THE TRAUMATIC IMPACT OF MEDIA HUMILIATION, MISREPRESENTATION AND VICTIM-SHAMING ON NARRATIVE IDENTITY AND WELL-BEING

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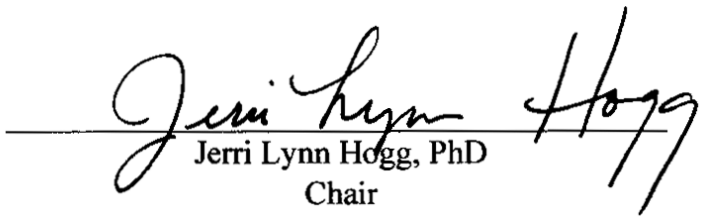

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Abstract

In today's media-saturated world filled with YouTube videos, social media, crime shows, contest shows, and reality TV, there is ample opportunity for average citizens to be humiliated or misrepresented in the media. Although media effects have been studied for decades, in almost every case the research has focused on how the media has affected the consumers of the media. This study, however, is interested in the impact of a negative or false media portrayal on individuals who were the subjects of the media, not the consumers. A mixed-methods phenomenological research approach was used to uncover the lived experience of those who have been humiliated, misrepresented, publicly shamed, or victim-blamed in the media. Quantitatively, 22 individuals answered the Peritraumatic, Dehumanization, Humiliation, Objectification scale, as well as the Centrality of Events scale, both modified to measure humiliation and misrepresentation in the media (MHM). A Pearson's correlation between these two trauma scales showed a strong significance at the .01 level. Qualitatively, questions probing Heidegger's existentials (lived things, lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived relationships) using five hermeneutic phenomenological lenses (humiliation, trauma, identity, power, and well-being) were explored to unveil the essence of the lived MHM experience.

Results support that survivors of MHM consider it a unique traumatic experience with a life-changing negative impact on multiple aspects of their lives and well-being. Results were amplified for trauma survivors. Dehumanization and powerlessness play a key role. Themes for recovery, post-traumatic growth, and implications for future research are discussed.

Key words: humiliation, narrative identity, media misrepresentation, trauma, victim-blaming, public shaming, well-being

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Background

For many, the thought of being publicly humiliated is their worst nightmare. According to Leask (2013), humiliation is the action by a powerful person or entity that unjustly causes degradation, loss of status, rejection or ostracization for one or more less powerful persons, while generally lacking any remedy for the injustice suffered. Hartling and Luchetta (1999) describe the internal experience of humiliation as "the deep dysphoric feeling associated with being, or perceiving oneself as being, unjustly degraded, ridiculed, or put down—in particular, one's identity has been demeaned or devalued" (p. 264). Hartling and Luchetta argue that the humiliation's psychotraumatogenesis occurs at the realization that one's identity has been publicly devalued and demeaned.

Humiliation is frequently described as a traumatic experience (Altshul, 2010; Berman, 2016; Dorahy, 2017; Ellison & Clark, 2007; Trumbull, 2008). A public humiliation experience has been shown to be intensely negative (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2004; Kendler et al., 2003; Torres & Bergner, 2012), emotionally debilitating (Chen et al., 2008; Ellison & Clark, 2007; Klein, 1991), and long-lasting (Leask, 2013; Otten & Jonas, 2014; Torres & Bergner, 2012). In cases where the humiliation takes the form of blaming or shaming a victim, public humiliation can also contribute to revictimization (Abrams et al., 2003; Ahrens et al., 2010; Bevens, 2016; Campbell & Raja, 1999; Mendonça et al., 2016). Humiliation is considered a traumatic emotional state likely to have far-reaching negative life consequences including harms to mental health such as severe anxiety, symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, and major depression (Chen et al., 2008; Chen & Williams, 2011, 2012; Garfinkel, 1956; Mann et al., 2017; Torres & Bergner, 2012). In a neuroscientific study by Otten and Jonas (2014), humiliation was found to

be the most intense human emotion. Klein (1991) argues that the fear of humiliation alone can drive an individual to prefer death to avoid it.

Although public humiliation is a serious matter with potentially devastating consequences, after a live humiliating event, the humiliated person can feasibly escape the humiliating environment, leaving only those present and those told about the situation to know what took place. Humiliation in the media, however, is an amplification of public humiliation. Events in film, television, or print media get redistributed and shared in social media. Videos that go viral on YouTube often make broadcast print and broadcast news. The aggregated effect of living in a digitally mediated world means that sensitive or humiliating information can be seen by potentially millions of people in a short period of time (Moore, 2012).

Furthermore, unlike a live humiliating event after which individuals can theoretically go home, with mediated humiliation, for 4.4 billion people who use the Internet (Statista, 2019), going home is no escape. The humiliating messages can be replicated on television, Netflix, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, other forms of media and social media, amplified through sharing, copying, pasting, liking, blogging and reblogging. It can show up on web sites, in text messages, in emails, or in search. The humiliating media can be rerun, rewritten, and retweeted, circulating from one country to the next, becoming a live archive, stored on servers, backed up on content delivery networks on land and in the cloud, seemingly forever (Langlois & Slane, 2017).

Like the impossibility of trying to gather up the feathers of a down feather pillow ripped open during a tornado, undoing the permanent footprint of damaging digital media is next to impossible (Moore, 2012), and it can leave those who have been publicly shamed or humiliated wondering if they can ever hope to recover their reputations. This can have lasting effects economically as well. Langlois and Slane (2017) point out that socioeconomic worth

"increasingly hinges on the kind of image of oneself as a subject that circulates online, and on the kind of attention it receives from others" (p. 121). Studies also confirm that the anguish of humiliation increases with the level of publicity of the humiliating event: The bigger the perceived audience, the greater the humiliation (Combs et al., 2010; Mann et al., 2017).

Contemporary Media Climate

Humiliation in the media has become particularly relevant over the past two decades where an explosion of non-scripted television programming exploits individuals who are neither celebrities nor media savvy. In television, for example, there are subgenres such as reality shows, true crime shows, documentaries, talk shows, therapy shows, docudramas, game shows, talent shows; competition shows centered around adventure, fear, surviving disasters, winning or losing contests; and shows about escaping traumatic situations. There are entire networks dedicated to non-scripted television, including some dedicated solely to crime (e.g., Investigation Discovery, Court TV, Sony Crime Channel, and Crime Investigation channels in numerous countries). Even the Oxygen Channel, which used to be programmed with reality shows targeted for women, recently morphed into a crime channel featuring kidnappings, scandalous behavior, assaults, rapes, and murders (Boboltz, 2017). Wellman (2016) describes how the survivors left behind in the case of homicides are often thrust into the news in times of traumatic grief. Although they want media coverage to generate new leads, especially in cold cases, survivors frequently reported how media professionals contributed to additional trauma. Wellman revealed that the survivors easily described negative interactions with media personnel and expressed how their cases were inadequately portrayed by the media.

Every show that revolves around such sensational or traumatic topics is rife with the potential to humiliate, misrepresent, or mishandle an individual's sensitive life stories.

Mills (2004) described the profit-driven trend for networks, producers and directors to publicly embarrass and insult people as “humiliation TV.” It has also been called “trash TV” (Lavie, 2019), freakshow TV (Dovey, 2000), train wreck TV (Galloway, 2011), voyeur TV (Calvert, 2004), and tabloidization (Glynn, 2000). Mills (2004) argues that the producers and directors of such shows often lack empathy, revel in schadenfreude, and rarely question whether it is ethical to exploit the vulnerabilities or needs of the people on their shows. Mast (2016) notes that most average citizens captured in media are not savvy regarding the media process or their individual rights, thus creating a power deferential between the non-professional actor and the individual who stands to financially profit from the content. Ultimately, the profiteer controls the production, story, or the final edit.

Furthermore, the unsavvy media participant is at risk of exploitation. When a participant, often referred to as a “contributor,” agrees to appear in a reality show, contest show, documentary or other non-scripted media piece, the contributor will be required to sign an appearance release that enables the producers to misrepresent, defame, and humiliate the contributor, while protecting the producers from lawsuits. It is standard practice for appearance releases to require contributors to agree not to sue the producers and networks for any and all claims including defamation, false light, false or misleading portrayals, or invasion of privacy, regardless of damages or injuries of any kind (Mast, 2016). This may include alleged damages resulting from embarrassment, infliction of emotional distress (whether allegedly intentional or negligent), loss of reputation, breach of any alleged moral rights, or fraud (such as deception about the program or the consent agreement), regardless of whether the damages occurred before, during, or after the actual appearance or participation in the program (Persuasions Productions Appearance Release, 2012; Rivr Media Appearance Release, 2015; Slauson Productions Appearance Release, 2018).

Aside from signing away the right to sue for damages, the contributor often agrees not to be compensated. “I understand and agree that my sole compensation for my agreeing to this Liability Waiver and Appearance Release is the opportunity to appear in the Series” (Rivr Media Appearance Release, 2015, para. 7). Furthermore, the contributor’s likeness and story often become the exclusive property of the production company.

Of course, people who do not sign release papers can also be the subject of media humiliation and misrepresentation (MHM). Such is the case with those who are the subjects of public shaming or humiliation in social media or in the news, including political news. On May 10, 2019, MSNBC’s host Rachel Maddow (2019) interviewed James Baker, the former general counsel for the FBI. She describes Baker’s MHM and shows concern regarding the impact it might have on him.

> The president has made a sport out of suggesting that you personally acted treasonously and attempted a coup. You’ve become a star in conservative media with them always pillorying you. Just as a human being, the transition in your life before to your life after just feels precipitous. Um, how are you? (:58)

Baker responds, describing his MHM experience as traumatic.

> I’m fine, thank you for asking, yeah. It’s been, you know, horrible, basically. I’ve used the word trauma to describe what happened. (1:18)

Referring to the firing of James Comey, Baker again referenced trauma.

> He got fired in a way that was terrible, very humiliating, in a very humiliating way …that was really hard, it was a traumatic experience to go through. Quite frankly, having it talked about endlessly in the media doesn’t help. You sort of have to like relive

> it every day. And there's like no escape, it's just on everywhere. So, it's been challenging. (1:49)

Maddow makes the point that MHM has now become normalized.

> It's now common, um, not only from the president himself, but from the president's supporters, from the conservative media, from now Republicans in congress to, not just name people like you individually, to take you on by title and as a person, but to pursue you, to say that you're the scandal, and that you and all of your other colleagues involved in the onset of the investigation, that you are the problem in the country, I feel like this is unprecedented. Do you feel like it's now become normalized, that this will be the way we do it from here on out? (3:15)

Baker shares his concern about MHM, particularly when the President of the United States is behind it. He describes potential consequences.

> I'm pretty concerned about that, it seems like it's become normalized, and quite frankly that's part of the reason I wanted to start to speak out more now, because it shouldn't be …I'm worried about it, yea. It could have a significant negative impact in the long run. Because people are worried about their careers, people are worried about their reputations, and when the President of the United States starts to go at you on Twitter, it's an out-of-body experience, as I've described it. It's unnerving, and if you're concerned about your reputation or long-term career, you're going to be, I think, you're more likely to be hesitant to do things that will attract that type of ire. (3:41)

Another recent example of MHM itself being highlighted in mainstream media is illuminated in CNN's (J. Blake, 2019) coverage of the MHM experience of Dominique Moran. Moran was an employee at Chipotle who refused to serve some clients who had a history of

ordering and then leaving without paying. The clients were Black. Someone took video of her refusal to serve them, posted it online, and claimed it was racism. The video went viral, garnering over 7 million views in 2 days. Moran was misrepresented, humiliated, villainized and fired from her job. Blake describes the moment Moran learned what happened. He writes, “Her body went numb. She took deep breaths. She felt a panic attack coming. She then fell from her chair and collapsed” (para. 10).

Blake (2019) quotes Moran explaining how life is really difficult now, and that everything had changed for her. Blake details some of the impact. “She talks as if she's experiencing some digitally induced form of post-traumatic stress disorder. Mood swings, anxiety -- she sometimes recoils when someone tries to take a smartphone video or picture of her.” He quoted Moran’s mother describing Moran as having had a breakdown as a result. While the article goes on to explain that an Internet vigilante was able to reverse the tide, the evidence that MHM is relevant in pop culture is that the topic of MHM itself is even making the news in mainstream media.

In summation, the opportunity to be publicly exploited, misrepresented, humiliated, victim-blamed, or shamed has never been more common, more normalized, or more acceptable as a business practice, yet there is scant research on the impact of such practices. In today's world, people witness the humiliation and exploitation of others in the media almost daily. While we know that such degrading content is entertaining to audiences and generates Internet traffic, viewers, clicks, and profit for media outlets, what we do not know is how it affects the demeaned or misrepresented individual. Baker used the term “traumatic” (Maddow, 2019). Blake (2019) referenced indicators of Moran having post-traumatic stress disorder. With the potential for severe and long-lasting psychological, reputational, and career consequences, it is

surprising that there is a lack of literature describing the lived experience of having been misrepresented, humiliated, or shamed in the media. This paper seeks to bridge that gap.

For the purpose of this study, the definition of media humiliation includes misrepresentation, victim-blaming, public shaming, dehumanization, objectification, and humiliation. These are referred to simply as media humiliation or misrepresentation, or MHM. MHM can include intentional and unintentional misrepresentation, attacks on a person's character, negative stereotypes, reinforcing stigma, intentional and unintentional omissions (e.g., failing to mention important details that would help create understanding and empathy), and negative associations (e.g., putting a survivor's story in a television series about criminals, describing an entire group of people based on the negative actions of a single individual). MHM can be facilitated through traditional media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, television, film) as well as digital media (e.g., blogs, social media, podcasts, books, music, texting, mobile apps, video games).

Researcher Subjectivity

Husserl (1936/1970) argued that a researcher must take all that one knows about a phenomenon and "bracket" it, which means to place it outside of one's knowledge when doing phenomenological research. HP, however, embraces the disclosure of researcher bias (Spence, 2017). According to Heidegger (1927/1962), it is impossible to take the perspective of the researcher out of any interpretation of the research interviews. In HP, objectivity is not a goal. Van Manen (1990) describes objectivity as an orientation of the researcher to the object in front of him or her. The goal with objectivity is to remain true to the object and describe its true nature as accurately as possible. Subjectivity, on the other hand, reveals a strong personal orientation to the phenomenon so that the researcher can use his or her perceptions, reflections

and insights to reveal the phenomenon in the richest, most layered way possible. The subjectivity of the researcher is an intrinsically valuable part of the interpretation process (Crowther et al., 2017). In HP, then, the researcher's preconceptions, biases, and understandings are considered assets and should be made explicit rather than bracketed away.

> We try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he (the subject) has formed his views. But this simply means that we try to understand how what he is saying could be right. If we want to understand, we will try to make his arguments even stronger. This happens even in conversation...The task of hermeneutics is to clarify this miracle of understanding, which is not a mysterious communion of souls, but a sharing in a common meaning. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 292)

Personal Disclosure

Since hermeneutic phenomenology encourages the disclosure of researcher bias and subjectivity through personal storytelling (Kafle, 2013), I will share how I developed an interest in this topic through an experience of my own. In 2013, I agreed to be interviewed by a reputable television production company regarding surviving a traumatic experience. It took me a decade to find the courage to agree to do this; it was not something I sought out. After years of therapy, study, and conversations that helped me to overcome self-blame, I came to believe that by publicly sharing my experience, I was exhibiting personal strength and reframing myself as the protagonist in my own journey. More importantly, I believed that others would benefit as a result of my decision to share my story. I thought that going public would be my way of giving positive meaning to an otherwise negative life event, and I believed I was proactively creating a happy resolution to a dark chapter in my life.

However, when the episode aired before millions of potential viewers worldwide, my story was drastically twisted. I was turned into a character in a fictional story with circumstances

I did not even recognize, yet it was touted as a true story. The media framing of the content was one of victim-blaming, and it launched a social media mob against me instead of my predators. Comments about the episode were filled with shaming refrains of how I was the cause of all the harms against me, and I deserved it all. I was mortified. Although I had survived multiple assaults by men, the psychological impact of being publicly misrepresented and humiliated on international television was exponentially worse. To me, the producers and the network suddenly became accomplices by completing the job that my primary predator set out to accomplish, which was to make sure I suffered absolute and complete humiliation. Each time the show aired I became afraid to check my email, my Facebook, my Twitter. The media experience that I anticipated would be my redemption story, instead turned into a tragedy that put a stranglehold over my positive life legacy. And I had no power to stop it.

Furthermore, the crushing weight of public disgust for me laid a heavy blanket of influence upon my sense of self and narrative identity. How could the whole world be wrong? The self-blame that took years for me to overcome, returned with a vengeance. I felt stigmatized, rejected, loathed, and cast out of society. Since I could not erase the degrading content from the Internet, I saw no way to escape the humiliating misinformation permanently branded on my character by the search engines. My credibility was gone. I felt I had to abandon the hopes, dreams, and plans that I had sacrificed to achieve my entire life. Nothing made sense to me. I was unwittingly thrust into a tragic final chapter of my life story, a chapter I did not write. I saw no light at the end of the tunnel, I thought I would never recover, and I felt like an embarrassment and a burden to my family. The state of alert inside of my body reminded me of a sandblasting machine on full blast. I laid in fetal position and cried myself into oblivion as the weeks merged into months. I just couldn't shake it off. I hid. My skin was always hot. I got shingles. When I could not stop my catastrophic thinking, I wondered if I would have been better

to be burned alive and been done with it. The network lawyers did not care at all that there was deceptive editing or that the life of a beloved wife and mother was now hanging by a thread. Their response to my plight was that I had signed a release.

My thoughts turned to suicide.

In my state of crisis, I began seeing a therapist. I remember telling the therapist how devastating it was for me to imagine the executive producers, the director, and the editor of my episode getting a fat Christmas bonus when they turned in a program so juicy it would create wild audience engagement (one of the network's bragging points), then moving on with their lives as if nothing happened. In the meantime, my legacy seemed destroyed. I felt like my body, my image, my story, and my life were nothing but pieces of free content to exploit for their own financial gain. I was nothing but a body, just like before. It was incomprehensible to me, how I could be so dehumanized.

It took a few years of hard work and narrative processing, but I did recover. I found the field of media psychology which enabled me to delve into understanding the dynamics behind the media exploitation machine. This gave me the platform I needed to turn my negative experience into something positive. What I was once thought was my greatest disaster is now reframed in my mind as my bricks of gold, my yellow brick road, my greatest source of growth and my springboard to flourishing. Since my pilgrimage through the fires of media humiliation, however, I have been filled with wonder and concern about lived experiences of other individuals who appear to have been subjected to media-amplified humiliation, misrepresentation, victim-blaming, and public shaming. My search for answers in academic literature on this topic has revealed little.

This was the genesis of my interest in researching this topic. In examination of my own experience, pre-understandings, pre-reflections, and reflections, I explicate my assumptions and

present five lenses that have emerged through which I predict to view the experience of others (Van Manen, 1990). These lenses are humiliation, including negative misrepresentation; trauma, including abuse, anguish, distress, or other descriptors of psychological pain; narrative identity or sense of self; power and powerlessness, and well-being. Although my experience with the phenomenon enrichens me in my quest to attune myself toward the ontological nature of the phenomenon I am studying, and I assume these themes will reveal themselves in the phenomenon as described by my research participants, conversely, I will also be looking deeply to see if they are not there, and if other themes emerge as well.

Statement of the Problem

Although there is a wealth of research regarding media effects on viewers, little to no data exist regarding the lived experience of individuals who have been humiliated, misrepresented, publicly shamed, or victim-blamed in the media.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of individuals who have felt misrepresented, humiliated, shamed, victim-blamed, dehumanized, or objectified in the media (MHM). Despite all we know about media effects, we do not yet understand how mistreatment by the media is experienced by an individual. This research seeks to describe the essence of the MHM experience, to learn whether it has a traumatic impact on the narrative identity and well-being of individuals, and if so, to ascertain whether the trauma experienced has enough distinct characteristics to be considered its own form of trauma.

Significance of the Study

Media content has been shown to exhibit a powerful influence on individuals on a behavioral, affective, cognitive, and physiological basis (Bryant et al., 2012; Nabi & Oliver, 2009; Potter, 2012). For almost a century, scholars have built a rich body of research regarding

how mass media effects influence everything from voting decisions to purchases to behavior (Daoust & Sullivan, 2017; Hopmann et al., 2015; Potter, 2012; Rapp et al., 2013; Wettstein & Wirth, 2017). For example, media has been shown to influence empathy in studies about violence towards women (Gabbiadini et al., 2016), encourage civic engagement (Tim et al., 2017; Warren et al., 2016), promote healthy behaviors (S. S. Ho et al., 2016), impact body image (Perloff, 2014), facilitate attitude change (Briñol & Petty, 2015; Park et al., 2019), encourage or mitigate stereotyping (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; F. Arendt, 2017), encourage prosocial behavior (Coyne et al., 2018), and more.

Although this is just a sampling indicative of the breadth of the work on media effects, one common factor throughout the history of media effects research is the emphasis on examining the impact of media on the viewers who consume or use the media (Bryant et al., 2012; George, 2016; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2016; Nabi & Oliver, 2009; Potter, 2012; Wettstein & Wirth, 2017), but surprisingly little is known regarding the experience of individuals who are the subjects of media stories, particularly when they feel they have been misrepresented, humiliated, shamed, objectified, dehumanized, or exploited by the media.

Reinecke and Eden (2017) explain that the interplay between media use and well-being is one of the most vibrant and evolving areas within contemporary media effects research. There is a rich body of work regarding how media can be used to enhance well-being (Bond, 2015; Buila, 2009; Gerson et al., 2016; Reinecke & Eden, 2017; Rieger et al., 2014; Verduyn et al., 2017; Xu et al,, 2016). There is also a vast amount of research on how media use can negatively impact the well-being of individuals (Anderson et al., 2015; Bryant et al., 2012; Bushman, 2018; L. Chen, Ho, & Lwin, 2017; L. Chen & Shi, 2018; Dahmen, 2018; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011; Lankford & Madfis, 2018; Lowery & DeFleur, 1995; Potter, 2012; Potter & Riddle, 2007; Slater, 2007). Whether well-being is enhanced or harmed, Reinecke et al. (2018)

reiterate that in today's environment where people are "permanently online" (p.1), it is critical for media psychologists to understand how various experiences with media might impact the psychological well-being of the individual (see also Reinecke, 2017; Reinecke & Eden, 2017).

There is a wealth of literature regarding cyberbullying and online harassment, which are types of media humiliation, that has laid the groundwork for expectations of harm to the individual (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Bonanno & Hymel, 2013; Davison & Stein, 2014; Friberg-Fernros et al., 2017; Goodboy & Martin, 2015; Guo, 2016; Haravuori et al., 2011; Huffman, 2016; Kasahara, 2018; Kowalski et al., 2014; Sest & March, 2017; Vance et al., 2015; Ybarra et al., 2012). Cyberbullying is described as aggression that is intentionally and repeatedly carried out in an electronic medium by an individual or group, often relentlessly, against someone who cannot easily defend himself or herself (Kowalski et al., 2014; D. Smith, 2008), and is typically associated with electronic aggression against children, while online harassment is the term used for aggressive activities against adults (e.g., trolling, stalking, revenge porn, virtual aggression, revealing private information, sending disturbing photos). In this paper, cyberbullying and online harassment will be referred to under the combined term *online cruelty.* Willard (2007) generated a taxonomy for online cruelty that includes cyber-stalking, sexting, impersonation, exclusion, outing and trickery, flaming, and harassment. However, online cruelty is a subset of the larger category of MHM for which no clear definition or defining taxonomy currently exists, despite the existence of a potentially significant number of situations for MHM which are beyond the scope and definition of online cruelty. For example, consider the experience of a trauma survivor who is victim-shamed on a television talk show. As a hypothetical example, imagine a dedicated pediatrician being falsely accused of child abuse in national news, or a selfless humanitarian being portrayed as a greedy criminal in a reality dating show.

Ventegodt, Merrick, and Orr (2011) describe public humiliation as "the worst and most traumatic experience that can happen to a human being" (p. 362). In pop culture publications, there are a number of articles expressing public concern about the number of suicides connected to individuals who were humiliated on reality television (Fisher & Praetorius, 2009; Hoffman, 2013; Mast, 2016). While the public concern for the ethical and compassionate treatment of media subjects indicates that this topic is relevant and important in pop culture, it has not yet heralded its own body of academic exploration. In spite of the trove of studies on the effects of the various forms of media consumption (Nabi & Oliver, 2009), there is still a lack of research regarding how MHM impacts the individual being improperly represented in media (Niemi & Young, 2014, 2016). When a media experience with such potentially serious consequences has such a scant amount of research, the significance of this contribution to the field of media psychology becomes clear.

This study utilized a mixed-methods research approach consisting of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Martin Heidegger's (1971) hermeneutic phenomenology provided the qualitative methodology framework that seeks to uncover the meaning of the lived experiences. In this approach, the Heideggerian interview process is a collaborative dance between the information brought by the participants, the preconceptions of the researcher, and the interpretive framework used to make sense of it all (Koch, 1995). Since the research goal was to grasp the meaning and essence of the phenomenon, which in this case is the experience of MHM, it was appropriate to use a methodology where participants provide their own interpretation of their experience. Gadamer (1975) refers to this as the co-construction of understanding. In this method there can be more than one interview, and more than one way to receive feedback and clarification until the participants feel that the researcher's interpretation of what they have shared honors their lived experience. This approach will facilitate the uncovering

of rich information beckoned through the lenses of humiliation theory (Hartling & Lindner, 2016, 2017; D. Klein, 1991; Margalit, 1996), trauma, narrative identity, power, impact on well-being, and finally, recovery and growth (Adler et al., 2006; McAdams, 1993, 2013; McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Chapter 2 is a literature review delving into the existing body of academic work regarding narrative identity from a life story perspective, including well-being and its relationship to narrative identity. It takes a deep dive into the topic of public humiliation, including the impact of humiliation on one's identity. There is a significant examination of the topic of trauma, and an exploration of how trauma can impact one's identity and well-being, particularly when the trauma survivor is humiliated, misrepresented, victim-blamed, or victim-shamed in the media.

Chapter 3 provides background for hermeneutic phenomenology, which is the framework that was used for the qualitative portion of the study. It describes the research ethics, rigor, plan for analysis, and how the qualitative and quantitative pieces work symbiotically to strengthen the results. This chapter describes the methodology, including a description of how the participants were recruited, and the quantitative measures used to serve as a prequalifier for the purposive sampling (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011) prior to conducting phenomenological interviews. The first quantitative tool is a three-question scale to determine the presence of media humiliation and misrepresentation, followed by a five-question Peritraumatic Dehumanization, Objectification, and Humiliation Scale (Moor, Ben-Meir, Golan-Shapira, & Farchi, 2013a) designed originally to measure the feeling of dehumanization, objectification, and humiliation of rape victims, modified for victims of media humiliation and misrepresentation. The third scale is a seven-question, modified Centrality of Events Scale

(Berntsen & Rubin, 2006) created to measure how central an event is to an individual's identity and life story. These combined questions not only serve to identify a proper purposive sampling for the interviews, but these instruments are used to triangulate the information to increase the validity of the interpretation (D. T. Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Triangulation has been commended in mixed methods research as a strong tool to help bolster the understanding by bringing diverse pieces of information together to paint a unified picture of the information (Archibald, 2016; J. C. Greene, 2007). Chapter 4 is a presentation of the findings and Chapter 5 is the discussion and analysis of results.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This dissertation proposes to understand the experience of misrepresentation and humiliation in the media, exploring the traumatic impact of MHM on the narrative identity and well-being. Hermeneutic phenomenology was used to explore the life world, or human experience, of the MHM survivor as it was or is currently lived. This research begins with the pre-understanding that public humiliation is considered a traumatic experience. Therefore, there are two primary target perspectives to consider: (a) those who have felt traumatized by an MHM experience, and (b) survivors of trauma who have had an MHM experience related to their trauma. In the first case, it is expected that MHM will be experienced as traumatization, and in the second case, it is expected that MHM will be experienced as retraumatization.

There are five primary lenses that will be used in this work. The first lens is humiliation and misrepresentation (Ellison & Clark, 2007; Silver et al., 2007), including public shaming. It explores undeserved, forced social displacement through activities that impose the loss of status and rejection from the community (Lindner, 2001b; Margalit, 1996; D. Smith, 2012). Studies confirm that a humiliation experience can negatively impact identity and well-being (Elshout et al., 2017; Fernández et al., 2015). Therefore, the second lens involves the life story theory of narrative identity. A narrative identity is "a person's internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233). Narrative identity theory explains that an individual's sense of identity is generated from birth to death in the form of a story, with a beginning, middle, and end (Čapek, 2017; Hammack, 2008). The third lens is through a perspective of psychological trauma and well-being (Badour & Adams, 2018; Brewin et al.,

2000), the fourth lens revolves around power and powerlessness, and the final lens examines recovery and post-traumatic growth.

Part I - Narrative Identity

Narrative identity theory states that people form their identities by creating meaningful stories out of their life experiences (Čapek, 2017; MacIntyre, 2007). McAdams and McLean (2013) explain that a "narrative identity is a person's internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose" (p. 232). Individuals construct stories out of life-defining memories and share them with others to understand and explain how they became who they are today. They use autobiographical reasoning to weave coherent life stories that connect past events to each other and to themselves (Bluck & Habermas, 2000; Singer, et al., 2013). By sharing specific autobiographical memories and finding the meaningful patterns between them, people internalize a sense of self, known as a narrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013; K. C. McLean, et al., 2007; D. Polkinghorne, 1988).

McAdams (1993, 2013) argues that people come to know themselves by creating a heroic story of the self. He argues that individuals organize their lives to see themselves as the protagonist in their own stories. They encounter obstacles and setbacks, but many times they overcome them or learn positive lessons that they use to better their lives or help others. To McAdams, life stories are less about the facts and details, but more about the meanings they portray in helping people to understand themselves. When sharing key personal stories, he argues that people selectively embellish or minimize details to help others understand the essence of who they are as well. McAdams refers to this as the creation of the personal myth. It is through the crafting and sharing of the personal myth that individuals build their identities and

create meaning to their lives. Scholars claim that this process of adding positive meaning to self-defining memories is also connected to an enhanced sense of self and well-being (Liao et al., 2018; Lilgendahl, 2015; McAdams, 2013; K. C. McLean & Pratt, 2006; Singer et al., 2013). The life story theory of narrative identity is relevant to this research because of the need to examine how MHM might influence the narrative identity and well-being, for better or for worse, including exploring what happens when the story is hijacked or contaminated.

Narrative scholars assert that people actually invent themselves through the stories they recall and through the stories they tell (Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Čapek, 2017; K. C. McLean et al., 2007). Generating cohesiveness out of these life stories not only creates a unified narrative identity, but has been shown to bolster cognitive development, enhance social development, and reinforce psychological well-being (Adler et al., 2008; Bluck & Habermas, 2000; Habermas & Reese, 2015; Waters & Fivush, 2015). However, mental health problems can be signified when narrative identity becomes disorganized, confused, or lacking in coherence (Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Crossley, 2000; Grant et al., 2015).

Furthermore, narrative identity theory suggests that an individual's identity evolves as the individual articulates his or her life history in story form (Bamberg, 2011; Čapek, 2017; Grant et al., 2015; Kerr et al., 2013; McAdams, 1993; McAdams & McLean, 2013). McLean et al. (2007) argue that "selves create stories, which in turn create selves" (p. 262). In other words, the narrative identity evolves over time as new stories and experiences are layered into the sense of self. McAdams (1993) explains that beginning in adolescence, an individual seeks to create coherence out of disparate and confusing pieces of individuality. As the individual begins to find meaningful themes or patterns, stories become woven into the individual's identity (i.e., I always help people, I am highly creative, people can depend on me) and the individual becomes the

protagonist in his or her own heroic journey. The building of this identity is what McAdams calls the "personal myth."

Narrative Foreclosure

A trauma survivor anticipates validation, respect, and healing to be the result of sharing her story in the media, but when she is misrepresented in a way that fosters public humiliation and shaming in mass media, the psychological consequences can be devastating (Ahrens, 2006; Lewinsky, 2014; Nwabueze & Oduah, 2015). The victim may even decide that sharing her survival story in the future is pointless, if not harmful. In fact, in such an instance, the survivor may prematurely experience what Freeman (2000) calls "narrative foreclosure." Narrative foreclosure is the feeling that the final chapter in one's life has been written, there is no hope of changing the future, and it is associated with overwhelming despair (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011). Narrative foreclosure is generally used regarding those nearing the end of life, but for the victim of MHM, she may believe her reputation and life legacy has been permanently destroyed. The consequence to this is the premature belief that one's life story is essentially completed; she has reached the end of life (Freeman, 2000). Freeman describes this as the phenomenon that "has the power to arrest some lives, to bring them to a stop without death occurring" (p. 185). On the other hand, for those to whom it seems that the world has all but ended, it may not be a big leap to take that final step.

Personal Myth

McAdams and McLean (2013) explain that a person has a unique personal myth which, like a story, has a beginning, middle, and end (see also McAdams, 1993; McAdams et al., 2006). In the creation of the personal myth, a person must become a self-historian and choose which stories matter in the process of fashioning their own legacy. Important, self-defining memories

that contribute to an individual's personal myth get shared as necessary to help others understand the essence of the individual (McAdams, 1993). McAdams argues that the myth does not make a person, but a person crafts his or herself through the personal myth, and that it is an ongoing process throughout adulthood. The personal myth is the story of self that enables an individual to make sense out of the past, know how to live in the present, and predict what will happen in the future.

Components of Narrative Identity

According to McAdams and McLean (2013) narrative identity can be shaped, described, and understood through seven key elements. These include agency, communion, redemption, contamination, meaning-making, complexity or exploratory narrative processing, and coherent positive resolution. Each of these will be reviewed from the perspective of how the MHM experience might interplay with the life story constructs, especially relative to an individual's personal myth.

Agency

Agency is the control an individual has over his or her circumstances and destiny. In this context, agency is the degree to which the self-protagonist can make decisions, steer the life story, and build a legacy. Highly agentic narratives stress the stories of personal accomplishment and stress the ability to control one's fate (Adler, 2012; McAdams, 1993; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Even if an individual decides to participate in a certain media project, intentional misrepresentation or humiliation would be a violation of that individual's agency. MHM may impact the individual's status, capacity to have influence over others, and ability to accomplish future achievements. Stories involving MHM would seem likely to include the theme of a violation of agency and control of destiny.

Communion

Communion revolves around the stories of love, relationships and the feeling of belonging. Human beings are naturally driven to desire close relationships with others because it is through social belonging that people find increased meaning in life (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lambert et al., 2013). A body of research indicates that feeling accepted and valued within a romantic or social relationship, family, group, or community adds to the meaning in life, and conversely, that social rejection detracts from well-being (Baumeister, 2005; Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2004; Lambert et al., 2010, 2013; Machell et al., 2015; Stillman et al., 2009; Veldhuis et al., 2014). Since public humiliation decreases status and facilitates social rejection (Fernández et al., 2018; Veldhuis et al., 2014), and since MHM is a magnified form of public humiliation, it is possible that MHM stories would include the theme of loss of status and being rejected by the "family of Man" (Margalit, 1996).

Contamination Sequence

When a positive event or time period unexpectedly takes a dramatic turn for the worse, or when a good phase is interrupted by something negative, it is considered a *contamination sequence*. In a contamination sequence, the positive affect from the original happy event can get erased or destroyed by the negative development. The self-protagonist may lose hope, feel helpless, and internalize negative affect in the process (Tompkins, 1987). A contamination sequence is a powerful experience that impacts the narrative identity, especially when the negative event is deliberately inflicted by another human being, versus an accident or natural disaster (Berman, 2016; Santiago et al., 2013; Tolin & Foa, 2006). Narrative identity studies have shown that contamination stories are associated with maladaptive outcomes including depression and reduced self-worth (Adler & Poulin, 2009; McAdams et al., 2001). It is expected that the survivors of MHM will position the experience as a contamination sequence.

Redemption Sequence

When a negative event or circumstance leads to an emotionally positive outcome or an increase in well-being, this is referred to as a "redemption sequence" (McAdams, 2013; McAdams & McLean, 2013). For those who have experienced failure, trauma, or tragedy, sharing their stories publicly is one way for them to be the heroic protagonists in their own life stories, reclaim their personal narratives, and contribute to their own healing (Dunlop & Tracy, 2013; Lewinsky, 2015; Loney-Howes, 2018; Maddow, 2019). Pals (2006b) indicates that adults who emerge from negative life experiences strengthened or enhanced often engage in a two-step process to recover. First, they consider those experiences in depth and explore what role they may play in their overall life story. Research suggests that this step is associated with personal growth (Bauer et al., 2005). Second, they seek to create a positive resolution to the negative experience, a step associated with happiness that can restore the narrative identity.

The work of Bauer et al. (2008) indicates that people are happier when they can experience growth and transformation in their life story narratives and create positive resolutions to the negative events (Adler et al., 2008; Lilgendahl, 2015). The presence of redemption sequences in autobiographical stories has been linked to well-being, positive health behavior, and prosocial behavior (Dunlop & Tracy, 2013; McAdams et al., 2001).

