to accept their trauma through silence can be a constructive means of expression.

For most, their trauma is a life-changing event that can have negative effects throughout their lives (Mailloux, 2014). It can take a long time for individuals to be able to cope with their trauma, and this may look different for everyone (Mailloux, 2014). This theme arose from the following questions: "How do you feel your childhood traumatic experience impacted your adult life in relation to silencing behaviors, if at all?" and "Do you often find yourself engaging in self-silencing behaviors as an adult? Can you explain an instance or two where you have do done this?" (See Appendix A). Some participants stated that this is learning to accept what happened to them; however, for others, it may be that they are seeking acceptance from others as a way to learn to accept

themselves. Although the effects of experiencing trauma can be rigorous to move past, it is completely possible to learn to accept, confront, or move on from traumatic experiences (Mailloux, 2014). Not every participant who was interviewed showed signs of or said they had learned to accept their trauma. Participant Selena stated the following regarding acceptance:

> Sometimes when you go through things, you're like, oh yeah, you don't know how to react. Well back then, as a child, I knew that if I used, everything was better, I wouldn't feel anything. So now as an adult I have to actually go through all those emotions, if that makes sense. (Selena)

Unable to accept the multiple traumas she had been through, Selena reportedly dealt with many emotions throughout her childhood. It took Selena many years afterwards, far into her adulthood, to understand that dealing with and moving on from her trauma was necessary if she wanted to stop using drugs as a way of coping. Therefore, Selena did not learn to cope with her traumas until years after they had occurred.

Unlike Selena who was seeking to accept what happened to her, the following participants were seeking acceptance from others, such as their loved ones, as a way to learn to accept themselves and the traumas they experienced. For example, Marie stated:

> As a kid, you want your parents to be happy with you and to think that you said or did something to make one of them happy, mad or upset. Like you just don't want to be in that position. (Marie)

As a child, Marie was reportedly conscious of always wanting to keep her parents happy, both in her actions and words. She understood the turbulence that was occurring within the family and felt that if she were to be her best, she could obtain their approval. Marie stated that she constantly worried about what she should conceal or reveal to her parents to avoid upsetting either one of them. According to Petronio's (2002) third privacy management principle, privacy rule development, Marie is seeking acceptance from her parents by regulating what she chooses to say to her parents. Furthermore, "privacy changes when circumstances warrant it" (Wilbur, 2018, p. 74). Prior to Marie's household going their separate ways when she was a child, she reportedly never was concerned with saying what she wanted to say, when and where she wanted to say it when it came to her parents.

Participant three, who has been given the pseudonym Jackie, is a 54-year-old White female. Like the other participants, Jackie also disclosed what she had experienced as a child. Many times throughout her childhood, Jackie experienced trauma. Jackie went on to tell her parents about the trauma she was experiencing, however, they brushed her off and turned a blind eye. According to Jackie, her traumatic experiences only stopped when she herself became brave enough to say enough was enough. The disregard Jackie felt from her parents, and even her sister, reportedly left her with feelings of anger, frustration, and shame. Jackie, at 54 years-old, expressed that she is still seeking approval and acceptance from her loved ones. For example, Jackie states:

To not be believed is a big one, to not be understood. Mmm. Dismissed,

you know, the impact that it had on me, um, has, I feel like has never

really been recognized, you know, by the people that matter the most. You

know, my parents, my siblings. (Jackie)

Although Jackie did not say she accepted what happened to her specifically, she

did state that she is seeking acceptance and belief from her parents, siblings and

husband. Her loved ones, for years, have never recognized her pain and trauma

from her childhood. For some individuals who are never given confirmation that

they in fact have experienced trauma, they often find it hard for themselves to

accept what has happened.

According to CPM theory's catalyst criteria, Jackie originally was

motivated to seek help from her parents while she was experiencing her trauma.

However, children are often unaware that if they disclose private information, it

could potentially have more risk than benefit (Almas, Grusec, & Tackett, 2011).

Jackie's parents created a cold, and harsh context for her, thus teaching her that

disclosing private information could have negative consequences or no action

taken at all. This reportedly altered Jackie's views of how and when she should

conceal and reveal private information to others throughout her life, which in turn

created boundaries.

Participant eight, who has been given the pseudonym Rico, is a 25-year-

old Latino male. Like the other participants, Rico also disclosed what he had

experienced as a child; however, to ensure his confidentiality, this information will

be left out. Rico began experiencing mental health issues around the age of 9 that caused mostly in part from his traumatic experiences. When he went to his mother with his mental health concerns, she automatically turned him away and sent him to speak with a therapist. Furthermore, when other family members became aware Rico was having mental health issues, they came to him with anger and even went as far as threatening him. Rico reported that he continuously struggled with his mental health throughout his childhood. Lastly, Rico was also associated with a gang in his neighborhood where he witnessed and endured a violent and drug filled lifestyle. The traumatic experiences Rico endured in his childhood reportedly left him feeling alone, scared, angry, confused, depressed and a lack of self-confidence.

Furthermore, Rico experienced a different form of silencing than any of the other participants. As stated, Rico was involved in a gang during his childhood; whereas stated previously, individuals in gangs go by the phrase "snitches get stitches." For Rico, this meant that he had to learn to remain silent about something he had maybe seen or been a part of. If another gang member had found out that Rico had said something he should not have to someone he should not have, he could have wound up physically hurt. During our interview, Rico had this to say about learning silencing behaviors from gang culture:

Within that [gang] culture you learn to be silenced a lot about things, whether it is, uh, illegal activity or just other activities that are associated with that. And um, you can't speak about certain things because then you

can get in trouble within their politics or you're also seen as a snitch. And

so, a lot of things I didn't really talk about was because some of the stuff

that I grew up from. That culture kind of got instilled in me. And so, I, from

time to time, I do talk about certain things, but it's also difficult too as well

'cause um… yeah, it's just, it's just that. That those ideologies that have

been instilled. (Rico)

The impact of learning silencing behaviors at a young age had on Rico shows us

the possible longitudinal power it can have on individuals throughout their life.

Rico also stated that he still struggles with wanting to speak up about certain

things because of what he has learned, however, he makes every effort to do

what is best for him. According to CPM theory, both core and catalyst criteria are

involved in Rico's reasoning behind his silencing behaviors. For example, gang

culture had taught him that speaking up was absolutely against the rules and

there would be severe consequences if he did. These are common group values

of gangs, making the cultural criteria important learned behaviors that now play a

large role in Rico's silencing behaviors.

Furthermore, Rico's gender played a role in how his family reacted to his

mental health issues as a child. They believed that since he was a male, he

should just "man up." Additionally, catalyst criteria played a role in Rico's choice

to disclose to his mother when he first began experiencing mental health issues

because he felt that the benefits greater outweighed his risk. For example,

changes occur within the rules when the risk-benefit ratios vary, when

motivations for telling or concealing are changed, or when circumstances occur that call for different privacy rules, such as a separation or relational breakdown (i.e., having to tell family and friends you have an eating disorder, mental health concerns, or trauma). Rico experienced a violation of trust when he told his family about his mental health concerns and he was brushed off.

According to muted group theory, Rico also displays behaviors similar to those groups who might be characterized through this theoretical lens. Although the focus of muted group theory falls primarily under the hegemonic umbrella that women are among the silenced groups, men can also fall victim to abuse and are silenced in different contexts, such as witnessing gang violence or those whom are victims of violence themselves. Which in Rico's case, limited his access to communicate freely. Due to his gang affiliation in his teen years, Rico was taught that he could not say what he wanted to say, when and where he wanted to say it. This social form of silencing has impacted Rico, and many others who experience gang culture. As an educated individual now, Rico finds himself able to finally speak freely in a safe environment and understands the importance of having a voice. Coming from a background such as Rico's creates a sense of power for him that he had reportedly been unable to feel previously.

Rico was one of the very few participants who seemed confident in accepting his childhood traumas.

I did struggle a good part of my life trying to learn to accept myself for who I am and things like that. But, um, the reason why I really love being an

introvert is because anywhere I am, I learn to feel comfortable and at ease

with myself…I learned to stop being angry at the world, angry at myself,

and allowing myself to explore new things. That was when I first started

my journey of being able to be happy with who I am. At one point in time I

did not like the person I saw in the mirror, but I now look at the person in

the mirror and I'm happy with who I became. (Rico)

Rico disclosed that he had experienced multiple childhood traumas, where he

learned silencing behaviors, as well as who he could trust to reveal information

to. Rico learned the CPM game of tug-of-war at a young age, due to both core

and catalyst criteria. Based on core criteria, Rico fits all three categories of

culture, gender and privacy orientation. Rico learned most of his cultural beliefs

on silencing via gang affiliation. Being a male, Rico was expected by both family

and gang members to not gossip or open his mouth when he was not supposed

to according to their cultural norms. Rico's road to acceptance is a successful

one, which is something he is proud of. For years of feeling alone, depressed,

and unaccepted, Rico reportedly can finally feel like he is happy with who he has

become despite his struggles.

Acceptance, either of one's own traumatic experiences or seeking

acceptance from others, in relation to silence, can become an important

characteristic of CPM theory. Looking through a CPM lens, we can understand

that when we seek acceptance from others this might also entail how individuals

regulate revealing and concealing private information. In other words, we can go

back to the definition of silence used in this study where silence is viewed as a "communicative gesture". It is an individual's choice whether to give co-ownership of their private information to another person, while also deciphering if after sharing, they will be accepted for who they are or not after the other person knows they had been through a traumatic experience(s). When an individual chooses this route, they are constructively managing their silencing behaviors by holding power and control over whom they choose to share information with. With this choice to reveal private information, I found that one participant viewed their silence as empowering. The perspective of the following individual is something that I was not at all expecting and was interesting to hear how this participant viewed silence as empowering.

<u>Silence as Empowerment</u>

For some individuals, deliberate silence can be used to "don a new identity" (Acheson, 2007, p. 31) in an effort to place control over a traumatic situation. According to Parpart (2014), the definition of empowerment is "about people—both women and men—taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems, and developing self-reliance" (p. 383). Individuals who experience trauma, at any point in their life, may experience a lack of feeling strong or confident due to a loss of control that occurred during a traumatic experience. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, esteem is one of the five basic human needs.

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Feeling strong and confident takes time to develop as humans navigate through life and when we lack this basic human need, we may struggle to obtain the other levels as well. However, many individuals who have experienced trauma seek to gain control of their life again, as previously mentioned. This may look different to everyone in the way they seek control. Silence has been found to be a powerful communicative act that can be constructive if used for the proper reasons because silence is dependent upon meanings (Houston & Kramarae, 1991). The value an individual holds for silence as empowering is the control they feel they have over a situation or information. There are few scholars that deny silence as a powerful, constructive communicative act, and even view silence as a position of strength for an individual (Acheson, 2007).

Responses that fall within this theme sought control of their experiences through holding onto the choice to remain silent. Participant four, who has been given the pseudonym Leslie, is a 25-year-old Latina. Similar to the other participants, Leslie also felt it was relevant to disclose what she had experienced as a child. At two different times in Leslie's early childhood, she experienced trauma. The time between both incidents was approximately seven years. These traumatic experiences reportedly left Leslie feeling confused, ashamed, guilty, angry and alone.