Meaning-Making

Meaning-making in the life story theory of narrative identity is when the self-protagonist gains insight regarding how particular stories or experiences can be integrated into the context of the global life story. Sometimes there is little to be learned, and other times there are epiphanies that help the self-protagonist interpret things differently or see the world in a different way (McAdams & McLean, 2013). A significant body of work indicates that individuals are predisposed to make meaning out of negative experiences (e.g., Baumeister & Newman, 1994;

Mansfield et al., 2015; McAdams, 2013; McAdams et al, 2001; McLean & Syed, 2016; Pals, 2006a). This suggests that people are motivated to find the silver lining in a negative event so they can process it and integrate it into their life stories. Pasupathi et al (2007) posit that people are more likely to seek meaning from negative experiences than positive. This happens often with survivors of trauma as they seek to find healing and comfort. Janoff-Bulman (1992) explains, "By engaging in interpretations and evaluations that focus on the benefits and lessons learned, survivors emphasize benevolence over malevolence, meaningfulness over randomness, and self-worth over self-abasement" (p. 133).

Exploratory Narrative Processing

Explorative narrative processing entails looking internally for the rich elaboration and insights within life stories in an effort to enable individuals to understand themselves better (McAdams & McLean, 2013). It is the intentional exploration and interpretation of a difficult past event to see what can be learned from it (Pals, 2006b). This involves introspection and revisiting self-defining historical memories to reconsider the emotions, thoughts, and personal beliefs (Bruner, 1990; Fivush, 2010). The lessons learned can motivate a change in the life story (Pals, 2006b).

Fivush (2010) asserts that one empowering aspect of narratives is that they provide a framework that enables individuals to explore the moral justifications for their thoughts and actions. Life story narratives are influenced by a master narrative, or "cultural myths and motifs that provide a moral, ethical, and affective framework for understanding events" (p. 94). Since people are in the constant state of learning new information, they have an ongoing opportunity to reinterpret the past and its relationship with master narrative (Pals, 2006b). For individuals whose life stories include life-changing traumatic experiences, considering those experiences in depth and exploring what role they may play in their overall life story can foster personal growth

(Adler et al., 2016; Bauer et al., 2008, 2005). The next step is to seek a positive resolution to the negative experiences to integrate the story into their lives.

Coherent Positive Resolution

Coherent positive resolution consists of two separate components--coherency and positive resolution. This occurs when a story is complete and in spite of difficulties or obstacles, it ends in a positive way (Pals, 2006b). In the ending of a traditional story, tensions are generally relieved as the denouement brings resolution. Scholars affirm that narrative coherence is adaptive for identity (Dunlop et al., 2016; Habermas & Reese, 2015; McAdams et al., 2006), that incoherent personal narratives have mental health implications (Adler, 2012), and that coherency in autobiographical narratives is related to psychological well-being (Waters & Fivush, 2015).

Aside from coherency, positioning a traumatic or distressing story with a positive resolution is also important for well-being. In a life story that is negative or difficult, individuals prefer to distance themselves from those memories to protect their positive sense of self (Dunlop et al., 2015; Pals, 2006a), and to see themselves as having improved (M. Ross & Wilson, 2003). In autobiographical memory studies, although there are some exceptions (e.g., Gibbons et al., 2018; Gibbons et al., 2013; Ritchie et al., 2019), affect associated with negative experiences dissipates faster than the affect associated with positive ones (Walker et al., 2003). This is known as the fading affect bias (Corsa & Walker, 2018; Walker et al., 2003) and possibly serves as a coping mechanism to motivate individuals to have enough hope for the future to take positive action when faced with their next big life obstacle (Walker & Skowronski, 2009).

Creating a positive resolution to a difficult story symbolizes to the self-protagonists and others that they have overcome those obstacles and achieved well-being (McAdams et al., 2001; Pals, 2006a). Positive or redemptive narratives are more often associated with well-being,

whereas contamination sequences or negative narratives are associated with negative well-being (Dunlop & Tracy, 2013). Positive well-being is also associated with narratives that stress agency and communion (Adler, 2012), with narratives that give meaning to negative events and with narratives that have positive resolutions (Pals, 2006b; Waters & Fivush, 2015). Narrative identities that include stories of personal growth or autobiographical reasoning that results in positive self-change also contribute to well-being (Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2010; Waters & Fivush, 2015).

Narrative Identity and Phenomenology

There are two major schools of thought in narrative identity theory. MacIntyre (2007) declares that the life first must be lived before the life story can be told. The self is then created by unifying the life story with themes, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, just like a book. Ricœur (1992), on the other hand, argues that identity is constructed by the stories told and the meaning these stories are given. Ricœur explains that the "sameness" of the body, the DNA, and the memories may make a person recognizable over time, but these unchanging aspects do not make the "self." Heidegger (1927/1962) also rejected this notion of unchanging selves. He argued that if the self stayed the same, for the aspects of the self that stayed the same in a person, it was purposeful, like staying in a marriage. He explains that the self-identity revolves around the meaning and interpretation that individuals give to their experiences. The importance of this is illustrated in the instance where individuals experience things they do not choose, such as an act of violence against them or an unexpected tragedy. People seek to know why unchosen things happen or why their positive life flow was contaminated in such a negative manner, but sometimes they will never have this answer. They can, however, give the negative experience a meaning that will enable them to process the event and move forward. Čapek (2017) argues that

regardless of which school of thought is espoused, a life still being lived does not have a final chapter yet, and the unclear ending is still being written. “By narrating a life of which I am not the author as to existence, I make myself its coauthor as to its meaning’’ (Ricœur, 1992, p.162).

The narrative identity does more than provide meaning to the autobiographical past. Psychologists (McAdams & McLean, 2013) argue that narrative identity enables people to know where their lives may be headed in the future (Kerr et al., 2013; McAdams, 1996, 2001). The stories from the past form a filter through which people can imagine and predict their future lives with unity, purpose, and meaning. For trauma survivors, these imagined future stories can be used to raise their own spirits, influence their loved ones, and guide their own decision-making. Life stories help survivors draw inferences and find patterns in their lives that provide valuable insight into themselves.

The process of reviewing, reconsidering, re-storying, narrating, questioning, reframing, retelling, and rewriting one’s life story can help trauma survivors find meaning in their stories and can empower survivors on the path to recovery (Grant et al., 2015). There is a strong body of research on life story narratives that describes the relationship between meaning-making, psychological improvement and well-being (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; Bauer et al., 2005; Pals, 2006b). According to Viktor Frankl (1992), striving to find meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man (p. 104). In fact, Frankl created what he called “logotherapy” to help people flourish and overcome depression by finding their unique meaning in life (Frankl, 1955; Tate, Williams, & Harden, 2013). When MHM seems to deconstruct the prior life meaning of trauma survivors, it is hoped that some survivors will be able to integrate the new trauma into their narrative identity, give it a coherent positive resolution and meaningful purpose, and thereby turn the MHM experience into post-traumatic growth.

Cognitive Dissonance and Identity

People are deeply motivated to be publicly viewed in a way that is consistent with how they see themselves (Donath, 1999). Erikson (1968) describes identity as a sense of sameness and continuity of the self, and an observable self that others recognize with continuity and consistency. When people are publicly represented to be something they are not, or when they are assigned character traits or motives that they do not have, it causes an inconsistency with their narrative identities and creates both psychological discomfort and social pain. To address such internal tension, Louis Festinger (Festinger et al., 1956; Festinger 1957/1985) introduced a concept called cognitive dissonance, which is "a state of tension occurring when a person holds two psychologically inconsistent cognitions" (Burke et al., 2017, p. 299). Cognitive dissonance theory is based on the assumption that individuals seek consistency between their expectations and their reality, and that when conflicting cognitions, or beliefs, do not fit together, it creates a tension that motivates individuals to eliminate the contradictions (Festinger, 1957/1985).

To reduce the cognitive dissonance, there is a powerful motive for people to ignore or reinterpret facts and then align with those who support their irrational view so as to restore internal consistency (Harmon-Jones, 2002). A survivor can adopt the beliefs of the firestorm of negative social media messages. For example, a trauma survivor who previously viewed herself as a good person who did not deserve to be harmed could become confused when the public feedback is filled with messages of victim-blame. When it seems like "the whole world" agrees that a victim is somehow responsible for the crimes against her, it can create tremendous dissonance for the victim. Such enormous social pressure can influence a victim to modify her own perception of the world and internalize the false message as a true reality. In other words, even if she knows that she did not cause herself to be harmed, and that she is a worthwhile

human being, a barrage of negative social messages can contribute to the internalization of the negative appraisal.

Part II - Humiliation

Definitions

To humiliate is "to cause (a person) a painful loss of pride, self-respect, or dignity; mortify" (dictionary.com). The Latin root word for humiliation is *hum* and *humus*, referring to earth and ground. Lindner (2002b) explains that regardless of the language, words that signify humiliation invoke the concept of being made low, pushed down, held down, or kept down. Humiliation invokes symbolism of being forced to the ground, or even buried in the ground. Hartling and Lindner (2016) describe three components of humiliation: (a) the internal experience (i.e., emotions and meaning); (b) external interactions (i.e., how it happens), and (c) systemic conditions (i.e., social domination, forced migration, poverty, lack of education). This research will focus on the internal experience for individuals who feel they have been humiliated by the media, but the external interactions will provide context, illustrating the systemic condition in this case being the powerful media industry.

According to Margalit (1996), "humiliation is the rejection of a human being from the 'family of Man' – that is, treating humans as nonhuman, or relating to humans as if they were not human…as if they were objects or animals" (p. 108). Treating people as nonhuman includes treating them as if they were machines, as if they were subhumans or inferior, treating adults as children, or overlooking them altogether. Margalit explains that overlooking a human can involve not seeing a person accurately, viewing a person as inferior, missing the important attributes of an individual, or not seeing a person for who they really are. Humiliation sends a message to victims that they are rejected from the family of man because they are seen as

inferior and therefore unworthy of respectful treatment (Statman, 2000). Klein (1991) defines humiliation to include being degraded for what one is, rather than what one does.

A person can be humiliated in active ways, such as abuse, insults, betrayal, entrapment, enslavement, being killed, or through being used as a means-to-an-end rather than an end-in-him or herself. A person can also be humiliated in passive ways such as being ignored, neglected, rejected, unacknowledged, abandoned, taken for granted, or denied a certain right or privilege (Klein, 1991; Margalit, 1996; Smith, 2008). Dehumanization is present in most forms of humiliation, and it can be traumatic (Z. Chen et al., 2008). Hartling and Lindner (2016) explain that prior to the 1990s, research on humiliation was practically nonexistent until Donald Klein (1991), the editor of the *Journal of Primary Prevention*, focused two special issues on the topic. Klein unpacks the concept of humiliation by explaining that humiliation requires three parties: (a) the victim who is the target of the insults or degrading treatment; (b) the humiliator--a person or institution that has more power than the target individual; and (c) the witness, audience, or the public that sees the humiliating event.

Margalit (1996) disagrees that humiliation requires a humiliating agent. He argues that human beings can be humiliated by the conditions of life if those conditions are man-made. He stresses the importance of understanding the underlying rationality for an individual's feelings more than identifying a humiliator. Margalit explains how institutions, organizations, governments, and powerful entities in societies can place individuals in circumstances which result in feeling humiliated. Media organizations are powerful entities (Couldry, 2002; Cui, 2017; Freedman, 2015) that some consider a media hegemony (Altheide, 1984; Block, 2013; Redding, 2017). By reinforcing a certain stereotype, status quo, or media frame, media can contribute to systemic conditions that humiliate certain individuals or classes of individuals.

Humiliation: An Attack on Identity

Humiliation is considered an attack on one's sense of self, or narrative identity (Adshead, 2010). Mann et al. (2017) call humiliation an intense attack on one's character and describe it as a threat to the core aspects of one's identity. When one's image is at risk of being degraded, it fuels serious fears of social exclusion and isolation (Gausel et al., 2012; Gausel et al., 2016). Another word commonly used to express intense humiliation is *mortification*. In Latin, French and Italian, the root *mort* means death. In the 14th century, the word *mortification* meant "to put to death." Mortification, then, is an equivalent to death by humiliation. Libbey (2006) describes mortification as "the primitive terror of self-dissolution, triggered by the sudden exposure of one's sense of a defective self" (p. 1), whether that defect is true or not.

Humiliation can also impact the way one thinks about oneself. "Even if the humiliated person has no doubt that she has incurred an appalling injustice, whereas she is just as human as anyone else, she cannot ignore how others treat her in shaping the way she regards herself" (Margalit, 1996, p. 124). The experience of humiliation includes not only the loss of status, but the loss of self (Adshead, 2010; D. Klein, 1991; Silver et al., 2007). Just as trauma has been shown to impact identity (Berman, 2016; Crossley, 2000; Gil, 2004), scholars argue that humiliation can also disrupt an individual's positive sense of identity (Fernández et al., 2015; Gausel et al., 2016; Silver et al., 2007; Torres & Bergner, 2012). The greater the loss of status, the more difficult it will be for humiliated individuals to regain their social position. The more serious the attack on one's identity, the more burdensome it will be for those individuals to function in their lifeworlds (Bergner, 1999; Torres & Bergner, 2012).

> Humiliation, I believe is not just another experience in our life, like, say, an embarrassment. It is a formative experience. It forms the way we view ourselves as

> humiliated persons…Humiliation, in the strong sense, is a fundamental assault on us as human beings, becomes constitutive of one sense of who we are. (Margalit, 2009, p. 130)

Fernández et al. (2015) argue that a critical aspect of the humiliation experience is the internalization of a devalued identity and the acceptance of a lowered status (D. Klein, 1991; Torres & Bergner, 2012), even though the humiliated individual believes that the negative appraisal is undeserved and has been wrongfully imposed upon them. The negative appraisal is deemed as unfair, and yet, paradoxically, the appraisal is accepted.

Studies affirm that humiliation, trauma, victim-blaming, and shaming can impair the narrative identity of a trauma survivor (Adler et al., 2008; Crossley, 2000; Niemi & Young, 2014; Webb & Jobson, 2011). Fernández et al. (2015) explain that too often people end up believing the negative stories that have been told or written about them by others. When negative, false, or humiliating stories are published in the media, the perceived audience is vast, and the possible onslaught of negative feedback from the public has the potential to create a false public narrative that could be difficult to overcome, and to not internalize. A high-profile example of a survivor of MHM, Monica Lewinsky (2014), explained, “If you haven’t figured out who you are, it’s hard not to accept the horrible image of you created by others” (p. 148).

Humiliation and Power

Humiliation theory examines the dynamics of forced social displacement (Mills, 2004). Leask (2013) calls humiliation “a demonstrative exercise of power against one or more persons, which consistently involves a number of elements: stripping of status, rejection or exclusion, unpredictability or arbitrariness, and a personal sense of injustice matched by the lack of any remedy for the injustice suffered” (p. 131). Humiliation can be interpreted as an act of

disempowerment by a more powerful person or entity that strips individuals of their status, limits their options, denies them privileges, constrains their rights, or exposes their vulnerabilities (Hartling & Lindner, 2017; Reyes, 2007).

A loss of power is a central feature in humiliation (Elshout et al., 2017). Fernández, Saguy, and Halperin (2015) found that when humiliation was delivered by a hostile, high-status perpetrator, there was an enhanced effect on the feeling of injustice. Not only is humiliation a wound of unjust treatment, but because the mistreatment was perpetrated by a more powerful party, the humiliated individual generally does not have the status to repair the wound to their dignity and reputation (Torres & Bergner, 2012).

Other forms of powerlessness in humiliation involve negative stereotyping and microaggressions against members of stigmatized minority groups (Sue, 2017). Microaggressions have been associated with severe negative psychological outcomes for members of the target groups (Houshmand et al., 2017; O'Keefe et al., 2015).

Humiliation through Dehumanization

As Margalit (1996) explained in his seminal book *The Decent Society,* when human beings are treated like non-human objects or animals, they are dehumanized and therefore, humiliated. One example of this would be if an individual is forced to work with no decision-making power and is treated like nothing more than a beast of burden or a working machine. By taking away an individual's agency or disregarding his wishes, he becomes stripped of his humanity. Haslam and Loughnan (2014) reaffirm that dehumanization attempts to strip one of human characteristics.

When there is a denial of all the unique attributes that make a person a full human being, various detrimental effects are manifest. Dehumanization has been linked with increased

prejudice and discrimination (Kteily et al., 2015; Schmitt et al., 2014), decreased helping behavior (Andrighetto et al., 2014), violence and aggression against the dehumanized group or individuals (Bandura et al., 1975; Bruneau & Kteily, 2017), less support for favorable or harm-reduction policies aimed at the dehumanized group (Costello & Hodson, 2011; Kersbergen & Robinson, 2019; Kteily, Hodson, & Bruneau, 2016; Loughnan et al., 2017), and increased negative thoughts and behaviors aimed at the dehumanized individuals (Kersbergen & Robinson, 2019; Prati & Loughnan, 2018; Zhang et al., 2017). Other consequences for victims of dehumanization include sadness, feeling inferior, cognitive deconstruction, shame-related emotions, and denial of competency and being civilized (Zhang et al., 2017). Zhang and colleagues found that for people with higher self-esteem, being mechanistically dehumanized (treated like a machine devoid of human attributes and needs) resulted in a greater tendency to respond with sadness or aggression. For those with lower self-esteem, being animalistically dehumanized (compared to or treated like an animal) denied them uniquely human qualities and created inaccurate judgments of lower cognitive ability (Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Zhang et al., 2017). When individuals are regarded as being devoid of all their fully human attributes, they are likely to feel sadness, despair, disrespect, and emotional wounds (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007). Twenge et al. (2007) also explain that humiliation and dehumanization can result in cognitive deconstruction, a construct that Baumeister (1990) developed to explain a deconstructed awareness of the self as “just a body.” Cognitive deconstruction is a coping mechanism that helps “blot out threatening implications” (p. 92) by removing the painful meaning that comes when one is acutely aware of one’s own dehumanization or objectification.

A conceptual sibling to dehumanization is infrahumanization, a concept describing how people assign a fuller spectrum of human emotions and traits to ingroup members compared to

outgroup members (Leyens et al., 2000; Vaes & Paladino, 2010). Common targets for dehumanization, infrahumanization, and objectification include members of outgroups (Vaes et al., 2012), racial and ethnic groups (Fitzek, 2015; Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016), immigrants (Miranda et al., 2014), refugees (Bruneau et al., 2018), artists (Loughnan & Haslam, 2007), obese people (Kersbergen & Robinson, 2019), workers in dirty or sanitation occupations (Valtorta et al., 2019), people with disabilities (Capozza et al., 2016), homeless people (Harris & Fiske, 2006), survivors of natural disasters (Andrighetto et al., 2014), LGBTQ individuals (Capozza et al., 2014; Fasoli et al., 2016), women (Bernard, Gervais, et al., 2015; Bernard, Loughnan, et al., 2015; Vance et al., 2015), medical and psychiatric patients (Martinez, 2014), working people (Loughnan et al., 2017), athletes (Delbosc et al., 2019), and victims of crime (Bastian & Haslam, 2011), to name a few. Although this is not an exhaustive list, it is clear that dehumanization, infrahumanization, and objectification are not rare occurrences.

Humiliation Through Objectification

Dehumanization is conceptually related to objectification because when people are treated like objects, they are not being treated like full human beings (Bevens & Loughnan, 2019; Vaes, Paladino, & Puvia, 2011). Objectification theory was originally conceived by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) whose work created an awareness to the problem of women being more valued as sexual objects rather than complete human beings. Bartky (1991) explains that sexual objectification is present when a "woman's sexual parts or functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her" (p. 35). The concept of objectification has since expanded beyond women's sexual objectification (e.g., Davids et al., 2018; Heath et al., 2016; Wiseman & Moradi, 2010), and is related to dehumanization and humiliation (e.g., Guizzo et al., 2017; Wollast et al., 2018). In a more global sense, objectification involves seeing a human being as an

inanimate object, an instrument whose value in society is not who the person is, but what the individual can do (Loughnan et al., 2017). Individuals are objectified when their "instrumental utility" is valued over their personhood.

Studies show that humanity is associated with the human traits of warmth, competence and morality (Harris & Fiske, 2006; Haslam, 2006; Loughnan et al., 2017). The more objectified an individual or group is, the less the individual or group will be perceived as embodying these human attributes (Harris & Fiske, 2006; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Heflick, Goldenberg, Cooper, & Puvia, 2011; Loughnan et al., 2010). These less-human perceptions exist both in sexual contexts (V. Beck & Rose, 2018; Bernard, Gervais, et al., 2015), and in non-sexual contexts (Andrighetto et al., 2014).

There are a number of negative consequences of objectification, including the risk of victims internalizing their objectification (Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Loughnan et al., 2017), a condition where the objectified see themselves as they are seen by those who objectify them (Formanowicz et al., 2018). Feminist theorists argue that objectification also leads to increased likelihood of aggression against women (Dworkin, 2000), habitual body monitoring, increased shame, depression, eating disorders and anxiety (B. L. Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), increased rape, victim-blaming, and decreased perceptions of victim suffering (Loughnan et al., 2013). Loughnan et al. (2017) found that objectification contributes to depersonalization and diminished perceptions of worthiness.

Stereotyping

Stereotypes are heuristic judgments and beliefs about the representativeness of the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors about certain categories of individuals, often causing errors in judgment (Bordalo et al., 2016; Hilton & von Hippel, 1996; Kahneman & Tversky, 1972). When people are judged based on their membership in a certain social or biological

category, they are less likely to be recognized for their individuality (Devine, 1989; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Stereotyped individuals are denied the opportunity to be seen for their unique attributes, or to be viewed as full and complete human beings (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Haslam, 2006; Haslam et al., 2008; Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016; Rapport, 2013; Vaes & Paladino, 2010). Stereotyping, then, can be seen as a form of misrepresentation and dehumanization (Bordalo et al., 2016; Haslam et al., 2008; Margalit, 1996).

In some situations, stereotypes can be accurate (Bian & Cimpian, 2017; Hřebíčková et al., 2018), or appear positive (i.e., Asians are good at math; African Americans are excellent athletes), but even positive stereotypes can produce harmful, limiting, and misrepresentative beliefs about broad categories of people (Czopp et al., 2015; Kay et al., 2013). Allport (1954) described stereotypes as promoting misrepresentations and biases that function like fertilizer for social injustice. Derogatory stereotypes are commonly activated in regard to social and racial minorities and outgroups (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; F. Arendt, 2016; Cooke-Jackson & Hansen, 2008; Costello & Hodson, 2011; K. N. Dukes & Gaither, 2017; Fasoli et al., 2017; Hester & Gray, 2018; McInroy & Craig, 2017; Remedios & Snyder, 2018; Schemer, 2012; Wasarhaley et al., 2017). Although a well-established body of literature describes harmful consequences of stereotyping (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; Appel & Weber, 2017; Bakalova, 2013; Beeghly, 2015; Chakvetadze et al., 2016; Cooke-Jackson & Hansen, 2008; Devine, 1989; K. N. Dukes & Gaither, 2017; Fasoli et al., 2017; Follmer & Jones, 2017; Garland, 2015; Gervais et al., 2011; Hester & Gray, 2018; Inzlicht, 2012; Jin et al., 2017; Masser et al., 2010; Remedios & Snyder, 2018; Schemer, 2012; Schmitt et al., 2014), stereotyping in the media remains a problem and can increase the harm to people (e.g., Adams-Bass et al., 2014; Appel & Weber, 2017; Bakalova, 2013; Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, 2013; Boden, 2016; Chakvetadze et al., 2016; Garland, 2015; Jin et al. 2017; Schemer, 2012).

Portilla (2018) contends that media misrepresentations such as stereotyping inflict their own form of discreet harm upon those misrepresented. Portilla argues that media portrayals that convey derogatory stereotypes, especially towards minorities or disadvantaged groups, should be considered a "subtler but insidious manifestation of hate speech" that contributes to hate crimes and discrimination (p. 6). Prati et al. (2015) argue that stereotyping leads to prejudice and discrimination and is one of the most pervasive social problems today. A stereotype is a common, simplified view of a particular type of person or thing that is commonly associated with prejudice. Stigma comes from negative and often unfair attitudes about a group of people that have a distinguishable characteristic.

Stigma

Stigma is a condition of lowered status that occurs as a result of labeling and including individuals in a category of people for whom there is a negative stereotype attached (Angermeyer & Matschinger, 2005; Mikolon et al., 2016). Public humiliation is an intentional action designed to demean and lower the status of an individual in the eyes of the others (Elshout et al., 2017). There is overlap between the two concepts in that both involve a lowered status of an individual or group, although stigma is more about perception (i.e., labeling an individual or group in a negative category), while humiliation is more about a negative affect and action (Hartling & Lindner, 2017), or "the experience of some form of ridicule, scorn, contempt, or other degrading treatment at the hands of others" (Klein, 1991, p. 94).

Stigmatization is one of the potential consequences of public humiliation (Robson & Lian, 2017). Link and Phelan (2001) describe stigma as a complicated social process that involves stereotyping, labeling, separation, discrimination, and status loss. According to

Goffman (1963), stigma is a negative social differentiator that results in what he calls a spoiled social identity. Goffman explains that a person who is stigmatized is "disqualified from full social acceptance" (preface) and "reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). He argues that stigma involves the relationship of both an attribute and a stereotype. Link and Phelan (2001) identify the stigmatization process as arising from the tendency for humans to label human differences, linking the differences to negative stereotypes, categorizing these people to distinguish and separate them from "us." The labeled individuals then experience discrimination, loss of status, disapproval, exclusion, and rejection. Link also notes that stigmatization will only thrive where the existing social power structures allow it (see also Angermeyer & Matschinger, 2005).

Academic literature frequently includes the concept of stigma as a consequence or component that intersects with stereotyping, prejudice, status, shame, and humiliation (Angermeyer & Matschinger, 2005; Askew & Salinas, 2018; Battle, 2019; Derks et al., 2008; Fortenberry et al., 2002; Lucas & Phelan, 2012; Mikolon et al., 2016; Phelan et al., 2008; Phelan et al., 2014; Pinel, 1999; Remedios & Snyder, 2018; Riley, 2010; Ritter & Ueno, 2017; Robson & Lian, 2017; Shu et al., 2014; Treloar et al., 2016; Vijeyarasa, 2013; Weng & Clark, 2018). Phelan et al. (2008) identified three categories of the function of stigma and prejudice as "exploitation and domination (keeping people down); norm enforcement (keeping people in); and disease avoidance (keeping people away)" (p. 358). Stigmatized individuals and groups have been reported to be dehumanized, marginalized, discriminated against, and excluded, all of which affects their subjective well-being (Schmitt et al., 2014; Verma et al., 2018). One of the most serious consequences of stigma is when people begin to agree with negative public stereotypes, particularly mental illness, and the stereotypes become internalized (Bonfils et al.,

2018). When public stigma gains internal acceptance as self-stigma, it becomes integrated into a person's identity and unlocks a host of challenges (Corrigan & Rao, 2012). A non-exhaustive list of some of the consequences of stigma and self-stigma include damage to the self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy (Corrigan et al., 2006; Ehrlich-Ben Or et al., 2013), hesitancy to seek mental health care (Corrigan et al., 2014; Hagger & Riley, 2017; Pellegrini, 2014), impediments to seeking or receiving adequate medical care (Corrigan et al., 2014; Fortenberry et al., 2002; Hagger & Riley, 2017; Philbin et al., 2018), impairment of social relationships (Doyle & Molix, 2014; Newheiser & Barreto, 2014), reduced sense of life meaning (Ehrlich-Ben Or et al., 2013), and advanced structural inequalities (V. K. Blake & Hatzenbuehler, 2019; Frost, 2011; Hatzenbuehler, 2016; Herek, 2007; Link & Phelan, 2014). However, Verma, Bharti, and Singh (2018) argue that stigma does not always have negative consequences, citing examples of beggars in India who use their stigmatized status to elicit donations, and students of minority groups who take advantage of their stigmatized status to gain educational benefits.

The intersection of stigma and humiliation is clearly strong. People who are publicly humiliated can feel stigmatized as a result (D. Taylor, 2018), and people who are stigmatized are likely candidates for humiliation as well (Hartling & Lindner, 2017; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Lindner, 2002). Lindner (2002a) states that humiliation is the “enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honor or dignity” (p. 137). Fraser (2009) explains that when individuals are misrepresented and disparaged through stereotypes in the media, it is a humiliating experience that contributes to widespread misrecognition, injustice, and stigma.

Neuroscience of Humiliation and Rejection

Human beings have a fundamental need to have positive relationships with other people and to feel like they belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When the social standing of an

individual is threatened, the panic circuitry in the brain is activated as the individual fears rejection (Eisenberger, 2011). Humiliation is generally perceived as a signal of potential exclusion and is solidly established as one of the strongest of human emotions (Gibson, 2018; Hartling et al., 2013). Neuroscience provides support for this (Otten & Jonas, 2014; Otten et al., 2017). In one electro-encephalogram study, Otten and Jonas (2014) found that the elevated cortical activation in the brains of subjects revealed humiliation to be the most intense human emotion. Research also found that the brain sustains stronger and longer neurocognitive emotional processing when a direct insult is accompanied by a laughing crowd (Otten et al., 2017).

van der Molen et al. (2017) examined the neurodynamics of midfrontal oscillatory activity of subjects while processing social feedback and found the most powerful effect when the subjects experienced unexpected social rejection. Humiliation is a form of social rejection, and rejection hurts, in both humans and animals (Z. Chen & Williams, 2011; Eisenberger, 2012b; Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2004; Eisenberger et al., 2003; Harlow, 1958; Krill & Platek, 2009; van der Molen et al., 2017). Social pain/physical pain overlap theorists argue that social pain is processed in the same areas of the brain as physical pain, a concept supported by neuroscience (Bernstein & Claypool, 2012; DeWall et al., 2010; Eisenberger, 2012b, 2012c, 2012a; Eisenberger et al., 2003; Kawamoto et al., 2012). Since there is overlap in behavioral and neural mechanisms that register pain-related affect, acetaminophen has been shown to reduce not only physical pain, but social pain as well (DeWall et al., 2010).

Neuroimaging studies indicate that the dorsal anterior cingular cortex (daCC) is one of the primary neural structures active during both physical and social pain. In particular, it is prominent in the human social pain experience as well as in separation-distress behaviors in mammals (Eisenberger, 2011; Rainville et al., 1997). Distress vocalizations of infant animals, or

animals separated from their herd, are believed to signify social pain in animals and be a call for reconnection and inclusion to increase chances of survival (Eisenberger, 2011; Hudson et al., 2015; Linhart et al., 2015). In human beings, rejection and exclusion can create not only psychological distress, but it can feel like physical pain as well (Eisenberger et al., 2006). Eisenberger (2011) explains that rejection, or anticipation of rejection, arouses the separation distress/panic circuitry in the brain. This emotional network utilizes the same neurochemistry as animals. Since humiliation is both a sign of rejection and a predicter of future social exclusion, psychological pain systems are activated.

While physical pain in the body can be remembered, it cannot be re-felt in the body. However, the social and psychological pain of public humiliation takes place in the brain, not the body. Therefore, not only can the suffering be remembered, but it is easily recalled, re-felt and relived (Z. Chen & Williams, 2011; Z. Chen et al., 2008). Vorbruggen and Baer (2007) argue that even in times of war, the most damaging impact of torture is the psychological degradation and humiliation because it contributes to "longer-lasting and more effects on the soul and mind on the tortured than does the physical torture" (p. 32). In essence, humiliation is a social pain that is likely to have far-reaching negative consequences, lasting even longer than physical pain (Z. Chen & Williams, 2012).

Humiliation as a Violation of Dignity

Scholars equate humiliation with a violation of dignity (Lindner et al., 2011; Shultziner & Rabinovici, 2012; Statman, 2000). Dignity, they argue, is essential for human development. Dignity begins with situated stories, or autobiographical memories through which humans make meaning and sense of their identities (Singer et al., 2013). If individuals' stories are ignored or disregarded, then they are "without dignity," marginalized, powerless, and rendered invisible.

These autobiographical memories, especially those that are emotionally charged, are the foundation of narrative identity.

The word *dignity* is derived from the Latin word *dignitas* which means social honor, esteem, standing, worth (Margalit, 1996). Immanuel Kant (1963), often considered the father of the modern concept of human dignity (Bognetti, 2005; Donelly, 1989), argued that the worth of a person is inherent in the simple fact that he is a human being. The essence of Kant's (1963) position is that no human being should be treated as an objectified means-to-an-end because human beings are ends-in-themselves. This concept of dignity is similar to that in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948). Not only is dignity the cornerstone of today's understanding of human rights, it is also a key principle in ethics and law (Waldron, 2007; Zylberman, 2016). In the world of media, however, among some content creators and decision-makers such as producers, directors, editors, and network executives, there seems to be no standard business model that requires treating people with dignity or handling the subjects of their media stories in a matter that does not objectify or exploit them (Maccarone, 2010; Mast, 2016).

According to Kantian ethics, the objectification and exploitation of human beings diminishes individual dignity (Bayefsky, 2013; Donelly, 1989). Kant (1963) argues that people deserve the right to exercise their free will. To treat an individual as anything less than an end-in-himself is to humiliate that individual, impede his free will, and deny him of his very humanity. Expounding on Kant's principle, O'Neill (2017) explains that "to use someone as a mere means is to involve them in a scheme of action to which they could not in principle consent" (p. 17). When it comes to the representation of one's likeness in the media, individuals generally hope and expect to be represented accurately and ethically (Mast, 2016; Nash, 2011, 2012). When MHM occurs instead of the accurate and respectful representation the individual

expects, it is likely to be experienced as a deep disappointment and have a powerful impact on that individual's well-being (Portilla, 2018).

Consequences of Humiliation

Since humiliation happens in the context of a social situation, it is considered a social pain and has been linked to a number of negative outcomes (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2004; Riva, Wirth, & Williams, 2011). Humiliation is associated with consequences such as depression and anxiety (Collazzoni et al., 2017; Kendler et al., 2003; D. Klein, 1991), harm to identity and self-worth (Adshead, 2010; D. Klein, 1991; Lukes, 1997; Torres & Bergner, 2012), post-traumatic stress disorder (Hamby et al., 2018), worthlessness (D. Klein, 1991; Torres & Bergner, 2012), hopelessness and helplessness (Hartling & Lindner, 2016), losing trust in the world (Leask, 2013), and suicide or suicidal ideation (Bergner, 1999; D. Klein, 1991; Torres & Bergner, 2012). In fact, humiliation not only contributes to the feeling of reputational and psychological death, but the anguish experienced can be so severe, it has not only been frequently cited as a risk factor for physical death by suicide, but also as a motivator for homicide (Z. Chen et al., 2008; Ebert & Dyck, 2004; Fernández et al., 2015; Hartling & Lindner, 2016; Torres & Bergner, 2012; K. D. Williams & Nida, 2011).

Individuals who have been publicly humiliated sometimes ruminate obsessively about how to undo the damage, making it difficult for them to focus on little else (Negrao et al., 2005). Negrao and colleagues explain that the preoccupation stems from the inability for the humiliation victim to get the experience out of his or her mind. Constant intrusions and reminders approach the characteristics of post-traumatic stress symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is difficult for such deeply affected persons to function effectively in a relationship, at home, or in a career. Since humiliation is based on the broadcasting of false information, misinformation, or undeserved attacks, there is no act for which the humiliated one

can apologize (Stein & Barton, 2018). Without a remedy or a way to make sense out of what occurred, one consequence for an experience of humiliation is often festering anger (Leidner et al., 2012; Veldhuis et al., 2014).

Humiliation-Related Emotions

In addition to shame, other emotions are related to humiliation such as guilt and embarrassment. Shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride are known as *self-conscious emotions.* (Hacker, 2017; Tangney & Fischer, 1995; Tracy & Robins, 2007). The self-conscious emotions are also identified as commonly occurring after trauma. Although the term 'self-conscious' is used, this does not refer to engaging in self-reflection on these emotions. Rather, it designates the emotions that one experiences when becoming aware that others have particular judgments, assessment, or emotions about him or her (Tangney & Fischer, 1995; Tracy & Robins, 2007; Tracy et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2018). Fessler (2007) describes the self-conscious emotions as other-oriented emotions since the emotions one feels about oneself is influenced by how others might perceive them.

Embarrassment is that awkward feeling of being self-conscious and distressed when something unexpected occurs that leaves an individual feeling vulnerable, exposed, or flawed (Tangney & Fischer, 1995). Embarrassment is considered a mild and less intense version of shame (Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Rochat, 2009). It is more of a social evaluation than a self-evaluation in that it acknowledges a discrepancy between how others evaluate one and how one wishes to publicly present the self (Tracy & Robins, 2004). Tracy and Robins explain that shame reaches to the core of the identity whereas embarrassment only reaches the outer self. Shame is more intense than embarrassment (Buss, 1980), more shattering and painful (Zahavi, 2010), more persistent (Buss, 1980), and it involves a negative self-evaluation for failing to live up to a

personal ideal or social expectation (Tangney & Fischer, 1995). Shame is also associated with hiding (Hacker, 2017), wishing to shrink (Fessler, 2007), and lasting damage to self-esteem (Zahavi, 2010). Embarrassment is temporary (Buss, 1980), can disappear on its own in a short period of time (D. Y. Ho et al., 2004), and is also associated with smiling and laughter (Buss, 2001; Crozier, 2014). Shame promotes self-reflection and self-evaluation (Tangney et al., 2007). Embarrassment often makes for a good story, but it does not elicit self-evaluation.