Leslie was an interesting case. Leslie was the only one who viewed her silence as empowering. Leslie repeated several times throughout her interview that she felt a sense of control over her truth, knowing that she had the power to

decide when to tell anyone, if she ever did, about her childhood traumatic experiences. Furthermore, she reportedly felt strongly about silence as a form of empowerment and this was visible not only through her words, but her nonverbal communication during our interview as well. For example, although she cried during the interview, as soon as she began to speak about silence as empowerment again in the conversation, she would wipe her eyes, sit up straight, and use an assertive tone of voice and firm hand gestures. Leslie states:

> I think it's empowering, but I also think it's all scary, you know, to talk about things. So, it's something that I've, I personally feel like it's something that you've worked on so much to like, not say anything today. I'm going to cry now… Sorry. [Long pause] People should speak up, but, um, I feel empowered in a way. I feel scared when, like I said, because it's something that I've worked on for so many years to not say anything and I everything that I've been able to control, not saying anything. So, the point, the fact that you're so vulnerable, it's scary. (Leslie)

Leslie views what happened to her as a child as something she must keep locked away from everyone around her. She stated that her silence is something that she has worked on for many years, which for her, is a communicative gesture that she is stronger than she felt in her moments of trauma. Like Violet, Leslie also fits characteristics of muted group theory. Muted group theory explains Leslie's behavior that she has been exhibiting for years now in relation to her silencing behaviors. Leslie is among the group of individuals who have

been abused that feel their voices are dominated by their guilt and shame; however, Leslie's resilience and strength shine through her pain, allowing her to reportedly turn her guilt, shame, and pain into feelings of empowerment.

Furthermore, according to CPM theory, Leslie's silencing behaviors can also be characterized through this theoretical lens. For example, Leslie very strictly regulates who to reveal and conceal private information to. Although she stated that she often is a very closed and private person, her choices to reveal and conceal private information also fall under core (which include culture, gender, and privacy orientation) and catalyst (which explain for times when privacy rules are receptive to needed change) rules. Leslie's cultural beliefs on what should be open information taught by her parents, versus secret, can impact an individual's choice on concealing and revealing.

According to Ahrens et al. (2010) they state that "Latinas were hesitant to disclose for fear of disappointing their family and causing strife" (p. 285). Because Leslie felt so much shame and guilt, she did not want to let her parents or family down. Leslie's gender also plays a role in who and what is appropriate to disclose, because women need to feel confident in the people they choose to disclose to, which is what Leslie had stated. Furthermore, Ahrens et al. (2010) study concluded that nearly every focus group that was a part of their study had described gender role ideologies that privilege men over women. The privacy, culture, and gender rule criteria that have been applied to Leslie's experiences

provide insight into how individuals learn to guide privacy rules and manage boundaries.

People who have experienced trauma often deal with it in their own way and this may look different for every individual. Whether or not their way of figuring out how to go about their daily lives after experiencing trauma is healthy or not, many individuals will choose to do what makes them feel best. For some, this may be talking to a therapist, family, or friends. For Leslie, not talking about it to anyone at all, reportedly, was her way of finding strength in a sea of chaos and confusion. Leslie stated the following during our interview when asked what silence meant to her:

> I also see it [silence] as a way of empowerment because you can't control what ever happened to you and the only thing you have control over is not letting anyone else know. So yes, I can see it as a form of submission. I do see it as a, as a form of not saying anything, but I also feel like it could be really empowering because it's the only thing you can control. (Leslie)

Although Leslie stated that she can understand how some may view silence as a form of submission, she was firm on her belief that silence is a form of empowerment. Later in our interview, Leslie also stated that she does not like to use the word victim because she does not like to feel sorry for herself. She also said that although silence can make individual's feel ashamed, they should still view it as a form of empowerment. The traumatic experiences that Leslie had to endure have had a direct impact on her silencing behaviors as an adult now.

Bogoroch-Ditkofsky (2005) stated "silences that sting, bruise, and hurt cause disappointment and even evoke feelings of despair" (p. 189). Leslie feels that sharing these experiences will allow her to feel shame, submissive and vulnerable. Leslie chooses to believe that, looking through a CPM theoretical lens, the only way she can regain control of her past is by concealing those two stories from everyone. The trust that Leslie lost for others reportedly greatly increased following her traumatic experiences. When we give trust to individuals who are supposed to love and care for us and are hurt by them, we have lost confidence in them. Individuals also reported that upon disclosing to others about their trauma(s), they experienced one of two forms of judgement which in turn led many to not want to disclose at all.

<center>Destructive Means of Silencing Experiences</center>

The second major category that arose upon coding is: Destructive Means of Silencing Experiences. The themes of this category are: Judgement, Victim Blaming, Minimizing Trauma, and Harmful Expressions of Pain. It is important to note in what ways to who and how participants have destructively expressed their silencing behaviors. To maintain intimate relationships and avoid conflict, individuals must also be aware of self-silencing behaviors that can constrain "one's thoughts, feelings, and actions" (Arroyo, Woszidlo, & Janovec, 2020, p. 507). According to Arroyo, Woszidlo, & Janovec (2020):

> Self-silencing is problematic because it does not allow women to express authenticity, limits their self-development, and can lead to the experience

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of a divided self, wherein a woman externally appears satisfied and

content but internally feels anger and dissatisfaction for suppressing her

genuine self. (p. 507)

There are many scholars that believe silence is a marker of oppression,

marginalization, lack of agency, culture, and power and a loss of one's identity.

Moreover, secrets have been considered one of the most toxic forms of silence

(Arroyo, Woszidlo, & Janovec, 2020; Goodall, 2005), stating that this form of

silencing typically stemmed from abuse or other power dynamics within the

household. To have a destructive means of silencing experiences means an

individual is harming their own wellbeing by participating in silencing behaviors,

as well as expressing their pain by self-harm, use of drugs, developing eating

disordered behaviors, etc. Reasons why individuals may have chosen to

participate in silencing behaviors from this study arose from the following themes:

Judgement, Victim Blaming, Minimizing Trauma, and Expressions of Pain. There

are two categories of judgement identified: (1) judgement from others, and (2)

judgement from self.

Judgement

Judgment can also take the form of victim-blaming, which also became a

separate theme that will be a subcategory to judgement. Both judgement and

victim blaming can be experienced by self and others. For many participants, the

topics arose from the following interview question: "In what ways do you feel you

have been silenced as an adult (self or others)? Are there any particular

instances you can recall?" (See Appendix A). Often the individual would feel as though they had no other choice but to remain silenced for fear of being judged. Therefore, participating in a destructive means of silencing behaviors. When an individual felt they were being judged by others, it would lead them to reportedly feel betrayed and alone, thus leaving the individual feeling as though they should not disclose. In addition, judgment falls under the category of Destructive Means of Silencing Experiences due to this theme reportedly leaving individuals feeling rejected and antisocial. Some participants, however, would also be hard on themselves.

Participant seven, who has been given the pseudonym Michael, is an 18-year-old Hispanic male. Michael also chose to disclose his childhood trauma. As a child, Michael reported that he endured verbal abuse and neglect from his parents. Michael's father worked a lot, however, when he was home, he talked down to Michael and often used pejorative language. Michael's mother reportedly never stood up for him during the abuse, leaving him with feelings of betrayal, loneliness, and a lack of self-confidence.

Michael's experiences have shaped him into the person he is today. Characteristics that Michael has now as an adult are reportedly fear of rejection, approval seeking, antisocialism, as well as a fear of being judged by others. Michael stated:

I feel like it's a very wide thing where a lot of people are afraid of judgment. I've often felt I've opened up to people or talk to people and

they kind of dismiss you as, as being irrelevant or unimportant and that

that kind of creates a sense of rejection and it makes you feel bad about

yourself. So, and nobody really wants to be rejected. So, I'd rather just not

show a vulnerable side or risk being hurt. (Michael)

As stated previously, Michael's trauma consisted of emotional neglect and verbal

abuse. When an individual is made to feel unimportant, both by communicative

gestures and verbally, they can feel a sense of rejection as Michael stated.

These actions can lead to the individual pulling away from others in fear of

judgment (O'Leary & Barber, 2008; Weiss, 2010). According to CPM, Michael fits

the privacy orientation core criteria group, or family, value that his family had

ingrained in him (Petronio & Durham, 2015; Serewicz & Canary, 2008). Michael's

family reportedly made him believe that whatever emotions he felt should be

pushed down and not be discussed. Therefore, his communication style altered

based on what he learned from his family. Michael stated that after he sought

help from his family and they rejected his feelings, he made the decision to

isolate his thoughts and emotions from then on. Michael's fear of judgement and

rejection led him to use silence as a communicative gesture.

Selena feared judgement from her mother not only as a teenager, but

even as a young adult. As stated previously, Selena used drugs to cope with her

childhood traumas. Her drug use continued into adulthood until she finally

decided to leave everything behind and learn to cope with her trauma in healthier

ways. Selena stated, "On my mom's part, I was afraid of how she would look at

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me or how she would talk to me or would she, if she knew I was using off and on. Would she believe me that I was sober?" Although Selena vocalized that her fear of judgement from her mother was from the aftermath of the trauma she endured as a child, Selena also eventually learned to accept being judged by others, stating, "I'm at the point in my life where I'm 30…I don't care if people judge me, people judge me on my life. I'm gay. It is what it is." Not many individuals who experience trauma can feel like Selena does. Nevertheless, it is possible.

Selena's decision-making process in how she decides to reveal and conceal information to are heavily influenced according to the five core principles of communication privacy management. For example, Selena is the owner of her private information and maintains the right to either disclose or withhold it from anyone and oversees controlling her private information (Petronio, 2002). In the process of controlling her private information, Selena constructed boundaries that guide and shape her rules for disclosure to control the release of her private information based on her past experiences of disclosing to others (Wilbur, 2018).

Once the decision is made to disclose, the person Selena decides to disclose to becomes co-owner of her information. Lastly, when the person who has just been granted private information violates the privacy rules, boundary turbulence happens which can have consequences for Selena and her relationship with the person she chose to disclose to (Petronio, 2002). Previously, Selena had feared judgement from her mother if she had decided to reveal to her that she had been addicted to drugs. However, CPM principles

explain how over time, Selena had learned that she had control over her private information, allowing her to decide when or if she would disclose to her mother.

Ivy also displayed a fear of being judged by others. However, Ivy included that because she is White, she feels that her trauma can often be pushed aside by others. Stating that she feels she can be overlooked sometimes as someone who has struggled because she believes that Caucasians are automatically assumed to be privileged and not grow up with issues. Ivy stated:

I feel like I'm going to be constantly judged if I share traumatizing experiences that I've had as a child or traumatizing situations that my, my parents experienced that have affected me…I know people have it worse than me, but it's just like, well, if it's constantly going to be about someone else, when is it going to be about me? (Ivy)

The idea that others have it worse, is minimizing her own trauma based on her fear of being judged. Ivy clearly would like to talk about her experiences, however, is afraid of being judged by others so much that she chooses to keep a wall up around her. The thought of sharing our experiences can be terrifying enough, let alone adding in a fear of what others might say or think of us after disclosing, which falls in line with the fourth and fifth principle of CPM. Once the decision is made to disclose, that person becomes co-owner of the information, according to the fourth principle. Secondly, when the person who has just been granted private information violates the privacy rules, boundary turbulence happens which can have consequences for the individual and their relationship

with the person they chose to disclose to (Petronio, 2002). Ivy fears more that others will reportedly judge her for her past experiences.

Contrastingly, the second type of judgement that was identified in this theme, judgment from self, can be analyzed using participant Marie's story. Marie stated:

Sometimes I feel like there's the real Marie, and then this show Marie, like you know, outside of the home. I always try to be happy or have a smile. Like no matter what is going on, you know, and then at home, like that's when I break down or I just tend to myself or that's where I'm angry.

(Marie)

Marie's response tells me that she is extremely hard on herself and believes that she must put on a show, in a sense, for others in order to save face. Marie reportedly does not like to share her emotions, thoughts, or feelings, and to avoid doing so with others, Marie would rather walk around with a fake smile to hide her pain. Although Marie is afraid of judgement by others, she is also judging herself. Looking through a CPM theoretical lens, Marie's need to conceal her private information weighs very heavily on her shoulders on a daily basis. Marie seldom chooses to self-disclose and engages in self-silencing behaviors due to a lack of self-worth, shame, and guilt for fear of not being believed, or fear of being judged (O'Leary & Barber, 2008; Weiss, 2010).

Similar to Marie, Leslie also does not like to share and avoids doing so. However, as stated previously, Leslie views her silence as empowering. In the following statement, Leslie reveals a fear of judgement from others. Leslie states:

It's harder because of the relationship. That was my uncle when I was 11. If that wouldn't have happened, I feel now as an adult, it would be easier to say, hey, this stranger when I was five did this. But Oh, by the way, when I was 11 this happened, I think that the experience that I had when I was 11 makes it harder for me to speak up because I feel, I can't just say, oh yeah, this happened to me when I was five. That's it. I feel like I'd have to tell everything that happened. (Leslie)

Leslie's last statement demonstrates that she is afraid of what others might think of her choice to disclose years beyond the actual traumas. After waiting years to talk about it, she fears that others will judge her as well as question her intentions. According to CPM, Leslie's inability to communicate her past traumatic experiences are dominated by both self and others. Her decision on who to reveal and conceal information to has become so much a part of who she is that it has allowed her to find meaning behind those choices. In addition to Leslie's fear of others judging her, she had also previously mentioned she feared being blamed for her traumas. Victim blaming is a phenomenon that occurs for individuals who experience trauma (Walsh & Foshee, 1998). The following section, victim blaming, emerged as a theme after multiple interviews had been completed.

Victim Blaming

Some stereotypes that lead to victim blaming include, but are not limited to clothing the victim was wearing, consumption of alcohol or drugs, flirtatious behavior, etc. When any of these occur or are said, what commonly follows is phrases such as, "They were wearing a short skirt and flirting all night long, so they were asking for it." For individuals who experience domestic violence, for example, others will say "They must have said something to make their partner mad, they deserved it." The culture of victim blaming in our society has also made victims afraid to speak up. Meaning that victim blaming can be manifested by blaming him/herself instead of being blamed by others, destructively participating in silencing behaviors.

Additionally, many individuals are afraid of what others might say or think, leaving them afraid to come forward with their traumatic experiences. The fear alone of feeling as though an individual might be blamed for what happened to them, creates or adds to already existing destructive silencing behaviors. The questions asked that led me to the theme of victim blaming were: "In what ways do you feel you have been silenced as an adult (self or others)? Are there any particular instances you can recall?" and "How do you feel your childhood traumatic experience impacted your adult life in relation to silencing behaviors, if at all?" (See Appendix A).

Walsh and Foshee (1998) state that "good will be rewarded and evil will be punished, and therefore, that if bad things happen to certain people, those

people must have brought misfortune upon themselves" (p. 141). What the authors were referring to is the 'just world' belief, developed by Rubin and Peplau (1975). These beliefs have been hypothesized to be precursors to victim blaming because they can obstruct our realistic awareness. An individual might choose to participate in silencing behaviors due to the societal implications that are linked to victim blaming. Jackie's response shows the longitudinal effects of victim blaming, stating:

> One of the things that I've always wished for, I guess, is that they would, my parents, would apologize. They knew my grandfather, his behaviors... and they would even leave me with him. And when I have tried to talk to them about it, even to this day, um, they've never apologized. And so, I haven't talked to them about it in years because I just kind of, kind of figured what's the point, you know? I feel silenced. I can't say how I feel. (Jackie)

The actions of her parents after the abuse, even years later, made Jackie feel as though they blamed her for her grandfather's behavior. Never acknowledging anything different, Jackie always wondered what she did to entice the abuse, and this can be common thoughts of someone who is victim blamed. Society had led Jackie to believe that she would be to blame for her traumatic experiences, that she was at fault somehow for what had occurred to her in her childhood.

Additionally, the way her parents reacted to the situation reportedly made Jackie believe that somehow the trauma inflicted upon her was her fault. Victim

blaming falls into correlation with muted group theory, as individuals are often not alone in this particular phenomenon. The domination of the hegemonic society that we live in overpowers the ability of an individual to be able to say what they want to say, when and where they want to say it. As previously mentioned, individuals can be blamed for abuse they endured solely based on what they may have been wearing (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013).

Leslie also experienced similar thoughts of victim blaming, however, to this day she has yet to tell her parents. Leslie stated that she is afraid of telling her parents because she feels they would blame her somehow. She stated:

Growing up I knew that it was wrong what happened to me, but it was more so of, I can't say anything now as an adult because they [parents] won't believe me…why would I say something if you're not even going to believe me? Or somehow, it was going to be turned on me, or it's been so long. Like, what's making you talk about it now? Like, you would think they would be the person you would go to. But I just feel like they would be the first ones who judge and even though they, even though in your head, you know they won't. I don't know... there's just still something that tells you, like, they're still going to blame me. Or they're still going to question like, "well what did you do?" Sometimes I even asked myself, like if I were to tell my mom, she would beat herself up over it and she would say, "well, what did I do wrong?" (Leslie)

Leslie reportedly has a lot of thoughts and feelings surrounding her parents and reasons why she does not think she should tell them. Reported underlying feelings of shame and guilt also factor into her experiences which cause her to feel like her parents might blame her somehow. Leslie also worries about her parents emotional and mental wellbeing; for instance, when she stated her mother might wonder what she did wrong. Even though Leslie has never told her parents about the two traumatic incidents, feeling like she might be blamed is a common feeling amongst victims (Harber, Podolski, & Williams, 2015).

Muted group theory explains Leslie's behavior, caused by her fear of her father blaming her, as a repression of speech (Ardener, 2005). Leslie also limited her communication with others about her experience because of her Latina cultural background. According to Lefley, Scott, Llabre, and Hicks (1993), they found that "Hispanics were most likely to attribute victim blaming views to most men and most women in their ethnic communities" (p. 628). She feared that her father would blame her for "allowing" herself to be put in that position.

Similarly, after Violet was let down continuously and the abuse continued, she reportedly decided at one point that she would no longer speak up. Her abuser now had children of his own and she was afraid they would blame her if the truth came out and tore their family apart. Violet stated:

I felt as if, um, if I did that, um, the people, well, the family members, um, their kids I guess, would come to hate me and blame me. So, I was like, I'll just, it's better if I stay quiet and just don't say anything. It's better for all of

us. I was also scared that she'd [mother] blame me and just tell me like,

oh, like "why, why would he do that?" Like, "why would you let that happen

to yourself?" (Violet)

Time and time again, Violet sought help from her parents and each time she was

let down. As Violet got older, she feared her mother would now question why she

would let the abuse happen to her. Thinking that she could stop it from

happening because she was older now. However, Violet also disclosed that her

abuser would manipulate and coerce her by saying things such as, "No one is

going to believe you," and "If you say anything to anyone, I won't help your

parents anymore [financially]." Although Violet's mother or her abuser's children

never actually blamed her, she was afraid they would. Violet's abuser used his

hegemonic male power position to his advantage by completely dominating

Violet's ability to communicate freely. He instilled fear in her that made her

reportedly feel muted and unable to speak up about what happened to her. Violet

feared the repercussions of not only being blamed for the abuse, but also what

might happen to her family financially because of the threats her abuser had

made.

Violet's experiences reportedly left her feeling let down, angry, confused,

depressed and worthless. Learning silencing behaviors began at a very young

age for Violet, both from self and others. Part of Violet's silencing behaviors are

also culturally engrained in her, which would fit the core criteria component of

CPM theory. Cultural influences on disclosing experiences of sexual assault and

intimate partner violence have been looked at by many scholars. Ahrens, Rios-Mandel, Isas, and Del Carmen Lopez (2010) examined traditional gender roles and beliefs about marriage, attitudes towards sexual assault and intimate partner violence, cultural norms against sharing personal information with strangers, and cultural norms against sharing family secrets amongst Latinas.

What they found was that participants focused on "…how male privilege, the subordinate position of women, and the sanctity of family tends to justify and obscure instances of interpersonal violence" (p. 291). Furthermore, Ahrens et al. (2010) states that when describing difficulties with disclosure, participants focused on:

> Repercussions such as being blamed or bringing shame on the family. This desire to protect the family is consistent with research suggesting members of collectivistic cultures may refrain from disclosing to friends and family out of a sense of shame and a desire to not burden their social networks. (p. 291)

Violet having stated that she was fearful of being blamed became a reality for her. Her cultural background created distinct differences between her and her parents in the sense of their traditional beliefs that private matters should be kept private.

In her early childhood, Violet reportedly feared she had to be silent for multiple reasons, such as not being believed because her abuser told her that no one would believe her, fear of being blamed for the abuse, as well as the fear

that nothing would happen to her abuser even if she did seek help. It was during

Violet's teen years where her silence took a shift towards feelings of guilt and

shame. Violet stated:

> I've been silencing myself ever since I was a kid, so that's, that's a big part
>
> of it…I remember I told this family member about it [childhood traumatic
>
> experience] as well, and when I told this family member about it, I
>
> remember that they made a phone call and I was scared because I was
>
> like, oh, this is going to be a huge problem. Everyone's going to find out.
>
> So then, um, after that, like the trauma did stop for like, uh, like two
>
> months or so, but then it began again. So then at that time I was like, I
>
> can't talk about it anymore because it's just, it's never gonna stop. And
>
> then, um, in a way, uh, that person, they would blame me for it. So, they'd
>
> be like, oh, no one's going to believe you. (Violet)

Violet had stated in the interview that she had told someone more than once

about her traumatic experiences. Each time she would say anything, the trauma

would stop for a brief time; however, the trauma would continue shortly after.

Violet believed that because the person inflicting trauma would often help her

parents financially, that this was the main reason why her parents never decided

to take legal action, as well as why the person inflicting trauma felt he had a right

to do so. As Violet got older, she began to feel guilty about saying anything to

anyone about her traumatic experiences in fear that she would ruin the lives of

the persons family inflicting trauma. Many victims of trauma, such as what Violet

had to endure, often feel the same as her.

Constantly being let down by people who are supposed to protect you can

lead individuals to believe that remaining silent is their only option. Muted group

theory explains Violet's behavior that she has been exhibiting for years now in

relation to her silencing behaviors. The theory explains how groups who feel they

are unable to communicate because their voices are often dominated. Violet is

among the group of individuals who have been abused that feel their voices are

dominated by their guilt and shame, brought on by not only the person inflicting

the trauma, but their own family as well.

Individuals who are blamed for their traumatic experiences may also feel,

or are taught, that they are the 'problem' (Harber, Podoloski, & Williams, 2015).

Michael states:

It took me a long time to realize that it's not really a 'me' problem. It's a

'them' problem. And I believe that when you were silenced as a child or as

like a, um, adult, even, I feel like we're taught 'you'… like, you're the

problem. It's your fault. And it kills me now, because I even see it

happening with my nieces that they're getting the victim blaming. And so, I

always tell them like, it's okay to cry. It's okay to do these things. It's okay

to have these feelings, but don't hold on to that anger or hurt. (Michael)

For Michael and other victims who experience trauma, victim blaming just adds

insult to injury, like pouring salt on an open wound. Victim blaming challenges

"their morals, demeans their judgment, and diminishes their right to sympathy at the height of their suffering. Victim blaming contributes to victims' self-blame, self-silencing, and distrust of others. It also heightens their anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder" (Harber, Podoloski, & Williams, 2015, p. 603). The impact that victim blaming has on an individual can have everlasting effects, as shown through research I have found, as well as through the interviews conducted for this research (O'Leary & Barber, 2008; Weiss, 2010).