Shame is often confused with guilt because both emotions are associated with a concern about causing a loss, harm, or distress to others (Higgs et al., 2019). Shame, however, is the negative affect centered on a core defect of the self, whereas guilt emerges when a person realizes they have committed a regretful action (Gibson, 2018; Haidt, 2003; Higgs et al., 2019; D. Y. Ho et al., 2004). Guilt is also associated with the motivation to take responsibility for one's actions by correcting a wrong and making amends (Higgs et al., 2019). Neuroscience supports the premise that embarrassment and guilt are distinct self-conscious emotions. When activated in a laboratory setting, embarrassment recruits greater anterior temporal regions which signal social knowledge, while guilt recruits greater prefrontal regions, indicating the use of areas where perspective-taking and behavioral change take place (Higgs et al., 2019; Jankowski & Takahashi, 2014).

Embarrassment denotes low-intensity emotion, sometimes accompanied by laughter, in a public setting (Ellison & Clark, 2007). Melchers et al. (2015) studied the neural basis of embarrassment by focusing on reality TV shows that exploited the human flaws of individuals such as lack of hygiene, obesity, sexual content, lack of talent, failures, or social norm violations (e.g., Harry, 2008). They noted that while many found such embarrassing content entertaining, for others it was a trigger for vicarious embarrassment (Higgs et al., 2019).

Guilt revolves around a moral violation and is believed to serve a relationship-enhancing purpose (Baumeister et al., 1994; J. F. Johnson & Connelly, 2016). Shame is a high-intensity emotion believed to contribute to adherence to positive morals and social norms (Ellison & Clark, 2007; Stuewig & Tangney, 2007). Humiliation, however, when used as a verb as in "to humiliate someone," is comparable to bullying (Ellison & Clark, 2007). The emotion of "feeling humiliated" is brought on by an unjust attack on the self, and it can ignite feelings of anger, aggression, and revenge.

Humiliation Versus Shame

Humiliation has not been the topic of decades of research literature, in part because humiliation is so often equated with shame (Elshout et al., 2017; Hartling & Lindner, 2016). Shame is an intensely negative emotion that contributes to a devaluation of self (Tangney et al., 1996). Synonyms for shame include guilt, penitence, regret, remorse, self-reproach, contriteness, repentance – all words that indicate that people feel responsible for an action they took. With shame, people feel an activation of conscience and they believe that actions could be taken to change themselves or make amends (Lickel et al., 2014). Humiliation, on the other hand, is associated with words like debasement, disparagement, degradation, dehumanization, mortification, take down. None of these terms imply agency, action, or responsibility on the part of the humiliated one.

Although the word *shame* is often used in place of the word *humiliation* as if it is the same construct, a body of work indicates that shame has different antecedents and consequences than humiliation, and that shame and humiliation should be considered two separate emotions (Fernández et al., 2015; Otten & Jonas, 2014). In fact, humiliation is associated with affect and actions that are not usually linked with shame, such as anger (Ellison & Clark, 2007; Fernández et al., 2015; Veldhuis et al., 2014) and feeling powerless (Elshout et al., 2017; Leidner et al.,

2012; Veldhuis et al., 2014), depression (Collazzoni et al., 2017), suicide (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; D. Klein, 1991; Torres & Bergner, 2012), the desire for revenge (Lewis, 2016; Lindner, 2009; Winlow & Hall, 2009; Zulueta, 2006), and the motivation or willingness to kill (Fattah & Fierke, 2009; Hartling et al., 2013; Lewis, 2016; Lindner, 2009; Zulueta, 2006). Humiliation is associated with perceived unfairness in that there is always a sense of injustice in the humiliation experience (Elshout et al., 2017; Fernández et al., 2015).

When people experience shame, they can identify an action or personal defect that gives rise to the experience of shame. In shame, people look down upon themselves and often believe they warrant being looked down upon by others (Fernández et al., 2018, 2015). In humiliation, they do not (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). In other words, as described by Mann et al. (2017), shame casts a negative judgment on the self by the self, and it is perceived as deserved, whereas humiliation casts a negative judgment on the self by another, and it is perceived as undeserved. Dorahy (2017) explains, "Humiliation is described as denoting the naked self exposed *by* another, while shame is described as denoting the naked self exposed *to* another" (p. 386).

In an effort to explicate the difference between humiliation and shame, Elshout et al. (2017) tested the concept of humiliation from a prototype perspective. Their results show that humiliation involved the belief that individuals were unfairly brought down, feeling small, inferior, and powerless. For humiliation, an audience was necessary. The emotions associated with humiliation included a combination of disappointment, anger, and shame. When shame is used as a verb, as in "to shame" it has passive and active uses. "To be shamed" also means to be publicly humiliated; "to shame someone" is to reveal an individual's defects, shortcomings, or flaws to the public (Hacker, 2017). Jogdand (2019) explains that humiliation is distinct from similar emotions, that it requires the dehumanizing or disparaging of another, and that it is an intense, painful, dysphoric experience perceived to be undeserved.

The words *humiliation* and *shame* have definitional overlap and are in many cases interchangeable, for the purpose of clarity in this paper, I use the term *humiliation* to describe the experience or feeling of having been undeservedly degraded in public. Even in cases of personal shame, when the public joins in to try to force a person to feel shame beyond what one feels is deserved, the shaming is supplemented with humiliation. I contend that one can experience shame and humiliation as two separate emotions at the same time.

Shame Versus Public Shaming

Shame is perhaps the emotion with the least agreed upon definition. Some argue that shame is inward-facing, and that it does not require an audience (Deonna & Teroni, 2011). Others contend that it requires an audience (Bero, 2019; Sartre, 1943; Uebel, 2016). Deigh (1996) points out that the definition of shame, according to Aristotle, Aquinas, Darwin, Descartes, Spinoza, and Sartre, includes concern for the opinion of others. Uebel (2016) argues that shame requires an audience, even if that audience is internally imagined. He contends, "Shame is an emotion routed through the eyes and its mise-en-scène is thus specularity and exposure, involving the spatial organization of a spectator who can be external, internal, or both at once" (p. 234).

Some argue that one must agree with the content of the shaming in some way and acknowledge that something horrible took place (A. Phillips, 2019; Tangney et al., 2007). Phillips (2019) argues, "Where there is shame there is unassailable consent to the ethical standards that have been violated" (p. 73). Others disagree, arguing that one need not agree with the external assessments in order to feel shame (Calhoun, 2004; Galligan, 2016). Some authors assert that shame and shaming alike are productive and can promote change within an individual and within society (Jacquet, 2015; Klonick, 2016; Lum, 2011; Mielczarek, 2018; Probyn, 2005;

Probyn et al., 2018; Sznycer et al., 2016). Conversely, others assert that shame is maladaptive and nonproductive (Orth et al., 2006; Sabini & Silver, 1997; Tangney et al., 1992, 2007). Shame, according to Walker (2011), incorporates the visceral experience of being shunned and exiled from human connectedness. Like humiliation, shame is concerned about the appraisal of others. Brown (2006) confirms this. She describes shame as, "An intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging" (p. 45).

Shame is a noun that is often used in contexts where other emotions overlap, such as guilt, embarrassment, or humiliation. Frost (2016) contends that shame invokes concealment, the desire to keep something private. Shame is also a verb, as in “to shame someone,” which involves outing or exposing someone for a defect, a condition, or violation of a social norm. When the flaw or misdeed is exposed, the individual then wishes to hide (Darwin, 1965; Declerck et al., 2014; Tangney et al., 2007). The adjective *ashamed*, as in “to feel ashamed,” implies that someone who is ashamed knows or believes that the committed infraction was indeed wrong. The desire to hide the things that make us feel ashamed tends to protect us from the disapproval of society.

Public Shaming

With the rise of digital incivility and online cruelty, the verbs *shamed* and *shaming* have become popular in modern culture, for example, Monica Lewinsky’s (2015) Ted Talk, *The Price of Shame;* the acclaimed *Shame Nation* by Sue Scheff and Melissa Schorr (2017); and Jon Ronson’s (2016) *New York Times* bestseller *So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed.* Although the term *shaming* inherently implies a public audience, the term *public shaming* in today’s culture invokes a digital mobbing. An individual’s faulty behavior is criticized and condemned, then

digital vigilantes share, like, and promote the condemnation to enlist others to join in an Internet takedown (Billingham & Parr, 2019). In public shaming, the activity goes beyond enforcing social norms, or inspiring personal accountability or restitution for what was deemed an unacceptable act by an individual. Those shaming use the act as a justification for unleashing a dehumanizing fury directed at the full individual, not just for the act. Gregoire (2015) explained how social media "has created an aggressive culture of public shaming in which individuals take it upon themselves to inflict psychological damage" (para. 20).

Nussbaum (2004) compares public shaming to the centuries when punishments were accompanied by public humiliation and were bodily in nature. Punishments included physical markings such as tattoos or brandings seared onto the cheeks or foreheads; disfigurement, such as gashing the cheeks or slitting the nostrils; maimings, such as hacking off ears; or placing offenders in iron masks, cages, or stocks and parading them down the street, forever to be remembered in ignominy (Earle, 1896; Green, 2015a, 2015b). In her book *Curious Punishments of Bygone Days,* Earle (1896) describes all manner of public punishments that would permanently scar and forever damage the sinner, whether physically or psychologically. She wrote about the bilboes, wooden structures used to restrain the unworthy by hands, neck, or feet, noting how punishments were strategically meted out when crowds would gather.

> It was not their use but their glare of publicity that was offensive. They were ever placed on offenders in the marketplace, in front of the meetinghouse on lecture day, on market day; not to keep prisoners in lonely captivity, but in public obloquy; and as has here been cited, for what appears to us to-day slight offenses. (Earle, 1896, p. 10)

Although the shaming of today no longer involves physical cruelty, digital shaming beckons society to remember the permanent brand of shame of centuries past with the “lasting mark of shame at the hands of the media in the digital age” (Hess & Waller, 2014, p.101). Earle (1896) also describes the particular cruelty of the pillory that forced one’s face to be exposed

and then pelted with rotten eggs and garbage by the participating public. The worst outrage, she explained, was being unable to hide one's face in shame. The face is symbolic. In English and Chinese cultures, terms like "losing face" or "saving face" signify being humiliated or being spared humiliation (grammarist.com). With public shaming, the names and faces of perceived wrongdoers are broadcast, forever branding them with the marks of their misdeeds.

McBride (2015) notes a concern with online mob mentality in that public shaming sometimes takes place without substantial proof of the perceived infraction, and often with scant information about the actual person being targeted. Furthermore, more often than not, the permanence and severity of the punishment exceeds the scope of the crime, if there was one at all (Gregoire, 2015). While social media has given voice to the powerless and provided an effective platform for social justice efforts, it has also made it possible for cyber vigilantes to take matters into their own hands, and to act as judge, jury, and executioner for the targeted offender, and in the process, destroy lives. In most cases, the life-altering, public shaming punishment for a non-criminal infraction is far too severe (Sorell, 2019). Cyber vigilantism, or "digilantism," has enabled the blossoming of "call-out culture," which Ryan (2017) describes as "the use of lightning quick ad hominem attacks or the use of a lack of context to single out an individual for what is seen as 'immoral behavior,' whether or not the issue at hand is something that happened" (para. 4). Call-out culture is related to outrage culture, vengeance culture, cancel culture, and de-platforming--all forms of public shaming dedicated to exposing, silencing, and shunning transgressors, with a glossy appearance of intending to make the world a better place.

For the publicly shamed transgressor, however, the punishment is overkill. There is rarely an opportunity to make amends and be forgiven, to learn from one's mistakes, or to find a path welcoming them back to humanity. Like cyberbullying or cyber harassment, public

shaming involves repeated verbal aggressions, but unlike cyber harassment, it enlists an army of strangers that act as digital enforcers eager to punish an unknown individual for the real or imagined violation of a social norm.

A sibling of shaming is "flaming." Steele and colleagues (1983) introduced the term *flaming* in *The Hacker's Dictionary,* defining it as speaking "rabidly or incessantly on an uninteresting topic or with a patently ridiculous attitude" (p. 158). The definition of flaming since then has been inconsistent. For example, Alonzo and Aiken (2004) include in their definition the intention to "inflict harm to a person or an organization resulting from uninhibited behavior" (Alonzo & Aiken, 2004, p. 205). Although there is not one clear definition, it generally refers to a message sender's hostile emotional expressions characterized by using insulting, profane, offensive, or violent language (i.e., you are a piece of shit, go kill yourself), and it is exacerbated when the identity of the flamers is not disclosed (Cho & Kwon, 2015; Coe et al., 2014; Lampe et al., 2014). One consistent theme running through the definitions is that it is fueled by anger and the reaction is overboard, if not bizarre. Flamers urge "hyperbolic rape, torture, or death threat the moment they disagree or disapprove" (Jane, 2015, p. 65). Flaming can be proactively aggressive without needing provocation, or it can be reactive and escalating (Hutchens et al., 2014). YouTube is known for being a favored platform for flamers and trolls (McCosker, 2013; Moor et al., 2010). Flaming is different than *trolling* in that the goal of trolls is to provoke, to disrupt civil communication, to sow discord (Coles & West, 2016; Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017). Nonetheless, the terms flaming, trolling, and hating are often used interchangeably (McCosker, 2013). In public shaming, there is a seed of a misdeed that provides the justification that acts as lighter fluid for the worldwide digital bonfire. Shaming involves overkill as well, like sentencing a jaywalker to life in prison. Unfortunately, the digital

aggression often moves to the offline world, and can impact, if not destroy, nearly every aspect of an individual's life (Goddard, 2014; Jane, 2015, 2016).

Humiliation in the Media

Public shaming is a form of humiliation in the media, but media humiliation is distinct from public shaming in that it requires no specific offense. Since the latter part of the 20th century, the mass media has used humiliation as a currency for profit in the name of entertainment, news delivery, and social control (Rowbottom, 2013). Presdee (2000) warns that the frequent depiction of humiliated people in popular culture should be of public concern due to its trend toward mass media's celebration and desensitization of cruelty and harm. To Presdee, mass-mediated forms of hurt and humiliation, including crime television and reality TV in its many varieties, form "a bridge to a displaced world of irrationality and change where our subjectivity runs riot" (p. 85). Kohm (2009) explains that while public humiliation is now a staple of pop culture, there is risk of a backlash against the media companies that use their power to invoke humiliation of the less powerful for profit or social control. Kohm also argues that to be a consumer of the "imagery of shame, hurt and humiliation is a profoundly symbolic act, affirming our difference from the object of humiliation" (p. 195). When viewers are entertained by the humiliation of others in the media, they are reassuring themselves that they are superior to those humiliated. Perhaps that is why shows that involve seeing people lose or exposed are so popular (Hershman-Shitrit & Cohen, 2016). Kohm (2009) refers to this as "the commodification of humiliation" (p.194). Pratt (2000) argues that mass media smudges the boundaries between fact and fiction, entertainment and punishment, and that humiliation stands at the economic conflux of it all. Mass-mediated humiliation has nearly become its own industry.

Misrepresentation in the Media

Gérard (2014) asserts that most people are not media savvy and therefore unaware of the subtle ways the media can misrepresent their stories. Although media misrepresentations can be intentional and humiliating, other misrepresentations can be unintentional. For example, editing a program in a way that leaves out key aspects of an individual's character, motivations, or circumstances can leave readers or viewers with an unduly negative impression or sense of disgust for the individual. While an editor may have simply been trying to fit the story within the allotted time slot or word count, if the overall impact on the public perception of the individual's character is distorted or degrading, it has a humiliating impact, intended or not.

Examples of media misrepresentation include, but are not limited to taking words out of context; splicing words together to form sentences the individual never said; misrepresenting key facts; altering photos or videos, eliminating the circumstances that would create empathy for an individual; (under) representation (Portilla, 2018); failing to cite research, quote an expert, or explain the psychological backdrop that would enable viewers to understand an individual's decisions (i.e., why most rape survivors do not report right away); presenting an individual as a flat, one-dimensional character; imbuing an individual with motives that did not exist; dealing with fallout from faux social media accounts; presenting an individual as a caricature rather than as a full, competent human being. The possible ways individuals can be misrepresented in the media are as varied as the number of media pieces that exist.

Misrepresentation can also be facilitated in the media when stereotypes are reinforced, or when public stigma is fueled (Link & Phelan, 2014, 2001). Disadvantaged groups are frequently subjected to negative media framing which includes stereotyping and stigma, and helps to maintain an oppressive status quo (Yang, 2015). When the media framing contributes to a

dominant but negative narrative about a group, it leads to more negative emotions and opinions from the viewers about individuals within that group (Lecheler et al., 2015). This can result in a variety of negative impacts on an individual, either directly or through policy (Dobson & Knezevic, 2018; Fiske, 2018; Sieff, 2003).

Media Framing of Victim Stories

Media framing is when the media information is organized, presented, and interpreted in an intentional way that will make a specific point (Sieff, 2003). According to Dowler (2006), crime news coverage typically leaves the personal stories of the victims largely untold and invalidated, for the most part ignoring the voices of the victims of violence. Dowler defines news framing as supplying "contextual cues which provide order and meaning to problems, events, and actions" (p. 385). News television uses frames to guide the viewers to focus on a single aspect of a story. By presenting an edited version of the victim's words and experience that fit within a particular news frame, the portrayal of violence can be decontextualized, misrepresented, and unrealistic (Cowan, 2000; Nwabueze & Oduah, 2015). These frames may contribute to the misrepresentation of the true story resulting in negative social media feedback, secondary victimization, and confusion in the narrative identity of the victim (Fernández et al., 2015).

In the case of media coverage of a survivor story, a few examples of misrepresentation include focusing on a victim's flaws or actions instead of the perpetrator's crimes; using words that imply agency (i.e., she chose, decided, wanted to, agreed; minimizing or eliminating elements of coercion, manipulation, deception, or incapacitation) when true agency did not exist; quoting a perpetrator's friends or lawyer in a way that questions the credibility of a victim; neglecting to explore the victim's positive character traits, accomplishments, or motivations; humanizing or being sympathetic to the perpetrator instead of the victim; sensationalizing a

story (Mueller, 2019); presenting a survivor as a debilitated victim after the fact instead of as a strong survivor.

Using Media as a Form of Punishment

Valier (2004) explains that "the power to punish is the power of the image" (p. 951). Gallardo (2017) contends that humiliation is society's vehicle for enforcing norms as indicated by placing individuals in public stockades, branding people to inflict permanent scars, forcing individuals to wear scarlet letters that broadcast their misdeeds, subjecting people to tar and feathering (Alexander, 2012; Gallardo, 2017; "Way more than the scarlet letter," 2015). While such physical humiliation techniques may be relics of the past, the use of public shaming techniques has returned with a vengeance in the digital age (Hess & Waller, 2014; Huffman, 2016; Kasra, 2017; Petley, 2014). In today's media-saturated world, an individual can be misrepresented, dehumanized, victim-blamed, publicly shamed, exploited, or humiliated by the media worldwide within a matter of hours.

Rowbottom (2013) explains that the media concept referred to as "naming and shaming" has a punitive aspect that reinforces social control, especially when a crime has been committed. However, he cautions that the social stigma brought on by naming and shaming may be so overwhelming that it could interfere with the goal of rehabilitation, making it difficult for the shamed offender to put his past behind him. Cartwright (2012) states that while publishing crimes may have a public protection effect, it may also overpunish the offender relative to the crime or act committed. This is especially true if the act is socially unacceptable, but not a crime. Rowbottom (2013) points out the power of the media to have a vastly negative impact on a person's life and argues that if naming and shaming has any value in social control, it should be used carefully and sparingly. Kantian ethics would disapprove naming and shaming individuals

for the purpose of garnering viewers, readers, or Internet clicks (Bayefsky, 2013), because such behavior would be using a human being as a means to an end. Publicly humiliating people for profit would be an example of using human beings as a means to an end, rather than as ends in themselves, by objectifying and exploiting people for financial gain.

Part III - Trauma

Using trauma as a lens of exploration will help shed light on the experience of trauma survivors whose stories were made public in the media, who were subsequently subjected to MHM. Throughout history, the term *trauma* has been associated with physical injury. In the late 19th century, trauma took on the new, prominent definition of being a psychological wound or injury (Caruth, 1996; Hacking, 1995). This study is interested in psychological trauma for two reasons. The first reason is to explore whether MHM is experienced as a form of psychological trauma, and whether it has common meanings and shared practices that are unique from other forms of trauma. Lindner (2001a) argues that the significance and role of humiliation in trauma has been overlooked by researchers and practitioners for decades.

In the definition of PTSD, neither MHM nor any form of humiliation is listed as a possible precursor to PSTD (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 271). The definition of PTSD, when it was introduced in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), required that a person experienced a one-time life-threatening event outside the range of normal human experience (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). The definition has been modified with each subsequent edition of the DSM. Dr. Frank Ochberg (2015), a clinical psychologist on the committee that originally defined PTSD, shared his opinion that even with the current definition of PTSD in the DSM-5, experiencing humiliation in

the media or cyberbullying in social media would not meet the criterion for a diagnosis of PTSD. Yet, with all the indicators that humiliation is a traumatic experience (Combs et al., 2010; Ellison & Clark, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Leask, 2013; Rivera, 2013; Torres & Bergner, 2012), an exploration into the meaning of trauma and PTSD is an important foundation for this research.

Caruth (1996) explains that the term *trauma* is "understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind," and that the wound of emotional shock is so catastrophic that it ruptures "the mind's experience of time, self and the world" (p. 6). It is caused by "an encounter that is not directly perceived as a threat to the life of the organism but that occurs, rather, as a break in the mind's experience" (p. 6). Trauma emerges from an intensely negative physical or emotional occurrence that is difficult to assimilate into the survivors' frameworks of understanding (Ford, 2018; Mahat-Shamir et al., 2019; Palgi, Shrira, & Ben-Ezra, 2017). Studies have shown that individuals who experienced intentionally caused traumatic events exhibited worse health outcomes than those who experienced harm that was unintended (Matthieu & Ivanoff, 2006; Miles-McLean et al., 2019; Santiago et al., 2013).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a term that was originally developed with a single incident in mind, such as death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), there are eight criteria required for a diagnosis of PTSD, the first of which is Criterion A, which describes the involvement of a traumatic event.

> A. Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one or more of the following ways:

1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s).
2. Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others.
3. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental.
4. Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (e.g., first responders collecting human remains; police officers repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse). (p. 271)

Criterion A4 is followed by a note of clarification, stating that it "does not apply to exposure through electronic media, television, movies or pictures, unless this exposure is work related" (p. 271). Zoellner et al. (2013) explain that the above note was intended to describe watching traumatic events in the media, such as events like 9/11 or the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombing, unless it was work related. Other criteria include

> (B) intrusive re-experiencing of the trauma, (C) avoidance and emotional numbing, (D) negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and (E) hyperarousal or hypervigilance. The remaining criteria are required circumstances, namely (F) duration of criteria B – E lasts more than a month, (G) the disturbance impairs healthy life functions, and (H) the disturbance is not attributable to any medication, substance, alcohol or medical condition. (p. 272)

The definition of PTSD evolved from being an anxiety disorder in the DSM-3 (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) to trauma and stressor-related disorders, which is a new category that redefines what constitutes a traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Zoellner et al., 2013). A new symptom cluster, Criterion D, was added to the list of PTSD criteria to capture the negative alterations in cognitions and mood commonly experienced by

trauma survivors. At least two of the following Criterion D symptoms must be present to be diagnosed with PTSD:

1. Inability to remember an important aspect of the traumatic event(s). . .
2. Persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs about oneself, others, or the world.
3. Persistent, distorted cognitions about the cause or consequence of the traumatic event(s) that lead the individual to blame himself/herself or others.
4. Persistent negative emotions (e.g., fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame).
5. Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities.
6. Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others.
7. Persistent inability to experience positive emotions (e.g. inability to experience happiness, satisfaction, or loving feelings). (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 272)

Persistent Negative Emotions

Taylor and Uchida (2019) explain that when an individual has an experience that shatters core concepts regarding how they perceive the world, other people, or the self, intense negative emotions can arise. PTSD Criterion D symptom 4, persistent negative affect, was explored by Badour et al. (2017) regarding the negative emotion states of fear, anger, shame, guilt, horror. Badour et al. found that negative affect was significantly present for survivors who experienced assault-related PTSD, and that anger, shame, and fear were “significantly and uniquely” associated with PTSD related to human-caused assault.

Fear and anger are part of a group of emotions considered basic, or discreet, emotions. Basic emotions are biologically based, shared with animals, cross-culturally recognizable in facial expressions, and believed to have assisted the human race to survive and evolve (Pacella et al., 2017; Scheff, 2015; Tracy & Robins, 2007). Fear and anger also have a known

relationship to humiliation and can give rise to aggression, suicidal ideation, and homicidal ideation (Dorahy, 2017; Ellison & Clark, 2007; Hartling et al., 2013; Hartling & Lindner, 2017; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Veldhuis et al., 2014).

In earlier descriptions of PTSD, anger was recognized as a common PTSD symptom among returning military veterans (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Chemtob et al. (1997) described the intense anger as a "ball of rage" (p. 17). Chemtob suggested that the source of the anger and rage is the impending sense of threat to survival, thereby heightening physical reactivity, psychomotor scripts, and hostile attributions when assessing the intent of others. Anger is considered a strong predictor of PTSD severity among both veteran and civilian populations (Andrews et al., 2000; Orth et al., 2008; Orth & Maercker, 2009; Worthen et al., 2015). A recent study targeting civilian trauma survivors also supports an indirect relationship with PTSD and anger through hostile attribution biases and aggressive psychomotor scripts (Ripley et al., 2019). In a study of PTSD with crime victims, anger directed at the self was expressed in the form of internalized shame (Andrews et al., 2000; Orth et al., 2008; Orth & Maercker, 2009). Andrews et al., (2000) found that at one month post-trauma, anger and shame were the strongest predictors of PTSD symptoms, and at 6 months, when the one-month symptoms were controlled, internalized shame was the sole remaining independent predictor of PTSD.

The D-4 criterion for PTSD diagnosis specifically names anger, fear, guilt, horror and shame, emotions, and is supported by a trove of literature (Andrews et al., 2000; Bastin et al., 2016; Budden, 2009; Carmassi et al., 2017; Castillo et al., 2002; Claycomb et al., 2016; DiMauro & Renshaw, 2018; Durham et al., 2018; Frijling, 2017; Higgs et al., 2019; LaMotte & Taft, 2017; Leskela et al., 2002; McHugh et al., 2012; C. P. McLean & Foa, 2017; Orth & Maercker, 2009; Pugh et al., 2015; Ripley et al., 2019; Salcioglu et al., 2017; Seligowski et al.,

2019; Sevon et al., 2018; Thome et al., 2018; Tuomisto & Roche, 2018; Van Voorhees et al., 2018; Vermetten, 2015; Worthen et al., 2015; Zuj et al., 2016). However, these five named emotions are by no means meant to be a comprehensive list of the negative emotions associated with trauma.

Other self-oriented negative affective states have also been found to persist, including but not limited to negative self-appraisals (Müller-Engelmann & Steil, 2017; Samuelson et al., 2017), self-focused disgust (Badour & Adams, 2018; Badour et al., 2014; Ojserkis et al., 2014), self-blame (Maddox, 2008; Pugh et al., 2015; Sheikh & McNamara, 2014), rumination (Bishop, et al., 2018; Mozley et al., 2019), and trauma-related guilt (Baumeister et al., 1994; K. C. Browne et al., 2015; Klasen et al., 2015; Ojserkis et al., 2014; Pugh et al., 2015; Raz et al., 2018). The persistence of negative emotions after a traumatic event has been shown to predict distress levels (Badour et al., 2017; Brake et al., 2019; Kleim et al., 2007; Ojserkis et al., 2014).

Different Types of Trauma

Beyond the DSM-5 list of traumas that could result in PTSD, literature identifies other specific types of traumatic experiences that could contribute to PTSD. Both the military and civilian sectors acknowledge that different types of traumatic stressors come with distinct characteristics and symptoms and should be handled accordingly (Ehring & Quack, 2010; Lehavot et al., 2018; Luz et al., 2011; McMillan & Asmundson, 2016). Additional possible PTSD-inducing events outlined by Litz et al. (2018) include a life threat to the self, a life threat to others, aftermath of violence, traumatic loss, moral injury to the self, and moral injury to others (p. 287). Luz and colleagues (2011) broke it down further. Their list of traumatogenic events includes additional specifically defined events such as war-related trauma in combat, war-related trauma in a civilian setting, child abuse, motor vehicle accidents, medical causes, injury, violent crime, chronic complex exposure in high-risk professions, terrorism, domestic

violence, accident, holocaust, imprisonment, death/disappearance of a close person, exposure to human remains, torture, sexual mutilation; suicide attempt; and refugees (not in a war context; pp. 246-247). Humiliation and public shaming are not in this list.

McMillan and Asmundson (2016) created a lineup of traumas that includes those already named above, plus additional potential PTSD catalysts such as peacekeeping/relief work in a war zone, assaultive violence, being physically attacked by spouse/romantic partner, being physically attacked by anyone else, sexual assault (molestation, rape, or unwanted sexual advances), being stalked, being mugged/held up/ threatened with a weapon, being kidnapped/held hostage/POW, going through a serious fire/tornado/flood/earthquake/hurricane, directly witnessing or being injured in a terrorist attack, having someone close injured or killed in terrorist attack, unexpectedly seeing a dead body, having someone close die unexpectedly, having someone close experience any other serious/life-threatening illness/ accident/injury, or childhood maltreatment in the form of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, or physical or emotional neglect (p. 564). Humiliation and public shaming are not in this list either.

Hyland et al. (2017) describe how variation in trauma types influence predicting differing ICD-11 PTSD and CPTSD symptoms. While the above lists of traumatogenic events are not intended to be exhaustive, they illustrate that trauma researchers acknowledge that PTSD is not one-size-fits-all. There is both agreement and variation in trauma types and in how particular PTSD symptoms are manifest. Therefore, different traumatic events may need to be handled in distinctive ways by professionals (e.g., Au et al., 2017; Boals, 2018; Carretta & Burgess, 2013; Earles et al., 2015; Hyland et al., 2017). For example, a rape survivor may need a different therapeutic treatment plan than someone who has suffered an automobile accident.

It is noteworthy that none of the trauma literature cited lists public humiliation or shaming as a traumatic catalyst for post-traumatic stress, yet humiliation literature sometimes

lists posttraumatic stress symptoms in the list of consequences for humiliation (Z. Chen & Williams, 2011; Z. Chen et al., 2008; Mann et al., 2017; Hamby et al., 2018; Torres & Bergner, 2012). Public humiliation results in consequences that appear to overlap with post-traumatic stress symptoms. Therefore, it is fitting to examine MHM for its unique characteristics and its relationship to trauma.

CPTSD and Acute Stress Syndrome

For individuals who have experienced prolonged trauma or multiple traumas, or traumas that do not involve serious injury or the threat of death, the construct of complex PTSD (CPTSD) was created by Judith Herman (1992). Although CPTSD has not found its way into the DSM, it is a construct in the 11th revision of the *World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-11; World Health Organization, 2018). In contrast to the DSM-5, the ICD-11 describes PTSD with only three symptoms clusters: (a) reexperiencing, (b) avoidance, and (c) a state of perceived current threat in the form of excessive hypervigilance or enhanced startle reactions. It also includes CPTSD, describing it as "a disorder which arises after exposure to a stressor typically of an extreme or prolonged nature and from which escape is difficult or impossible" (p. 200). According to the ICD-11, CPTSD includes the three core symptoms of PTSD as well as other impairments such as "difficulties in emotion regulation, beliefs about oneself as diminished, defeated or worthless" (p. 200). Both the DSM-5 and the ICD-11 have labeled the less severe versions of these disorders "acute stress disorder" (ASD). ASD has similar symptoms as PTSD and CPTSD, including "a daze, a sense of confusion, sadness, anxiety, anger, despair, overactivity, stupor and social withdrawal" (WHO, p. 200) but are expected to be gone within 3 days to a month (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; World Health Organization, 2018). These types of symptoms are predicted to be present in the descriptions of those who have experienced MHM, but since this research is looking at the

subjective experience, a formal diagnosis of PTSD by a clinical therapist is not necessary for this study. Boals (2018) affirms that distress after trauma is expressed differently, and that all trauma is somewhere on a spectrum. Therefore, proper interpretation of the MHM experience is largely dependent on gaining a thick and accurate description from the individuals who lived through it.

Controversy with PTSD, DSM-5, and ICD-11

Although the concepts of PTSD in the DSM-5 and the ICD-11 have provided useful tools to understand those who have survived stressful adversities, and to facilitate research and legal work (Nardi et al., 2013), neither the PTSD construct nor the diagnostic manuals are without controversy. In fact, Allen Frances, chair of the previous DSM task force (DSM-IV), was so concerned about the potential misuse of diagnostic categories and symptom lists in the DSM-5, he said, “Don’t buy it. Don’t use it. Don’t teach it” (Mechanic, 2013, para.18). Reacting to the imperfections of the DSM-5, the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) released its own alternative called the Research Domain Criteria (RDoC) project with the goal of using more science, genetics, imaging, and other evidence-based information to generate a new classification system for better diagnoses (Insel, 2013; Nardi et al., 2013).

In a study by Gayle and Raskin (2017), the majority of psychologists surveyed maintained a more negative than neutral view of the DSM-5. Frequent concerns about the DSM are that it stigmatizes and pathologizes clients using a medical model which does not adequately fit for mental health issues or psychosocial problems (Halter et al., 2013). Even using the term *disorder* in post-traumatic stress disorder implies an abnormal health defect. Strong alignment with this view was confirmed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur’s report that asserted there was an “urgent need for a shift in approach and… [to] abandon the predominant medical

model that seeks to cure individuals by targeting ‘disorders’” (UN General Assembly, 2017, p.19).

Additional disagreement about the definition of PTSD revolves around the most fundamental part of its nosology, Criterion A, which is also the most controversial element (Friedman, 2013). Some scholars have been arguing for the abolishment of Criterion A since the DSM-IV (Brewin et al., 2009; Kraemer et al., 2009). The DSM-5 retained Criterion A but narrowed it to require exposure to “actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 271; Pai et al., 2017, p. 2), which, in a literal sense, MHM is not. This eliminates an experience with media humiliation or public shaming as a potential traumatic stressor when considering the aetiology for a clinical diagnosis for PTSD, regardless of whether the individual exhibits every other symptom in the nosology.

The ICD-11 defines PTSD as “a disorder that may develop following exposure to an extremely threatening or horrific event or series of events.” A full definition is below.

> Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that may develop following exposure to an extremely threatening or horrific event or series of events. It is characterized by all of the following:
>
> 1) re-experiencing the traumatic event or events in the present in the form of vivid intrusive memories, flashbacks, or nightmares. These are typically accompanied by strong or overwhelming emotions, particularly fear or horror, and strong physical sensations;
> 2) avoidance of thoughts and memories of the event or events, or avoidance of activities, situations, or people reminiscent of the event or events; and

3) persistent perceptions of heightened current threat, for example as indicated by hypervigilance or an enhanced startle reaction to stimuli such as unexpected noises. The symptoms persist for at least several weeks and cause significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning. (First et al., 2015, p. 86)

Trauma, Self-Blame, and Guilt

Guilt is a negative affect and cognition that may intensify the link between post-traumatic psychopathology and negative outcomes (K. C. Browne et al., 2015). Studies confirm that after a trauma, psychological outcomes and functioning are more likely to be worse for individuals who feel guilt (Badour et al., 2017; T. Browne et al., 2012; Bub & Lommen, 2017; T. Greene, 2018; Kubany & Watson, 2003). Traumatic guilt encompasses negative emotions and self-judgment related to taking responsibility for the trauma, including negative thoughts about one's ability to thrive in the future, and other distorted cognitions that lead to self-blame (Pugh et al., 2015; Zoellner et al., 2013).