Michael's experience with victim blaming from his family and how he has responded to his trauma regarding communication and silencing behaviors can be explained using CPM theory's core culture and privacy orientation criteria. For example, Michael stating that he now worries for his nieces implies that he was aware how victim blaming affected himself long term, regarding his style of communication and how past trauma has affected his silencing behaviors as an adult. Michael's style of communication tends to lean more towards being that of an introvert and gets anxiety around others he is not familiar with. Additionally, coming from a Latin cultural background, Michael was taught that males in the family needed to "act like men" and were shamed for crying about situations that hurt them.

As mentioned thus far, CPM theory has been useful in providing a framework for how individuals understand and regulate their private information based on their personal interviews. As suggested by Harber, Podoloski, and Williams (2015) "negative emotions can also be resolved through emotional

disclosure, suggesting that disclosure can prevent victim blaming" (p. 603).

However, like Michael, Violet experienced disclosing her trauma, yet was still subject to victim blaming. This is not to say, however, that one instance makes this a false statement. Many individuals fear what might happen or be said if they choose to disclose their traumatic experiences.

According to Wood (2005), there is a certain "power in naming" within language and muted group theory focuses on this idea. For example, Rico was reportedly told phrases such as "be a man," and "don't be weak." For the simple meaning behind the word "woman," women are treated differently. When discussing the cases on rape culture, women are often targeted by what they were wearing or if they had makeup on and phrases such as "she was asking for it" or "well, did you see how short her dress was?" are brought into many conversations surrounding this subject. From personal experience, I was followed by a man in a parking lot after I had just finished working on campus. The thoughts revolving around my mind after the incident were thoughts that society has repeatedly imbedded into my mind such as, "I was wearing a pencil skirt, is that why?" and "Maybe if I wasn't wearing heels or makeup this wouldn't have happened." Unfortunately, the power in naming is language that we hear being used far too often that can influence women and men to believe the words they are being told. The following section will discuss how the participants communicate their silence by minimizing their trauma, or others minimizing their trauma.

<u>Minimizing Trauma</u>

For this theme, participants drew importance to the idea of minimizing their own trauma, or others telling them that their experiences were less traumatic than others; therefore, they should not feel like a victim. For many individuals who are told that what they have experienced is insignificant compared to others can really impact their own views of their traumatic experiences, to the point where they begin to believe it themselves. If an individual feels their experiences might be less than, they in turn might choose to stay silent about what they have experienced to avoid others making them feel as though what they have gone through is not as important as what someone else has gone through. Creating a destructive pattern of participating in silencing behaviors, individuals may bury their feelings and might think to themselves that if someone has it worse, why should they complain. By submitting to silencing behaviors, individuals are accepting the identity assigned to them by those they have now given power to. The questions asked that led to this theme include "Do you often find yourself engaging in self-silencing behaviors as an adult? Can you explain an instance or two where you have do done this?" (See Appendix A). For example, Leslie stated:

> My uncle from my dad's side, he used to touch me in really weird ways, and it was never to the point where I was sexually abused, but I was still harassed. This happened when I was about 11 or 12 years old. (Leslie)

Over and over again throughout our interview, Leslie would minimize the trauma she had endured as a child by saying things such as "he used to touch me in really weird ways, and it was never to the point where I was sexually abused, but I was still harassed". However, Arroyo, Woszidlo, and Janovec (2020) assert that silencing behaviors can be:

> Problematic because it does not allow women to express authenticity, limits their self-development, and can lead to the experience of a divided self, wherein a woman externally appears satisfied and content but internally feels anger and dissatisfaction for suppressing her genuine self. (p. 507)

According to muted group theory, individuals who have experienced a childhood trauma, feel unable to communicate because their voices have been dominated by self (O'Leary & Barber, 2008; Weiss, 2010). In some instances, individuals may have experienced more than one form of childhood trauma at a time, or throughout their adolescent years, which for Leslie is true. Experiencing multiple traumas can affect individuals in different ways and may encourage stronger tendencies to engage in self-silencing behaviors due to a lack of self-worth, shame, guilt, for fear of not being believed, or fear of being judged (O'Leary & Barber, 2008; Weiss, 2010).

Aside from the self-minimizing traumatic experiences, others have a way of also devaluing our experience(s) and can make individuals feel what they feel is not valid. Violet states:

You're just in the dark and when people do come out to the light about

their things, you want to relate with them, but you can't because you just

feel like your problem or your trauma that happened isn't as significant or

as big and impactful as theirs. So, you feel like people are just going to

brush it off and be like, oh, like, get over it and nothing happened. It was

just something small. So it just feels like something that, where you're

cornered in a way...people just don't understand or they just bash and like

say, um, a lot of people have gone through worse things, so then you just

go back into your corner and like, okay, well, like I'm just going to keep this

to myself now. (Violet)

Violet is communicating a fear of being judged by others because she fears that

they will think what she has gone through is not as significant or impactful as

theirs. She fears that if she discloses the trauma she experienced, that

whomever she reveals her private information to will tell her that her trauma is

not as significant, and that others have had it worse. This can be a common

response from some: "Yeah, you had it bad but others had it worse." Not that an

individual is necessarily trying to make one feel like their trauma is less, however,

their intentions can be misunderstood by saying this phrase. In an attempt to

make you feel better about your experience(s) they try to make you feel like what

you experienced was not as bad as it could have been.

This could make an individual feel guilty about feeling bad for themselves

rather than how the message was intended to come across. Pain is valid, no

matter what anyone else has been through. According to muted group theory, Violet's experiences and communication style after her trauma fully supports the behaviors she exhibited. Over time, Violet feeling as though she was unable to say what she wanted to when and where she wanted to say it due to others minimizing her traumatic experiences (Kramarae, 2005).

As previously mentioned, our society plays a role in how individuals may view their own experiences in relation to others who have "had it worse." For example, Ivy states:

> ...abuse that my parents and my aunts and uncles experienced. Which kind of, like, trickled down to me, my experience as a child, but it wasn't as bad as they had it, so I don't like, really like calling it abuse, but it like, I had my own abuse to deal with, too. (Ivy)

After being told that others have had it worse and that should make us feel better, individuals begin to believe this statement to be true. For example, according to muted group theory, individuals who experience this sort of censoring choose to acknowledge that others have possibly had it worse than themselves, therefore, encouraging their own process of mutedness (Burnett et al., 2009).

Although Ivy did not specifically state she felt what she experienced was less than what anyone else has experienced, other individuals do. For example, Michael states:

I feel like what I've gone through, what I've experienced is insignificant

compared to other people. (Michael)

Michael stood out from the other participants in the sense that although he disclosed a small amount of what he experienced as a child, he truly felt that what he experienced may not have been as awful as what other trauma individuals may experience. Some individuals choose to minimize what they experienced as a coping mechanism, as well as maladaptive coping and antisocial behavior (McBride & Ireland, 2016; Van der Kolk, 2005). Michael had previously expressed during our interview that he believed his trauma turned him into an introvert; however, at first impression, Michael seemed friendly and welcoming. Michael's responses and overall communication style aligns with the concepts of communication privacy management theory. For example, he felt unable to communicate because his voice had been dominated by self, due much in part to privacy orientations he was taught from his family. His overall experiences as a child shaped the way he communicated as well as his participation in silencing behaviors.

Needless-to-say, we have the right to feel whatever we are feeling, regardless of what others have experienced. Minimizing an individual's experienced trauma can lead them to believe that what they have experienced is not as important as someone else's trauma because it might seem worse. In a sense, the way silence can be understood regarding this theme is through a CPM theoretical lens.

Individuals who have experienced being silenced by a means of
minimizing their past traumas can feel as if they are in tug-of-war with the idea of
revealing based on their fears surrounding past experiences of their trauma
being minimized. However, these feelings can also lead individuals to seek other
ways of coping that they think might work for them such as self-harm or drug use.
Humans are capable of learning to cope with minor, as well as severe, traumatic
experiences; however, this may not be possible to do alone. Silencing behaviors
that we have been taught or learn to do ourselves can hold individuals back from
seeking the proper help they need. The following section discusses how
childhood traumatic experiences have affected the participants mental health in
ways such as self-harm, drug use, eating disorders and depression.

Harmful Expressions of Pain

Participants disclosed during their interviews that they have struggled with
self-harm, their mental health, as well as holding in their feelings and
experiences. "Due to the inability to express one's needs and thoughts within
their close relationships, self-silencing has been connected to a number of
reduced well-being outcomes, including mental health outcomes (e.g.,
depression, eating disorders" (Arroyo, Woszidlo, & Janovec, 2020, p. 507). Some
individuals expressed their pain through self-harm, others would fall into deep
depressive episodes, and some would just hide everything behind a smile. The
pain these participants reportedly felt led them to destructive means of silencing
behaviors. One of the most destructive ways to participate in silencing behaviors,

caused by the significant amount of emotional, physical, and mental pain

reportedly felt by the participants.

There has been little to no research conducted using muted group theory

in relation to mental health, such as depression and self-harm. However, I

believe this is a topic that should be further investigated due to what was found

during interviews for this research. Muted group theory recognizes that our

society (and others) is structured hierarchically, designating some groups as

more dominant (or centered) than others (Wood, 2005). Just as Ardener (1975)

found that women's voices are muted in Western society, over the last century or

so, individuals who struggle with their mental health have also been muted.

Individuals have been made to feel "weird" for feeling depressed, anxiety ridden,

or even just sad. They are made to feel like outcasts. The question asked during

the interview process that led to this theme include "How do you feel your

childhood traumatic experience impacted your adult life in relation to silencing

behaviors, if at all?" (See Appendix A). The following participants disclosed how

being silenced about the trauma they have experienced has affected their mental

health, and their paths down drug usage, self-harm and eating disordered

behaviors.

Every trauma that Selena endured in her childhood reportedly led her

down a destructive path of self-harm through her use of drugs, mainly

methamphetamine. For years after experiencing multiple childhood traumas,

Selena struggled to maintain sobriety. Selena stated:

If I was sitting in a room by myself and someone said, hey, here, hold this

pipe with this meth for me, I can't tell you that I wouldn't use it. (Selena)

Although Selena has stated previously that she now knows she needs to learn to

deal with her past in healthier ways, having been addicted to methamphetamines

may still cause her challenges in the future, such as searching for her dream job

in law enforcement. Methamphetamine usage reportedly made her feel numb

inside, where she could no longer feel the pain and rejection of her past. With

strength and will-power, Selena stated that she will overcome her thoughts of

using methamphetamine as a coping method, or in this case, a way she was

choosing to silence herself about her traumatic experiences. The process that

Selena chose not only suppressed her traumatic experiences, but according to

muted group theory, also reinforced the dominant worldview that she would not

be accepted because of what she experienced.