The understanding that traumatic experiences give rise to inappropriate self-blame is well-documented in trauma literature (Harsey et al., 2017; Kline et al., 2018; Kubany et al., 1996; Kubany & Manke, 1995; Maddox, 2008; A. K. Miller et al., 2010; Reich et al., 2015; Sheikh & McNamara, 2014; Ullman et al., 2014). Victims of sexual assault with strong reports of self-blame were found to have more PTSD symptoms, and high self-blame was correlated with a more negative impact on physical health as well (Koss et al., 2002). Self-blame and guilt are predictable consequences to trauma that have been documented in survivors of a variety of traumatic situations, including, but not limited to, veterans (Bannister et al., 2019; Crocker et al., 2016; Dennis et al., 2017; Horwitz et al., 2018; Kubany et al., 1996; Norman et al., 2014; Tripp & McDevitt-Murphy, 2016; Zerach & Levi-Belz, 2018), former prisoners of war (Leskela et al.,

2002; Solomon et al., 2015), survivors of interpersonal violence (Hamrick & Owens, 2019; Kennedy & Prock, 2018; Kubany et al., 2004; Reich et al., 2015), adult survivors of childhood trauma (Dorresteijn et al., 2019; McCormack & Devine, 2016; McCormack & Thomson, 2017; Moulding et al., 2015), survivors of sexual abuse (Hamrick & Owens, 2019; Harsey et al., 2017; Kline et al., 2018; A. K. Miller et al., 2010; Ullman et al., 2014), shipwreck (Joseph et al., 1995), earthquakes (Carmassi et al., 2017), and survivors of terror (Aakvaag et al., 2014). Filipas and Ullman (2006) found that female college students who had been sexually abused as children blamed themselves during the abuse and continued to blame themselves at the time of the study. The more that sexual assault survivors exhibited self-blame, the greater their PTSD symptoms, including some symptoms which lasted for decades (Dorresteijn et al., 2019; Kline et al., 2018; Koss et al., 2002).

Ullman et al. (2007) found that avoidance coping and negative social reactions are the most substantial correlates of PTSD symptomatology. They argue that the negative reactions from others may contribute to both self-blame and PTSD. After measuring the self-blame of individuals at four points in time after a sexual assault, Kline et al. (2018) found that increased self-blame occurred at Time 2, however, at Times 3 and 4, increased PTSD symptomology then predicted increased self-blame. Self-blame, they suggest, may be predictive of PTSD at the onset, but a consequence of PTSD at other times. In a review of 65 studies and 588 analyses of causal attributions after unexpected negative events, self-blame was 5.2 times more likely to be associated with negative outcomes than all other attribution categories (Hall et al., 2003), however this was not consistently found.

While literature suggests that behavioral self-blame contributes to PTSD (J. G. Beck et al., 2004; Hamrick & Owens, 2019; Janoff-Bulman, 1992), other studies suggest that behavioral self-blame can serve as a buffer against PTSD as it gives the survivor a sense of control (Koss et

al., 2002; Startup et al., 2007). Frazier (2003) undertook a longitudinal study that found both behavioral and characterological self-blame to predict more negative psychological symptoms for sexual assault survivors. Hall et al. (2003) concluded, “When the consequences of events are severe, any potential benefit conferred by self-blame may be outweighed by the severity of consequences of making these attributions” (p. 526).

Successfully assisting a trauma survivor to discontinue the maladaptive tendency to self-blame is often a goal of clinical therapy (Bevens, 2016; Hamrick & Owens, 2019; A. K. Miller et al., 2010). When the survivor finally abandons self-blame, the survivor may then be empowered to create a redemption sequence to mitigate the contamination sequence in the narrative identity that may have resulted from trauma. However, when a survivor finally feels ready to share their story publicly, if that story is misrepresented or results in MHM, I predict that a feeling of betrayal or injustice may ensue, and self-blame may return in a more magnified way.

Centrality of Traumatic Events

A variable known as “centrality of event” has been found to be key in PTSD (Blix et al., 2016; Blix et al., 2013; Boals, 2010). Central events are turning points in one’s life story that have become a foundational component of one’s personal identity (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006; Boals, 2010; Boals & Ruggero, 2016). When there is a traumatic central event with no positive outcome or meaning-making, PTSD is predicted.

Highly vivid personal memories help provide milestones to life narratives and serve as touchstones for self-understanding. If memories of negative events become life markers, or turning points in a life story, the results may be maladaptive and harmful to mental health (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006; Berntsen et al., 2003; Boals & Ruggero, 2016). Berntsen et al. (2003) studied 181 subjects who were asked about the traumatic memory that affected them the most. A

significant number of those with PTSD reported that the trauma had become part of their identity, and that they saw more thematic connections between their present lives and the past trauma, suggesting that traumatic events had become central dysfunctional reference points for how they organized their other memories as well.

Power Threat Meaning Framework

The DSM-5 was published in 2013. That same year, the Division of Clinical Psychology of the British Psychological Society published a Position Statement entitled *Classification of Behaviour and Experience in Relation to Functional Psychiatric Diagnoses: Time for a Paradigm Shift*. The position paper was published in response to *"*widespread acknowledgement that current classification systems such as DSM and ICD are fundamentally flawed" (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018a, p. 5). For the next few years, the British Psychological Society (BPS) supported a task force led by researchers Lucy Johnstone and Mary Boyle to develop an alternative to the medicalization and psychiatric classification system of emotional distress. The result was the Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTM Framework; Johnstone & Boyle, 2018b).

The PTM Framework takes issue with diagnosing a distressed individual with a *disorder,* which is a medical term used to refer to those with illness. Johnstone, Boyle, and colleagues argue that people who have been through traumatic or distressing situations should not be made to feel abnormal when in fact, their "symptoms" are normal responses to adversarial events. The PTM Framework (the Framework) posits that symptoms are more accurately viewed as "intelligible responses to various types of social and relational adversities, attempts to change or mitigate a situation, to keep safe or even survive" (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018, p. 97). In this scenario, an individual is helped to understand their responses to distress and is not made to feel defective. Furthermore, the Framework does not detach the brain from the body from the social

relationships and context. Rather, the Framework uses a “lifelines” model that incorporates the varied, complex processes from social, cultural, psychological and biological perspectives. These aspects of human response to distress are not discreet. They are interconnected, and together provide a basis to integrate meaning into the “situatedness” of an individual’s life. They argue that trying to deal with one dimension of an individual’s distress as if it is distinct from the others is a fundamentally flawed approach. Examining the role of power and meaning to a particular individual in a distressing situation is essential across dimensions. Furthermore, what is threatening and distressing to one individual needs to be understood in context of that individual’s culture, background, situation, and interpretation of events. In phenomenological terms, the situatedness matters in understanding the lived experience. Situatedness “posits that the mind is ontologically and functionally intertwined within environmental, social, and cultural factors” (Costello, 2014, para. 1). In other words, meaning has to be examined in context.

The Framework has introduced “Provisional General Patterns” to replace DSM and ICD trauma symptoms with meaning-based threat responses. It reconnects the links between the meaning-based threats to the meaning-based responses by understanding the functions they serve. The threat responses emerge when an individual’s core human needs to be safe, protected, and valued in society are violated. Threat responses might include bodily sensations; fight, flight, or freeze responses; withdrawing from society; using alcohol to escape; anger outbursts; loss of life vitality, and so on. Johnstone and Boyle (2018b) argue that these responses serve a purpose to ensure survival.

Foundational in the Framework is examining the fundamental role of power and powerlessness in adversity or trauma. Examples of types of operational power include social, cultural, interpersonal, coercive, physical, embodied, legal, economic, professional, intellectual,

material, ideological, religious, biological, natural, reputational, and others. For example, to become caught in a hurricane is to be powerless over nature. A car accident would be physical or material powerlessness. To be held captive or experience interpersonal violence could involve the misuse of power in an embodied, coercive, or physical force sense. To take away one's ability to make their own choices is an abuse of power over an individual's free agency. When power is operating in a negative way, people can become distressed or traumatized.

Powerlessness is mitigated by the power resources to which one has access. Examples of power resources include a positive attitude, personal resilience and grit, an excellent therapist, a supportive family, strengthening experiences from the past, personal skills, finances, education, housing, social resources, spiritual strength, strategic relationships, fearlessness, and more. How individuals respond varies based on the personal context, the violations, and the resources. With the PTM Framework, there is no Criterion A required to validate an individual's experience of extreme adversity or trauma. Public humiliation and shaming contribute to powerlessness over one's public image and reputation and can lead to a cascading effect of powerlessness in other realms. Since this research is examining the lived experience of MHM and whether it is traumatic, the PTM Framework is an appropriate lens through which to examine the role of power in lived MHM experience.

Part IV – Victim-Blaming

Survivor Stories

Some trauma survivors choose to never share their stories, while others choose to share their life stories or traumatic experiences in the media. A productive life story has an overarching narrative that creates meaning out of self-defining memories, but whether people choose to share these stories involves deeply personal reasons. Sharing survival stories can help

individuals achieve psychological insight and well-being (Singer et al., 2013). “The art of disclosure is a powerful therapeutic agent that may account for much of the healing process. When people put their emotional upheavals into words, their physical and mental health seems to improve remarkably” (Smyth & Pennebaker, 1999, p. 95). Henry (2010) explains that publicly speaking one’s narrative can be a way to provide external validation for the survivor’s experiences, to restore dignity to the survivor, to enhance psychological recovery, and in some cases, to help create awareness about an issue so that justice can be served.

Survivor stories are ripe fruit for the news media. In the news world there is a well-known adage--if it bleeds, it leads--which means stories of bloodshed, tragedies, and other traumatic events take top priority in the news world (R. A. Miller & Albert, 2015). Beyond news, survivor stories have a particular appeal to readers and viewers and are therefore valuable and sought after by the media (e.g., BIRN Justice Report, 2014; Carr, 2016; James & Ranganathan, 2016; Prince, 2015). For those who have personally suffered or witnessed terrible tragedies, going public with one’s story can be a form of bearing witness and finding vindication. Yet such public disclosures also carry the risk of secondary traumatization. For example, if journalists or caregivers pressure survivors to tell their stories before they are ready, or to publicly share the parts of their stories that they are not comfortable sharing, there is a risk of distorting the producer-participant relationship into one that replicates abuser–victim roles, risking revictimization (Cloitre et al., 2011).

For certain types of survivors such as survivors of human-caused trauma, speaking out may be particularly difficult. In an article about the film *The Silent Scream* (2014) documenting war rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the BIRN Justice Report (2014) issues a call for survivors to speak up and urges survivors not to be ashamed. At the same time, the report acknowledges the excruciating difficulty for them to do so because of the social pressure to stay silent or risk

exclusion. The film includes survivors, with their identities hidden, explaining that there was such heavy stigma associated with their stories that they could not even tell their spouses. Other survivors described how they were socially abandoned after they spoke out. Survivors regularly fear that their stories will not be believed, or that their stories will be improperly exploited, and they will be revictimized (Henry, 2010).

Often survivors, especially survivors of sexual violence, must exhibit tremendous courage to tell their stories publicly. They expect and deserve sensitivity, accuracy, respect, validation and sympathy, but sometimes what they get instead is MHM. There are abundant ways the media can misrepresent survivor stories, even unintentionally, that result in public humiliation, dehumanization, objectification, shaming, and negative social media reactions. Studies indicate that the manner in which the public reacts to these stories will have an influence on whether survivors will languish or flourish (Ahrens, 2006; Ahrens et al., 2010; Jirek, 2016). When trauma survivors are misrepresented, humiliated, blamed, or shamed in the media, they can be retraumatized and experience narrative foreclosure. Although victim-blaming and shaming in the media has been well-studied and has been shown to have deleterious effects on individuals, it still takes place far too often.

Victim-Blaming and Shaming

Victim-blaming, including victim-blaming in the media, has a strong body of literature which examines the theories, motivations, and consequences of holding victims responsible for the harm against them (Ayala, Kotary, & Hetz, 2018; Bevens, 2016; R. Campbell & Raja, 1999; Cross, 2015; Cross et al., 2019; Culda et al., 2018; K. N. Dukes & Gaither, 2017; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Hadwin, 2017; Lumsden & Morgan, 2017; Putra et al., 2015; Sheikh & McNamara, 2014; Simeunović-Patić, 2017; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Thacker, 2017; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Victim-blaming includes victim-shaming or demeaning the character

of the victim to appear less innocent, less like an ideal victim, and therefore more blameworthy (Cross et al., 2019; De keersmaecker & Roets, 2017). The victim-blaming dynamic can involve misrepresenting or minimizing the harmful nature of the experience, invalidating the victim's experience, and denigrating the character of the victim (Campbell, 2008). Therefore, victim-blaming and shaming are forms of misrepresentation and humiliation and are included in the definition of MHM.

One of the consequences of this type of MHM is that it punishes victims for speaking out. Feminist researchers and activists are interested in the power structures that keep women silenced (Ahrens, 2006; Lumsden & Morgan, 2017). When the media focuses on the personal flaws or decisions of female survivors rather than the actions of the perpetrator, or when the victim story is inaccurately represented, the clear, strong voice of the female survivor is stolen or diminished (Ayala et al., 2018). She is robbed of the opportunity to share her true story on a public platform where she might have longed for the chance to show her strength, find validation, restore her dignity, and experience healing.

Unthank (2007) argues that "irrational self-blame specific to a traumatic event is an act of violence against an innocent self," and calls it "shame's momentary lethal impact on the self" (p. iii). The traumas most often repeated and experienced by females, such as rape and domestic violence, often result in PTSD as well as changes in the survivor's self-concept (Herman, 1992). Moor (2007) contends that a human-caused trauma such as rape is more than a vicious physical assault; it is a horrific attack on the self that can injure the victim's very core of being. Moor cautions that blaming a survivor for her own trauma can create intense self-shaming and magnify the original trauma. It can darken her perspective of self-defining memories, and negatively impact her narrative identity.

Secondary Victimization

When the trauma experienced by a rape victim is disregarded or minimized, the feelings of the victim can "closely mimic the victim's experience at the hands of her assailant" (Campbell & Raja, 1999, p. 142). For this reason, negative experiences such victim-blaming or shaming a sexual assault victim have been referred to as the "second rape" (Madigan & Gamble, 1991) or "secondary victimization" (J. E. Williams, 1984). Rape victims have often been publicly humiliated, differentiated as flawed, and depicted as liars in the media, while perpetrators are portrayed as truthful, falsely accused victims (Bieneck & Krahé, 2011; Doherty & Anderson, 1998; Estes, 2013; Gruber, 2009; Hockett et al., 2016). Survivors of human-caused trauma, or interpersonal violence (IPV) are especially prone to battling feelings of guilt, internal self-blame, and public victim-blaming (Maddox, 2008; A. K. Miller et al., 2010; Ullman et al., 2014).

Victim-blaming is most likely to occur when the survivor does not meet the definition of the "ideal victim" (Meyer, 2016). Ideal victims are those who were behaving in morally acceptable ways when victimized, who are perceived as weak, shy, innocent, vulnerable, and who were victimized by a stranger with whom the victim had no prior relationship (Christie, 1986). The ideal victim myth undermines the reputation and credibility of individuals who are outside the boundaries of the ideal victim stereotype, and who deviate from societal assumptions about proper and reasonable responses after the fact (Randall, 2010). Therefore, when the media presents survivor stories insensitively, inaccurately, or frames the stories in a way that calls attention to ways victims were outside the ideal victim stereotype, the stories can generate a swarm of victim-blaming in social media and online comments (Sills et al., 2016). Such

messages can reinforce to the survivors that they deserved the traumatic cruelties that were inflicted upon them due to character defects.

Victim-blaming and shaming can intensify the negative psychological effects of the original trauma (Jaffe et al., 2019; A. K. Miller et al., 2011; Schneider & Watkins, 1990; Yamawaki & Tschanz, 2005) and can contribute to psychological distress which may ultimately have a more severe life impact than the initial trauma (Hattendorf & Tollerud, 1997; Jaffe et al., 2019; Perren et al., 2013). Victim-blaming, whether experienced in person or through the media, can create additional trauma symptoms for survivors including severe despair, difficulty coping, negative self-representations, negative emotions, and greater self-blame and shame (Classen et al., 2005; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Lord, 2008; A. K. Miller et al., 2011; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Furthermore, in a study by Miller et al. (2007), victims of sexual assault who endorsed self-blame were more likely to become victims of sexual assault again. Although victim-blaming is commonly associated with sexual assault, victim-blaming can occur across a wide spectrum of victimizing experiences.

Theories of Victim-Blaming

Psychological constructs that help explain victim-blaming include the "belief in a just world" (BJW), also called the "just world theory," (Correia et al., 2007; Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2017; Simeunović-Patić, 2017; Strömwall, Alfredsson, & Landström, 2013) as well as psychological distancing (Hafer & Begue, 2005), and the "fundamental attribution error" (Hooper et al., 2015; L. Ross, 1977). Although there are other theories of blaming (see Malle et al., 2014), these three major theories of victim-blaming provide explanations for why victim-blaming often comes packaged with victim-shaming. Victim-blaming and shaming in the media and social media remains present and problematic in

today's society (Cross et al., 2019b; Lumsden & Morgan, 2017; Ponte, 2016; Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). Although hermeneutic phenomenology is interested in the lived experience of a phenomenon and not the "why" of a phenomenon, these theories are provided as background for possible influences on the producers and journalists behind such stories, and as possible explanations for negative audience appraisals towards the victims portrayed.

Belief in a Just World

After an incomprehensible injustice or traumatic experience happens to an individual, some observers may feel compassion and motivation to exhibit prosocial behavior, while others may exhibit apathy or disdain towards the victims. Lerner (1980) argued that the reason people can distance themselves from the suffering of others is because they believe that the world is just, and that people get what they deserve. Lerner's BJW theory explains that people are driven to find effective ways to reduce the threats to their need to believe in a just and predictable world to feel assured that a similar fate would never happen to them.

Wayment, Barger, Tolle, and O'Mara (2010) explain that the more the members of the public can relate to the victim of an undeserved misfortune or tragedy, the more likely compassion and helping behavior will emerge from the public as long as there is no relationship connection with the victim, as in the case of senseless, unpredictable violence (i.e., the Boston Marathon terrorist bombings). However, the stronger the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, the more acceptable the perpetrator's actions are perceived to be (Bieneck & Krahé, 2011; Durán et al., 2010; Viki et al., 2004). If there is a preexisting relationship between victim and perpetrator, any victim responses that did not match public expectations of normal behavior will make it more likely that the members of the media and the public will zone in on missteps by the victim (Ayala et al., 2018; Pedersen & Strömwall, 2013).

Bevens (2016) suggests that people have a tendency to devalue and denigrate victims, even those that are most deserving of sympathy, in order to bring about a more appropriate match between the victim's character and her fate. This enables media observers to handle the presence of the injustice they see in the media. To maintain a sense of personal safety, people use strategies such as avoiding a deep awareness of the injustice, refusing to acknowledge the suffering, reinterpreting the outcome, and psychological distancing (Hafer & Begue, 2005; Lerner & Miller, 1978; van Zomeren & Lodewijkx, 2008).

Psychological Distancing, or Othering

Psychological distancing occurs when the story observers (viewers) perceive victims of injustice as being so distinctive from themselves that they are cast into a completely different world walled off by a sense of "otherness" and distance (Hafer & Begue, 2005). Differentiating victims (i.e., painting them as unwise, gullible, weak, idiotic, too trusting, asking for it) sets the foundation for viewers to believe that victims merited their suffering due to their internal characteristics. Psychological distance serves to mitigate viewer fears that they could fall prey to the same misfortune (Hafer & Begue, 2005; Lerner, 1980; Mahoy, 2013).

Psychological distancing happens more often when the victims are not significantly different from the observers. Hafer and Begue (2005) explain that observers do this to try to perceive themselves as different from the victims with whom they most identify. Goldenberg and Forgas (2012) found that victim-blaming was more likely to take place among in-group members with whom the viewers had the most similarities. By casting the victim as a dehumanized being with character deficiencies, the observer artificially molds the victim into someone far different than herself. Rather than focusing on the external circumstances that contributed to her victimization, observers convince themselves that the victim deserved her fate (Bell et al., 1994). This thought gives media consumers a sense of control and predictability over

their world. Wayment et al. (2010) explain that psychological distancing enables victim-blaming which allows the viewers to feel both superior and safe (i.e., the same misfortune would never happen to them because they are not that stupid, they would never do that). According to Bevens (2016), by constructing psychological distance, a person creates a stronger sense of personal invulnerability.

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory has long recognized that individuals commonly attribute judgments of causality, responsibility, and blameworthiness to the victims of assault and trauma (Ayala et al., 2018; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Hayes et al., 2013; Kahneman & Miller, 1986; K. M. Klein et al., 2011; Landström et al., 2016). A wealth of research has documented the tendency for individuals to blame sexual assault survivors (Brown & Testa, 2008; Cowan, 2000; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Hayes et al., 2013; Hine & Murphy, 2017; Hockett et al., 2016; Klettke & Mellor, 2018; Niemi & Young, 2014, 2016; Strömwall et al., 2014; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014) because they engage in "discounting sociocultural milieu that arguably give rise to sexual assault" (A. K. Miller et al., 2010).

The fundamental attribution error refers to the tendency for people to attribute the behavior of others to internal personality traits, or dispositional characteristics, rather than situational causes external to the individual (Hooper et al., 2015; L. Ross, 1977). When the media commits the fundamental attribution error and reconfigures survivor stories to form sensational content implying that survivors caused their own traumas, the sense of betrayal and humiliation felt by the subject in the media can be profound (Trumbull, 2008). Victim-shaming in the media may also cause the survivor to agree with the media to reduce the cognitive dissonance. The more survivors believe that viewers, readers, or listeners worldwide blame them

for their own victimization, the more they will feel devalued and humiliated. Such an experience with the media is likely to have a central and profound effect on a survivor's life.

Part V - Well-Being

A vast amount of research has been done on the topic of well-being. Over the past few decades, numerous types of well-being models, indicators, and mediating factors have been studied (Adler et al., 2016; Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2016; Austin, 2016; Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Bauer et al., 2008; Bond, 2015; Brooks, 2015; Busseri, 2018; Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 2017; Diener et al., 2015; Diener et al., 1998; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Diener et al., 1999; Feist et al., 1995; B. L. Fredrickson et al., 2015, 2013; Gaspar & Balancho, 2017; Hill et al., 2015; Klug & Maier, 2015; Leonardi et al., 2005; Rodogno, 2014; Ryff, 2013; Sirgy, 2012; Steel et al., 2018; Stone et al., 2013; Wirtz et al., 2009). Diener et al. (2017) report that in recent decades, roughly 14,000 publications a year examine the topic of subjective well-being. Due to the breadth of the domain, there is no single, unanimously agreed upon definition or research approach to the topic of well-being, or subjective well-being (Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2016). However, since this study is interested in the self-appraisal of personal well-being after humiliation in the media, subjective well-being will be briefly reviewed.

Narrative Identity and Well-Being

The relationship between a strong, cohesive narrative identity and well-being is well established (Adler, 2012; Adler et al., 2016; Adler et al., 2018; Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Hill et al., 2015; McAdams, 1993; K. C. McLean et al., 2007, 2019; Semerari & Giancarlo, 2001; Waters & Fivush, 2015). McLean et al. (2007) propose that the stories one tells about oneself are a core contributor to both the enduring nature and changes in the self. They argue that situated

life stories and the self-concept have a reciprocal impact on one another. Pasupathi et al. (2015) suggest that negative life experiences can bring both opportunities and challenges to the narrative identity. The narration of such experiences can modify affect, identity, and well-being. In effect, individuals may take on the identity of the stories they tell about themselves.

> The means toward these successive interpretations and embellishments include the mediation of identity by signs, and symbols extrapolated from history and lived experience, the revisiting of emotional touchstones, and even the subtle variations that tend to occur each time a story is retold. (Rolling & Bey, 2016, p. 309)

When individuals interpret a negative event as having been caused by a stable aspect of the self, they make a causal connection between the identity and the event (Mansfield et al., 2015; K. C. McLean & Pasupathi, 2011). In some cases, they attribute personal change to the story, and this change may be for better or worse (Pasupathi et al., 2007). The more negative causal connections an individual makes in regard to a negative experience, the more likely the individual will be to suffer from diminished psychological well-being, including increased stress, anxiety, and depression (Banks & Salmon, 2013). However, Mansfield, Pasupathi, and McLean (2015) point out, narrating stories of growth that comes from low-point experiences can provide coherent meaning to the narrative identity and contribute to increased well-being.

Subjective Well-Being

Subjective well-being (SWB) is the self-assessment of positive affect, lack of negative affect, and the cognitive appraisal of overall life satisfaction (Diener, 1984, 1994; Diener et al., 1999). Life satisfaction is considered an individual's evaluation of personal goals, ideals, and standards compared to the actual circumstances in the individual's life (L. Chen et al., 2018). The greater the discrepancy between real life and the individual's ideal, the less life satisfaction

will be perceived. Since subjective well-being lies on a spectrum from negative to positive, Diener et al. (1999) explain that SWB researchers are interested in the "entire range of well-being from misery to elation" (p.277).

Diener (1984) advances two approaches to SWB. The top-down approach stresses that personal disposition is a stable characteristic that contributes to perceptions of life satisfaction. The bottom-up approach is concerned with how external factors such as events and situations influence happiness and life satisfaction. In other words, negative events or circumstances contribute to negative affect, which then lowers the positive assessment of SWB. Both approaches have been shown to play a role in judgments of SWB (L. Chen et al., 2018; Feist et al., 1995; Leonardi et al., 2005). While the primary goal of SWB research is to understand causes and correlates of human misery and happiness (Fox & Kahneman, 1992), this research seeks only to recognize SWB from a phenomenological approach as it relates to understanding an individual's descriptions of the lived experience of MHM.

Well-Being and Positive Life Functioning

Well-being literature is generally unified in its finding that higher levels of SWB are correlated with positive functioning in a number of life domains. Such areas include strong relationships, having a sense of community, and psychological, educational, physical, and cognitive domains (Diener, 1984, 1994; Diener et al., 1999, 2015; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). If MHM is a distressing or traumatic experience, then those who have experienced MHM likely have had a negative impact on productive life functioning in multiple areas.

Conclusion

This chapter describes the components of media humiliation and misrepresentation. It provides the academic foundation for the phenomenological lenses that are used in this study, which are humiliation, trauma, narrative identity, power, and well-being. Existing literature

shows that humiliation and trauma have similar emotional consequences and similar impacts on narrative identity. Humiliation is a form of rejection and has a long-lasting painful effect on individuals (Z. Chen et al., 2008). Since the media commonly seeks crime stories or stories of victims who survived traumatic experiences (Kaplan & Wang, 2004; Shlomo & Levin-Keini, 2017), and since victim-blaming is a common form of MHM, theories of victim-blaming and shaming were discussed. Media humiliation can be overt and intentional, caused by a humiliator with a desire to degrade. Individuals portrayed in the media can also feel humiliated in more subtle ways, without a clear humiliator who desires to demean, by being stereotyped, otherized, stigmatized, or inaccurately or inadequately portrayed. By leaving key information about an individual or situation out of a media piece, an individual can still feel humiliated by media misrepresentation. To understand the lived experience of being humiliated or misrepresented in the media, a phenomenological research approach is utilized. The next chapter provides a brief history of hermeneutic phenomenology, and describes key aspects of its utility as methodological framework.

CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study seeks to understand the lived experience of MHM and to explore whether MHM has a traumatic impact on an individual's narrative identity and well-being. A mixed methods research approach that involves both hermeneutic phenomenological exploration and quantitative surveys was used.

Phenomenology Framework

Phenomenology started as a branch of European philosophy in the early 20th century and has evolved to become a form of qualitative research frequently used in human-oriented fields such as psychology, philosophy, education, pastoral studies, nursing, and the social sciences. Phenomenology as a research method can be credited to the original work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), sometimes referred to as the father of phenomenology (Koch, 1995; Palouš, 2013). Husserl began his career in mathematics and science, but shifted his focus to psychology, only to realize that the research methods used in the sciences cannot be universally applied to human life or experiences, particularly when humans react differently to stimuli depending on what the stimuli mean to them (Husserl, 1952/1980). Husserl paved the way for researchers to question positivism and whether the focus on empirical data, prediction, measurement, and control groups were adequate if such methodologies came at the expense of discovering and describing phenomena and their various meanings (Laverty, 2003; Lee, 2008).

The word *phenomena* originates from the Greek root *φαίνειν* (*phainein*), which means "to bring to light" or "to make appear" (Liddell & Scott, 2003, p. 854). Phenomenology today is known as the study of things, or phenomena, as they appear to or are consciously experienced by individuals (Frey, 2018; Gadamer, 1975; Heidegger, 1927; Husserl, 1952/1980; Moustakas,

1994; Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). Moustakas (1994) boiled it down to this short statement: "What appears in consciousness is the phenomena" (p. 26). In spite of that simple concept, there are multiple approaches to phenomenology, including transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, 1980), critical phenomenology (Ricœur, 1990), embodiment phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 2012), gender phenomenology (de Beauvoir, 1988), existential phenomenology (Heidegger, 1927; Sartre, 1943, 1957), ethical phenomenology (Levinas, 1979), political phenomenology (H. Arendt, 1951), hermeneutic phenomenology (Gadamer, 1975; Heidegger, 1927/1962), and others.

The various methods are grouped into two primary phenomenological traditions: transcendental, also known as descriptive phenomenology, and hermeneutic phenomenology, also referred to as interpretive phenomenology (Armour et al., 2009; Kafle, 2013; Laverty, 2003; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The premise of transcendental phenomenology is that we can put our biases aside and get to the true, objective essence of an experience (Giorgi, 2012; Husserl, 1936/1970). Hermeneutic phenomenology, on the other hand, states that researcher subjectivity is impossible to detach from, and therefore involves the researcher and subject dialoguing together to come to an understanding of a phenomenon (Lauterbach, 2018; Van Manen, 2018).

A fundamental characteristic of phenomenology is that it seeks to uncover the shared essence, the essential meaning, the invariant core characteristics of a phenomenon, without which it would not be the phenomenon (Bu & Paré, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Gadamer, 1975; Heidegger, 1927; Husserl, 1952/1980; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). The goal of phenomenological research is to focus on the wholeness of an experience (the phenomenon) including how the experience is perceived and the meaning ascribed to it, rather than focus only on individual parts, causation, measurement, predictability, or reproducibility. In phenomenology, the basic unit of interest is not the individual, but the phenomenon itself and

how it is experienced by the individual (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenon's essence will only become clear as it manifests itself in the lifeworld of the individual (Husserl, 1936/1970). *Lifeworld* is a term used by Husserl to describe the world as it is experienced and lived in everyday situations, the world that we consciously perceive through our senses, the world of straightforward intersubjective experiences.

Intentionality is a term introduced by Brentano (1973) that was borrowed by Husserl to denote the connectedness of the human being to the rest of the world through the vehicle of consciousness (Butchart, 2017; Husserl, 1931, 1952/1980). Intentionality means that humans become attached to the items that reveal themselves in consciousness. In other words, consciousness is the internal experience of being conscious of something (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). Husserl (1936/1970) explained that when one directs one's thoughts into the world of the phenomenon, intentionality takes place. He writes, "The word intentionality signifies nothing else than this universal fundamental property of consciousness: to be conscious of something; as a cogito, to bear within itself its cogitatum" (Husserl, 1993, p. 33). While Brentano's (1973) intentionality implied that an object perceived in the consciousness was an object that actually existed, Husserl argued that the object may be imaginary and not exist at all (Moustakas, 1994). Nonetheless, an imaginary object could still be an intentional phenomenon. To give an example, in the case of MHM, even if producers or viewers do not see a media piece about Person X as humiliating, if Person X experiences humiliation as a result of the media piece, the phenomenon of humiliation is nonetheless real to Person X. It is the intentionality of Person X that matters.

Phenomenological Reduction or Epoche

One of Husserl's important philosophical assumptions included the requirement for researchers to suspend their personal opinions in order to develop an unbiased understanding of

the phenomenon (Husserl, 1931, 1936/1970). Husserl's goal was to get to the pure essence of a phenomenon. In order to do this, he engaged in "phenomenological reduction," or "epoche," to suspend prior judgments, biases, and previous understandings as a researcher. Reduction involves setting aside or clearing away anything that could cloud an objective description of an experience (Van Manen, 1990). In order to accomplish this, Husserl addresses the *natural attitude*, a term that describes how we human beings, in our everyday living, or "everydayness," see the world as an external entity that is separate from us. He argues that people must bridle the assumptions that exist in the natural attitude because it glosses over the real meaning of things. In order to do that, the experiencing subject must turn inward and reflect upon the phenomenon that is habitually filtered out otherwise (Husserl, 1931, 1936/1970). Husserl taught that when we replace the natural attitude with a judgment-free, self-reflective awareness of a phenomenon, a rich flow of new and multifaceted perspectives can emerge.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes reduction in layers, beginning with an openness to the spontaneous ebb and flow of the lifeworld. This openness is filled with wonder and awe regarding the discovery of how the world works and what a phenomenon means. This reflectiveness can also be thought of as a form of mindfulness (Felder et al., 2014). To achieve this self-reflective mindfulness, another layer of reduction includes brushing away any pre-existing perceptions, preferences, or expectations that could inhibit an objective comprehension of a phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Phenomenology becomes hermeneutic when the method becomes interpretive, not just descriptive (Gadamer, 1975). The origin of the word *hermeneutics* comes from the Greek word *ἑρμηνεύειν* (*hermeneuein*), which means "to interpret" (Liddell & Scott, 2003, p. 315). The word hermeneutics is often associated with the ancient Greek character Hermes, who delivered

messages to the gods. As early as Plato, hermeneutic knowledge is understood to be intuitive knowledge that is revelatory from within that involves personal interpretation, rather than empirical and objective knowledge (Gjesdal, 2011).

One of Husserl's most prominent disciples, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), developed philosophical differences with his teacher, particularly about whether it was possible to suspend prior judgments. He developed his own approach to phenomenology, which is now known as hermeneutic phenomenology, and was later expanded upon by Hans-George Gadamer (19002002), Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). Heidegger (1927/1962) rejected the idea that bracketing was possible, that reduction could enable a truly objective description of a phenomenon separate from an individual interpretation, and that personal opinion and historical influence could be suspended. He believed one could never be truly free of the culture and personal background that influenced researcher perspective (Van Manen, 2014).

Bracketing vs Researcher Subjectivity

In contrast to Husserl's (1931, 1952/1980) descriptive phenomenology which tries to uncover phenomena from the unbiased view of a "stranger in a strange land," Heidegger's (1927/1962) hermeneutic phenomenology puts forth that the most fundamental human experience of the world comes preloaded with meaning, and that interpretation of phenomena is inherently packaged in the context of one's own social-cultural history. Heidegger's goal was to provide an alternative to interpreting the world from a rational, objective ivory tower perspective. He believed that all knowledge could not be attained from a detached perspective, particularly in regard to human experience. The context, condition, and background of the experience must be considered in the interpretation (Rentmeester, 2018). Heidegger (1927/1962)

describes the purpose of phenomenology as being to let "that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (p. 58/34), or to get to the essence of the real phenomenon.

Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges the subjective experience through individual interpretation of one's lifeworld stories, and even calls for the researcher to unveil and embrace personal bias as part of the research process (Kafle, 2013). After all, it is through our lifeworlds and personal biases that the world is experienced. Heidegger (1993) believed that a researcher could actually gain an enhanced understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon if contextualized by the researcher's own experience and relationship with the phenomenon. In his perspective, researcher subjectivity was something to be acknowledged and embraced.

Heidegger (1927/1962) explains that we cannot separate ourselves from cultural or social influence in the world because "the world is always the one I share with others" (p. 155). Van Manen (1990) asks, "How does one put out of play everything one knows about an experience one has selected for study?" (p. 47). Heidegger constructed the term *mitsein* or *being-with*, to capture this concept. The term *intentionality* is also used to describe the "inseparable connection to the world," conveying the purposeful and intentional reflection required to realize how one's thoughts are influenced by being-with others in the world (Van Manen, 1990, p. 5). Intersubjectivity means that the interpretive phenomenologist must involve others, such as the subjects of the study and the readers, to produce a dialogic relationship with the phenomenon and thereby validate the shared understanding with others (Van Manen, 1990).

Porter and Robinson (2011) explain that hermeneutics is a means to reexplore our being, describing it as a path to reexamine existing concepts regarded as truth and knowledge about human life. A hermeneutic phenomenological researcher should aim to create a vivid, living,

breathing unveiling of a phenomenon rather than just present an accurate analysis of the description provided by the participants (Hein & Austin, 2001). Gadamer (1975) explains that hermeneutics is highly linguistic and textual; understanding and meaning emerges upon analyzing both the context and the words involved in human experiences. Hermeneutics places an emphasis on the context of a phenomenon through a process called contextualization and amplification that keeps prior theoretical assumptions to a minimum, and focuses on vivid ways to reveal experiential details (Packer, 1985).

Characteristics of Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research

Phenomenological research has unique characteristics embedded in its methodology that, when combined, distinguish it from other forms of qualitative research. First, it focuses on understanding how a phenomenon is experienced by an individual in a lifeworld setting. All research questions need to be about experience. The data-gathering activity involves in-depth conversational interviews, or discourse, with individuals who have experienced a particular event or phenomenon. These conversations can be supported by observation and artifacts such as preexisting documents, journal entries, media examples, and artwork (Creswell, 2013). Although hermeneutic researchers sometimes adopt one another's methods or formats when writing up their studies, there are no step-by-step method requirements. The hermeneutics research approach grants flexibility to the researcher to enable the flow of authenticity in the way the researcher deems most fitting. However, there are guidelines for research activities. To start, the researcher must be "swept up in a spell of wonder about phenomena as they appear, show, present, or give themselves to us" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 26). Van Manen describes this as being driven by a pathos. In his characteristic poetic academic writing, he elucidates.