For other participants, although drug use was not something they turned

to, depression was a common theme. Marie stated:

I bottle a lot of things up, you know, until it becomes too much. And then I

go through anger…then when I'm angry at everyone or upset with

everyone, then I go to depression. Like, it's a cycle I've been doing for a

long time. I'm not saying it can't stop, but it's hard, you know. And

sometimes you don't even realize you're starting the cycle over again or

that you're in your cycle even until something blows up or something

makes you think, oh shit. Or when you're upset or angry or depressed or

whatever, and then you're down in the bottom and then you try to come

back up and sometimes it's hard. (Marie)

From childhood to adulthood, Marie has reportedly felt very much alone. Although she disclosed she was married for a time, she admits that even then, she felt as though she had no one to turn to. She was alone in her feelings and thoughts which would lead her to a path of depression and anger. Marie would like to move forward in her life and deal with her emotions in a healthier way but does not feel she has the ability to. According to communication privacy management theory core criteria, privacy orientation states that women need to feel confident in the people they choose to disclose to (Petronio, 2002). Using muted group theory as a theoretical lens for Marie's experiences, I can state that Marie is part of a minority group, women, who should not speak up about their emotions. Marie reported that feeling as though she has no one to talk to often times causes her to fall into depressive episodes.

The following participants disclosed that their silence, in relation to their traumas, caused them to self-harm through non-suicidal self-inflicted injury, such as cutting. There was no intent to commit suicide, rather a way for the individuals to feel better and this is the only way they knew how at the time. Overwhelmed with emotions caused by their trauma, participants sought alternative ways to feel better without committing suicide since they felt silenced by self or others. For example, Jackie stated:

In my twenties, I never spoke about it [trauma] ever. I was just angry…I

never, ever spoke about it. I cut myself and had a bad temper. (Jackie)

Typically, individuals who cut themselves are in their teens, however, it is not

uncommon for someone to continue this behavior in their twenties if they are

college students (DeAngelis, 2015). Jackie was unsure how to handle her

emotions surrounding her traumatic experiences and for years, had not been

believed by family. She felt that since no one had believed her before, why

should she speak up to anyone ever again. She was silenced by both self and

others. Jackie turned to self-harm because talking about her trauma was no

longer an option for her. According to muted group theory, Jackie's voice was

muted because she was a subordinate group of society, both as a child and

woman.

Furthermore, Violet, who also had a very similar traumatic experience as

Jackie, also suffered from depression and self-harm. Violet states:

It's had a huge impact on my life because for one, um, I really don't speak

up, speak out about a lot of things. So, when, um, when I was depressed

and everything, I began to self-harm and I never spoke out about it

because I told myself, "oh, I'm my own. I'm my own person and I can only

rely on myself." Like, no one's ever gonna like, um, love me. (Violet)

Both Jackie and Violet experienced continuous molestation by someone they and

their families knew. When each of them sought help, multiple times, they were

turned away. For these individuals, feeling loved was not something they were

receiving from the people who they thought were supposed to love and protect them. Resistance can come in many forms, such as a healthy way to resist against violence and oppression, to stop or refuse to comply with, as well as the idea that resistance does not have to be prescribed or instructed (Wade, 1997).

Wade (1997) states, "Extreme situations provide instruction for us, not so much in regard to the grander forms of loyalty and treachery as in regard to the small acts of living" (p. 32). For many individuals who encounter physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, it is the mere act of living that continues the resistance. Although they both turned to self-harm, anger, and depression, they are both examples of resilience. They struggled to get through their pain alone yet were able to go on living even if this meant using a destructive means of expression.

Lastly, the following participants have both experienced suicidal ideations multiple times that have stemmed from their childhood traumatic experiences. According to Mageary and Wixson (2017), discussing what matters to individuals who have experienced trauma is what is going to produce rich conversations that allow individuals who have suicidal ideations to think beyond these sorts of thoughts. Ivy states:

> I was made to feel ashamed to the point where it's just like, well fuck, like why am I even here then? When you're not heard, it just feels like what's the point anymore? So, it kind of pushes you to the point where sometimes, like, you don't even feel like living. (Ivy)

As our lives become structured by the dominant worldview of the hegemonic umbrella, individuals that are a part of muted groups feel more and more powerless, such as in Ivy's experience. The muting from other's that Ivy experienced pushed her to the point of having suicidal ideations. Although this scope is out of my knowledge, I feel that it is an important topic that should be researched further in relation to muted groups theory.

It is quite possible that individuals who are a part of muted groups, such as women, children, and those who have been victims of traumatic experiences suffer from long-lasting mental health effects such as the participants that I have interviewed. I believe that if this topic were researched further alongside muted group theory, there could be groundbreaking information to surface. Furthermore, I have also found that this topic does not discriminate against gender. For example, Rico states:

> When I first started having my [suicidal] ideations, which started around nine, um, I would try to talk to her [mother] about it and she would just be like, oh no, let's not talk about it or go see a therapist. And so, it became hard to try to talk to people I'm really close with and um, some family members would even get mad at me and try to hurt me because I thought like that, which didn't make sense to me. (Rico)

Rico's family members were minimizing his feelings by telling him they would hurt him for having suicidal ideations. Prior to the age of nine, however, Rico had reportedly already experienced multiple types of trauma. As a child, Rico did not

understand how to manage his emotions caused by his experiences and turned

to self-harm. As previously mentioned according to CPM and family beliefs, Rico

became a part of muted groups due to his gang affiliation as well as his male

family members. He was told at a young age by his male family members that as

a man, he should not show emotion or talk about what was bothering him.

Additionally, his gang affiliation also taught him that everything that goes on

within the gang, stays in the gang and if he were to speak upon anything, he

would face severe consequences. According to CPM, this can be viewed through

core culture criteria (Petronio & Durham, 2015).

Furthermore, literature suggests that adolescents who have experienced

abuse will have implications regarding their health, not only mentally but

physically as well (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Skomorovsky et al., 2006). Rico

states:

> I've had these negative self-serving biases, um, thoughts of myself and I
>
> still have these negative thoughts, like never really amounting to anything
>
> or, um, even, uh, body image issues. I was always either too skinny, too
>
> fat, and I was never like just the perfect human being, body size or shape.
>
> And so, I started having Anorexia, I would starve myself. And so, um, it's
>
> just something that carries on 'til now. I eat a little bit more often, but I still
>
> notice I do starve myself from time to time. (Rico)

Whether or not Rico knew this was his own way of coping, it certainly was and

was his own way of reacting and recovering from his traumatic experiences

(Tuval-Mashiach, Freedman, Bargai, Boker, Hadar, & Shalev, 2004). When an individual seeks safety and comfort because they feel threatened, they usually turn to the parents or a parental figure due to the expectations of attachment they have previously experienced. However, when a parent or parental figure is unavailable, like Rico's, the adolescent then turns to peers. The lack of security and comfort lead individuals to express these feelings through forms of disordered eating behaviors (Zachrisson and Skårderud, 2010). Individuals are seeking some form of control over their lives, and when they are unable to control relational attachments, eating disordered behaviors are just one way that individuals can find their place of comfort and control.

By the end of the conversation, Rico reported to have a new realization on how he adapted his thoughts, feelings, and actions throughout his life experiences. He stated that he now realized the ways in which he was lacking in communicating his emotions and thoughts was not the best way to deal with his traumas. He was hiding how he felt behind acts of self-harm and self-silencing. When Rico was able to realize that he needed to somehow address his feelings, he invited a sense of personal agency back into his life by responding to the situation as he encountered them (Carey, Walther, & Russell, 2009).

CHAPTER FOUR:

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to analyze how the participants make sense of their experiences with silencing through narrative analysis of their retrospective reports. The purpose of using retrospective accounts was to understand what silencing behaviors participants engage in and how they manage those silence behaviors as adults (RQ1), as well as how silence can be characterized though a muted group theoretical lens (RQ2), followed by how can silence be characterized through a CPM lens (RQ3). Understanding these past experiences will help determine reasons why they are silenced and to gain an in-depth understanding of the silenced adult phenomenon.

The questions I wondered about prior to interviews were if societal pressures cause them to be silenced? Was it parents and peers? None of the above? Or, perhaps both? I expected that those who have experienced a childhood trauma will be less inclined to report violent behavior/crimes/abuse (through learning about the concept of snitching and/or tattling; an abuser threatening the victim; or self-silencing behaviors) as an adult and would be more likely to engage in self-silencing behaviors. Although there are many important areas to explore involving silence, it is important to note that as a scholar, I entered this project open to any ideas of silence that may be formed after conducting this study.

The following discussion will provide in-depth interpretation of the themes generated from interviews, as well as illuminate clear connections of these themes to the theoretical frameworks, CPM theory and muted group theory. Although there is literature on communication mechanisms and processes that guide and shape silencing behaviors among individuals who have experienced trauma, the research conducted for this study can add to research on communication privacy management theory and muted group theory. The information that has been found from conducting this study can be used to inform and assist communication researchers and mental health professionals facilitating healthy disclosure about trauma and the long-lasting effects of silencing behaviors.

My intent was not to examine the difference between child abuse survivors and silencing behaviors, but to offer an analysis of experiences adults have in relation to their silencing behaviors and to take into account these experiences considering what previous research had suggested. Using a constructivist-interpretivist approach, I listened to the participants experiences with an open mind to how they understood their stories. Being open to interpretation allowed me to focus on the personal beliefs of the participants as well as on the social and theoretical contributions of the silenced adult within the communication field.

Finding value in making sure others are happy before our own happiness, still, in some way, allows us to find a pathway to our own healing process. However, although this can be an effective way to cope with our traumatic

experiences for a short time, this way of responding to trauma forces individuals to hold onto what is precious to us and question what is going on (Carey et al., 2009). Moments of abuse can cause a lifetime of challenges and struggles. The following section will dive into the research questions in relation to communication privacy management and muted group theory.

Implications of Themes

Data was analyzed in this study employing thematic analysis of the narratives given by the participants. Using a narrative methodological approach emphasized the individual's story and considers problems through different contexts. Finding strength as an individual can often times be overshadowed by more dominant stories about problems, such as traumatic experiences. What is beyond the problem story is the "future narratives of possibility and change" (Lang, 2016). Each participant has experienced trauma in their childhood that led them to participate in silencing behaviors, either by self or others. However, each individual also displayed resilience in their words and how far they have come beyond their trauma. Throughout the interviews, several participants had "ah hah" moments where they reportedly realized now what they did not know then. For example, realizing that they actually had chosen to silence themselves after experiencing trauma or that others had let them down so much, they gave up trying to even have a voice.

Research question one states: What silencing behaviors do participants engage in and how do they manage those silencing behaviors as adults?

According to the categories formed while organizing the themes, there are two major ways the participants explained how their past trauma has affected their participation in silencing behaviors: constructively or destructively. Themes related to how participants explain and make sense of their silencing behaviors include: (1) Constructive Means of Silencing Experiences with themes of Revealing Private Information, Trust, Acceptance, and Silence as Empowerment; (2) Destructive Means of Silencing Experiences with themes of Judgement, Victim Blaming, Minimizing Trauma, and Harmful Expressions of Pain. Using a narrative methodological approach, how the participants explain and make sense of their experience with silencing behaviors was more apparent after analyzing each theme.

Individuals who constructively manage their silencing behaviors explain and make sense of their participation by regulating who gets to know what about their lives or past experiences based on their level of trust with an individual, if they feel accepted by them, and last but not least, their level of comfortability with an individual. Contrastingly, individuals who destructively managed their silencing behaviors explain and make sense of their participation through behaviors such as self-deprecation. For example, a participant believing they deserved the trauma(s) they experienced as a child.

As stated previously, participants reportedly realized during the interviews that they did not know they were choosing to self-silence or that others had silenced them when they were younger. Although participants had similarities in

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how they each made sense of their silencing behaviors, there were also few who stood out, including individuals who choose to make sense of their silencing behaviors by choosing to self-silence because they view silence as empowering. Existing literature on why women can view silence as empowering and as a power move can also be conceptualized as a form of resistance (Brear, 2020; Houston & Kramarae, 1991; Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). Although Leslie illustrated her silence as empowering, she also for example, was visibly communicating pain through her nonverbal behaviors throughout her interview, such as tears, crossed arms and crossed legs.

Since every participant has a different story to tell, I knew the information that would come to light in this research would be different than what I have heard before. Some individuals in this study decided to use silence as a communicative gesture or as a way to find control of their situation or experience(s), others may have used silence as a form of privacy management, and lastly, some individuals may have been a part of a muted group. Additionally, for some, their choice to not reveal private information also included other factors such as not wanting to burden anyone else with their experiences.

Even though silence has been put into two categories for this study, it is important to remember that it was not my intention to dichotomize silence as binary; instead, view silence as a continuum that can be explained using these categories that have been formed to help better understand the themes and how participants in this study explain and make sense of their experience with

silencing behaviors. Some participants engaged in behaviors that were both

constructive and destructive, leading to the idea that the behaviors are not static,

binary categories. Deconstructing the idea that silence has been categorized as

constructive and destructive in this study was decided after the themes had been

coded. The categories were formed to offer a better understanding of how the

participants were participating in silencing behaviors. Once I realized that

participants were participating in silencing behaviors either in a constructive or

destructive manner, I combed through the themes to see which category the

participants examples belonged.

As a reminder, abuse of a child can be defined as emotional, physical, or

sexual abuse; trauma in a child's household environment can be defined as

substance abuse, parental separation and/or divorce, mentally ill or suicidal

household member, violence to mother, or imprisoned household member; and

lastly, neglect of a child can be defined as abandonment, child's basic physical

and/or emotional needs were unmet (Cloitre et al., 2009). Each of the

participants reported to have experienced one or more of the above-mentioned

traumatic experience(s). Grella et al. (2005) stated that it was unclear what

specific childhood traumatic events cause silencing behaviors in adults; however,

participants in this study were specifically chosen because they had experienced

one or more of the three types of trauma: abuse of a child, trauma in a child's

household environment, and neglect of a child. What I have found are specific

reasons why adults choose to participate in silencing behaviors when they had

experienced trauma as a child, and how they explain and make sense of their experiences through either a constructive or destructive manner. Additionally, the themes illuminated specific silencing behaviors caused by traumatic experiences.

Research question two states: How can silence be characterized through a muted group theoretical lens? Each participant was silenced one of two ways, by either self or others. Although participants may have exhibited differences in how they characterized silence, there were also similarities. For example, the way individuals learned to trust others with their private information after experiencing trauma; how individuals chose how and who to reveal or conceal private information; through victim blaming and the minimization of their experienced trauma by self or others. Additionally, participants learned who they could or could not trust when it came to reveal private information, and who they knew they could not trust. Silence is characterized in relation to trusting an individual in this sense.

Acheson (2007) asserted that "treatment of abuse and power in relationships, silence is silencing—the imposed inability to name oneself, events or others, and the internalization of the naming performed by others" (p. 4). This is not only "power in naming" but this is also the power of manipulation. According to Wood's (2005) "power in naming" aspect of muted group theory, we can take a look at victim blaming and how silence can be characterized through this particular theory. For the participants involved in this research who experienced victim blaming after their trauma, it was the language used by others

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that manipulated them into participating in silencing behaviors. Participants believe the words spoken to them because they have now become vulnerable after the trauma they have experienced. For example, participants are manipulated into believing their experiences are their fault, when in fact, they are not. Once the individuals believed what they were being told, they were in a sense forced into participating in silencing behaviors.

Viewing individuals who have experienced trauma through a muted group lens has truly allowed me to research aspects that go beyond just our male power society and women as a silenced group. This research has allowed me to now view women and men who have been traumatized and now communicate silencing behaviors. Additionally, the research that has been conducted can now be used to expand the view that muted group theory can be applied to men who have been silenced in the circumstances that have been looked at within the body of communication knowledge.

Women are expected to assimilate and function to the hegemonic ideals our society has created, from work exclusion to prescribed roles. However, when looking beyond the dichotomous view of male power versus women as silenced, I found that in some ways, they are more alike than not. For example, although Rico and Michael are males, they both experienced some form of silencing from other male counterparts they grew up with initially. Membership regarding muted group theory not only means to experience muteness, but it also means

struggling to communicate an individual lived experiences in their lives after

trauma according to the participants in this study.

Looking through a muted group theoretical lens, silencing behaviors can

be characterized and explained by how the individuals have been forced into

participating by those individuals who were a part of their traumatic

experience(s), whether constructively or destructively. Rico and Michael were

expected to support belief systems of their family members even though they did

not believe them themselves, such as being told to "man up." The dominant

language used to "teach" these male participants to be more manly-like was

intended to embed norms, while the participants in turn were unconsciously now

participating in the inability to express themselves. Additionally, "deeply rooted

American cultural values around individualism, stoicism, personal "grit," and

"pulling yourself up by your bootstraps" can convey that victimization and

emotional vulnerability are personal weaknesses, which should be overcome

promptly by force of personal will" (Delker, Salton, McLean, 2020, p. 243).

Silence was also characterized through the findings presented in the

themes using muted group as the theoretical framework. This conclusion is

supported by the two categories and themes. As stated previously, there were

multiple topics of harmful means of expression that arose from the interviews that

included: self-harm, suicidal ideations, drug use, depression and eating

disorders. Each of these topics, however, were used by the participant as a

destructive means of expression to their trauma. Instead of talking about their

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experiences, they chose other outlets to express themselves, not knowing these were also self-silencing behaviors. This theme feels especially important to have come about due to the amount of data surrounding individuals who suffer from mental health disorders, both situational and chronic (Arroyo et al., 2020; DeAngelis, 2015; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mageary & Wixson, 2017; Skomorovsky et al., 2006; Tuval-Mashiach et al., 2004; Wade, 1997).

Individuals who have experienced trauma are already afraid to speak up about their experiences, and now we add in that they are also silently suffering with their mental health and it can lead to individuals such as Ivy and Rico who contemplated suicide on multiple occasions. Research on how individuals in muted groups are affected by trauma should be examined further to better help those who are silently suffering. Communicating to someone after experiencing trauma can be daunting for many and according to communication privacy management theory, the process to know how and who to reveal or conceal private information only adds to this. Lastly, I will discuss how silence can be characterized through a CPM theoretical lens.

Research question three states: How can silence be characterized through a CPM lens? While conducting interviews, transcribing and analyzing data, I found that the participants were able to understand that they have become silenced, and perhaps even where and when their silencing behaviors began, as well as some participants even able to begin to place meaning to why they may still be engaging in silencing behaviors. CPM theory can be used as the

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theoretical framework to help explain how individuals give meaning to the private information individuals choose to disclose or conceal to others in ways they did not realize they were concealing private information. This goes back to that "ah hah" moment I witnessed during participant interviews. For example, when Rico decided to tell his mother that he was having suicidal ideations and she turned him away, it was at that moment he realized he would not be able to go to her for comfort and support and instead decided to self-silence what he was going through. According to communication privacy management theory's catalyst criteria, Rico's shift in silencing behaviors can be explained by the fact that the risk-benefit ratio changed, and he had to reevaluate how to manage his disclosure boundaries with his mother. Unfortunately, he was not the only participant who also had similar experiences.

Additionally, Jackie reportedly did not realize she was still engaging in silencing behaviors at this point in her life. However, she was able to find meaning behind why she still was, and this is one example of that "ah hah" moment for her. Jackie cried a few times in her interview and one of those moments in particular it was when she realized she was still engaging in silencing behaviors, but also, she now knew it. I believe this moment for her was crucial in understanding how she got to this place after all these years of being silenced by both herself and others. Talking through her experiences as she willingly disclosed allowed her to communicate and understand what she went

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through and how concealing and revealing her own private information has affected and controlled her communication style.

CPM includes boundary turbulence as a tenet of the theory. According to McLaren and Steuber (2012), boundary turbulence refers to "a failure in rule coordination between co-owners of private information and can occur because of a variety of reasons, from intentional violations to privacy dilemmas… thus, boundary turbulence can present an obstacle that produces distrust or disengagement" (p. 607). For example, Jackie discussed during her interview that her silencing behaviors had been affected as an adult within particular relationships, such as her husband, mother, and father. Jackie stated that after noticing communication between these individuals was damaged caused by a violation of trust, it led to rule change, which is a characteristic of communication privacy management theory's boundary turbulence.

Furthermore, silence was also characterized using a CPM theoretical lens with great emphasis on participant cultural backgrounds. According to Petronio and Durham (2015), core privacy rule criteria explains that cultural beliefs as what should be open information, versus secret, can impact an individual's choice on concealing and revealing. Participants who came from Hispanic cultural backgrounds were affected by their parent's communication style. It became apparent through interview observations that the way Hispanic cultures view privacy rules keep certain conversations and events that occur within their families quiet. Hispanic families, according to the participants in this study, teach

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their children to remain quiet and not share certain information with others. For example, Violet's family reportedly made her feel, through both verbal and nonverbal communication, that the trauma she endured should not and would not leave their immediate family.

I believe that new findings have surfaced from this research and should be researched further in the future. Muted group theory can be used to encourage others to use their voice and resist the process of censoring because we might fear judgement, shame, or rejection. Communication is a fundamental and necessary part of an individual's life, as is disclosing to others our thoughts, aspirations, beliefs, and values. When an individual is unable to communicate with another person due to past trauma and experiences, it can further enhance an individual's tendencies to participate in silencing behaviors. The participants interviewed for this research had all experienced some sort of childhood trauma that was described previously. The significance of what I have found has even allowed myself to view the way I have self-silenced over the years.

As humans we have the tendency to compare ourselves to everyone around us and this can often be reinforced by the society we live in. For many of these participants, their culture played a keen role in how their families responded to their trauma, as well as how they each learned to communicate, or not communicate, what they experienced and their afterward. Individuals who experience trauma often push it down as far as they can as they enter into adulthood in hopes of being able to forget and move on. However, what many do

not know is that this can lead to our underlying feelings of shame, guilt, and a lack of self-worth (O'Leary & Barber, 2008; Weiss, 2010).

The focus of this study was to analyze how individuals make sense of their experiences with silencing through narrative analysis of their retrospective reports. I believe that regardless of sex, however, these findings support a general notion that individuals explain and make sense of their silencing behaviors in relation to their traumatic experiences in a multitude of ways, including but not limited to: being caused by the trauma(s) they experienced; a lack of trust caused by a mistrust of someone who was supposed to care about them; being blamed for the trauma(s) they had no control over; because culturally, they were told it was inappropriate to discuss how they felt or about particular situations; they feared being ostracized or judged by others; and lastly, they felt someone else has had it worse than them so why should they complain. What I have found are specific reasons why adults choose to participate in silencing behaviors when they had experienced trauma as a child, and how they explain and make sense of their experiences through either a constructive or destructive manner. Additionally, through narrative interviews, I was able to characterize silence through both a muted group and communication privacy management theoretical lens.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

The questions that have focused my research arose from personal experiences that created a gripping desire to discover where self-silencing behavior stems from regarding victims of one of the three categories of childhood trauma. Through narrative and thematic analysis, I was able to hear the lived experiences of the participants who have been silenced and have also fallen victim to a childhood traumatic incident(s). From this study, I believe I have made important theoretical contributions to both muted group theory and communication privacy management theory.