> In the encounter with things and events of the world, phenomenology directs its gaze toward the regions where meanings and understandings originate, well up, and percolate

> through the porous membranes of past sedimentation—then infuse, permeate, infect, touch, stir us, and exercise a formative and affective effect on our being. (pp. 26-27)

Phenomenology involves an orientation that focuses more on questioning than answering, and on being obsessed with a particular lived experience, the meaning of that experience to the subject, the origin of that meaning, and the meaning of meanings (Van Manen, 2014). The interview questions are open-ended to allow subjects free rein to describe their experience without limitation. Unlike other forms of qualitative studies where the researcher tries to stay as silent and unobtrusive as possible after asking the question (Josselson, 2013), hermeneutic interviews are more like conversations (Van Manen, 1990; Vandermause & Fleming, 2011).

Researchers in hermeneutic phenomenology are also free to interview and re-interview, look at supporting indicia, circling back to dive deeper as they search for meaning units in parts and as a whole. They describe the phenomenon through writing and rewriting (Kafle, 2013). In essence, Van Manen (1990) conceived the HP research attitude as involving six research activities: orienting to the exploration of a phenomenon, delving deeply into the lived experience of that phenomenon, sifting out essential themes through hermeneutic phenomenological reflection, attending to the phenomenon through writing and rewriting, sustaining a strong orientation the research question, and reflecting on both parts and whole to balance the interpretation in proper context. During the reflection process, Van Manen also describes the importance of addressing the existentials; how lived things (materiality and technology), lived time (temporality), lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), and lived relationship to others (sociality) are perceived in the subjects who experience the phenomenon.

Hermeneutic phenomenologists agree that pure objectivity cannot be achieved while investigating human experience, and therefore, to understand a phenomenon, the researcher can seek a variety of lived-experience material that might yield a fundamental aspect of the phenomenon (Gadamer, 1975; Heidegger, 1927/1962). Such material begins with verbal and written recollections which include reflections and descriptions of those experiences, but there are other potential sources as well, such as observation, dialogue, literature in the form of stories or poetry, biographies, diaries, journals, and even art (Gadamer, 1975; Van Manen, 1990). In today's digital world, additional supporting artifacts might include emails, texts, blogs, opinion pieces, video clips, news, social media commentary, film, documentaries, television, radio, podcasts, voicemails, photography, and other forms of media.

Co-construction of Meaning

Gadamer (1975) describes a fusion of horizons as the ever-evolving understanding of a phenomenon as situated in both the past and the present, and a co-construction of meanings that occurs when the researcher and the participant process an experience together. Lopez and Willis (2004) explain that co-construction of meanings is a "blend of the meanings articulated by both participant and researcher within the focus of the study" (p. 730).

> Hermeneutics invites its participants into an ongoing conversation…Understanding occurs through a fusion of horizons, which is a dialectic between the pre-understandings of the research process, the interpretive framework, and the sources of information. The implication for hermeneutic inquiry is that research participants are also giving their self-interpreted constructions of their situation. (Koch, 1995, p. 835)

Heidegger (1927/1962) pointed out that human beings exist and communicate within historical and cultural contexts, or pre-understandings, that form their worldviews. Therefore,

the process of interviewing research subjects inherently involve interpretation that synthesizes the worldviews of the researcher and the subject (Bu & Paré, 2018). The final interpretation of the interview should birth a thick description that Geertz (1983) also describes as a co-construction of meaning. Gadamer (1975) calls this process the hermeneutical dialogue, an exchange of understanding similar to developing a mutual understanding regarding the proper interpretation of the interview. In the dialogical phenomenological approach, Stawarska and Toadvine (2009) considers the subjects of the interviews the co-researchers and involves them in the thematization and analysis of the research project.

Co-construction is built on dialogue and disclosure (Spinelli, 2005). Since hermeneutic phenomenology embraces co-constructive and interpretive processes, the importance of intersubjectivity and researcher reflexivity is emphasized (Armour et al., 2009; Crowther, et al., 2017). The researcher and participant work together to cocreate a clear interpretation of the meaning of the subjective knowledge relayed.

Hermeneutic Circle

For HP researchers, the quest for understanding includes an examination of the phenomenon from the parts to the whole, and from the whole back to the parts, repeatedly. In the process of acknowledging and setting aside "fore-structures of understanding," "foreconceptions," "fore-projections" (preexisting beliefs and subjective prejudices), the researcher allows new interpretations to evolve (Ginev, 2017). This is known as the "hermeneutic circle" (Gadamer, 1975; Longxi, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Exploring information through the hermeneutic circle is a process that is dynamic, nonlinear, and ever open to change, allowing the researcher to shift into different levels of thought and understanding (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Interpretation moves from the phenomenon needing to be understood, which in

this case is the lived experience of MHM, to the personal understanding of the researcher, and back (Gadamer, 1975). The preconceptions of the researcher are considered lenses. Gadamer stressed the importance of constantly reinterpreting the meaning of the phenomenon through each lens instead of trying to suspend, or bracket, researcher preconceptions.

Nonetheless, Heidegger (1927/1962) warns researchers against staying within the confines of their own preconceptions to confirm preexisting assumptions. He calls this a "vicious circle," and asserts that it keeps researchers locked into a stale, predictable view. However, the hermeneutic circle is intended to help researchers break free from that. Gadamer (1975) states, "All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought and direct its gaze 'on the things themselves'" (pp. 266-267). He stresses the necessity for the researcher to stay fixated on understanding the phenomenon despite the constant stream of potential distractions that may arise within the interpreter himself.

> A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in a text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 267)

While HP is commonly used to study literary and biblical texts, the framework can also be used to study the texts of interviews, letters, journals, psychological reports, and even non-textual media pieces and art to help reveal the meaning of the things themselves. At the heart of hermeneutic phenomenology is a "philosophically consuming fascination with the question of origin, sources, and meaning of meaning and meaningfulness" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 74). The goal

is to get to the essence of a phenomenon, which in this case is MHM, to be able to describe it in such a way that readers can grasp the nature and significance of the phenomenon in a fresh and novel way previously unseen. The hermeneutic circle helps the researcher get to the core of the meaning.

Research Questions

There are various forms of trauma, but MHM has not yet been established as a form of trauma and has rarely been recognized in scholarly work, let alone defined or studied through a phenomenological lens. Sometimes people have unwittingly become the subject of negative media stories, revenge media, YouTube attacks, or other forms of disparaging public portrayals without ever having agreed to be in the media at all. Others have chosen to be in reality television, to participate in contest shows, or to allow their life stories to be told in films, books, documentaries or docudramas, but did not expect to have their stories or character misrepresented in a way that mortifies them.

Sometimes those who have survived harrowing or traumatic experiences decide to share their stories in the media. They often do so with a purpose of creating a redemption story, or giving positive meaning to negative events (McAdams, 2001, 2013; Phillips, 2017). However, the media can invalidate survivors' stories through misrepresentation, victim-shaming, or victim-blaming, potentially humiliating them on a grand scale, causing secondary victimization, also known as retraumatization. In this case, fresh new psychological wounds would be added to the original trauma, creating festering blisters in well-being and the sense of self. If media portrayal has the power to contribute to such serious after-effects to the subjects of stories, this topic should be of the utmost importance in the field of media psychology.

Furthermore, the reconstruction of the sense of self and identity, particularly after trauma, is a critical but daunting task. When individuals experience a loss of self and identity,

there is a drive for the identity to be restored in order for recovery to take root (Grant et al., 2015; Kerr et al., 2013). As McAdams (1996) explains, individuals need to forge new connections and associations between their stories, identity, and behaviors so that they can generate healthy new options. In telling stories, individuals continue to shape their identities and steer their journeys to recovery. However, what happens to the identity of the individual when the life narrative is hijacked, the character of the individual is publicly misrepresented, the world sees the individual in a false way, and public feedback provides strong social proof that the negative view of the individual is correct? What does all this mean to survivors of MHM? The psychological consequences for some MHM survivors appear to be profound and traumatic but this has yet to be validated in research. To establish that this phenomenon exists, this research begins with the following question.

The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the nature of the MHM experience?
    a. What is the lifeworld like for the MHM survivor?
    b. What are the common meanings and shared practices of those who have gone through MHM?
    c. What is the role of power and powerlessness?
2. How does MHM impact narrative identity and well-being?
3. Should MHM be considered a traumatic experience?
    a. What is the comparison between MHM, PTSD, and CPTSD?
    b. Is the MHM experience for trauma survivors different than the MHM experience for non-trauma survivors?

4. What are the common meanings and shared practices of those who have recovered from MHM?

Research Design

In addition to the qualitative nature of HP interviewing used to disclose the lived experience of MHM, a quantitative piece is used to deepen the understanding of the relationship between MHM, trauma, narrative identity, and well-being. Greene et al. (1989) describe mixed-methods research designs as those that include at least one qualitative method designed to collect words, and one quantitative method designed to collect and analyze numerical data. Other scholars argue that mixed-methods research can include more than just quantitative-qualitative data combinations, that is, investigator, methodological, or theory triangulation are mixed methods as well (Flick, 2017; Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012; Wilson, 2016). This study uses quantitative-qualitative mixed methods to collect and analyze information to make the understanding of the MHM phenomenon stronger than using one methodology alone (Creswell, 2011, 2015; Flick, 2017).

Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2015) argue that phenomenological research lends itself to work extremely well with other types of research. Greene et al. (1989) describe five reasons that researchers used the qualitative-quantitative mixed-methods phenomenology research (MMPR): (a) triangulation, to seek a convergence of findings, enriching the breadth, depth, and consistency in methodological process (Flick, 2007; Wilson, 2016) while minimizing biases and seeking to analyze the same phenomenon, or part of a phenomenon, in different ways (Alatinga & Williams, 2019; Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015); (b) complementarity, to measure overlapping or different aspects of a phenomenon (Greene et al., 1989); (c) development, designed to use the results from one measurement to inform another (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015); (d) initiation, which sparks analysis from different perspectives (Greene et al., 1989;

Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015); and (e) expansion, which broadens the scope of the research (Greene et al., 1989; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2015) assert that MMPR also facilitates positioning phenomenological content within an existing context or framework that makes the interpretation clearer. MMPR enhances the meaning of the quantitative data when supported by the richness of the human experience. It helps confirm findings from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. MMPR can also provide an orientation, frame of reference, or focus in regard to a particular aspect of a phenomenon, or the phenomenon itself, thereby providing additional layers to the interpretation or analysis.

In this MMPR study, particularly in the HP qualitative piece, the research embraces the information in the spirit of the bricoleur, or someone who constructs things out of the materials at hand. In this case, the participant was given the opportunity to supplement the information they shared verbally with examples of media, social media comments, emails, letters, journals, or art. MMPR is an excellent vehicle for the interpretive bricoleur because the researcher understands that research is an interactive process shaped by many elements of the participants of the research as well the researcher (Denzin, 1989). Denzin calls this “interpretive interactionism.”

> The product of the interpretive bricoleur’s labor is a complex, quiltlike bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage, a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations. This interpretive structure is like a quilt, a performance text, a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole. (Denzin, 2012, p. 85)

Garza (2007) explained that the “flexibility of phenomenological research and the adaptability of its methods to ever widening arcs of inquiry is one of its greatest strengths’’ (p. 338). Although phenomenological research facilitates insights and understandings into lived

experiences, it is not an ideal methodology for generalizing, predicting, or identifying various conditions under which the phenomena might impact subjects differently. When pairing phenomenological research with quantitative research, the results can be strengthened (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018; Greene et al., 1989; Johnson, 2017; Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2014, 2015). In this study, surveys were used to ensure the participants have experienced the phenomenon and are therefore qualified candidates for the phenomenological interview, but they also serve to enhance the final interpretation.

Methodology Fit

According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological exploration enables researchers to gather rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the subject, then mine these descriptions for common patterns and themes. Qualitative interviewers maintain the goal of seeking layers of contextual and socially constructed meaning from which they can engage in thematic analysis (Adler et al., 2017). Since the phenomena in this study revolve around how the subjects perceived that their characters or stories were represented in the media, and how it impacted them, these experiences are autobiographical memories that are dynamically reconstructed and highly subjective. Whether the recalled experience is factually accurate is irrelevant (Van Manen, 2018). The information most relevant to MHM experiences is that which helps the researcher understand the essence of the experience, and how the situation was experienced by the subject. Hermeneutic phenomenological research is appropriate for the study of MHM because MHM is a deeply personal, hence subjective, topic that is rich with layers of meaning. Hermeneutic scholarship welcomes an interpretive lens facilitated by dialogue and discourse to uncover this lived experience. Therefore, a HP approach is an appropriate fit.

While the HP methodology provides an ideal framework for generating an understanding of the lived experience of MHM, there is also a need to understand whether the participants

experienced any of the post-traumatic stress systems outlined in the American Psychological Association's (2013) or the ICD-11's definition of post-traumatic stress disorder. There is also a need to evaluate the negative impact of MHM on the narrative identity and well-being of MHM survivors. For this purpose, two short quantitative surveys were used: the Peritraumatic Dehumanization, Objectification, and Humiliation Scale (Moor et al., 2013a), and the Centrality of Events Scale, short version (Galán et al., 2017). The Peritraumatic Dehumanization, Objectification, and Humiliation Scale (Moor et al., 2013a), a five-item measure with each item using a 5-point Likert scale, was originally developed to measure experiences of peritraumatic dehumanization, objectification, and humiliation among rape victims, as well as victims of other forms of interpersonal trauma. The reliability measure for this scale was a Cronbach's alpha at .86. The Centrality of Event Scale (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006), is a seven-item measure with each item using a 5-point Likert scale that measures how central a specific event is to a person's identity and life story. The Cronbach alpha measure is .88 for the shorter seven-item scale. The scale also correlates .38 with PTSD symptom severity.

Validity and Rigor

There are numerous strategies on how to achieve rigor in quantitative and qualitative studies. El Hussein et al. (2015) developed an acronym as a strategy for the rapid assessment of rigor in qualitative inquiry. The acronym is FACTS, which stands for fittingness, auditability, credibility, trustworthiness, and saturation. *Fittingness* is another term for transferability, meaning that the results could be utilized in other studies. Auditability in qualitative research consists of a robust collection of documentation regarding each step and modification of the research process. This can be performed through an audit trail which is thorough and systematic recordkeeping regarding all aspects of the research (Given, 2008). Credibility, or internal validity, relates to how authentically the description and interpretation of a phenomenon

matches with how the participants view it. A credible study includes descriptions that capture the essence of the phenomenon so vividly that the participants would recognize it as their own. Regarding phenomenological studies, Maxwell (1992) refers to the credibility concept as "interpretive validity," describing it as the extent to which the researcher accurately represents an understanding of the perspective of the individual and the meanings attached to the words and actions of that individual.

Trustworthiness is captured by the above concepts, taken together, and refers to the degree to which one can be confident in the overall findings. Trustworthiness speaks to the rigor of the above steps, ensuring the information and results are achieved and described in a way that meets high standards (El Hussein et al., 2015). Saturation is when researchers believes they have all the information needed since additional interviews would only provide repeats of information already gleaned and collecting more data would add no additional value to the analysis (Saunders et al., 2018).

Flynn and Korcuska (2018) put forth another perspective. In addition to saturation, Flynn asserts that trustworthiness procedures in qualitative research include triangulation, rich descriptions, member-checking, prolonged engagement with data, audit trail, reflexivity, epoche, and essence. Regarding procedures that bolster rigor and trustworthiness in qualitative studies, Creswell (2012) states that "qualitative researchers should engage in at least two of them in any given study" (p. 253). To ensure rigor and validity in the qualitative portion of this study, the following strategies were used:

1. Audit trail. The audit trail makes the research confirmable and enables a review of the conduct of inquiry, along with the ability to reconstruct the findings in a way that another researcher could logically follow to assess the rigor (Given, 2008).

2. Reflective journal. This is a written log capturing the thoughts and learning process when conducting the hermeneutic analysis (Vicary et al., 2017).
3. Member-checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), also known as participant feedback, will involve systematically obtaining feedback about the information received, the themes, categories, interpretations, and conclusions from the study. Morse (2015) asserts that participants in qualitative research should not be allowed to have input for the analysis in case there is disagreement. However, in HP, the participant and the researcher are to come to a fusion of understandings. Therefore, member-checking was utilized in this study.
4. Triangulation. The surveys used to screen participants provide a second method to collect data regarding the phenomenon to help ensure validity.

Ethics

The standards of ethical research were applied in this study. Maintaining the dignity of the research participants is of the utmost priority. All participants were informed that the study was voluntary, that they had the right to withdraw participation at any time, and that there would be no consequences for failing to complete the study. Research participants were given a code name to ensure anonymity. Participants were informed as to the kinds of questions that would be asked before beginning, and they were told about the potential for the interview process to bring up uncomfortable memories and emotions. Participants were asked to sign statements of informed consent before they began.

This study explores whether humiliation and misrepresentation in the media is experienced as a form of trauma. Trauma-related research is of serious concern to Institutional Review Boards (IRB) due to the possibility of generating distress by asking participants to remember experiences that were traumatic for them (Jaffe et al., 2015). IRBs are aware that even

more sensitivity is required on research of individuals victimized by interpersonal trauma due to the likelihood the they may develop depression or trigger PTSD symptoms (Hopper & Gonzalez, 2018).

However, researchers also argue that denying research on vulnerable populations that are potentially psychologically traumatized is not a reasonable solution since this population needs scientific inquiry as to their needs (Abu-Rus et al., 2018; Jorm et al., 2007; Newman & Kaloupek, 2004). Abu-Rus et al. (2018) assert that there is important psychological information to be learned without which "the voices of the vulnerable or disenfranchised populations are more likely to be silenced" (p. 2). Some scholars argue that although the risk of asking participants about past traumatic events is real, the risk is minimal and may be overestimated, while the benefits are invaluable (Becker-Blease et al., 2006; Jaffe et al., 2015; Legerski & Bunnell, 2010). Furthermore, there is lack of a strong body of literature supporting the view that talking about past trauma is any type of substantial risk for participants (Abu-Rus et al., 2018; Newman & Kaloupek, 2004; Newman et al., 1999). The cost and benefits analysis supports the need for this research to be done. Moor et al. (2013b) suggest that since dehumanization, humiliation, and objectification experiences are rarely looked at and are largely atypical of other traumas, it might explain the lack of attention in trauma literature. "Accordingly, it might go unexamined in therapy to the detriment of the sufferers" (p. 1063).

To research this matter further, Jaffe et al. (2015) did a wide-scale study where they analyzed 73,959 participants across 70 samples to examine the extent of distress caused by trauma-related research. They found that participation did in some cases lead to mild distress, more so for individuals with trauma history or PTSD, less so for those who completed surveys. However, regardless of history, the level of distress was minimal and temporary, and participants had no regrets. In fact, Jaffe asserts that individuals generally regarded participating

in the research to have been a positive and validating experience. While extra caution was taken with these participants who may have experienced some form of trauma, the type of trauma explored in this study revolved around how individuals were characterized (or mischaracterized) in the media, which was predicted to be manifest as a different type of trauma.

Terminology

One of the unique aspects of Heideggerian phenomenology is his creative use of language to facilitate phenomenological thinking. His terms are often translated as hyphenated phrases to express concepts that could not be easily captured in single words. For example, a key concept in hermeneutic phenomenology is *Dasein*, a German word that literally means "there being," but in Heideggerian terms it refers to being-in-the-world, signifying the human ability to reflect upon our own existence and wonder about our being (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Heidegger elucidates the concept of Dasein by signifying its threefold structure: At once it encompasses how and who we were in the past, how and who we are in the present, and how and who we will become in the future.

In phenomenology, the concept of the lifeworld, or the lived world as the individual experiences it, sets the foundation for exploratory research efforts in everyday situations (Van Manen, 1990). The lifeworld consists of lived time (temporality), lived other (relationality), lived body (corporeality), and lived space (spatiality), lived things, and technology (materiality). Van Manen (2014, 2018) describes these concepts as universal existentials that serve as guides for reflecting upon the complicated lifeworld.

"'Thrownness' is Heidegger's term for the way we find ourselves 'thrown' into or 'delivered over' to circumstances that are beyond our control" (Wrathall, 2005, p. 35). Heidegger (1927/1962) explained that thrownness is a circumstance into which a being finds itself. "This characteristic of Dasein's Being—this 'that it is'—is veiled in its 'whence' and

'whither,' yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the 'thrownness' of this entity into its 'there'" (p. 135). Thrownness implies that we are thrown into a situation at a particular point in time that we are forced to face (Lagerkvist, 2017). In today's digital culture, people's lifeworlds are like vessels immersed in an ocean of digital technology, and they are vulnerable of being thrown overboard, so to speak. Withy (2014) explains that thrownness involves being thrown into something or finding ourselves in circumstances that must be dealt with as a new condition in life.

In phenomenology, the concept of *mitsein*, also known as "being-with," or sociality, explains that individuals are not stand-alone objects that merely interact with other individuals. Heidegger (1927/1962) explains, "Being-with is an existential constituent of Being-in-the-world...So far as Dasein is at all, it has Being-with-one-another as its kind of being" (p. 163). In other words, mitsein argues that human individuality involves relationships with others as a constitutive element of being human (Rousse, 2016). As such, humans are inherently concerned about how they are situated and conceived by their fellow human beings. When faced with public humiliation and potentially being cast out of the family of man, acceptance, and human belongingness, then being-with-one-another becomes lifted out of the everydayness of life with the poignancy and importance of life breath.

Quantitative Methods

For the quantitative surveys, Qualtrics was used, and each instrument was a 5-point Likert scale allowing the participants to express to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement. The first survey was a three-question 5-point Likert scale, the Media Humiliation or Misrepresentation Scale (MHM Scale), designed to screen whether the potential participant actually experienced media humiliation or misrepresentation. This ensured the proper purposive sampling. A fourth question was for an estimate of how many people could have potentially

seen the misrepresentative media. Those who did not qualify as having MHM according to the MHM scale were thanked and no further information was shown. For those who did qualify as having experienced the phenomenon via the MHM scale, those participants were shown the informed consent form. After the consent form was signed, demographic information regarding age, gender, ethnicity, and education was gathered, followed by two brief surveys which presented a combined total of 12 questions.

The first survey was the five-question Peritraumatic Dehumanization, Humiliation and Objectification Scale (PDHO). A score of 10 or more indicates the presence of dehumanization, humiliation and objectification associated with the individual's MHM. The second survey was the seven-question short version of the Centrality of Events Scale. This scale indicates trauma and the impact on narrative identity (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006).

Participants were asked to participate in these two relevant surveys with instructions that say, "Please think back upon your eventful media experience and answer the following questions in an honest and sincere way, remembering what you felt at the time, by circling a number from 1 to 5."

Media Humiliation Scale

Please answer the following questions based on how you felt immediately after your worst experience being humiliated, victim-blamed, or misrepresented in the media.

1. I felt as if I was severely misrepresented, victim-blamed or humiliated in the media.
2. The way I was portrayed in the media was false, negative and deeply shaming.
3. The mischaracterization of my persona left me feeling betrayed, exploited and degraded by the media.
4. The number of people who could have potentially seen the humiliating or misrepresentative media about me:

___dozens ___hundreds ___thousands ___millions ___many millions

A correlation test for association was conducted to find whether there was a significant relationship between the MHM scale, the Centrality of Events score, and the PDHO scale.

Centrality of Events and PDHO

H_0 – The null hypothesis is that there will be no significant relationship between the severity of the Centrality of Events scale and the PDHO scale.

H_1 – The alternative is that there will be a significant relationship between the severity of the Centrality of Events scale and the PDHO scale.

It is predicted that the relationship will be significant in all three comparisons.

Peritraumatic Dehumanization, Objectification, and Humiliation Scale

The Peritraumatic Dehumanization, Objectification, and Humiliation Scale (Moor et al., 2013a) was developed to measure experiences of "peritraumatic dehumanization, objectification, and humiliation among victims of rape and other acts of interpersonal violence and trauma" (para. 1).

The questions in this test, before modification, are the following:

1. To what extent did you experience a sense of being stripped of your humanity during the event?
2. To what extent did you feel exploited and used like an object during the event?
3. To what extent did you feel humiliated during the event?
4. To what extent did you feel that you were denied control over the event?
5. To what extent did you feel that your personal space was thoughtlessly invaded during the event?

Since this study is not about rape, but about the impact of a negative media experience, the word "space" in Question 5 was replaced with the word "life," and the phrase "during the event" was replaced with "by the media" in all questions.

The modified questions were as follows:

1. To what extent did you experience a sense of being stripped of your humanity by the media?
2. To what extent did you feel exploited and used like an object by the media?
3. To what extent did you feel humiliated by the media?
4. To what extent did you feel that you were denied control over your story by the media?
5. To what extent did you feel that your personal life was thoughtlessly invaded by the media?

The Centrality of Events Scale

The instructions by Galán et al. (2017) state, “Please think back upon the most stressful or traumatic event in your life and answer the following questions in an honest and sincere way, by circling a number from 1 to 5.” To make the instructions more appropriate and clearer to the participants, the instructions were modified. “The most stressful or traumatic event in your life” was changed to “the most stressful or traumatic media event in your life.” The following seven questions represent the short version of this scale.

1. I feel that this event has become part of my identity.
2. This event has become a reference point for the way I understand myself and the world.
3. I feel that this event has become a central part of my life story.
4. This event has colored the way I think and feel about other experiences.
5. This event permanently changed my life.
6. I often think about the effects this event will have on my future.

7. This event was a turning point in my life.

Recruiting Participants

Typical sample sizes for hermeneutic phenomenological (HP) studies range from 1 to 10 persons (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Smith and Osborn (2003) recommend that first-time HP researchers perform their research with three participants because it allows for "in-depth engagement with each participant, and also allows for a detailed examination of similarity and difference, convergence and divergence" (p. 57). Dukes (1984) recommended 3 to 10 participants for a phenomenological study, and Polkinghorne (1989) suggested no less than 5, nor more than 25.

To find these participants, several means were employed. Online advertising for research subjects is considered an acceptable practice (Hamilton & Bowers, 2006). The following online means were used to find subjects:

1. Word of mouth
2. Ads placed in the TV/film/video section of Craigslist.com, targeting cities known for television production: Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Atlanta
3. Queries sent to agencies, law firms that do defamation cases, counseling agencies in the selected cities, and professional actor/directors' guilds
4. Queries sent to activists, leaders, organizations, or social media groups that provide services for survivors of trauma, wrongful convictions, human trafficking, cults, rape, domestic violence, online harassment, catfishing, revenge porn, and so forth.
5. Queries to individuals in media stories that appear to have experienced MHM (i.e., as evidenced by published stories indicating a false conviction, a lawsuit against the media for defamation).

Qualitative Methods

Phenomenological Interviewing

Phenomenological research seeks to maximize the information acquired. For this reason, less structured interviews are considered more effective than highly structured interviews. Van Manen (2018) explains that within hermeneutic phenomenology methods, interviewing is not for the purpose of mining the factual details of an experience other than to provide context for the experience of the phenomenon. Rather, the interview should be an open conversation that serves as a pathway to develop a rich understanding of the phenomenon and to uncover the meaning as ascribed to it by the experiencer (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, open-ended semi-structured questioning, verbal prompts, stimulated recall, and probing questions were used to help the participants produce information about the phenomenon in ways beyond simply reflecting (Lauterbach, 2018). Inquiries were made about the circumstances, nature, and content of the media that helped refresh the participant's memory of the MHM experience (Reeves et al., 2016). Participants were informed that they could share the media that was the source of the MHM, or any other related items, with me if they felt comfortable so doing. Some shared links and media. Others simply described the content and the impact it had.

Participants were interviewed either by video conference, by telephone interview, or by Skype, depending on the comfort level and desires of the participant. No participants felt the need to have the interview in person. Since the necessary purposive sampling required that the participants endured a previously negative experience with the media, participants were assured that there would be no video recording, only audio recording, even if the interview took place by video chat. Confidentiality was assured both verbally and in writing, using the proper IRB consent form. The interview was recorded, then transcribed using QSR NVivo software. I went

over each recording multiple times to ensure that the transcription was accurate, and to ensure that I was deeply familiar with each story.

Filler words such as “so,” “okay,” “you know,” or “I mean” were eliminated from the transcripts, repeating words or phrases were removed, minor grammar errors were fixed, and references to specific individuals or media organizations were replaced with generic terms enclosed in parentheses. For example, the name of a major newspaper would be removed and replaced with (major newspaper). The transcribed texts of each interview have been filed in the name of the participant’s pseudonym, along with copies of any links, documents, emails, texts, music, books, art, or other applicable artifacts that the participant may have shared. These files are located on a password-protected cloud storage account on Microsoft OneDrive.

Interview Questions

For those who chose to be interviewed, the opening question was preceded by rapport building with an explanation similar to this:

> I had an experience where I was humiliated and misrepresented in the media, and I also went through the recovery process myself. I am interested in understanding what it was like for you to have felt misrepresented or humiliated in the media. The focus of this study is to find out what it was like, what it meant to people like you who have been through this experience. Try to remember how you felt right after it happened. Tell me about your experience and what comes up for you when you think about it.

Active listening was employed, but dialogue took place as needed to increase clarity.

There are five lenses activated during the hermeneutic circle. The following probes were used if the topics did not come up naturally.

Lens 1: Media humiliation and misrepresentation

Let's start at the beginning. Tell me about your experience being humiliated or misrepresented in the media.

Probe: How did that make you feel?

Probe: What sticks out in your mind about it all?

Probe: Do you remember some of your thoughts at the time?

Lens 2: Narrative identity

Did seeing how you were represented in the media impact how you saw yourself in real life?

Probe: How was that person that you saw in the media different from the real you?

Probe: Do you feel like your sense of who you are changed?

Lens 3: Trauma

Can you tell me more about the various ways that this impacted your life at the time?

Probe: What about now? How have you changed?

Probe: What was the most intense thing about it?

If the subjects brought or emailed additional information to share with me:

Probe: Let's talk about the things you sent.

Probe: Did you have anything that you want to read to me, any links you want me to look at, or anything else you want me to see that will help me understand your experience?

Lens 4: Power

Let's talk about the role of power in all this.

Probe: Is there anything that made you feel powerless?

Probe: How did you get your power back?

Lens 5: Well-being

Was there anything that helped you heal and cope?

Probe: What are your strengths?

Probe: Is there any way you have grown since this happened?

Probe: What advice would you give others?

The last question is designed to lift the subject from a potentially low affect, and to remind the subject of his or her strengths. After the conversational interview, I explained that I would be sending the stories and the significant statement to them to check for accuracy. I disclosed that I might need to follow up and asked if it would be okay to follow up with questions if needed. All participants approved the accuracy checks and follow-up questions.

Phenomenological Voice

Finlay (2012) describes Husserl as the pioneer of phenomenology who advocated the studying, reflecting upon, and writing about the structures of conscious experiences from the first person perspective. In order to most authentically interpret and describe the phenomenon of the lived experience from a researcher perspective, many phenomenological studies are written in the first person ‘I,’ ‘we,’ and ‘our’ (Bu & Paré, 2018; Butchart, 2017; Felder et al., 2014; Finlay, 2014; Ginev, 2017; Guignon, 2012; Landes, 2015; Lauterbach, 2018; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Stolorow, 2007). Kafle (2013) explains that using everyday or academic language does not do justice in lifting the core essence of a phenomenon out of the everyday world. The best phenomenological voice to reflect the depth of the participants’ experiences is a casual voice with an “informal tone with idiographic expressions full of adages and maxims” (p. 196).

Therefore, in keeping with the spirit of phenomenological writing, I will now use a more casual tone, and provide rich, colorful reflections.

Crafted Stories

After each interview, a story was crafted, either from the subject's verbatim words, or from a combination of my own structural description, supported by verbatim quotes. Each story was sent to the participants for editing or approval. Approval dates were recorded on a master list located in the research files. Crowther et al. (2017) explain that crafting stories out of the verbatim transcripts is part of the interpretive process. It involves my ontological sense of attunement to the story that was shared, and my interpretation regarding the important key elements of the story. The participant feedback was integrated, and approvals supplied validation that I crafted or interpreted the stories correctly.

As I gathered these stories, more than once a sense of relief and gratitude was relayed by the participants to know that someone in academia cared about this experience enough to study it. For some, their stories about how this experience impacted them had never been told elsewhere. This was not an easy story to tell, not only because it brought up negative memories, but also because, as some participants explained, people who have not experienced traumatic media misrepresentation cannot understand the depth of the anguish they experienced. As I learned from my own experience, people who do not understand the experience but mean well do not know what to say and give minimizing advice, like "just get over it." Such a response can shut people down. Knowing that I had experienced MHM myself and that this research was being conducted for academic reasons and was overseen by an ethics committee, created a sense of trust and willingness for the participants to revisit their painful pasts to contribute to this body of knowledge.

Thick and Rich Descriptions

Thick and rich descriptions are often enabled by in-person interactions, but this is not a requirement. Jorgensen (2009) asserts that thick descriptions can be achieved without the visual observation of context and character responses and can include an explication of how we perceive and understand elements that cannot be seen. She explains that thick descriptions are in pursuit of the "richness of thought and purpose that might lie behind the action" (p.70).

> A thick description...evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (Denzin, 1989, p. 83)

The questions asked in this research were designed to gather thick descriptions of the lived experiences of MHM to better understand what the MHM experiences mean to the participants (Gadamer, 1975; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). A non-visual source of rich information I discovered became manifest in the length and details of the answers, without prompts or probes. Sometimes the answers emerged as if they were encased in a written monologue that had grown dusty in the theater archives, waiting for their opportunity to be heard, to be acknowledged, and to matter. Some stories included moments of silence when the participants struggled for words or became too choked up to speak. There were also capsules of time during the retellings that were punctuated by soft sobs or the need to get tissues. Inextricably woven between the pulsations of anguish, anger, and strength were the threads of facticity of the contextual details.

Originally, I had intended to only provide a short, structural description of the context behind the MHM experiences I sought to uncover, after which I would go into more detail about what the MHM experiences meant to the participants and how it impacted them. However, when

the MHM experience repeatedly revealed itself like a river of details backed up behind a damn whose rusty floodgates had finally been pried open and emotions were pouring out, it soon became clear that the details of the story were impossible to extricate from the phenomenon. The story itself was part of the Dasein, the story revealed the journey of the thrownness, or the whence and the whither. In other words, the lifeworld began in a certain place or expectation (the whence), and the participant was then thrown into an unexpected situation (the whither), out of which emerged the phenomenon. For this reason, the structural descriptions are not as short and uniform as I had originally intended, but different lengths, depending on the story and the participants' input regarding essential elements to include for a proper telling of their experiences.

Significant Statements

After each story, a list of significant statements is displayed according to the five lenses. Significant statements related to the phenomenon and the lenses have been pruned for repetition and overlap, and then catalogued by theme, a process known as *horizontalization* (Moustakas, 1994). The structural descriptions, or stories, illuminated the category of "materiality and technology," one of the Dasein existentials. The four other existentials are organized by significant statements and displayed by category after the stories. As participants reflected upon their media misrepresentations, questions were asked to prompt insight on the lived existentials. Each reflection showcased different existentials, but the "lived things and technology," or the "materiality" aspect of the lifeworlds are revealed in the descriptions of the experiences. Other existentials (temporality, corporeality, spatiality, and relationality) emerge from both the stories and the horizontalizations.

To ensure accuracy and validity, the significant statements were also reviewed with each participant to confirm the accuracy of the statements. This process is known as member-

checking. Member-checking was desired by me and required by the ethics committee to ensure there would be no inaccuracy or misrepresentation of the participants' experiences, particularly since these participants were previously harmed by media misrepresentation. Participants were encouraged, not only to check for accuracy, but to edit their key statements in case, upon reflection, they birthed a better way to articulate the essence of their experiences. In some cases, participants sent follow-up emails or texts. These were integrated into the significant statements, horizontalizations, or stories. The participant approvals were logged in the research file along with the other confidential data on Microsoft OneDrive.

The horizontalizations were then compiled, compared, and organized according to meaning units, or themes. Five themes were expected to emerge since they were the subject of the lenses (humiliation, identity, trauma and well-being, power, and recovery and growth). However, in following the data where they led, the horizontalizations were mined in search of invariant structures with which to define the essence of the phenomenon of traumatic media misrepresentation (Moustakas, 1994). In this process, other themes emerged as well.

CHAPTER FOUR – PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Participants

Eleven participants were interviewed in depth about their experiences being or having been misrepresented in the media. Participants consisted of seven women and four men, with three in the 25-34 age range, two in the 35-44 age range, three in the 45-54 age range, and three 55 years or older. Ethnicities include one African, one African American, one Latina/multiracial, one Native American, one Arab/Middle Eastern/multiracial, and six Caucasians. One had less than a high school education, four had some college or an associate degree, three had college degrees and three had post-graduate degrees.