Conducting this study allowed me to share with others how we can better understand if silencing a child, or the trauma itself, can have long-lasting, negative effects. Many of the participants suffered from so much more than just silencing behaviors throughout their lives after experiencing a trauma in their childhood, such as those described in the theme of harmful expressions of pain. Communication styles were affected by what these individuals have experienced and will take time for each of them to learn how to communicate properly with those they trust. Learning to cope with traumatic experiences not only affected an individual's ability to communicate with others, but it also affected the way they chose to conceal or reveal information from others, and whom to trust with their personal information.

Silencing a child by either telling them not to tattle, peers telling each other not to snitch, and abusers manipulating children by telling them to stay quiet or something bad will happen to them or a loved one, were just a few of the reasons these participants still had a fear of speaking out. The data collected confirmed that these areas of silencing do, in fact, affect the way an adult is silenced in their adulthood. Additionally, other key factors that play a role in the silencing of adults included but was not limited to: silence as a choice (empowering), acceptance of their experiences or acceptance from others, trust or mistrust in an individual's interpersonal relationship, judgement from self or others, victim blaming, as well as using other means of expression such as drugs, suicidal ideations, and eating disordered behaviors.

This study not only allowed participants to reportedly have a better understanding of why they have been silenced, but it also brought to light these issues to parents and guardians, and I can begin the process to change these issues gradually with future research. Those of us who have a voice but have been silenced, deserve the opportunity to at least be given the chance to speak up. If at three years old society is teaching children not to tell us when something occurs, how should we expect adults to behave differently? Although there is literature on reasons why people are silenced from various reasons, the communication literature is scant when it comes to linking adult silencing behaviors to childhood traumatic experiences. As research becomes more

widespread in this area of study, I believe this knowledge gained will be at the disposal of many individuals.

Limitations of Study Design and Procedures

With every study conducted comes limitations that we may not have seen coming before beginning our research. In this case, I believe that the number of participants interviewed could have been greater. Furthermore, I also believe the questions could have dived deeper into more personal questions, however, due to my lack of knowledge surrounding psychology or mental health, as well as a lack of training, I was unable to ask questions surrounding participant trauma. This can be researched further with possibly an individual who has a background in psychology or mental health and continue to use muted group and communication privacy management theory as the theoretical lens'.

Additionally, based on my own personal experiences, I feel that there may have been things I was not seeing, or choosing to see in certain ways, and this could have gotten in the way of the themes that emerged during the analysis process. Although this may be a limitation, it could also be a benefit to what was found during this study. An individual who may not have any traumatic experiences may also not have been able to relate to participants in ways I was.

In terms of validity, reliability, and credibility, triangulation was not completed, and I solely relied on interview data during the analysis; therefore, could be lacking credibility in terms of honesty from the participants. Accuracy of

participant narratives could be skewed without my knowledge, which could have, in turn, led to an outcome that was different than what was actually reached.

<div align="center">Future Research and Recommendations</div>

I recommend that this topic continue to be researched. Silenced individuals are not disappearing, because unfortunately, childhood traumatic experiences happen every single day. Which means that there will always be individuals who are suffering silently and alone. Although as a society, we may not be able to stop traumatic experiences from happening, we as researchers can continue to research the after-effects and try to help on this level by providing the knowledge that was found in this paper to mental health and communication professionals in how to guide individuals towards constructive silencing behaviors.

Future research on silencing behaviors within specific cultures should also be researched further. For example, communication accommodation theory would be interesting to use as a framework to view how silencing behaviors are affected within specific cultures and their interpersonal relationships. Additionally, although silence has been conceptualized in many different ways, I do believe that it can and should be looked at further in how an individual can work through their silencing behaviors caused by childhood traumatic experiences. Childhood traumas that have caused adult silencing behaviors affect the way they communicate with others as adults and their interpersonal relationships. It is

important to have healthy, thriving interpersonal relationships as adults, but also, learn to use silencing behaviors constructively.

Researcher Reflection

What I did not disclose previously was my own household status. My parents divorced when I was approximately two years old, and my mother had full custody. Having a single mother who worked long hours each day left us with an exhausted mother, who worked to provide for my siblings and me. We had a father; however, he was in the military. For years, he constantly volunteered to deploy overseas, and we did not get to see him often. When he was home, our mother would tell us to pack our bags and we would wait. We would wait for hours with our backpacks and jackets and he never showed. I was left with a longing to see and have both parents near me, but they never were. One, because she was working hard to make sure she could provide for us. While the other, I could not understand why he did not want to see us. I understand now as an adult that my mother was only doing the best she could, while my father, unknowingly only felt himself while he was gone. He suffered from PTSD from losing many close friends and the military was all he knew that made him feel himself again.

As a teenage girl, I was left feeling unwanted and seeking attention from places I should not have been, leading me to a destructive path of abusive relationships and over a decade of eating disordered behaviors. While listening to interviews myself, some took everything out of me to not break down while the

participants were speaking. At times, I would sit and cry for a moment once the participant had left our interview room because it was all too relatable. I experienced the hurt and rejection some of the participants felt as well and I hurt for them. The overall experience of conducting this research has been more than rewarding, not only for myself, but for the communication discipline who I believe will greatly benefit from viewing muted group theory from a new angle.

What I truly enjoyed most about my research was choosing narrative as the method because each participant has their own story to tell, and this is what makes each person unique in how we communicate as humans. In the years to come, I know that I plan to research this topic further and hope to collaborate with others as well who might be interested. The following and final section is advice from the participants to those who are reading this. I felt that it was important to hear what they had to say because we each have a unique voice in this research.

<center>Advice to Others</center>

The following and final section offers advice from the participants to individuals who have maybe experienced trauma or are struggling with destructive silencing behaviors. From participants experiences and knowledge going through destructive silencing behaviors, they wanted others to know who may have similar experiences that: they are loved, that there are others willing to listen, and that not everyone is going to hurt them just because someone has before. At the end of each interview following the question "Do you think we have

missed anything significant that would help us to understand your experiences?"

(See Appendix A) I asked if there was any advice they would like to leave for

others who may be or have been in similar situations and these were a few

participant responses:

Marie states:

> Try not to shut everyone out for fear of being hurt...I know it sucks, but you
>
> can't constantly keep people away because you're scared and it's hard.
>
> It's a battle every day trying to trust people. But because one or even five
>
> people hurt you, that doesn't mean everyone is going to. (Marie)

Jackie states:

> Just know you're a survivor, you know? So, I used to feel like what
>
> happened to me as a kid, that was my identity and it's not my identity
>
> anymore. I mean, it still hurts. There are still things that it affects, but it's
>
> not who I am...I think that those changes started happening when I found
>
> my voice, you know? So just don't let it become your identity. (Jackie)

Leslie states:

> Those two or three people who know about it have made me so much
>
> better. So, think if they can find at least one person that they can, can
>
> confide in...also, don't feel bad for not saying anything...don't feel bad for
>
> not speaking out because it wasn't your fault. When you're ready, you're
>
> ready. (Leslie)

Violet states:

Know that you're not to blame for whatever happened and that it's okay to

feel that way, but to know that it's never your fault and you can still do

something about it. (Violet)

Ivy states:

Don't let someone silence you because you feel like you're not good

enough because you're here for a reason. You are good enough. And I

wish someone would've told me that I was good enough. You're an

amazing person. You deserve love even when you're at your lowest point,

you deserve more love. (Ivy)

APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you consider private information?

2. Are there particular times you feel you are concealing private information to others as an adult? Can you give me an example?

3. When do you feel comfortable revealing private information with others as an adult?

4. How do you feel about being here telling me your story of how you have been silenced?

5. To you, what does it mean to be silenced?

6. In what ways do you feel you have been silenced as an adult (self or others)? Are there any particular instances you can recall?

7. How do you feel your childhood traumatic experience impacted your adult life in relation to silencing behaviors, if at all?

8. Do you often find yourself engaging in self-silencing behaviors as an adult? Can you explain an instance or two where you have do done this?

9. Do you think we have missed anything significant that would help us to understand your experiences?

10. Do you think we have missed anything significant that would help us to understand your experiences?

11. What question did I not ask that you think I should have asked?

12. Is there anything you wish people knew about your position that you haven't told me already?

13. What advice would you give to someone who have experienced similar life experiences?

14. What did you feel was the most important thing we talked about today, and why?

Interview questions created by: Rebeccah M. Avila

APPENDIX B:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate adults who have experienced a childhood traumatic experience who now exhibit silencing behaviors. This study is being conducted by Rebeccah Avila under the supervision of Dr. Brian Heisterkamp, Professor of Communication Studies, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The objectives of this study is to better understand if silencing a child, or the trauma itself, can have long-lasting effects on adults. This study will not only allow adults to have a better understanding of why they have been silenced, but it will also bring to light these issues to parents and guardians, and I can begin the process to change these issues gradually. By understanding how childhood traumatic experiences within interpersonal relationships affect adult silencing behaviors, a new awareness can be given to adults and caregivers of children.

DESCRIPTION: This study will be conducted through face-to-face interviews; however, Zoom interviews is also another option if you are unable to interview face-to-face. The interview will be audio recorded in order to make sure that your words will be accurately understood and represented. At the end of the interview, you will be given flyers to hand to individuals you may know who might also be willing to participate in this study, however, doing so is not required. If you are unable to participate in a face-to-face interview, the researcher will contact you prior to participating in any future Zoom interview to ensure that the study's consent form is completed and signed.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is completely voluntary, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any question and can freely withdraw from participation at any time. You can decide to not answer all or parts of the surveys and questionnaires associated with this study or the questions in the interview, even if you have signed this letter of consent.

To participate in this study, you must be and must show proof that you are 18 years or older. You must also fit one of the categories of having experienced childhood trauma, such as abuse of a child; trauma in a child's household environment; and neglect of a child. Abuse of a child can be defined as emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; trauma in a child's household environment

can be defined as substance abuse, parental separation and/or divorce, mentally ill or suicidal household member, violence to mother, or imprisoned household member; and lastly, neglect of a child can be defined as abandonment, a child's basic physical and/or emotional needs were unmet. Furthermore, the participant must have experienced a form of silencing as an adult (either by self, or others). No participant will be excluded from this research on the basis of class, socio-economic status, sex, gender, sexuality, disability, religion, and educational level.

AUDIO:

I understand that this research will be audio recorded and give consent. Initials:_____

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your participation in this study is confidential. Interviews will be recorded, based on the participant's permission. Prior to interviewing, any email correspondence will also be filed as "confidential" and held in separate folders on the researchers personal, password-protected computer for purposes of this research. The audio recordings of your interview will not be heard by anyone except the researcher. Your real name will not be used in the publication of this study, nor will the real names of any person or organization mentioned in the interviews. All confidential information must be marked "confidential." If in question at the time of receipt, I will ask the owner if it is "confidential."

If any copies of confidential information are made, I will make sure all copies retain the "confidential" label. All confidential information will be kept in a secure place and will not be easily accessed by unauthorized persons. Paper copies will be kept in a locked drawer or file cabinet or encrypted if received online. If asked, I will return all confidential information, or destroy it at the option of the owner. If there has been any unauthorized release of the confidential information, the university legal counsel will be contacted immediately as well as the owner of the confidential information.

When face-to-face interviews will be replaced by Zoom interviews, confidentiality will be ensured by utilizing end-to-end encryption, which requires that all meetings are encrypted using AES, and passwords will be required to join the meeting that only the individual participant will have access to. Participants will be asked to interview alone, in a separate room, if Zoom will be the method of interview. Furthermore, each participant will be given a pseudonym in transcripts and their identity will be separate from the data collected.