Table 1

Participant Information

Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Education	Potential viewers	Mediums
Female	African American	25-34	Associate Degree	Thousands	Print, TV News, Online News, Social Media
Female	Caucasian	25-34	Graduate Degree	Millions	Print News, Online News, TV News, Social Media
Female	Caucasian	45-54	Some College	Millions	Print News, Online News, Blogs, TV, Radio
Male	Caucasian	45-54	Graduate Degree	Thousands	Print News, Online News, Professional Publication
Male	Native American	55+	College Degree	Millions	Print News, Online News
Female	Arab/Middle Eastern Multiracial	35-44	College Degree	Millions	TV, Reality TV, Print & Online News, Social Media
Male	Caucasian	45-54	Some College	Millions	TV, Reality TV, Social Media
Female	Latin Multiracial	55+	Some College	Millions	Reality TV, Social Media, Website
Female	Caucasian	55+	Less than High School	Millions	Blog, Print & Online News, TV
Male	Caucasian	25-34	College Degree	Thousands	Social Media
Female	African	35-44	Graduate Degree	Hundreds	Print News. Online News

Note: This information is for only for those participants who were interviewed.

Organization of Phenomenological Data

After the interviews were transcribed, the stories were crafted and approved by the participants. Each participant is introduced with their story of having been misrepresented, humiliated, publicly shamed, or victim-blamed in the media. The stories are different styles and different lengths. The significant statements were culled from the transcripts, then catalogued by topic. There are three overarching categories of significant statements: lenses, existentials, and emerging themes. The information that is revealed through the lenses (humiliation, trauma, identity, power, and well-being), will follow the participant's story with significant statements organized by lens. The significant statements are often paragraphs if the context was needed to properly relay the concept.

The humiliation lens is labeled both "Humiliation and Misrepresentation" to capture the nuances of the overlap of the two concepts (Margalit, 1996; van der Rijt, 2016). As Margalit (1996) contends, to have your character misrepresented is a form of humiliation. This category will also include anecdotes or statements that signify public shaming. The trauma lens category primarily includes participants' representations or indicators of psychological pain or trauma. The identity lens is labeled "Impact on Identity" since that is the aspect of interest in this research. It also includes statements of self-reflection. The power lens is titled as "Power and Powerlessness." This lens incorporates examples of how power is misused, powerlessness, hopelessness, and thoughts of suicidal ideation or "ending it all," due to the link between powerlessness and suicide (Canetto, 2008; Qiu et al., 2017; Syme et al., 2016). The well-being lens category is labeled "Impact on Well-being" and highlights participants statements describing the negative impact of MHM on their psychological and physical well-being (i.e., decreased life zest, depression, need for medication, loss of income, sickness, desire to withdraw

from society, and so on). Significant statements may be repeated if they represent valid examples of the experience in more than one category.

After the stories and their subsequent thematization by lens, the five phenomenological existentials (materiality and technology, corporeality, spatiality, temporality and relationality) will be presented and are arranged as follows: Materiality and technology is revealed in the essence of the story shared. Under that heading, there is a brief overview of the concept, as well as the essential parts, or "things" in the stories, including the various mediums for participants' MHM experiences. The remaining four existentials will be presented in a horizontalization format as a master list of key statements from all participants. Each statement was given equal weight, but overlapping or repetitive statements have been removed. Finally, emergent themes are presented in tables of horizontalizations as well.

Lived Experiences

In presenting the experiences of the participants, I unveil these stories only from the perspective of the participants. I make no claims about the veracity of any particular facts. The facts are not king in hermeneutical phenomenological research; it is the subjective experience that reigns. Kafle (2013) explains that there is no one reality because it is a construct that is dependent on an individual's experience and perception; there are multiple possible realities to each event. I also take no stance about whether the participants deserved to have been treated the way they were, or whether they should feel the way they do. Instead, I have walled off all judgments and placed them in the freezer to enable me to peer inside the snow globe of their worlds, in their situatedness, to catch a glimpse of what it was like for these people to have lived through being humiliated, misrepresented, shamed, victim-blamed, dehumanized, objectified, and exploited in the media.

Note on Identity

Certain participants preferred to use their real identities. I expressed this to the IRB at Fielding Graduate University, and the decision was made not to disclose participant identities in this work, so pseudonyms were used. However, in the consent form, it was made clear that due to the unique circumstances and details of each particular story, it could not be guaranteed that identities would remain anonymous.

Aria

Aria, the daughter of parents who had a television ministry, was a student driving through a college town when she was hit by a drunk driver who ran a red light. Aria's airbags deployed which blocked her vision, and as Aria tried to maneuver her careening car to a stop, three other female students were hit. She said, "People started swarming the streets pointing at my car, calling me reckless and all kinds of things. Getting out of the car, I stood shaking and scared. The next day I was on the news and in the papers. Students were calling my phone because all they heard was that my car struck pedestrians. I was shamed." In the news coverage, Aria felt the narrative failed to focus on the drunk driver that hit her, but rather on her as the one who hit the pedestrians. "I thought that was a big deal, the fact that this young lady is driving a car, she's uninsured and she's drunk out of her mind, and she runs a red light and speeds. That's a big deal to me. And for that whole thing to kind of be grayed out...because this end of the story [about me] is the one they're showing. I felt like that's the wrong story."

"I was made out to seem like a bad person. There was nothing else to it. Like it was just so cut and dry." The subsequent media stories updated readers on the recovery of those students, without mentioning that Aria was also a university student who was hit and recovering. She received victim-blaming responses from people she knew who had read the stories. One

comment that sticks out in her mind is, “Oh well you know God don’t like ugly. I don’t know what she’s done in her life that would make her fall into these places.” Although Aria lived her entire life serving the community through her parents’ ministry, and trying to be the perfect daughter, after feeling publicly portrayed as a bad person who recklessly harmed innocent individuals, her entire life and identity were impacted to the point of needing therapy. “It changed me because it felt like I was such a giver to the world. And it felt like being that person, and then having the world just turn its back and look down on me, I felt shredded. I was shredded in so many ways.”

Lens: Humiliation and misrepresentation. Aria explains some of the ways she felt humiliated and misrepresented.

> Before the media situation, it was almost like it was a foretelling of what was going to happen. For some reason, when I got out of the car and the woman across the street was saying, “This car just came out of nowhere, this green car.” She was pointing and she was like, “This green car just came out of nowhere and started driving crazy.” That’s all she was saying, and people were like, “Yeah, what was that?” And they’re listening to this woman and I’m sitting up there saying, “No, I was hit, I was hit!”

The misrepresentation in Aria’s case did not involve intentional misrepresentation, but an omission of key facts that created the impression that Aria recklessly plowed into pedestrians. She states, “I feel like they could have done a better job representing everyone that was involved in the accident. Giving truthful news that didn’t seem like it was opinionated…it seemed like it was obscured.”

> People would call me saying, “You know, we’ve heard about you. So, what’s going on with you?” Not like, “Are you OK?” But, “What’s wrong with you?”
> And with that whole thing in the media I wanted to say, “No, it wasn’t really like that.”

Lens: Trauma. Aria describes her experience as traumatic. She mentions the word “replaying,” a term associated with intrusions, one of the symptoms of trauma in the definition of PTSD according to the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

> It was traumatizing. It is interesting because whenever I think about it, the way that I replayed what happened in the media, what happened with people calling me, what happened with the way people looked at me based on what they saw and heard and read in the media, I've replayed that.

Aria's psychologist brought up PTSD due to experiences from her past. He explained that this situation may have activated and amplified past trauma.

> I remember [the psychologist] mentioning to me what post-traumatic stress disorder was and what it does and all that stuff. But the interesting thing is he didn't necessarily mention it to me with this situation, even though I came to him because of the situation. He mentioned it to me based on other things I had experienced in my past, and how this situation was something that was so traumatic, maybe it just shook something up in me that triggered emotions from past events.

Aria articulates how, in spite of the past traumas in her life, she felt that her portrayal in the media did the most damage. "The past traumas were more hidden. This is the one where they totally exposed you, like everything is out there. I think the portrayal [in the media] did the most damage."

Lens: Impact on identity. Aria takes us further into her life-changing journey from the young lady who did everything right and cared about others, to the one falsely accused of causing harm to others. This had a profound impact on her sense of self, and subsequently, her future choices. She discloses, "It changed me because it felt like I was such a giver to the world. Being that person, then having the world just turn its back and look down on me, I felt shredded in so many ways."

> At that point, it was like I checked out. It's interesting because everything changed. I went from being known for being Christian. Back home my parents had a TV ministry, so a lot of people knew them. I was in the media, I was in the paper, I was known for my parents. I'm this good Christian girl. I'm in school. I'm in plays. I'm in drama. People look at my face, they're familiar with me and then this happened. It's like everything changed because I changed. It changed me.
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> I was raised to be the person that smiled even when I was hurting, being a minister's daughter. You have to kind of be that person no matter what's going on in the household.

> You have to smile and still help other people. And when this all happened, I think it did change me in a lot of ways, it did affect me. I no longer wanted to fake it.
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> I'll tell you how it changed. Initially, I was this young lady who was so…bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, eager in the world, just so excited…I would go out and serve the community. We'd give away things or feed the hungry. I did so much. And I gave a lot of myself being in ministry with my parents. And then when this happened, I was the person that everyone was pointing at and looking down on.

Lens: Power and powerlessness. "I felt totally powerless," Aria explained, for a number of reasons. She did not know what people were thinking. She believed that many had the wrong impression, yet she felt powerless to correct the misinformation. She wanted to retreat, from life, from society, from the world.

> What about the people that knew me? They didn't say anything to me or didn't call me to reach out. [They] knew my name, that this happened, and may have seen that negative portrayal of me. I was thinking about what they were thinking about. And the fact that there was nothing I could do about it. I mean I wanted to go on Facebook and say something.
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> I felt so powerless being someone who portrayed her life in such a way that every single thing was so strategic, and so controlled, and so planned out. [I was] coming from a place where I had to really watch how I presented myself, so much. In this situation, I felt so powerless and the pain was in the fact that there was nothing I could do about it. There was nothing I could do.

Without knowing what others are thinking, she expresses the concept of getting away from it all, or just disappearing.

> I never thought about the action [of suicide], but I thought, "Would everybody be happier if I wasn't here?" It's interesting to hear myself talk about it. It probably sounds suicidal the way I'm saying it, but I felt like I just want it over with. I just wanted to get away from everything.

Lens: Impact on well-being. This experience resulted in a dramatic change in Aria's lifeworld.

> I moved back to my parents, stopped school, of course I no longer had a car because it was totaled. I felt like this great reputation had a smear to it now. I've never been the person accused, not to say I was perfect, but I was never the person to do anything to hurt anyone. I think that's what hurt the most. I would never hurt anyone. So to be receiving

> from all angles as if I am that person, that was hurtful as far as how I was presented in the media.
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> When I moved back home, I started getting involved with things that I would have never done before, very negative things, because I was hurting so bad. I got in with the wrong crowd and I started smoking marijuana. This was so different from who I was. I can see how it was my way of trying to self-soothe, trying to self-medicate. I was trying to find that peace when I felt like I didn't have it. I was trying to give myself that tranquility when it didn't exist around me.
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> My parents, they were upset with me, feeling like this isn't our daughter. This isn't who we raised you to be like, what's wrong with you? I was just in that place, like I tapped out. I was gone. I felt like I followed the right regimen my entire life. And when something happened to me, I felt like everyone turned their back on me, so I no longer wanted to follow the right regimen, the good way.

Aria describes the impact on her well-being. “I was in pain. I didn't have anyone, I didn't have friends, I didn't have family, no one understood. Everyone was looking down on me. So I was self-healing.”

Dahlia

Dahlia was bullied as a child, and she turned to music as her outlet for healing, expression, and strength.

> In school where I was bullied a lot, how I sought refuge from those moments was through music, through singing. To me it was just like breathing air or eating food or having friendships. It was like a necessity to survive almost. And it was like the source of joy and community. It was a space where I could really find the best of myself and figure out how to express myself to the world.

With music as a source of strength and confidence, Dahlia became a professional singer, songwriter, and musician. She was signed to a record label, and performed for three decades, playing over 1,000 shows in a variety of venues from prisons to stadiums. In 2014, she was hired to be the singer in a cover band that became the subject of a lawsuit between a personal injury attorney, who claimed he should own the band because it was his idea, and the band leader, who

was accused of stealing the idea. Dahlia performed only once before she found herself thrust into a $10 million lawsuit between the two men.

> [The lawsuit] was 112 pages long. It was frivolous. It was mostly about the two men. However, there was one small sentence in there where the plaintiff said that I was too unattractive to be in a [pop] cover band. There was a lot of mudslinging in that case against the defendants and there was one thing that was said about me. The lawsuit was extraordinarily abusive. I couldn't get out of it. I was told I would be in the legal system for a couple of years racking up tens of thousands of dollars.

Upset by the unfairness and potential legal costs of what she felt was an abusive lawsuit, Dahlia turned to the media for help.

> I spoke to [a major publication] for a couple of days, they looked through the lawsuit. They knew that it had nothing to do with me. They asked me all about the relationship between the two men, they got in depth about my singing career, they even said, “Oh you have a great voice.” I knew they could spin something, but I never thought they would lie and pull something out of thin air. The next day after the interview, I went to a deli, I grabbed a newspaper. I opened it up and on page three, there was a picture of me. It looked like it had gone through one of those face apps, you know where you can make someone look older? I'm like, “Who’s this lady?” and I'm like, “Oh that’s me.” It said, “Singer sued for being too old and too ugly for [pop] cover band,” in the headline.

Dahlia was shocked. This misrepresentation was not only a violation of her expectations, but she felt publicly humiliated without cause.

> I just felt like, “How dare they?” If they had written the article about the fact that he called me unattractive, I would not have been mad. It was the fact that they told the public that I got sued for being unattractive, and that I got sued for being so bad or so old and so ugly. It was very violating. I just couldn't understand how a journalist could do it. Like I knew the media twisted the facts, but I didn't know they could blatantly lie. I feel like we're nothing more than words on a paper to entertain, to get people to click.

Lens: Humiliation and misrepresentation. Dahlia shares details around her being humiliated and misrepresented.

> They lied about me. Then they just shamed me for existing, they shamed me for being 40, they shamed me for being 40 and a singer. The [major publication] actually had a picture of me with my full name and the words “Too old and ugly gal” underneath my picture. That’s abuse. Basically, I was abused in front of the entire world from the media. Yeah, that was abuse.

> They made it look like the whole thing revolved around me and then that went viral for three days. It was everywhere. It was in [a major publication], it was more so online but it was also on radio stations. I had friends who were driving in Mid-America listening to a country station. They heard the news for the day, and it was about this singer who got sued for being too old and too ugly for a [pop] cover band. It was in dozens of legal publications. I was astounded that nobody was actually reporting on the real lawsuit.
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> For pages and pages and pages on Google, it had headlines referring to me as being old, ugly, untalented, ruining the [pop] cover band. It was just insane defamation beyond my wildest nightmares. This bogus story was regurgitated in media outlets worldwide…even legal journals. It completely destroyed my reputation as a professional session singer.

Lens: Trauma. Dahlia discloses that she felt like she had PTSD, that she had experienced trauma as a child, and that she believed her MHM experience made it worse.

> [My therapist] said she felt I may have had acute stress disorder, which is like mini PTSD. To me it felt like full-blown PTSD but I was never officially diagnosed. I did have a pretty traumatic childhood. I had been living with these traumas and maybe not maintaining them in the healthiest way, so this incident kind of blew all of that and amplified it a thousand-fold.

She describes impaired functionality, loss of life zest, and that even figuring out how to get to the resources she needed for help was difficult. According to the DSM-5 and ICD-11, impaired functionality is one of the symptoms of PTSD (Stein et al., 2014). The PTM Framework would refer to this as a threat response (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018b). She states, “It became very hard to do simple things, I mean like balancing a checkbook or doing multiple errands in one day, I just couldn't handle it.”

> I eventually got therapy but in this first six months, things felt so overwhelming I really couldn't do much. It was like I lost my ability to get anything done. Something as simple as researching a therapist and finding out which therapist to go to and calling them just felt too difficult.
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> And I wasn't going to doctors either…making the trip just got too difficult. There was a long period of time when I could only handle one appointment a day. Like if I went to go see a friend for lunch, that wiped me out so much I couldn't do anything else.

Dahlia further articulates her psychological distress, including a sense of disconnection and her inability to process it all.

> I was in a state of complete shock for about 6 months. It was to the point where I really couldn't feel anything, I couldn't process emotion. I couldn't do anything, and the actual trauma started leaking in somewhere about the six to seven-month point. It was like post trauma. I would find myself googling myself over and over and over again. And the trauma would come in waves. There were days when I would shake and I would cry and I couldn't get out of bed. My roommate would actually make me breakfast and bring it to the bed. There were times when I would just be in a coffee shop having a cup of coffee, I would just break down.

She hesitates to perform music to avoid the negative experiences and feelings that she now associates with her music career.

> If I make music I'm going to want to go out there and do it which means I'm going to have to face all the things, sexism, I'm going to have to face all the ageism and I'm going to have to face all the misogyny. And I actually want to [make music], but there is an underlying procrastination that makes it difficult on many days to even pick up a guitar and write a song.

Lens: Impact on identity. The toll that Dahlia's MHM experience had on her sense of identity was dramatic, including reactivating the past negative schemas she thought she had overcome from her childhood. She explains, "This experience changed me so much. I experienced such a loss of identity for so many years."

> When I was a child, I was actually bullied a lot and I was basically told that I was ugly on practically a daily basis by my classmates. I did wonder, like what is wrong with me that I'm having this experience that everyone is telling me how ugly I am? The fact that my age was never once mentioned in the lawsuit and all these media outlets shamed me. So yes, I did [buy into it]. Maybe I am this old and ugly singer, and I need to hang it up?

Dahlia makes the comparison to rape, not in the sexual definition, but in the sense that is often described as an outrageous violation, an act of plunder, violent seizure, or abuse; despoliation (dictionary.com). She cautiously explains. "I don't mean to minimize rape, but it was almost like a rape in a way. But like a rape of my identity and a rape of my life and a rape of my time."

She refers to both the lawsuit and the misrepresentative media as two separate adversities but notes how the combined effect magnified her distress to the point of it being nearly incomprehensible.

> I think if only one or the other happened, either one of them would have been devastating on its own, but the two of them together, it was like there were days where I didn't know if I was going to make it. I didn't know if I was just going to jump off a bridge. I think that if I would have had one or the other, it would still be really devastating. But not to the point where I slipped into a complete alternate reality. And I couldn't even, like figure out like what day it was.

Lens: Power and powerlessness. Dahlia reflects on her feeling of objectification and exploitation in the publication's misrepresentation of the facts. As she explains it, the media crafted a false story as well as a degrading description of Dahlia to serve as entertaining click-bait. In her perception, in addition to the stress of the lawsuit, she was now publicly mocked and demeaned with her image being distorted and used to sell papers. Her sense of powerlessness manifest itself in her thoughts of death.

> All the anger, rage, hurt and defamation hit me in the chest. I could barely breathe. I was tired of playing the warrior, only to scrape by. My demons started getting the best of me. "Should I just kill myself?" I thought.
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> I knew that I would never do it, but the desire to die at this moment was very real. The suicidal thoughts were persistent, and I had to start admitting to myself and anyone who would listen that I was getting sick in the head over this. The anger was also physically manifesting as I could no longer lift my right arm above a 50-degree angle. I was also frequently breaking out into full body rashes.

To make matters worse, music, her creative outlet that served as her lifelong safe space to help her through her anxiety and distress, was suddenly no longer available in that capacity. It was now reconfigured in her mind as the source of pain and anguish. She explains, "[Music] was taken away from me, it was like losing a piece of my soul, it was like losing a limb almost."

Lens: Impact on well-being. Before her MHM experience, things were going well for Dahlia. She was beating the odds and succeeding as an artist in New York City.

> Just having that record deal, having it come out, and we were featured on MTV. That got me in the door for so many singing jobs. I would see an ad, I would send in my links, they would research me and they would see that I had very legitimate credits, and so I got booked a lot. Once this article came out, I would say my response rate dropped by about 90%.

When the degrading stories came out, everything in her lifeworld suddenly changed. Her income suffered, her opportunities waned, she withdrew from her former life. In the life story theory of narrative identity, this is an example of a contamination sequence (Alea, 2018).

> I was making money, everything felt like it was on cruise control, and just very easy. I would be in the studio all day. I would get paid then. I'd go to a rehearsal. I was always singing. I was making enough money to live in New York City and just that is huge…I was doing what I loved and paying my bills on time. And that was amazing to me. And then all of a sudden it was just gone.
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> I don't have the singing career I once had. My phone for the most part is not ringing. It used to ring, so I feel very sad about that. I feel sad that I don't have any shows coming up. I did perform a couple months ago, but I don't feel as connected to the music scene, or to musicians. My desire to go out or be in music clubs has diminished severely.
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> It was just taken from me. To have the very thing that is supposed to protect you from the bullying and take your mind off the bullying all the sudden being the source of the bullying. Obviously, it wasn't just the media that bullied me, it was also the man who sued me and just to be honest, women over a certain age who perform are bullied constantly just for being older.

Kyle

Kyle and his partner Kara responded to an opportunity to receive certain free health and therapy services by participating in a reality TV pilot. They were asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) before filming. They signed the agreement, filming began. Kyle explains,

> Filming began by placing a camera in our bedroom. They said they wanted to keep track of our routines. Were we going to the gym, etc. They said this was a part of the audition for the pilot episode, so they kept saying everything was simply possible. They didn't know if we had the personalities for the show. They had us sign pages XX and XX [can't remember] to a fully executed contract. It was the last two pages of the full contract.

> They tricked us. We thought there would be a period of at least some type of negotiations because I do have an entertainment lawyer. They said I'd have an opportunity to show the full contract to an attorney if and when we were selected.

Things went well for a few weeks. In spite of Kyle's insistence that he did not want to participate in manufactured drama, he was being pressured to do just that. He tried to back out of the filming. Kyle and Kara were then informed that the NDA they signed was actually part of a complete talent release and performance contract, and that the production company had the right to use their likenesses any way they wished. In Kyle's words,

> [The producer] said, "If you don't do these things that we're telling you to do then we're going to sue you." Kara's freaking out because we have assets, now will they come after us for our home? Well, at this point you've got to think, you've been doing this for six weeks. And they've got what felt like hundreds of hours' worth of footage. And you start to think, "Well, what are they going to do with that footage?"
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> I'm thinking to myself, "Why did we keep going back?" And that's because they were negotiating these things and lying to us like. "Now if you just participate in this for one more time everything's going to be fine." And you kept thinking oh, you know, our reputations, they're so important to us. We'll keep [cooperating] just because it gives us another chance to make our reputations okay.

Producers convinced Kyle that additional scenes were needed to ensure that he would come across well. Although Kyle was granted access to certain licensed health care professionals on the show, he learned that they were actually part of the cast and were evidently coached on what to say to elicit certain negative or dramatic responses from Kyle. Kyle realized the health professionals did not have his best interest at heart and he threatened to sue.

> The producer came out and said, "You signed an agreement that said that our doctors can do whatever they want, and that they're not held to their Hippocratic oath." It really damaged my trust in doctors and the licensed professionals. Because if there's a way for them to get around the Hippocratic oath what's the point of the Hippocratic oath?...They should have been required by some kind of governing board as a reality program to provide me that information when I applied to know that if at any time anything [harmful] happened during the filming, I should have had a lifeline. Because I would have called it every time and met with them. We were both distraught.

Nonetheless, Kyle still counted on assurances from the producers that things would turn out well in the end.

> I was hopeful until I saw the trailer that what they told me was true, which was that they were going to make the effort to show us in a positive light. I guess I was naïve to believe this. They told us the name of the show was [show name], but it turned out to be [something different]. I assert they knew this the entire time…Was it as bad as I anticipated? I mean one million times worse. Because what they did is they highlighted every bad moment that they could. And what I was in shock about was how could, why would someone do this? There was not one instance in the entire show not one where I was represented in any truthful portrayal of my character, of who I am. Not one.

To this day, the show is accessible online, and Kyle worries that an influential blogger or trainer, employer, or competitor in his industry will bring attention to it, and that it will impact his future plans in business and politics.

Lens: Humiliation and misrepresentation. In his search for an answer to why producers would do this to them, a friend explained to Kyle that the network was promoting

shows about people who came across insane. In real life, Kyle is a successful businessman. He explains that his image was reconstructed to match the stereotype of someone "crazy." To make matters more distressing, a trailer for an episode takes the most sensational parts of the episode, is sometimes advertised on multiple networks, and is viewed by far more people than watch the actual episode. Kyle explains, "The trailer was probably more damaging than the episode because it was alluding to insanity. They were basically saying like, here's a crazy person tune in, tune in and see the crazy person."

This created a question about whether Kyle's episode and character were edited to create a media product that fit a pre-planned content desire. The misrepresentation was described as, "If somebody came up to you and slapped you on the face and captured your response, and then used that in an entirely different way. They were creating a completely false storyline." His character was misrepresented in a sweeping way. He explains, "There was not one instance in the entire show not one where I was represented in any truthful portrayal of my character, of who I am. Not one. Because they had they had to build this other person up."

In the process of crafting a show that has the elements needed to draw and entertain viewers, producers make editorial choices about storyline, framing, character development, and conflict, among other things. In unscripted television, footage can be edited in any number of directions. Being unwittingly cast for the purpose of creating a pre-planned story, regardless of whether it was authentic, would likely make an individual feel dehumanized, like an object the producers needed to alter and mold to accomplish their goals.

> They had this show produced in their heads long before we arrived. They knew how they wanted us to look before they cast us. And they just want you to be guinea pigs to play with. And that's not what we signed up for.
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> Had it been me saying all these things because they were authentically what was happening in my life, it'd be different. But it was manufactured, and they used threats of

> lawsuits. They used manipulation. It was anything but reality. And I said several times that I didn't sign up for this. I wanted to leave. Kara and I said several times we wanted to leave. It was like abuse. We felt trapped.
>
> They're like predators. I thought I thought about this long and hard. They knew from the very beginning from the time they pitched the show to the network, how they were going to do all of this. And we were pawns in their plan and their strategy.

Lens: Trauma. In describing his experience below, Kyle uses the words “distraught,} “numb,” and “traumatic,” three concepts associated with psychological trauma or distress.

> They should have been required by some kind of governing board as a reality program to provide me that information when I applied to know that if at any time anything has happened during and ethically that I knew that I should have had a lifeline. They should be required to provide that. Because I would have called it every time we met with them. We were both distraught.

Seeing the episode when it finally aired left Kyle in a state of disbelief. “I was shocked at because we didn't know what the show was about. This was a new show. We didn't know what the intention was yet. So to me, I was like, numb. Like what just happened?” A feeling of numbness can be associated with trauma. “If I was really honest I've probably never dealt with it emotionally just because it's so traumatic,” he explains. Kyle further describes his experience with the show as “abusive.” He says, “There isn't a number like that to call if a reality show is abusing you. They were abusing us 100%.”

Lens: Impact on identity. Although Kyle was concerned that people might believe the misrepresentation of his character, he knew that it was a fictional representation made by distorting his likeness. However, it was not him. Kyle explains. “Having my name on social media compared to [someone infamous], really makes you think, well, am I that bad of a person? And then I just think, well that's the character they portrayed, that's not really who I am.” He was concerned that people he cared about might believe what they saw. “Thinking back about how I

got through that, I just prayed that my relationships were strong enough to understand that people know the real me. And to know that I'm not the way they portrayed me."

Lens: Power and powerlessness. Kyle describes the imbalance of power between the production company and himself. He also points out the powerlessness of having no governing organization where complaints could be lodged against a production company.

> They used the fact that they had attorneys, that they had [the cable network] behind them, and that they had the power of storytelling, that they could do whatever they wanted to with our images. Which left us that we had no power.
>
> They had the power 100 %. It was the power to control us and manipulate us and deceive us with no mercy. How can a group like this even exist? How come there's no place I can go as a participant in something like that and file a complaint?

Kyle explains that he and his partner were pressured, under threat of a lawsuit, into participating in ways that did not make them comfortable. Furthermore, they were warned not to speak to attorneys. This placed all the power in the hands of the producers.

> They forced us with threat of lawsuit to behave in certain ways or they would sue us for $2 million. They said that verbally to us many times. They told us we could not speak to attorneys. No one. So we didn't get a lawyer--until we started to see the previews. We asked, "How can we get this show to stop?" And basically, it can be ten thousand dollars just to hire him, and then probably fail.

The production company also gained power through the use of deception, when Kyle and Kara were enticed to participate with the promise of access to licensed professionals who, they were led to believe, had their best interests at heart. However, Kyle explains that turned out to be a false promise. He explains, "[The dietician] and the producer came out and said, 'You signed an agreement that said that our doctors can do whatever they want, and that they're not held to their Hippocratic oath.'"

> And it was intentional. The whole purpose of the program which we were going to do it for free so that we would have access to all these licensed professionals. And then we didn't I felt 100% used and exploited and objectified. So they just used us and abused us

> and left us for dead. And still today it sits on [the Internet] with no recourse, no one to report them to.

Lens: Impact on well-being. The MHM experience for Kyle had a negative impact on his well-being. He was filled with anxiety. He was worried about his relationship with Kara. "We were both distraught," he says.

> It's hard to talk about the feelings when you're going through it. Because you're so vulnerable, that you're thinking okay what's next? I gotta keep letting everybody know I'm okay. I gotta keep letting everyone know I'm okay. Kara and I are okay. It's really hard to tell everyone you're okay when their intention is to make us look like we were a complete failure.

Olivia

Olivia is the former partner of a high-profile man who, long after his relationship with Olivia, was found guilty of sex trafficking and other crimes. After he and Olivia parted ways, he built a multi-million-dollar self-help organization that attracted celebrities and politicians alike. This gave him access to money and power he used to harass and terrorize Olivia in multiple ways, including entangling her in court cases, both civil and criminal, none of which he won. In the meantime, Olivia tried to support the survivors of this man and his organization. She helped with a blog dedicated to exposing him, campaigned to bring media attention to his crimes, and assisted the government as needed in their case against him.

Before the man's conviction, Olivia was usually portrayed in a positive, heroic light in the mainstream media and online sites. She was often quoted and used as a source of information about this man's background. However, after the conviction, and after she came out with a book, she became the subject of what she refers to as an "online assault" by one particular website whose owner and biggest contributors took issue with her. ["The blogger] has the power of a blog and is using it as a weapon, helping these people to try to recreate what is not their truth. And in order to do that, they have to discredit me because I am their truth." She describes being

the subject of degrading and defamatory posts for the past 6 months, with three to six posts minimum per week. “What this blogger did was took every aspect of anything that could be an embarrassment, or something that someone else could have glazed over, and made it a post, after a post, after a post. Prior to this, the negative things that were written about me in the media kind of pale in comparison to this onslaught.”

Lens: Humiliation and misrepresentation. “I was misrepresented. There are times when I was sensationalized.” Olivia said. She explains that on a couple of occasions journalists said something like, “I'm sorry it's going to be positioned this way but you get that. You know how it is. You have to make it over the top, that's what sells.”

Olivia describes how one individual was using his popular blog as a weapon to discredit her and others whose narratives did not support the story he and his supporters wanted to be told.

> Oh you know, there’s the lies, the blatant lies, that they're putting [out]--defamation. I've talked to two attorneys, I have defamation, provable absolutely. Prior to this, the negative things that were written about me in the media kind of pales in comparison to this onslaught…And they were pretty vicious.

The humiliation and misrepresentation were overwhelming and highly distressing to Olivia. She describes how difficult it was.

Lens: Trauma. Olivia describes what it felt like for her to experience trauma, and how she deals with it.

> I thought I was having another nervous breakdown. When I get triggered I have certain coping mechanisms that I use to try to put myself back in check. And sometimes I can and sometimes I can't. There's no there's no pulling me back. I just kind of have to roll with it.
>
> I don't [read the posts] anymore. I can't, I can't, I was literally making myself mentally and physically sick. I'm a little agoraphobic, so I would not leave my house. And even though I don't feel safe in my house, I feel at least it's somewhat of a controlled environment because if I went in that state, I can't process all the other stuff that's going on around me.

Olivia had been a trauma survivor in the past. Like Dahlia and Aria, the MHM seemed to have an amplifying effect by triggering her past trauma, and by magnifying the impact of MHM experience. “It's re-trigger I think. If there's recurring PTSD, I have recurring, recurring, recurring PTSD.”

> I didn't even know it existed, reoccurring PTSD, so it's, you know, when your body is just assaulted so much that it just doesn't stop it, it rolls into a reoccurring--it's like PTSD on steroids. So what happens is I get heartbeats or pulses in my body, it's pain. It's pain that vibrates through my entire body and I disassociate.

She also contends that this experience is probably beyond the realm of what most people could bear.

> I don't know if I hadn't been exposed to as much as I was exposed to in the past, or I made myself comfortably numb for so many years that, although this is an assault--and one I didn't see coming and one that is absolutely physically and mentally having its way with me more than more than not--I think about someone else and [don’t know] how they would do it.

Olivia uses the word “assault” to describe the MHM to which she has recently been subjected. Like others in this study, she describes how the MHM was related to an impairment to her daily functioning. She describes, “A sense of loss of control, a sense of not being able to make a decision or make a choice or move forward. I'm kind of stuck.”

Lens: Impact on identity. Olivia did some reflecting looking for the cause of the experience she was enduring. She turned inward.

> I thought after the trial, the validation I received from the government, reporters, and people that started to understand what really happened, I could finally exhale. When it started again, coming from people that I thought on some level were friends, if not friends, allies, I blamed myself. What is it that I do that I draw this kind of negativity into my life?

Lens: Power and powerlessness. Writing one’s life story can be a powerful tool for healing (Adler et al., 2012; Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Pennebaker, 2018; Smyth & Pennebaker, 1999). In the process of writing a book about her

experience, Olivia was able to create a unified story and make sense of the things that happened in her life. However, her detractors then targeted her book, the very creation that contributed to her healing.

> At times I feel very powerless…I have a morality clause in my book contract as anyone does. That's dealing with a real publisher, with a real author, with a real subject. You know, you can't sell on a lie. And they know this. I was in the process of selling the book. And they're trying to trip my morality clause.

Olivia also referenced a lack of power in her frustration with a society where people can use the first amendment to justify publishing false or harmful media. She uses the terms “assault” and “weapon” again.

> You can write anything you want, about anyone you want and they hide behind the First Amendment [saying]. “Well, I'm a journalist.” You know, you get a blog and you pop it up and for what, some ungodly reason, you were called a journalist. Someone should do something about the role of power that someone has that can hide behind a fake name, a fake post, where there is no accountability. I get the freedom of speech stuff. Well OK, but if it's hateful and if it's put out there just to hurt, really? Then that's not freedom of speech, that's an assault. That's like a weapon. They're using that as a weapon.

Olivia uses terms that reference violence yet again--“bash,” “destroy,” “pretty violent,” “road rage,” “mad mob.”

> Our society today has become so cloistered in this realm of fake. They talk about the fake news, because it's this catch phrase, the fake news. It allows them to bash each other. People are pretty violent on social media. It's fucking scary.

> You're allowed to just, with the stroke of a pen, by the push of a button let's say, destroy someone's life, or make a really good strong attempt to doing so--without any regard for how that's going to affect them or their family and what that is like.

She alludes to dehumanization in her description of how the shamers do not care how the shaming impacts lives. She also points out the power advantage of those who are allowed to anonymously comment, without oversight, making it almost impossible to hold them accountable. “There's no oversight and because there is no oversight, it becomes like a mad mob.”

> It's kind of like road rage, what we're experiencing on the Internet. If people get behind a car and because they're behind that big car and they feel like they're never really going to see that person, they drive by them and push them off the road. It's almost, I don't know, ten times worse because it's a computer and you're behind a screen. And the chances of anyone finding you is slim to none.

Lens: Impact on well-being. As a result of the MHM, Olivia describes unwanted changes in her lifeworld. She shared that she was not doing the things she used to do and was even concerned about being in public. She describes her impairment to daily functioning, fatigue and withdrawal. “I'm afraid to move. I don't mean physically, I mean I'm afraid to make any moves.” She continues, “I'm tired. I don't want to fight anymore. I just want to be left alone.”

Sterling

Sterling and his comedy partner, Skye, had a popular YouTube comedy channel, Instagram, and other social media accounts. Sterling explains,

> I'm in the midst of an over year-long public shaming. I was in an extremist online feminist community, was dating someone within it, when I broke up with her she called me out on social media regarding two “coercive moments” that I wasn't aware of, she had never brought up to me and refused to talk to me about.
>
> I could have been more empathetic, maybe I was more persistent than I should have been, but I certainly was never told no and continued against a woman’s wishes, certainly not anything where I used force or used deception. But I still realized that I did hurt her feelings, or she wouldn't be saying that. I tried to apologize the best I could. I offered to meet up with her and talk more. She declined, told me my apology wasn't good enough. She did a public call out and pretty much immediately my whole community I was in… turned against me. She kind of painted me as the person who knew these actions

were hurting her and I did them anyway, which I could tell you is not the case. That was hurtful.

Another member of this community and I had a single sexual experience after we had both been drinking. We remained good friends for years afterward. But after this first callout, she then posted, “I should have seen this coming. After a year and half of processing, I realize I was too drunk to consent to my sex with Sterling. He raped me.” I was stunned, shocked and overcome with anxiety. I texted her, “I had no idea that you felt uncomfortable with our experience. I’m really sorry. I shouldn't have engaged in physical activity when we'd both been drinking. I know alcohol can affect decision making and I wasn't really thinking about that. If you'd like to meet up and talk, I'd appreciate that.” She told her 30k followers, “Sterling just sent me a text admitting to raping me.” She then, shockingly, said “Sterling admitted to raping over a dozen women,” which was bizarrely untrue, but was taken by the community as accurate without question.