Recordings of the interviews will be done via a tape recorder, transcribed by listening to the tapes and then copied and encrypted to the researcher's personal, password-protected computer. After the tapes have been transcribed and checked for accuracy, the files will be permanently deleted. The transcription of the interviews will be kept until the research has been completed and published. No data collected will be stored via cloud storage data bases.

DURATION: All interviews will be conducted between 3/20/2019 and 5/20/2019. The expected duration of the interviews is 45 minutes. Interviews should not be conducted for more than 45 minutes at a time; therefore, if more than 45 minutes is required for the interview then multiple sessions will be scheduled.

RISKS: Immediate, short-term, or long-range risks that may arise for participants as a result of the procedures associated with this study include psychological side effects. Discussion of participant's childhood traumatic experiences, as well as any instances that have led to silencing behaviors, will be discussed and may bring up emotions for the participants that they have hidden away. However, if during the interview you feel particularly sensitive or distressed about certain matters, you are welcome to not discuss those matters. At the end of the study, participants will be provided resources to access if discussion of the experiences has produced psychological side effects.

Helpful Hotlines

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)
National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-422-4453
National Alliance for Mental Health Hotline: 1-800-950-6264
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Hotline: 1-800-273-8255
National Eating Disorder Association Helpline: 1-800-931-2237

Local Counseling Centers

CARE Counselors: 1-909-890-0525
CSUSB Counseling & Psychological Services: 1-909-537-5040

BENEFITS: This study will not only allow adults to have a better understanding of why they have been silenced, but it will also bring to light these issues to parents and guardians, and I can begin the process to change these issues gradually. As research becomes more widespread in this area of study, I believe this knowledge gained will be at the disposal of many individuals, including parents and caregivers of children.

CONTACT: For more information concerning this study and your right as a participant, please contact Dr. Brian Heisterkamp, Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, at the following: Phone- (909) 537-7665 Email- bheister@csusb.edu

RESULTS: The results of this study can be obtained at https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu.

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understood the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

Initials: _____

SIGNATURE:

Signature: _____   Date: _____

APPENDIX C:

AUDIO USE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

AUDIO USE
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
FOR NON-MEDICAL HUMAN SUBJECTS

As part of this research investigating adults who have experienced a childhood traumatic experience who now exhibit silencing behaviors, I will be making an audiotape recording of you during your participation in the study. Please indicate what uses of this audiotape you are willing to consent to by initialing below. You are free to initial any number of spaces from zero to all of the spaces, and your response will in no way affect your credit for participating. I will only use the audiotape in ways that you agree to. In any use of this audiotape, your name would *not* be identified. If you do not initial any of the spaces below, the audiotape will be destroyed.

Please indicate the type of informed consent
☐Audiotape

(*AS APPLICABLE*)

- The audiotape can be studied by the researcher for use in the research project.
  Please initial: _____

- The audiotape and transcription must be destroyed after publication of the research.
  Please initial: _____

- The audiotape and transcription must be returned to me after publication.
  Please initial: _____

I have read the above description and give my consent for the use of the audiotape as indicated above.

The extra copy of this consent form is for your records.

SIGNATURE _____DATE _____

APPENDIX D:

RESEARCH INFORMATION STATEMENT

Research Information Statement

Study of Childhood Traumatic Experiences and its Effects on Adults

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate adults who have experienced a childhood traumatic experience who now exhibit silencing behaviors. In this study, three research questions were posed:

RQ1: How do individuals who have experienced a childhood trauma explain and make sense of their experience with silencing behaviors as adults?

RQ2: How can silence be characterized through a Muted Group theoretical lens?

RQ3: How can silence be characterized through a CPM lens?

The research questions are going to be utilized in hopes to transcend across these barriers and answer the question of how adults make sense of their lost voices. These questions will guide my analysis of the participant's behavior through their interviews. I am particularly interested in describing and emphasizing how and why and by whom individuals have been silenced, and how childhood traumatic experiences may have played a role in silencing behaviors (i.e., concealing and revealing personal information) in adulthood.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the research with other students. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Rebeccah Avila by email at Rebeccah.avila@csusb.edu or Dr. Brian Heisterkamp by telephone (909) 537-7665 or email at Bhesiter@csusb.edu.

If you would like to obtain a copy of the results of this study, please contact Dr. Brian Heisterkamp by telephone (909) 537-7665 or email at Bhesiter@csusb.edu at the end of Spring semester of 2021.

Helpful Hotlines

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-422-4453

National Alliance for Mental Health Hotline: 1-800-950-6264

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Hotline: 1-800-273-8255

NATIONAL EATING DISORDER ASSOCIATION HELPLINE: 1-800-931-2237

APPENDIX E:

QUESTIONNAIRE

Q. **Age:** What is your age?

- 18-24 years old

- 25-34 years old

- 35-44 years old

- 45-54 years old

- 55-64 years old

- 65-74 years old

- 75 years or older

Q. **Ethnic origin:** Please specify your ethnicity.

- White

- Hispanic or Latino

- Black or African American

- Native American or American Indian

- Asian / Pacific Islander

- Other

Q. **Education:** What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

- No schooling completed

- Nursery school to 8th grade

- Some high school, no diploma

- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)

- Some college credit, no degree

- Trade/technical/vocational training

- Associate degree

- Bachelor's degree

- Master's degree

- Professional degree

- Doctorate degree

Q. **Parent/Guardian (1) Education:** What is the highest degree or level of school

parent/guardian (1) completed? *If currently enrolled, highest degree received. Skip*

if not applicable.

- No schooling completed

- Nursery school to 8th grade

- Some high school, no diploma

- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)

- Some college credit, no degree

- Trade/technical/vocational training

- Associate degree

- Bachelor's degree

- Master's degree

- Professional degree

- Doctorate degree

Q. **Parent/Guardian (2) Education:** What is the highest degree or level of school parent/guardian (2) completed? *If currently enrolled, highest degree received. Skip if not applicable.*

- No schooling completed
- Nursery school to 8th grade
- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree

Q. **Childhood Background:** Was parent/guardian (1) classified as…? (Check all that apply)

- Employed for wages
- Self-employed
- Out of work and looking for work
- Out of work and not looking for work
- A homemaker
- Military

- Retired

- Unable to work

Q. **Childhood Background:** Was parent/guardian (2) classified as…? (Check all

that apply)

- Employed for wages

- Self-employed

- Out of work and looking for work

- Out of work and not looking for work

- A homemaker

- Military

- Retired

- Unable to work

Q. **Childhood Household Income Status:**

- Lower

- Lower-middle class

- Upper-lower class

- Upper-middle class

- Upper class

APPENDIX F:

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

APRIL 12, 2019

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
FULL BOARD REVIEW
IRB-FY2019-106
STATUS: APPROVED

MS. REBECCAH AVILA AND PROF. BRIAN HEISTERKAMP
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO
5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY
SAN BERNARDINO, CALIFORNIA 92407

DEAR MS. AVILA AND PROF. HEISTERKAMP:

YOUR APPLICATION TO USE HUMAN SUBJECTS, TITLED "THE LOUDEST
VOICE IN THE ROOM IS OUR OWN SILENCE: NARRATIVE POSSIBILITIES
OF SILENCED ADULTS" HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB). THE INFORMED CONSENT
DOCUMENT SUBMITTED WITH YOUR IRB APPLICATION IS THE OFFICIAL
VERSION FOR USE IN YOUR STUDY AND CANNOT BE CHANGES
WITHOUT PRIOR IRB APPROVAL. A CHANGE IN YOUR INFORMED
CONSENT (NO MATTER HOW MINOR THE CHANGE) REQUIRES
RESUBMISSION OF YOUR PROTOCOL AS AMENDED THROUGH THE
CAYUSE IRB SYSTEM PROTOCOL CHANGE FORM.

YOUR APPLICATION IS APPROVED FOR ONE YEAR FROM APRIL 10, 2019
THROUGH APRIL 9, 2020.

PLEASE NOTE THE CAYUSE IRB SYSTEM WILL NOTIFY YOU WHEN YOUR
PROTOCOL IS DUE FOR RENEWAL. ENSURE YOU FILE YOUR PROTOCOL
RENEWAL AND CONTINUING REVIEW FORM THROUGH THE
CAYUSE IRB SYSTEM TO KEEP YOUR PROTOCOL CURRENT AND ACTIVE

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UNLESS YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR STUDY.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS THE RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR REPORTING TO THE IRB COMMITTEE INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING 4 REQUIREMENTS AS MANDATED BY THE CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS 45 CFR 46 LISTED BELOW. PLEASE NOTE THAT THE PROTOCOL CHANGE FORM AND RENEWAL FORM ARE LOCATED ON THE IRB WEBSITE UNDER THE FORMS MENU. FAILURE TO NOTIFY THE IRB OF THE ABOVE MAY RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION. YOU ARE REQUIRED TO KEEP COPIES OF THE INFORMED CONSENT FORMS AND DATA FOR AT LEAST THREE YEARS.

YOU ARE REQUIRED TO NOTIFY THE IRB OF THE FOLLOWING BY SUBMITTING THE APPROPRIATE FORM (MODIFICATION, UNANTICIPATED/ADVERSE EVENT, RENEWAL, STUDY CLOSURE) THROUGH THE ONLINE CAYUSE IRB SUBMISSION SYSTEM.

1. IF YOU NEED TO MAKE ANY CHANGES/MODIFICATIONS TO YOUR PROTOCOL SUBMIT A MODIFICATION FORM AS THE IRB MUST REVIEW ALL CHANGES BEFORE IMPLEMENTING IN YOUR STUDY TO ENSURE THE DEGREE OF RISK HAS NOT CHANGED.
2. IF ANY UNANTICIPATED ADVERSE EVENTS ARE EXPERIENCED BY SUBJECTS DURING YOUR RESEARCH STUDY OR PROJECT.
3. IF YOUR STUDY HAS NOT BEEN COMPLETED SUBMIT A RENEWAL TO THE IRB.
4. IF YOU ARE NO LONGER CONDUCTING THE STUDY OR PROJECT SUBMIT A STUDY CLOSURE.

PLEASE ENSURE YOUR CITI HUMAN SUBJECTS TRAINING IS KEPT UP-TO-DATE AND CURRENT THROUGHOUT THE STUDY.

THE CSUSB IRB HAS NOT EVALUATED YOUR PROPOSAL FOR SCIENTIFIC MERIT, EXCEPT TO WEIGH THE RISK TO THE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS AND THE ASPECTS OF THE PROPOSAL RELATED TO POTENTIAL RISK AND BENEFIT. THIS APPROVAL NOTICE DOES NOT REPLACE ANY DEPARTMENTAL OR ADDITIONAL APPROVALS WHICH MAY BE REQUIRED. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING THE IRB DECISION, PLEASE CONTACT MICHAEL GILLESPIE, THE IRB COMPLIANCE OFFICER. MR. MICHAEL GILLESPIE CAN BE REACHED BY PHONE AT (909) 537-7588, BY FAX AT (909) 537-7028, OR BY EMAIL AT MGILLESP@CSUSB.EDU. PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR APPLICATION APPROVAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (LISTED AT THE TOP) IN ALL CORRESPONDENCE.

BEST OF LUCK WITH YOUR RESEARCH.

SINCERELY,

DONNA GARCIA

DONNA GARCIA, PH.D., IRB CHAIR
CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

DG/MG

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