I put out a public accountability statement…I wanted to be accountable, responsible for all of this without any defensiveness. “To other men, here’s the ways that I could have been more thoughtful, please take heed. I'm sorry and I apologize. I'm working to expand my empathy and emotional awareness etc.” Most people took my accountability statements in good faith. A lot of women said it is heartening to see a man try and take responsibility for any type of toxic behavior.

This hardline feminist community however, they would not accept anything I said as genuine. To show me an ounce of empathy or benefit of the doubt was being “a rapist apologist.” “Now it's your responsibility to de-platform yourself, get off the Internet etc.”

> They see me as a knowing, sinister villain, and have vowed to never let us advance in our comedy career. They have massive reach, the power to make our lives unlivable, and a giddy readiness to use this power.
>
> People were messaging me, like “Kill yourself! How could you rape all those women?” People were texting Skye like, “How dare you? You have blood on your hands as much of he does. Disgusting fucking rat of a bitch person. Get raped again.” Even though Skye had never done anything to anybody.
>
> The community got me fired from my job, came to my house, vandalized it, started spray painting “Sterling is a Rapist” around Los Angeles, started hanging up signs with my photo and my comedy partner's photo [she is a queer victim of rape] and our home address, saying I was a “psychopathic rapist” and Skye “silenced the victims.”
> I don't want to deny I've ever hurt anyone. But I remain firm. I've never forced a woman against her will to do anything. We are suffering. Our lives and careers are over. We don't know what to do. It seems there’s nothing we can do.

Lens: Humiliation and misrepresentation. Sterling explains how he was falsely being accused of being a rapist. “Being called the rapist is the worst word, maybe pedophile is worst. Okay so that's the second worst thing that you could be. It seems to go much deeper than humiliating.” Even worse, he was accused of having admitted to repeatedly raping women. He described this as “bizarrely untrue.” About an Instagram influencer, Sterling said,

> She told her 30k followers, “Sterling just sent me a text admitting to raping me.” She then, shockingly, said, “Sterling admitted to raping over a dozen women,” which was bizarrely untrue, but was taken by the community as accurate without question.

Sterling explains that when the influencer was confronted to provide evidence, she deleted the post, but she did not walk the accusation back even though there was no such

admission from him, because, as he makes clear, there was no such behavior from him. Sterling further clarifies that, in spite of the pressure by an angered community, law enforcement saw no behavior that would merit a charge. When Sterling inquired with a civil attorney about suing the influencer for defamation, even though he had a strong case, it would still cost him a fortune in attorney's fees, and in the end, the influencer had no money which could be collected. The damage was done, and a remedy seemed out of reach.

Lens: Trauma. Sterling explains how public shaming affects the totality of one's life. This has been such a monumental experience for him that he counts the days since it began.

> People think a callout is just something that happens on Instagram and you move on. But it affects every aspect of your real life—socially, romantically, professionally, financially, emotionally, even physically [all my anxiety-induced vomiting]. And the effects continue for years. Next Monday will be day 400.
>
> Supporters of this type of shaming say the goal is rehabilitation and behavioral improvement, but I can't imagine anyone rehabilitating themselves while going through what I'm going through. You can't really focus on self-improvement in constant fight-or-flight mode.

He explains the irony of having the activists profess to care about victims yet they appeared completely unaware that they were also actively revictimizing a rape survivor. Aside from what they believed about him, Sterling was concerned about the welfare of his comedy partner Skye, who was a rape victim herself. He underscores what he saw as the hypocrisy of the community's accusations towards them. "They were like, 'They don't care about the victims. They have no idea how much pain they're causing by continuing to post their comedy.' That seems unfair because they are causing us massive psychological torture."

Sterling asserts that being physically assaulted would be preferable to the psychological anguish of this shaming.

> We've experienced every kind of emotional assault and are still afraid of that happening in the future. I'd almost prefer getting physically assaulted at this point. Everyone can just beat me up one day and then move on with their lives. Emotional abuse.

Sterling uses the terms “emotional abuse” and also refers to his experiences as “psychological torture.”

> We told our followers it's too much psychological abuse. We're going away. We sort of left it ambiguous whether this a permanent hiatus or temporary. We don't know either. Stopping posting our comedy stops about 98% of the abuse. We still get maybe one message every two weeks. Like, “Horrible rapist you don't deserve life.” That's about where it is. It's been over a year. And that's where we are.

Lens: Impact on identity. This experience has had a central impact on Sterling’s sense of self, not only because of the public shaming, but also because of the loss of a community he valued.

> [It impacted my identity] a lot, because like I said I continue to believe in feminist ideals, that we all need to work together to make sure we're all on a level playing field and being treated equally and fairly. I also had this extremist mindset which when I was part of this group. I sort of contributed to this other person's call out, which I feel bad about now. Being a part of this community was a huge part of my identity. I enjoy being a part of a group that was, I thought, fighting for a better world with art and comedy. And now whenever I post, everyone's like, “You're a horrible person, I hope you enjoy your new fanbase of women-hating Republicans or whatever.”

For Sterling, the shaming was made worse because it came from people he respected. “It's easy to dismiss a total stranger [who says] go kill yourself, but when it's someone you cared about, someone you had invested affection and trust into, turning around and saying these unbelievable, ego, confidence self-worth shattering things” it has a more intense emotional impact on the self. Sterling understands that this experience must be acknowledged as part of his life story now. He struggles with figuring out how to reconstruct his identity in light of all this.

> I mean this is now inextricably woven into the narrative of my life and will forever be. If I'm to remain on the public stage, I have to find a way to own it. It's never something I can run from or pretend didn't happen. There will always be someone who's upset that I'm alive or making art. And I'm not sure really how to reconstruct my identity to account for that. I mean, I still want to be seen as someone who is empathetic and cares about making the world a better place because that is how I see myself. But I know so many people who are on the vanguard are never going to accept that narrative of me.

Lens: Power and powerlessness. “I certainly felt powerless,” Kyle explains. He provides an example.

> To the winning people who have the power and the culture right now, you make one mistake you're out. And then if there's no way to defend or explain yourself or sort of stand up for the fact that you are a valid human being with empathy and, very well say, psychological torture. I certainly felt powerless. There's nothing you can even say to defend yourself.

Sterling’s credibility was rendered invalid. Nothing Sterling could say or do could make any difference. The shamers became his judge, jury, and executioner without exploring the evidence, and he was convicted by the flaming, shaming mob. The mental health or personality disorder of his main accuser could never be brought up because it is not politically correct. In the interest of being sensitive to victims, victims can never be publicly questioned. Sterling realized he could not bring it up or he would be accused of gaslighting. Yet, any facts shared in his defense were discounted, and any sincere apology was considered a lie. For this man, no amount of making amends, self-correction, or taking accountability would provide him a path back to humanity.

> First people were saying like, “He's not taking any accountability, you know he's trying to brush it off.” And then I did take accountability and then the same people are like, “He admitted it. He's an admitted abuser.” So, you know, there is no right thing to say. If you try to say, “Hey people are coming to my house and it's really scary,” everyone's like, “He's playing the victim. He brought this upon himself.”
>
> If you try to say, “Oh here's my recounting of the whole night.” Every step of the way, everyone is like, “He's lying, downplaying everything that happened.” If you say sorry, everyone's like, “He's a psychopath, he can't feel shame or it's just a lie because he wants to keep his Instagram account so he can keep this whole thing.” Anything I say is automatically some excuse for why it is wrong.
>
> It certainly didn't seem fair that anything I said was easily dismissed. People would say, “Oh he's a psychopath. He's just trying to save face,” or whatever, but any crazy rumor that anyone made up about me was immediately accepted as true without question. We are trying to fight. I still care about progressive values. I hold myself accountable. That's what I want to see other men do. I want other men to learn from any way I could have been more thoughtful in my relationships. I was wholly unaware that I could have

> been more emotionally aware in relationships. But everyone is like, “No, he knew. There was no way he didn't know that he shouldn't hook up with her when they were drunk.”

For Sterling, the powerlessness was overwhelming, if not life-threatening.

> I've definitely considered killing myself. I haven't gotten too far with it. I don't know how. I looked at where the nearest gun store was on Google but I didn't go there. Now one time when I was really down I called the hotline and waited, making small talk. It's run through my mind. But I don't think there's danger of me killing myself. I'm good at holding out [hope] though, when doesn't seem like there is any.

Lens: Impact on well-being. Sterling’s experience with public shaming was complicated by the fact that Sterling admits to having done something hurtful and chose to be accountable. However, his punishment and public banishment appears to have exceeded the scope of the crime. In the past, his outlet to overcoming depression was his comedy. Faced with a life sentence of being de-platformed from comedy, Sterling’s wellness spiraled.

> I sort of feel just like high school again, where I suffered extreme untreated depression, where I wake up every day miserable and I don't know the answer to make it stop. Just trudge forward hoping that there’s a light at the tunnel I can't see.
>
> For the longest time I tried to tell myself this: I did toxic behavior and she had a right to call me out. This is all happening for a reason. But the further away I get from it, I'm not sure. … Certainly, it was very hard to make any comedy for a long time. I do make comedy to sort of escape and process my depression and stuff, but when you're in a total depressive pit, I just can't find anything funny. So it definitely got me off from my one outlet for trying to process my life and depression.

Sterling shares how this experience affected his physical health as well. “I was vomiting a lot, in the early months, waking up feeling so nauseous from anxiety and immediately running to the bathroom as soon as I woke up. And my body is dry heaving and trying to throw something up.” He describes these physical responses to be anxiety-based connected to his public shaming. He now takes medication to help with the anxiety, but he has still not figured out how to move forward.

Mama Bear

I was on a reality show [a contest show] with my son. I guess I look younger than my age and my son looks older than his age. When we walked into the casting, they said, “You two, are you here for the family show?” We said yes. They brought us in front of everybody else. When the show aired, [the celebrity host], as well as the producers, must have gotten some bug thinking that they were going to insinuate that my son and I were incestuous, or that we acted differently than other mothers and sons did. They were calling my son a mama's boy and they were mocking us. When we saw the final footage, there was a commentary behind our backs. When the show aired, I was horrified. I was mortified. I was stunned.

After the show aired for the first time, I was completely embarrassed, and I felt I had to clear my name. I felt that my son was being attacked by [the celebrity host]. I contacted [a media publication] and I said to them, “How dare he, as a father, insinuate that my son and I are anything but normal?” After I went to [the media publication], I received a note from [the producers]. I received a letter from them stating that, if I open my mouth again, they would sue me for over one hundred thousand dollars for breach of contract.

[The celebrity host] then went on [another TV show] and mocked me and my son in an incestuous way. So he double attacked me. After that occurred, I had to go on antidepressants. I gave up my acting career because I was horrified. It was insinuated that I was an incestuous parent. I didn't want to go out. I changed my hair color so I wouldn't be recognized.

> I was called a pedophile in front of millions of people. You can't do anything worse to me. You cannot say anything worse about me. You have done the worst thing you could possibly do to me in the world. I went to a lawyer afterwards and he said, "What they probably did was something called predatory casting, where they looked at you and your son, and they went with this line." So how did it affect me? I am just now, since 2011, just now going back as an actor and trying to go back and do what I used to do for a living before. I was a [professional] woman and an actress in New York City. What this did to me, it tore me apart. It did. It literally tore me apart mentally and I had to go on antidepressants. To this day, I have an incredible amount of anger towards [that celebrity host]. What has it caused me all these years? I can't even tell you the damage it caused me.

Lens: Humiliation and misrepresentation. Mama Bear was misrepresented through the false portrayal of her character, her relationship with her son, and possibly even graphically. "One of the things I noticed is, in one of my pictures, it looks like they blew my breasts up. It looked like somebody put, like enhanced my breasts in a picture." Mama Bear explains. "I started to read what people were saying about me and my son, and that was horrifying. I was perceived as a pedophile because of [the celebrity host]."

> You took my image, you took my son's image and you exploited a lovely mother-and-son Latin cultural team, and you exploited my body. You changed the look of my body and made me more voluptuous so it would seem as if I was a sexy mom. You "MILF'ed" me. They insinuated a sexual relationship between me and my son.
>
> My son didn't think twice before about putting his arm around his mom's shoulders. [They would say] things like, "Do you think that they have a weird relationship?" [Adding] all of these comments in editing and editing the way my son spoke about him loving his mother.

Mama Bear was offended by the misrepresentation and insensitivity as it pertains to her Latin culture, which Burleson et al. (2018) describes as "placing greater emphasis on warm interpersonal interactions, in which touch may play an important part" (p. 1001).

> I'm of Latin descent and so is my son. We Latins touch each other and hug each other. Latin people touch each other, they kiss each other and there's nothing wrong with it. There's nothing wrong with loving your mother. And they use that as a weapon against me and my son. He loves his mother, so that's a freaky thing? And that is a cultural thing portrayed in this country as evil. I thought it was completely racist against Latin people and their culture.
>
> [They portrayed me] the opposite of who I was, completely.

Lens: Trauma. Mama Bear explains, "It was mental abuse. It was complete mental abuse." Specifically, she describes it in more detail. "It's abuse to women, culturally slapping every Latina in the face, Latino in the face by insulting our culture by the way that we show affection to each other." For Mama Bear, the wounds, the trauma responses, and the threat of future harm are ongoing.

> It's still out there. Every time it airs and I know it's airing, my blood pressure goes up. I get the same feelings all over again. And this is since 2011. It still causes my body to go into a panic attack when I see it. I start shaking.
>
> There is no time, it's as if it still happened [the celebrity host] is still out there. He is a predator and nobody's made him accountable for what he's done so it still exists. It's still an open wound for me.

Lens: Impact on identity. This MHM experience hit Mama Bear to the core of her being. It caused her to internalize negative feelings and worry about the impact on her profession. "It took my confidence away. It destroyed me, made me feel dirty and ugly. And people don't take [people in my profession] seriously if they're on reality shows and then they get dragged down the dirt hole." Mama Bear suddenly found herself rethinking key aspects of her identity, her appearance, her life. "I had to question everything in my life after that. Are you

a bad mother? Are you too sexy for your age? Should you cut your hair and look worse than you do? Should you not touch your son, ever again? I mean, all of these questions."

This unexpected MHM experience on Mama Bear's life resulted in an attack or her core sense of self. She uses the word "destroyed" four times in the following paragraph.

> This destroyed my confidence as [a professional], destroyed my confidence as a woman and as a mother. Because now I felt like I was a bad mother. I always prided myself on being a wonderful mother. By the end of the show, we were hated and viewers weren't rooting for us because he was insinuating there was something weird between me and my son. Yeah, he destroyed our beings, he destroyed who we were.

Lens: Power and powerlessness. Mama Bear described her powerlessness in multiple ways, including losing the rights to her image, being silenced by attorneys, and suicidal ideation. "The power imbalance? We went there and we were like chum for shark, and that's what we were." She went to a media publication to expose the facts being misrepresented by the production company. "After I went to [the media publication], I received a letter from [the producers] stating that if I open my mouth again, they would sue me for over one hundred thousand dollars for breach of contract." She was silenced. Mama Bear explains that after her MHM experience, she "thought of suicide for a bit which is why I needed to be medicated."

> I was going to go forward and sue everybody. But then I knew that I was going to put my son through the pain again of all of this. And I was afraid that [the celebrity host] would attack my son again in public. So I did not pursue it, for fear of how it would affect my son. I went to a very big lawyer and they told me that is, that you give up whenever you're on a reality show these days, you give up your image, you give up the rights to who you are. Your image can be tainted.
>
> Nobody took me seriously. When I did go to [the media publication], they went over into [the host's] court. So, women have a power imbalance. And it's, again, men in Hollywood abusing women. It's the #metoo movement as well.

Lens: Impact on well-being. Mama Bear's experience with MHM resulted in the need for medication, indicators of physical stress, a drastic change in her lifeworld, and a blow to her income. "I lost weight afterwards, I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep. I was grieving the loss of my

career. I was grieving." She continues. "You cannot be [in my profession] when you are on anti-depressants. That's why I had to put my whole career and everything else away because of this."

> I had to leave [my profession]. And here's the other thing. The reason I wanted to do this show also is because I wanted to come back into [my career] here in Los Angeles. I had come from that in New York and I wanted to get back into it, so I was also looking at this as something that was going to revitalize my career. It turned out to be the exact opposite.
>
> It took all my confidence away as [a professional]. This embarrassed me as [a person in my profession]. I stopped working [in my profession] and I had to work in stores because I was so embarrassed. I was so horrified and mortified.

Dekker

Dekker is a former marine who was convicted of a crime for which he spent years in prison. The media misportrayed the nature of his crime, and subsequently labeled him in a way he found derogatory. In today's online culture where it is customary for people to Google their new acquaintances, Dekker is still impacted by the label "stalker" given to him nearly 25 years ago. Although the label was proven false, and he has been out of prison for years, the media continues to tell his story while always describing him with this inaccurate label that portrays him as someone to fear. "Google my name and sometimes it pops up by itself. I think my photo's on there, so is my mug shot. But I can never win when I've been found not guilty."

His past prison history magnified by the stalker label has impacted his ability to live a normal life, to continue his education, to get a job, and have a family. When new stories emerge, he explains, "They misstate facts on my case and all kinds of crap, things that aren't even true." He has sought to have media outlets correct the misinformation, but to no avail. Furthermore, Dekker explains how the media misinformation contributes to new problems. "I continue to get targeted by law enforcement because of the past media misrepresentations, which generates new stories, and when I'm found not guilty of those new, recent charges, the media still repeats the old lies/exaggerations. I can't escape it."

Lens: Humiliation and misrepresentation. Dekker describes his misrepresentation. While one label was legitimate due to a conviction, that label was expanded and stretched by the media. “I’m in a jail and I’m seeing on a TV news report about me and the ex-girlfriend is on TV. And they were asking her questions about her stalker – which was me. Well that’s not true at all!”

> They misstate facts on my case and all kinds of crap, things that aren’t even true. They build the narrative based on how they want to present it. The nicest thing you could say about them is that they’re trying to sell papers.
>
> You’re stripped away of everything, you’re lost, everything’s been taken away from you. And now people are lying about you. I was hoping that because I didn’t do anything wrong the truth would come out. I spoke to what I did. And I’m thinking OK, once the truth comes out, no problem. Everything is being twisted. It’s totally beyond your control. Everything that’s happening, you can’t control at all.
>
> We did prove at the trial that there was no stalking. That was the only saving grace. Now 20 years later journalists don’t know about that. None of these reporters went to the trial. Now 20 years later they don’t know about the phone records that proved I wasn’t stalking anybody. And they’re now just repeating the stories from before the trial about me being a stalker.

Although Dekker had a genuine conviction and spent time in prison, he had done his time and supposedly paid his dues to society. He was ready to move on with his life. However, the media continued to misrepresent him as a stalker, something disproven in court. Yet this continued to create obstacles in his life. Even after being accepted into different graduate programs, including law school, he would be dropped.

> I applied for a master’s program…The school sent me a letter and they said if you come on the campus again you’ll be arrested for trespassing. So they are literally scared of me. I think because of the articles that are repeating the false stalking aspect. A self-defense type thing, people can understand that. But the stalking thing scares the shit out of people I think.

Lens: Trauma. Dekker explains, “When I was in the jail, I did feel traumatized by all these false stories. And that [individual]…was able to manipulate the media with all that stalking

crap and so that was a little traumatizing." It was difficult for Dekker to separate the distress from his prison experience in the past with that associate with his MHM experience. For him, the two were intertwined.

Lens: Impact on identity. "OK, the media presented me to be this crazy stalker, like a pedophile. It's the same level of being an idiot that nobody likes. So that's not me at all," Dekker asserts. Although the media and members of the public have sometimes treated him as if he is nothing but a menace to society, he does not buy into that.

Lens: Power and powerlessness. Dekker explains, "You just feel powerless. You can't control it." He gives the following example to describe it, saying it is "like when you stretch your arms out, but you can't reach something."

> Just Google my name and it pops right up. My photos are on there, my mug shot. And I can never win, even when I'm found not guilty of new false charges. It follows me everywhere because, you know, it's the combination of the media, being convicted in the media of one thing, and the actual thing I was convicted for.

Lens: Impact on well-being. Dekker gives examples of how his daily functioning becomes impaired by his distress, which gets exacerbated by the MHM. "What I have come to is, that for better or worse, it gets me very riled up now to have the label repeated. Very riled up."

> I can't get back into any college…They told me I was totally qualified, believe it or not, for graduate school. [Three universities] all turned me down. So I can't go back to school and get an advanced degree. That's number one. I can't go to school. I can't get a job. I have a lot of trouble if I meet a girl.
>
> I didn't go out today. I was going to go on run errands. I didn't do that. I stayed inside all day. I don't know if you call it depression or what. Like once a week I would just lay in bed all day, overwhelmed by the bullshit that I'm getting. You know, not being allowed to go to these schools, people messing with me.

David

I am an attorney in the state of [State Name]. [State] statutes has mandates that an attorney has a right to a jury trial prior to disbarred and I was not given that right. I was not afforded the ability to utilize a court process and none of my motions were ruled on, my notice of appeal was ignored. And so anyway, upon disbarment, the state bar coordinates with the local newspaper… to publish the disbarment and attack. All disciplinary proceedings that are public are published. It's distributed to most of the attorneys and judges and courts all throughout [the State]. And, of course, it's also a line of access to the Daily Report online…And so the media, the newspaper, did not take any steps to adhere to or comply with the journalistic rules in ethics such as verifying the veracity and validity of the statements.

The fact that a court, even the [State] Supreme Court, issued an order does not absolve media outlet of the requirement to verify the veracity and accuracy, and to just blindly publish it without reference, without interviews, without reference, without fact checking. I mean, they didn't do anything, they just assumed the information was accurate. But had they contacted me, I would have sent them the letter from my doctor, I would have sent them the polygraph test, I would have sent them all the records that rebutted every false statement.

There probably were, in the 13-page disbarment order, probably along the lines of maybe a couple dozen maybe 24-30 false statements where you're like, “WTF, are you serious, are you serious?” To know that I've been misrepresented and portrayed as someone that I'm not, the only saving grace is luckily I am at a point where I know I didn't do anything wrong.

> [On a web site] in red it says, “This attorney has been disciplined” and it's like a scarlet letter, it's like an electronic scarlet letter. And, you know, it's been very painful and difficult, and I have gone through a significant amount of stress and distress dealing with this. Ultimately the newspaper needed to say, “Look [State] Supreme Court justice or no [State] Supreme Court justice, we are a newspaper.” And while we may be the preferred newspaper of choice and the designated one to report and publish attorney disciplinary action, we're bound and guided by a code of ethics, journalistic code of ethics and standards and we are not going to publish disbarment order or any order that is inaccurate.
>
> And if they're going to say something that would hold me up to public contempt or ridicule, that I have an unsound mind and that I lied to my client, they better damn well…I'm emotional because it's just disgusting. And then they said in the order that I am not the type of person worthy of being a member of the bar. They said, “This guy is a liar. He's crazy, he engaged in misconduct during his divorce case,” which is not true. You know what? Law or no law, what they did is wrong, period. And it is unacceptable and there's no way that this media outlet or any media outlet can justify the publication of grossly defamatory information about someone, which is what happened to me.

Lens: Humiliation and misrepresentation. David explains that he was not only misrepresented and humiliated, but that it was provably false. It was hard for him to grasp. “I never fully understood when celebrities would talk about how they were misrepresented or mischaracterized in some of these tabloids. I never fully understood or appreciated it until that happened to me.”

> I just could not believe that the high-level public officials, the High Court of [State], could make such verifiably false statements. It's not an opinion, it's just objectively false, which included that I had an unsound mind, and which there was never any evidence of that whatsoever.

Lens: Trauma. David describes feeling abused, bullied, and cyberbullied due to the false allegations in his disbarment published on a web site. “When you have multiple people in a position of power ganging up to cause you harm, that’s bullying, adult bullying.” He explains, “I feel bullied. I feel bullied. It’s no different than a gang. I feel absolutely bullied. I have experienced cyber bullying. Why? Because of the disbarment order is on the State Bar’s website.” For David, like others in the study whose MHM was based on another distressing factor, such as a trauma or an injustice, it was difficult to isolate just one element as the source of trauma. “It's abuse, it's legal abuse, it's financial abuse, psychological abuse, physiological abuse. It's sort of a living nightmare where I'm not living a normal life.”

Lens: Impact on identity. Becoming an attorney was a long journey for David that required years of sacrifice, including failing the bar exam a few times before he finally passed. When he was finally admitted to the bar, he put his heart and soul into being a good attorney. Positive reviews about his services are still abundant on the Internet. However, becoming disbarred for what he claims were provably false allegations had a monumental impact on his life and his identity. About the publication of the misinformation, he explains,

> It makes you feel like crap, it makes you feel bad, and … you start to think, “Are they right? Do they have a point?” And that's part of the abuse, it is to wear you down…They're doing everything they can to break you and discourage you.
>
> I'm no different from most men where my value worth is tied up in my profession. I know that my job doesn't define me, but it was very important to me. I mean, there's a level of importance and prestige and esteem with being an attorney and the loss of that status is difficult.

Lens: Power and powerlessness. David explains his powerlessness. “I felt a lot of emotions. I felt exploited, misrepresented. I also felt helpless because how do you overcome that? How do you overcome a court order that purports to tell the truth, but it doesn't?” As a

result of his personal MHM experience, David now takes issue with media outlets that publish legal decisions without speaking to the people about whom the decision was made.

> That's what [journalists] think, "Who are we to question [the court decisions]?" While they would normally be under an affirmative and mandatory obligation to verify the facts, do fact checking and talk with other people, they didn't even come to me. And they should have.
>
> If the media had any journalistic aspects or scruples whatsoever, they would have taken solid steps, even at a minimum, to verify the veracity of the statement. With the [publication], it's basically saying is, "We're a newspaper and yeah, we're subject to journalistic ethical standards, but hey, this order was issued by the state Supreme Court, who are we to question?"
>
> It's a very callous and malicious thing to do to misrepresent someone because the publisher knows you've got a long uphill battle to disprove.
>
> All those things, when you're misrepresented in the media, is a violation of rights. It single-handedly has violated a lot of my rights. I mean, rights to a jury trial to freedom of speech to [being] denied due process. The publication, the misrepresentation in the media, violated all the rights in the first, fifth and 14th amendments and as well as other constitutional amendments.

Lens: Impact on well-being. The loss of his bar license, magnified by the MHM, seemed to impede David's well-being, including his social life, his ability to make money, and how he uses his time. "All the time that I was spending dealing with all this stuff, it's time that I'm not spending trying to make money in other ways, even in a non-legal way."

> The way that it's impacted me is that my life consists right now of pretty much working day and night. When other people were out with their significant and friends, enjoying life, I'm out working. Around the clock, on the weekends, the week, the weekdays blur, merge with the weekends.
>
> There have been a lot of times where I haven't been able to get to sleep. I'm worried about something or thinking about something and I'm numb.
>
> It's brought about depressions, at times, hopelessness, as it would anyone and it's further exacerbated my financial distress because of the cost. I mean it costs money to, just to vindicate your rights, whether it's filing a lawsuit or being an affidavit or whatever, it adds up.

Vittoria

Vittoria achieved a master's degree in clinical psychology and worked hard at her education and on her career. She was living in Africa running a non-profit organization when her experience took place.

> I'd been working for close to about ten years. I was one of the lucky few that was given the opportunity and made good use of it. In a sense, I was in the right place at the right time. I got into management without a formal management degree, like an MBA, and was not taught how to manage people. I learned on the job. I became a manager quite early in my career and it eventually evolved into leading a whole country office, such that I had about 80 to 120 people under my management, or under my leadership. Quite a lot was happening when I took up office, the organization was going through a turbulent time. And it felt more like a personal mission to make it work.
>
> The organization was an international nongovernmental organization. It was a charity arm of a big organization, a big brand. The mission was mainly developmental, using certain methodologies to bring about change in people's life. It was the whole of me. All I knew was that work. So I gave it the whole of me, that was all that I was. My identity was the job. I believed very much in that mission because...I had a humanitarian objective that I felt I wanted to pursue. It was like a calling. I felt like it was not just a job, I was doing something that mattered to society.

During this time Victoria also got married and then pregnant. On her return from maternity leave,

> I was notified of certain things that I didn't consider a big issue. I was not prepared for what was going to happen. I went through a process, and my contract was terminated…I

> couldn't make sense from what was happening at the time, it was happening too fast. I became a mother and then lost my job**.** So it was like, I had lost my identity. It was like I dropped into a big hole.

Vittoria had been hired by another company in a different African country when her contract was abruptly terminated in less than a month and she was told to leave the premises.

> It was while I was on the plane … that I got a link and that was when I found out about the article. An article had been written about me. That was how I discovered what had led to the termination, all by myself in the middle of nowhere. And the impact, it was after the write-up that had a lasting impact into my future or into my present because of that article. It was the article. I've lost jobs. Psychologically, I'm almost like I'm like a wreck. You know, I'm financially I can't even start talking about it, emotionally, wow, it's massive.

Lens: Humiliation and misrepresentation. Vittoria was humiliated by the misrepresentation of facts about an occurrence at her last job. The journalist who wrote the article never asked for her explanation of what really happened.

> I discovered, all by myself in the middle of nowhere, after feeling humiliated by the way I was asked to leave the organization's territory, then I read what was written about me. That was a misrepresentation of what had happened at my previous workplace.
>
> It was an online newspaper organization that was run by reputable "journalists." At the time, I felt before you write this condemning article, you have to balance the views; you have to balance the information you're getting. Nobody asked me, nobody, in the 48 hours that I was in that country nobody ever contacted me to say, "Can we get your views concerning a particular issue that has been raised?" And a decision was taken. Somebody wrote something about me without trying to find out what really happened in my first place of work. And [the paper] misrepresented the whole thing. And the impact--it was the write-up that had a lasting impact into my future or into my present because of that article.

Lens: Trauma. Vittoria had a difficult time recovering from the after-effects of her traumatic media experience. She said, “I went into a state of dissociation.”

> I'm naturally an introvert. I really don't like my business becoming everybody’s business having my business out there. It is like the worst punishment you could ever give to me. But I have had to go through that which I fear the most. I've had to live with it.

When asked to identify the source of her trauma, whether it was losing a job or her experience with the media, she responded, “I felt the trauma most on my self- image, my name and person.” In other words, the public destruction of her reputation was at the core of her trauma.

> It just dawned on me in the last couple of minutes that actually what I've been experiencing has been post-traumatic stress syndrome. It never clicked but I knew I was not depressed, in that clinical term. But I never did figure out what was wrong with me because since this incident, I find it very difficult, even when I have the opportunity, to look for a job. I'm not keen anymore.

During the process of this conversational interview, Vittoria had an “aha moment.” In phenomenology, this would be an example of the co-construction of meaning (Gadamer, 1975; Spinelli, 2005).

Lens: Impact on identity. Before her MHM experience, Vittoria had been a high achiever. She rose up in the ranks of the corporate world quickly and was able to accomplish a lot in a short time. It was as if the article wiped her slate of accomplishments clean and brought a sense of death to her legacy. “I lost the sense of who I was. I wasn't sure of who I was anymore. I wasn't sure of what I was.” She used the word “killed” twice in the following passage, the word “ruined” once, and the word “died” once.

> Besides my self-image, what I felt really it killed was all that I stood for, my years of hard work, my accomplishments, my reputation and to an extent my future, I felt that the legacy built from my career thus far has been ruined and killed to an extent. I should also mention that when I think of my legacy, it was the same as my identity, all of which I felt died as a result of that article.

She felt like a failure and said that she "felt small. I really felt very small." She even began to question the body of evidence about her own past successes. She described struggling with "imposter syndrome," a circumstance where an individual feels like a fraud, or feels undeserving of their accomplishments, despite evidence that clearly proves otherwise (Canning et al., 2019; Peteet et al., 2015). Vittoria was a stand-out success in her education and career. She threw her heart into her profession. It was more than just a job to her, it was her identity.

> It felt more like a personal mission to make it work. It was the whole of me, up until that time, all I knew was that work. My identity was the job. I had a humanitarian objective that I felt I wanted to pursue, rather than pursue business. There were a lot of things tied to the job. For me, it was more like a calling. I felt it was not just a job. It was more like I was doing something that mattered to the society.

> I found myself second guessing myself. I mean I have a master's in clinical psychology. I graduated as the best student in my time. I've received a couple of awards. I was a respected professional. Most of the things that I did within my field and all the experiences I had acquired all felt lost.

Lens: Power and powerlessness. For Vittoria, the threat of harm remains in front of her, and there seems to be little that she can do about it. "Any time anybody [searches], for my name, when you just want to do a quick search on me, that's the first thing that you find out. And not being able to have it removed or cleared off the Internet."

> The person that had the power in my mind is I think in the real sense is actually the media and the web. Not being able to do anything about everything that was done. The information that is there on the web. That's what I think took the power from me.

Lens: Impact on well-being. Vittoria reveals indicators of dissociation when she describes the effort it took to simply go through the motions of surviving life. "And the biggest struggle is that it really takes a lot of your energy and emotion. You look for people to get upset with."

> All I was doing was to just survive. I had to. If you need to clean, clean the house, if you need to feed them feed them. If you need to clothe them, do it. I was operating like a

> machine. I was just doing what I needed to do, spend my energy, and at night I would just collapse from tiredness, that was the routine.

Like other participants, the energy resources it took Vittoria to simply survive left her little brain space to work on healing, growing, or caring about her own advancement. The colossal energy drain of MHM created its own impediment to healing. Vittoria explains, “So that has made me withdraw from everything. It's almost like this incident has resulted in me not being able to do things that would change my circumstances.”

Grace

Grace was a college-educated, independent, health-conscious single mother who chose to have another child through in vitro fertilization. To the surprise of Grace and the medical community, the procedure was unusually effective, and even though she miscarried two fetuses, she still found herself expecting such a large number of viable babies that she became a medical phenomenon. Wanting to protect her privacy, she resisted pressure from the hospital and refused to do a press conference. The hospital, however, did a press conference without her, thrusting Grace and her babies into the media limelight against her wishes. “A nurse called the media. I was hiding. I was trying so desperately to stay as private as possible. I struggled with agoraphobia…They got 24-hour security in front of my room and the neonatal intensive care unit because of the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, from day one--death threats. Death threats before they even saw me. They never saw me. They heard of this woman. There were all kinds of lies being spun in the media before I even got off the delivery table. I mean how can one human handle just that alone?”

She explains, “I have been violated from day one since the residents were there observing me. I still feel like a freak show carnival attraction. I feel like a science experiment. From that moment on, I was traumatized, utterly traumatized. Words can't describe how traumatized.”

Although the hospital was later successfully sued by Grace for HIPAA violations, Grace had already been forced to deal with becoming a media sensation. “I woke up into a false narrative. I woke up into a false identity. Unbeknownst to me, there was an entire false narrative being spun out in the world.” Grace explains, “All of a sudden there's hundreds and hundreds of reporters, helicopters flying over the sky and then I'm like, ‘What do we do? This is like a horror movie.’” Under intense pressure from the hospital, Grace reluctantly acquiesced and, while still medicated, without being coached or prepared, did one televised interview with a celebrity host. She became an international intrigue and parody almost overnight. This began Grace’s complicated relationship with media exploitation and misrepresentation. “I was told what to say. I was told what to do. I did everything and said everything other than what was true to me.”

> Since my friends and family knew the real me, though the world all around only knew of this false identity, I felt like I was fighting [over one decade] for the death of that media-made-up false identity and the revival of my true self. I never quit on myself. I KNEW truth would surface over time. By taking control over my life, sharing the truth about my real self, and refuting the media’s misrepresentation of me, my true identity is now alive and well; though stronger, and more resilient.

Lens: Humiliation and misrepresentation. Grace makes it clear that not only was she misrepresented, but she was exploited at the expense of her dignity. She describes how a false character generated by the media resulted in difficulty. “They were just seeing dollar signs when I did the [television] interview. That's when they started to mock and ridicule me all over the world.” She continues. “I've been walking around with a doppelganger. There's a doppelganger out there--it's like another me. People think that's who I am based solely on how the media spun the false narrative and created a false identity.”

Becoming a media sensation was particularly difficult for Grace because, not only was she a private individual who neither chose nor desired fame, but she was not prepared for it, and she was demeaned. “I value privacy. I always have. That's why what's the irony is--that I was

catapulted in the public eye without permission, without being prepared, and turned into a parody."

Lens: Trauma. The violation of Grace's privacy, combined with the violation of HIPAA that launched her into becoming a worldwide sensation, resulted in trauma. She explains it point blank. "From that moment on, I was traumatized, utterly traumatized. Words can't describe how traumatized." She goes on to explain that she was "diagnosed with [media-related] severe PTSD." Grace also describes feeling as if she was constantly under threat. She describes a threat response. "I was under attack, so mine is fight, flight, frozen. I'm a fighter, so I would have my fighting up non-stop."

Lens: Impact on identity. When describing the impact of the media-made false persona, she explains, "The role was the total, polar opposite of who I really was." She clarifies the powerful but negative impact that the public persona had on her actual identity, and yet, in some ways, it enabled her to survive. As a single mother with over a dozen children, including a child with special needs, financial survival was imperative and also a monumental feat. She found a way.

> I paid for everything--all on interview money. All on allowing myself to be exploited and allowing myself to be called [Moniker] mom. I kind of became that character slowly, while feeling more and more deeply shamed. I started to internalize that toxic shame. I became morphed into, shamefully, this false narrative, false identity.
>
> I started to believe I had no worth, and believe I was just not a worthy person or human being…It was deeply internalized. I was not that caricature. The media, yes they coined [the moniker], and then they created this compartmentalized caricature that ironically was the antithesis of my true character. And that's what people don't know.

Lens: Power and powerlessness. Grace recounts experiences of feeling powerless due to several factors, including her lack of control over how she was portrayed, the resulting lack of

respect, and her feeling of desperation. “Because the image was so radioactive, I had no credibility. I had no respect from anybody.”

> The label [Moniker] mom was indoctrinated into the public’s minds indefinitely. False public perception was my new reality. The truth no longer existed. Public perception was powerful, and I felt powerless. I was fearing for my life, for my children's lives. I believe psychologically, when someone's in that state of desperation, they don't think of the long-term repercussions of their choices. It’s survival mode.

Lens: Impact on well-being. Grace’s MHM resulted in a slew of negative real-life consequences. She also describes her psychological pain and her need to numb.

> Unbeknownst to me, I would be picketed against. Hundreds of picketers--kill the babies, no more babies, kill [Moniker] mom. . .your uterus needs to be ripped out, I'm going to come kill you. We're going to come take your children. I had my car, back of the car smashed, the windows. I had my house toilet papered like 300 times. They were screaming at me while we're driving. I had my tires slashed--I can't even count how many times over the years. I had my brake lights broken. I had stalkers for years in front of my house.
>
> I was in defense mode from day one, utilizing every defense mechanism you can even fathom in the book--denial, rationalization, minimization, you name it. I was trying to protect me because no one else was going to protect me.
>
> I can identify with these victims of domestic violence. They're so trapped. That's how I felt. I was in prison for so many years, emotional prison. It almost killed me.
>
> I started to-self medicate and ironically that was the first time I got Xanax, that I got a prescription. In order to do those [media-related] gigs or jobs or whatever, which is all nonsense, it was all fake and just contrived and I had just I had to numb.

She explains, “I started spiraling down a darker dark hole because the toxic shame, I just couldn't continue to pretend.” Today, she has come out of that hole and has reclaimed her original identity.

Briana

> I was staying the night at my then boyfriend, who is now my husband, but it was at my boyfriend's house. We were woken up in the middle of the night with people surrounding our bed [with] flashing lights and laser dots scanning the walls and our bodies. We

> assumed that they had guns. Someone told us that this was a robbery, and that they didn't intend to hurt us, but they instructed me to tie up my boyfriend. I was moved to the closet where I was tied up, I was blindfolded. My boyfriend was moved to the closet where he was blindfolded. We were given recorded messages explaining what was going to happen next. After some time, we discovered that it wasn't just a robbery. I was told that I was going to be taken. I was going to be kidnapped for 48 hours and that my boyfriend had to do some tasks to ensure my return. I was put in the trunk of a car and driven to a location hours away, where I was held for 48 hours. And in that time, I was in fear for my life. I was convinced I would be killed.

During her captivity, Briana was sexually assaulted on video and forced to say things under the threat that if she went to police, the videos would be published on the Internet. The perpetrator decided to release her. By this time, the story was already national news.

> It had been aired nationally…because at the time, I was a missing woman and it was being reported that it was a kidnapping. But it was also being reported in a way that made people believe that the boyfriend had killed me. That's what the police were telling the media, lying to the media.
>
> When I had first contact with the [city] detective after I was released, he immediately said that he didn't believe that there was a kidnapping, that he thought I was lying, that he was going to offer me a proffer agreement, meaning some kind of immunity if I basically threw [my boyfriend] under the bus, but if [my boyfriend] chose to take it first, then essentially I would be thrown under the bus. They were trying to pit us against each other. They were planning on charging and prosecuting us with a crime, and I could get potential jail time.

And in that day, I went to my family's house and the whole house was surrounded by media. For days they had been camping out, knocking on the doors and the windows asking, “What do you know?” which was shocking to me.

Coming back to that media frenzy was unbelievable. It was destabilizing, it was exposing, and it was threatening. The lack of sensitivity to my grieving and terrified family, that was shocking and hard to understand. It was clear that the police just intended to prosecute me, so I got a lawyer. I didn't know what the details of that [legal offer] entailed. Obviously, I needed protection and that's why I sought counsel. The first thing [my attorney] said to me when I met him that first night, just twelve hours after my release from captivity, was that the [city] police just held a press conference saying that this was a hoax and I made it all up.

The [city] police had not even spoken to me. I had originally spoken to the local police department where I was released, about an hour after my release, and told them about the kidnapping. That information was relayed to [city] PD, and family had spoken with [city] PD. But because they were threatening me with prosecution, I had to speak with a lawyer before meeting with them. I was pretty exhausted and terrified at that point in time. In those conversations with my family, the detective was yelling and cussing and just irate. And it made no sense to any one of us why he was so angry. I couldn't understand why I was being so aggressively attacked so quickly. I didn't know who to trust and what people's motivations were.

After consulting with my attorney, and in his presence the day after my release, I spoke to [police] for six hours at least. They said that they would not tell the media, but when we tried to get there at the designated time, the media was surrounding the place.

There were helicopters hovering above us. My family had to meet with my attorney through back alleys and shady parts of [the city] where people were peering out the windows. I felt like everyone was attacking me and my family. They finally agreed to set up the [rape] exam at a local hospital, but originally refused to organize it until I sat with them and proved to them it was worth it to set it up. We went back the next day to give another six or seven hours of the statement in which, at the end of it, the FBI agent questioning me told my lawyer he was 99 percent sure I was lying. He asked my lawyer if he had seen the movie [movie title], there were a lot of similarities and he intended to prosecute me. What was being reported on in the news was that I was "the real life [movie title]."

The police refused to take it seriously and put all their energy into attacking me, telling the media only the information that made the case seem crazy, to make us seem shady and questionable. They just lied. There are things about the media that I'm irritated by, [including] their portrayal of what happened. At the same time, most of them were just reporting what the police were telling them.

No one really asked the question, "What motivation would a 29-year-old professional physical therapist with a doctorate degree, and a 30-year-old physical therapist with a doctorate degree [have]?" We both have good reputations. We have come from good families. In our case, the police were lying to the reporters and no one asked the serious questions like, "Why would these people do this?" It was frustrating to not have people in the media ask those questions, or just say this doesn't make sense. Instead they just ran with it, didn't double check, didn't backtrack and didn't follow up and because of that, all of the lies just got perpetuated, recycled.

> It actually wasn't really until [the perpetrator], the one who held me captive and raped me, got caught for breaking into another family's home just months after this, when the new media cycle started about how this actually, in fact, did happen. Then it came out that this was all true.
>
> When that happened, I started really reading old articles and reading the comments. I knew it must have been bad, but I just couldn't fathom how much hate, anger and violent aggression that people could have towards other people. I finally read through the messages that people sent me on Facebook. I can't imagine people going out of their way to say to other people like, “You lying cunt, I hope you get shot and killed,” “Show me your pussy, you might as well since I was looking for you for two days and you wasted my time. I hope you get beat in jail. I hope you die.” The level of hatred was just so overwhelming. It felt like this massive betrayal from humanity.
>
> I think even more disturbing [was] how quickly people want to believe that. Not just this person who they still thought was me, but also how much they hated women. It was just so easy for some people to believe that I am just some awful, lying, bitch of a woman who just wants fame and attention and that dragged her boyfriend into the mud, just so I could get attention, and I'm vindictive. Luckily, the guy got caught, then the truth came out. But if it wasn't for that, then we would still be viewed as criminals. That's a tough pill to swallow, what our life would be like if this criminal didn't attack another family. That's really disturbing.

Lens: Humiliation and misrepresentation. Briana describes some of the ways she was humiliated by media professionals and media outlets.

> [Reporters] still need to recognize that those they report on are still human and that you still need to be careful about what you say and how you say it because the truth is, even if

> you're reporting the information that you're given, like in our case, the police were lying to the reporters and no one asked the serious questions. And with us, there were reporters that were literally laughing, making jokes, and rolling their eyes at [my boyfriend] and I as they reported this. And we were innocent victims, suffering miserably, our lives destroyed.

Briana explains that the misrepresentation of her persona came to represent the worst in people. “People posted my picture with yellow writing over it saying things like, 'This is what's wrong with people today!’ I was the poster child of the problem with society today, the problem with millennials, the problem with women.” Her humiliation by her rapist was extended by the media.

> Having the media report on the rapes was a weird situation because when the guy was caught we agreed to have our names being out in the media because we wanted to show, “Hey, yeah, this really happened. I was kidnapped and oh, by the way, I was also raped.” That just came out there immediately, because it was in the FBI affidavit that was unsealed for the public to see. If we didn’t agree to have our names exposed in the affidavit, then people would still think that we were hoaxers, where other victims of sexual assault may have a pseudonym to protect their privacy, I didn't really have a choice in hiding that information because it was all a part of the case. I had to accept the fact that everyone's going to know that I was raped, and how I was raped, and get to view that.

Briana points out the painful irony that when she was being questioned as the victim, the reporters did not ask about or report on her background or try to bring light to possible motives. Had they explored that, the media would have likely realized that a young professional couple, both credible individuals with PhDs who were working hard on their careers in the medical industry, neither of whom had any history of attention-seeking behavior, even in social media, would have no motive to fabricate such a story. In even a cursory study of their character profiles, she explains, there was nothing that would indicate that they would have any incentive to create such a hoax, let alone put their careers at risk when they had a positive future ahead of them. However, when the perpetrator was caught, the media was quick to humanize him and

search for answers to the very questions that they failed to ask in regard to Briana and her partner. She explains,

> Another disturbing thing was when the perpetrator was caught, the stark difference in the reporting and consideration surrounding him. He was a Harvard trained attorney, so there were endless reports about how this is so unusual, for someone like that who had his whole life ahead of him could take such a hard turn into criminal activity. He claimed to have suffered from a mental illness, causing this behavior. But he has yet to provide documentation to back that up. But there are people who report on it that show him sympathy and ask the question, "Why would he do this? What caused this?" With us, we are highly trained healthcare professionals with doctorate degrees who help people suffering from life and death conditions for a living, yet that was never discussed, or those questions asked about us in the reporting, not once. And especially me, a woman, being accused of what I was, it was just so easily accepted.
>
> Even recently, I was just looking through a number of things that were said and reported on around that time, and still get infuriated by some of the reporters and how they chose to word things and what they chose to report on. It shaped a narrative of what people would take from what happened. That's incredibly important and crucial for reporters or anyone in the media, to recognize the huge responsibility that they have, and how they report, the tone that they give, and even the information and the details and how those details are written. The sentence structure, the words used, it changes so much in how people either read or hear what these reports are and then how they translate that story.
>
> There's still so much about our case that is false that gets reported and rereported and rereported. People do a podcast about our case or they try to write a new article about it and they read other articles and so they just keep recycling lies.

Lens: Trauma. Briana's family knew that she would be negatively impacted by the online comments, so they tried to protect her from potential revictimization.

> Initially, I couldn't receive what was being said about me, but I felt it. I could feel it walking down the street, people recognized us, videoed us. I couldn't avoid getting notifications from people who were sending me hateful Facebook messages. [My boyfriend] would read some things in the news, and kind of tell me about it. And my lawyer would tell me about some things. But overall, those close to me tried to protect me from it all.
>
> I remember, just days after my release and the false accusations from police, my brother and my family said [about the news coverage], "Don't even bother. Don't read it. For one thing, it's bullshit and inaccurate. Especially do not read the comments, do not read any comments at all." And I listened to them at first.

Once her perpetrator was caught, she felt the need to see what the existing public perception was as part of processing the experience.

> When I first read through the news articles and comments, it wasn't until after the perpetrator was caught and the truth came out publicly. I certainly was still very broken and traumatized at that time, but I felt like I needed to really see the scope of it all, to understand what I was up against. Back in the first few months I was just in shock and so attacked and so threatened and felt like I couldn't handle really reading a lot of it.
>
> The police still don't care about us and our well-being, especially because we had to sue the police based on the damages they caused. They refused to admit fault or take accountability for their actions. They refused to make any changes to their department to ensure this wouldn't happen again. They think they did nothing wrong, and that it was our fault, that I wasn't a good enough victim.
>
> I was so hurt and in pain and sad and angry, but the root of my PTSD and my body really experiencing the trauma didn't happen until maybe nine months later. I would have really horrible, debilitating anxiety attacks, panic attacks to where I thought I'd have to be hospitalized. And it was scary. I thought, isn't this supposed to be getting better? (Briana)

Briana's story provides another example of how MHM amplifies the stress in a trauma survivor.

> As far as my PTSD, it's not as cut and dry as--this is all media versus this is all kidnap, rape, this is all police. There was definitely a blend of all of them in certain ways. And one would amplify the other.
>
> I was terrified that it was getting worse but talking to my therapists, they were saying how I was getting to a place in my life that was more stable and so, because my body was actually more safe, it could finally start to experience some of the trauma that I couldn't before because, initially in the beginning, I needed all my energy to survive. I just needed to get through that initial phase. It was encouraging to know, like this was actually part of the process.
>
> A huge thing that I would have nightmares about or that would trigger me was people not believing me and people attacking me.
>
> There are moments where, in those first couple months, when I was talking to my therapist, and this is before the guy was caught and when the whole world still believed us to be hoaxsters. I remember talking to my therapist and saying, "I don't, I know that I felt hope and joy before but I'm so far removed from that, I don't know if I'll ever feel it again."

> I told her, I want to believe that I will, I have to believe that I will but I just can't, being in such a dark place it feels like it's never, ever going to happen again, like it's impossible it'll happen.

Lens: Impact on identity. This experience catalyzed Briana to do some deep self-reflection.

> I went through my own self-shame and blame at first, but not necessarily to a strong degree other than, should I have fought back and been bruised and beaten more, so then they would have believed me more? But in the end, I'm like, no because I would have been hurt more and that could have led to me being killed.
>
> I had to disclose every little detail, every mistake of my life, to my lawyer, because we knew that the police would use anything and everything they could to discredit me and assassinate my character. I was kind of taking stock of my life and all of the things that I wish that I could have done differently and things that I might have been embarrassed about or ashamed about or that I wish I could've changed and I was working on trying to change. (Briana)

As Margalit (1996) explains, failure to see an individual as a whole human being is a form of humiliation. Similarly, receiving pressure to change one's identity after being misrepresented would present itself as another form of humiliation. It would be ignoring the unfairness of the degrading media and placing the burden of a remedy on the victim. Briana explains, "Even my identity, my name, what I look like, people were like, ''You didn't change your hair color. Are you going to change your name?'"

> Some said, "Maybe it is a good idea for you to change your name, so you're not out there.'" I wasn't going to do that because I didn't do anything wrong and I am proud of who I am. I've worked hard my whole life to be the person I am and I'm not going to change my fucking name and my hair to hide because all these people are lying about me. So that was hard, to break my basic identity and trying to still hold on to that and not lose it, even though it still came with a lot of negativity.

Lens: Power and powerlessness. Briana unveiled the powerlessness she felt after her ordeal.

> I think that [the attack from the media, the public and the police] was harder in the end to heal from because you can kind of rationalize that there's bad people out there that are motivated by evil, who are motivated to terrorize and to have control and power over

> other people and go do whatever it takes to do that. And so, you kind of compartmentalize that as, “Okay, those are the bad people.” But when you try to go to get help and you try to turn to other people, the people who you think are supposed to be there to help you and instead they attack you, it's harder. It's a bigger betrayal and it's harder to accept and it's more hurtful.

The role of power in Briana’s story is evident in multiple ways. Betrayal by law enforcement and the news media, two institutions that are generally expected to tell the truth. They had the power to tell the right story and did not. Instead, they focused on repeating the comparison to a movie, they accused the boyfriend instead of focusing on catching the perpetrator, and they contributed to Briana’s revictimization.

> Seeing how people were so driven and motivated to seek me out, find me on Facebook, take the time and energy to write me a hateful message, made us feel even more vulnerable, threatened and at risk for further attack. How do we know that these people aren't just hiding behind the keyboard and saying what they want to say? How do I know they're not going to come and find me and get upset that the police aren't charging me and thinking, “Well fine, if the police aren't going to do this then I'll show her?”

Lens: Impact on well-being. Briana explains, “We didn't feel comfortable being out and about, going to the store, people recognize us. We went to a show and two women recognized us, started snickering and started recording us.”

> It's still hard when you're in it, especially already being physically, psychologically, emotionally destroyed and broken. When you’re surviving the traumatic event, you only think that you're not going to live again, but then to actually survive it, to have all these people point the finger at you and attack you even more when you already fought for your life, and you have nothing left, it made every aspect of living difficult and almost impossible.

> I think that [returning to work] would have been healing for me to be able to have a purpose and meaning. It might have taken a little time but certainly not as long as it took because of the re-victimization and public lies about me. It took me a year to return to work because my biggest fear was that people would recognize me, and not trust me with their care. I literally put my hands on people to help promote healing and positive energy and health. If people think that I am some shady, deceptive person, how could they ever trust me? How could I effectively do my job and help them?

> This was an exposure to a level of hatred and people taking matters into their own hands, feeling like they're entitled to do so. It opened me up and my family up to being threatened on a whole new level. Nothing felt safe for me.

Lifeworld Existentials

Materiality and Technology

Although the phenomenology of lived things includes the physical objects in one's lifeworld (furniture, cars, alarm clocks), it also incorporates technology.

> Our groping, coping grip on the world is increasingly caught up in oceans of sensors, networks, databases, and software apps tailored to and tailoring our thinking, sensing, gesturing, and social selves… the digital is reprogramming our foundational infrastructures, and thereby reshaping ways of thinking, being, and doing in the world. (Adams & Yin, 2017, p. 7)

In this study, the things of focus involve the ways that technology, including print and broadcast media systems, have impacted the lives of the individuals as it relates to the facilitation of their MHM. Every technology "is in fact a kind of word, a metaphor that translates experience from one form to another" (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988, p. 3). Each story has disclosed its own version of how media technology contributed to the thrownness of the participants' circumstances.

Relationality

Relationality, also known as "live others," looks at the way we share our world with other people, what concerns us about them, how the involvement of other people influences our decisions, our feelings, and life meaning. In the context of this research, I looked for the significant statements about how the MHM impacted the participants' feelings about the other people in their lives, or how it impacted their ability to develop relationships at all.

Table 2

Horizontalizations – Relationality (Lived Others)

Olivia	If I could do everything alone and not have anything that I do affect anyone else, I would be moved differently. I would process things differently. But I see that everything I do affects everyone around me. Even my friends.
Olivia	I don't want to fight anymore. But when they attack my child and they put a picture of my son up and claim that I tried to [harm his health], I mean, like what the fuck?
Olivia	I thought I was at a point where I wasn't going to be alone anymore. Or that I could allow people into my world. And I'm back to pushing people out of my world again. So you get lonely. It's always waiting for that next shoe to drop.
Olivia	I feel a little isolated. And I feel bad because people don't understand why I pull away. They just think I pull away because I don't care.
Olivia	I can't let anybody into my crazy world because then their world blows up. And then I told her that, and she was like, "I don't care." And I'm like well, "I know you don't care, I know you don't think you care. Nobody cares until they're there and then they're like, 'How the fuck did I get here?'" So I've been helping her at a distance.
Olivia	The sad part was that my son got to see me that way. And worse than that is, I have kept a distance from my child…to protect him.
Olivia	Just before, the blow up was at me, which was one thing, but now I'm looking at this vile fucking piece of shit on the Internet and it has my beautiful son's picture on it. Not okay.
Kyle	[I thought] I'm embarrassed. How did I end up here? I hope this doesn't fuck up the relationship with my partner.
Kyle	We probably do look at it as a moment in our relationship. Like one of the most horrible moments ever.
Mama Bear	I thought the world thought I was a pedophile and then I was horrified. I felt so guilty that I put my son in this position because it was my idea to go on [the contest show].

Mama Bear I felt the guilt of me bringing him into this environment, not thinking this would happen. That was killing me too. I felt so bad but then I was like, well the worst thing you could do is hurt yourself because now he needs you more than anything. So (suicide) crossed my mind briefly, but my love for my son quelled that. But I had the severe guilt of bringing him into it too and exposing him to this horrible human being. And so that nearly killed me because I felt guilty.

You want to do it to me, OK, but you attacked my son. And to me, that right there made me a mama bear, made me go after him too. You can't attack my child. They attacked my child. [The network] and [the celebrity host] attacked my child. I was not going to stand for it.

David Not only do I not have a lot of time or opportunity for something like dating, which is very important, to connect and bond with people, and pair bonding, it's very important and healthy. And I haven't really been able to do that because I've just been consumed with this.

David It's made me sad and distressed, and it's prevented me from seeking fulfillment and satisfaction…I haven't had any time, or I'm not in a place where I'm like, "Hey, I want to try to cultivate a relationship." … While everyone else is getting all their needs or needs for certainty, security, affection, esteem and all those other needs in the hierarchy of needs, I'm not able to nurture that effort.

David And it's hard to really put yourself out there to develop friendships or romantic relationships when you're in the midst of all this chaos. It's just it's so cruel and inhumane.

Dahlia I don't date to this day. I've always had some issues in that area but the last time I dated was three years ago and actually things were going well. I was at a bar with the guy I was dating who was a musician. And he told me that one of the other musicians recognized me and actually said to the band, "[That guy] is dating that girl who got sued for being too ugly." And since then I've had zero interest in dating. I'm still not ready. Our vibe completely changed after that day. That's when things went south. I would say that was the most horrific moment.

Dahlia And I would start yelling at my friends, like I lost a couple friends in that period because I snapped on them. The trauma part of it became very overwhelming around that point.

Dekker When I go out the door every day and I interact with people, it's always in the back of my mind. Is this person going to find out what's said about me in the media? You know, I'm always thinking that. It's always there in the corner of my mind.

Dekker You just gotta find people who can support you. But it's hard to do. I mean, I'm looking for a relationship. I think a lot of people, because they're married, they just kept that one person that supports them. I'm looking for that and it's made it much more difficult. I had at least three four people I would've had relationships with right now, except for the articles.

Sterling And like romantically I can't date. Anyone I match with on Tinder, the conversation stops immediately. Every woman smartly sort of researches the person they're about to go on a date with, and it only takes one glance at my Instagram for any sane woman to say no.

Sterling Sometimes I feel anger and rage, especially when I think about how Skye has been treated. People messaging her to get raped again and die because she supported me. I don't know, disheartened in general about seeing only all the worst parts of human nature for so long now.

Sterling I'm not like the most outgoing guy at a party. So romantically, I'm barred from that whole aspect of human warmth and interaction. And generally afraid to socialize.

Sterling You know, even people I thought were my friends won't text me back when I ask them to get coffee.

Sterling There were so many worst moments. I mean it really hurts. The community was a lot of my friends and artists. I respect their work, and their perspectives. And then to have them turn around and say Sterling is a rapist he should be de-platformed. We need to kick him off Instagram. You know, it's one thing to have a random person who clearly has their own issues that they're taking out on us. But when it's someone that, up until 10 minutes prior loved and respected you, then you're horrible. That's a lot harder.

Briana I just always felt like I was a burden to everyone. My family and friends were super supportive, but they were watching me struggle and I felt like I didn't want to have to burden them with that.

Briana Socially it was hard. Being in social situations was a trigger for me. I didn't know what people thought of me, believed about me. If they believed in me and they cared about me, if it would be a lot for them to deal with or handle. I didn't want to be this negative presence.

Grace A lot of my guilt was centered around [my son] seven years old. I have a picture with him pointing at the paparazzi. There were hundreds, every single day, every day, every day.

Grace This [celebrity] attorney, she tried to sue me to take away my parental rights for my children. And of course, we won over her. I had so many opportunists,

	parasitic opportunists trying to do whatever they could to either monetize off of this caricature, or to gain some type of notoriety.
Grace	There were hundreds and hundreds of false CPS reports. Every time CPS would come out, they almost like became like friends. They'd come out once a week for years. Every time they'd leave they would commend me. They said, "It's all paperwork, we have to come out, it's another false report." Then they come out and they commend me that they've never seen so many fresh fruit and vegetables being given to children, ever. They said usually, "You're doing a phenomenal job."
Vittoria	It was a combination of confusion, depression. Then there were a lot of bottled up emotions--it was anger. I was looking for a [word]--resentment. I began to resent my partner. I began to resent everything around me. And then I withdrew.
Vittoria	So bottom line somebody's mess up, has messed up not just my life but the lives of a whole lot of people that are dependent on me.

Temporality

Temporality, or "lived time," is the temporal aspect of the MHM experience. Van Manen's (1990) temporal landscape involves looking at the past, present, and future, including thoughts of time, time lost, or concerns about the future. I included those types of statements, as well as comments on time distortions, the merging of days, and sense of reliving.

Table 3

Horizontalizations – Temporality (Lived Time)

Mama Bear	There is no time, it's as if it's still happening. [The celebrity host] is still out there. He is a predator and nobody's made him accountable for what he's done so it still exists. It's still an open wound for me.
Kyle	It feels like it's still happening, until it's off the Internet.
Dahlia	There was definitely a sense of distortion in time. When I was really going through it, I barely knew what day it was. Like the days bled into each other. Now it was crazy the way it was only five years ago but it feels like it's been part of me longer than that. I definitely felt like maybe time slowed down or stayed still those first six months and the few months that came after, felt very slow and agonizing. And now time kind of feels a little more normal and linear. It was almost like the whole world stopped for a while.
Dahlia	I couldn't even think about the future, it was all about just surviving. I couldn't even think an hour from that moment, I couldn't think a day from that moment. When I was at my lowest, I was just like, "How do I get through this moment?"
Dahlia	It just vanished. It was almost like I didn't have any sense of past or future for a while. Just for survival I had to be very in the moment and figure out, "OK how am I going to survive the next few minutes?" That was kind of the thought process. Everything felt blank and gray for the first few months so everything just bled into each other.
David	I would just be working all the time, and sometimes I wouldn't even know what day it was, what day was next. I would think it's Thursday, Friday or vice versa. The weekdays blur, merge with the weekends.
David	One of the insidious things about … misrepresentation in the media is the amount of time that's involved [trying to repair the damage]. And even when you spend all the time it's still no guarantee you'll get you'll get justice.
Sterling	That's time I could have spent thinking about anything else, thinking about something new to write that will bring people happiness. It's robbing me of my ability to contribute to the world at all.
Briana	If I'm not feeling well, I'm having a hard time, or having a hard day, it was helpful just to admit it…There were moments where I would be the strong one, or he would be the strong one, or we both were just

	having a hard time, like, “Today’s a wash. I'm not going to get up. The biggest thing I'm going to do today is get out of bed, eat, and that's okay.”
Vittoria	It feels like a lot of time has been wasted, not being able to do the work that I'm so passionate about.
Vittoria	Twelve years of my life was lost. When that contract was terminated [due to MHM] I was like, “Wow, where do I start from? Where do I start? What do I do?”

Corporeality

Corporeality, or “lived body,” involves reflecting on how the MHM experience was manifest in the physical body. As Van Manen (1990) explains, we are always bodily in this world.

Table 4

Horizontalizations – Corporeality (Lived Body)

Sterling	Other ways, physically, I mean I haven't experienced any major illnesses. I was vomiting a lot, in the early months, waking up feeling so nauseous from anxiety and immediately running to the bathroom as soon as I woke up. And my body's dry heaving and trying to throw something up. I found some good medication to help with anxiety.
Sterling	Even physically, all my anxiety-induced vomiting…
Dahlia	All the anger, rage, hurt and defamation hit me in the chest. I could barely breathe. I was tired of playing the warrior, only to scrape by. My demons started getting the best of me. "Should I just kill myself?" I thought.
Dahlia	I knew that I would never do it, but the desire to die at this moment was very real. The suicidal thoughts were persistent, and I had to start admitting to myself and anyone who would listen that I was getting sick in the head over this. The anger was also physically manifesting as I could no longer lift my right arm above a 50-degree angle. I was also frequently breaking out into full body rashes.
Dekker	If I have an appointment, I don't miss it and I'd never miss any classes, got straight A's. But if I don't have anything to do, and I'm in a depressed mood, I'll just stay in bed all day. I'm not going to take any medication.
Briana	It's like an illness, a sickness that you try to mend from. Physically, every molecule in your body is affected by it, not only from the initial trauma, but then the exposure of everything else.
Briana	There were a lot of times where I just felt like my whole body systemically was shutting down, that things weren't functioning properly in my digestive system, my body temperature regulation, my sweat.
Briana	My hair was falling out, I couldn't sleep, I didn't feel safe anywhere or from anyone, so I was always on alert and I felt sick all the time.
Briana	You can't feel really grounded in any one spot. This is a really scary place to be in, so you don't know if your body's turning on you and it never course corrects. And because of all of that, it was exhausting.

Briana	I was so exhausted most of the time, the energy to hold myself together, just to get up out of bed and do the normal activities of living. Just any of the getting up and brushing your teeth, like the normal little daily functions, felt like they were requiring the energy it takes to run a marathon.
Briana	I felt like my whole body was going to disintegrate.
Grace	I was threatened [by the predatory media manager] to be sued if I failed to adhere to a previously agreed upon … gig to promote a … video. I immediately got another prescription for benzodiazepines in order to participate in the exploitation. I quit the drugs/alcohol on my own the day I escaped the false life in March same year.
Olivia	My body went into, and is still in, what I call fibro pain.

Spatiality

Spatiality is felt space, or "lived space." The statements included represent how the MHM experience impacted the sense of safety in the home, concerns about the home, what happened when participants left the home, or even the desire to withdraw or hide from the world.

Table 5

Horizontalizations – Spatiality (Lived Spaces)

Dahlia	I spoke freely [to the journalist] hoping it would inspire others to seek legal reform in our system… I was excited that my story would be told. Early that morning, I walked into my corner deli and opened the paper to page 3. My heart sank as I read the headline…. I wanted to vanish and hoped no one would see I was the ugly girl in question.
Aria	At first, I was in music and I loved it. My outlook on life was just so positive…And then I just didn't want to be seen or heard. I didn't act anymore. I just didn't want to be seen or heard.
Aria	I just wanted to hide. I didn't want to be known or seen or heard. I didn't want to be portrayed in any kind of way on the outside at all. I just didn't.
Sterling	It felt like we were unsafe in our home, and when we tried to leave our home I was looking around. I was like, "Is someone here that person? Did they see us come in on our bikes?" And it's scary if they recognized us while we were just going about our lives and sent us this message surely meant to terrorize us. Like, "I know what you're doing where you are right now."
Sterling	And then we got a message from a large meme account that was like, oh do a sick bunny hop on your bike. And that was it's really scary because how did [he] know we were riding bikes? Are we under surveillance? You know this I we went through is not that far from our home. Does this guy live near us?
Olivia	I don't feel safe in my house anymore. In fact, I want to move because those people know where I live. And they put my phone number up on the blog and the blogger said, "I know where she lives. I've been to her house." You know, they're scary. Because there's scary people out there and when a blog makes you the enemy, and they think, "Wouldn't the world be a safer place, a better place if she wasn't around?" It's scary.
Olivia	I'm still having a hard time leaving my house. I really need to get away and try and reset but I don't know where to go, and I'm afraid to go anywhere alone – crazy right, it's because I don't trust myself yet.
David	What is supposed to be my living space, my serene space is [filled] with papers and papers everywhere. It hasn't been clear of papers and clutter [since]…I can't remember the last time.

Grace	Unbeknownst to me, I would be picketed against. Hundreds of picketers--kill the babies, no more babies, kill [Moniker] mom, your uterus needs to be ripped out, I'm going to come kill you. We're going to come take your children. I had my car, back of the car smashed, the windows. I had my house toilet papered like 300 times. They were screaming at me while we're driving. I had my tires slashed--I can't even count how many times over the years. I had my brake lights broken. I had stalkers for years in front of my house.
Briana	It was public knowledge where my mom and my dad live, and what I did for a living, and my name and [my boyfriend's] family. Everything about us and our lives was fully exposed and open for anyone to come and hurt us. People posted my picture with yellow writing over it saying things like, "This is what's wrong with people today!" I was the poster child of the problem with society today, the problem with millennials, the problem with women. How am I supposed to know what people will do with that, how far they'll go? And so I didn't feel safe.
Briana	…walking down the street, people recognized us, videoed us. I couldn't avoid getting notifications from people who were sending me hateful Facebook messages.
Mama Bear	I hid in my house. I went on medication. I became like reclusive.
Dekker	I told my psychiatrist, I'm just taking a break from all the classes, this is too much. It's like a daily struggle to be accepted, so one way to get the power back is just don't go, don't play their game. You know what I mean? It's kind of sad.
Vittoria	So all I was doing was to just survive. I had to. If you need to clean, clean the house, if you need to feed them feed them, if you need to clothe them do it I was operating like a machine. I was just doing what I needed to do, spend my energy, and at night I would just collapse from tiredness, that was the routine.
Kyle	I said I'm not going to do that because I would never do that. And then he said, "If you don't do these things that we're telling you to do then we're going to sue you." My partner's freaking out because we have assets, now will they come after us for our home?

Emergent Themes

New themes emerged from the information unveiled in the lenses and the existentials.

Table 6

Violation of Expectations (Deception/Unfairness)

Dekker	Disillusioned. When I was in college, I would read the [newspaper] every day and sometimes I believed those stories. Now I know they're probably not true. You don't know the details of every subject matter. You don't know if they're true, you kind of believe they're true. So was I was totally disillusioned. I felt betrayed by the system, the newspapers. Powerless, frustrated, weak, kind of victimized. I'm a victim. I mean Jesus, I was the one who was attacked.
Mama Bear	I was completely floored. I never would have expected this in a million years that that's the angle they would have taken with me and my amazing son.
Mama Bear	And I'm still horrified, you can hear it in my voice. I'm horrified that this man did it, as a father, that's the biggest thing, as a father. How could you have done that? And I want to ask him one day, “How could you do that?”
Kyle	Betrayal from the health care providers, from the doctors and the therapist and the dietician, even the trainer. Because they were all in on it.
Kyle	I guess there's just a part of you that if you think--on television, that if somebody is giving therapy that they're held accountable. I mean, that they're being televised too. You think that some kind of like psychological board of ethics would be watching them or something.
Kyle	It really damaged my trust in doctors and the licensed professionals. Because if there's a way for them to get around the Hippocratic oath what's the point of the Hippocratic oath? I can't unforget that.
Kyle	I was shocked because out of all the filming, why did they pick that? We still were under some kind of idea that this was about us trying to successfully lose weight. Until we actually saw the episode, we weren't fully aware that this was a program that was attempting to make us look bad.
Kyle	I was still in the space of like why would, I could not understand why somebody would do this. So it was shock and not comprehending.
Kyle	Was it as bad as I anticipated? I mean one million times worse. Because what they did is they highlighted every bad moment that they could. And what I was in shock about was how could, why would someone do this?

Kyle I've never met anyone that intentionally sought to destroy me. And that's what they were doing.

David I just could not believe that the high-level public officials, the High Court of [State Name], could make such verifiably false statements.

Sterling I didn't realize this was possible in human nature.

Vittoria I got a lawyer to write them legally and inquire about what they said concerning me. They responded and denied any wrongdoing. In the end, somebody's slip has messed up my life.

Vittoria So bottom line somebody's mess up has messed up not just my life but the lives of a whole lot of people that are dependent on me.

Vittoria I felt betrayed because when I returned to the country and tried to follow up with the online newspaper, they said they got the information from my previous employers.

Grace I don't watch TV now or watch the news, I believe nothing, nothing because it's all lies and propaganda, and it's all profit-fueled opportunists. All these will throw you under a train, a bus for a dollar. They villainize because they know it's going to increase the ratings.

Kyle And you know we're sitting there thinking, "We don't want to be sued, they threatened to sue us if we refused to participate." They said there's a clause in the agreement that says if we refuse to participate.

Kyle Had it been me saying all these things because they were authentically what was happening in my life, it'd be different. But it was manufactured, and they used threats of lawsuits. They used manipulation. It was anything but reality. And I said several times that I didn't sign up for this. I wanted to leave. Kara and I said several times we wanted to leave. It was like abuse. We felt trapped.

Kyle What they decided to do, at some point, was build the character that they wanted by intentionally setting up scenarios where they knew, once we sat down, that they had an hour to manipulate the circumstances to get from me, anyway they could, for me to say something that they could use to build a different character. So yeah it was me. But none of the situations were authentic, real, it was all manufactured. So yeah, they could say it was me, but it was me responding to an entirely different set of circumstances.

Kyle I'm thinking to myself, why did we keep going back? And that's because they're negotiating these things and lying to us like. "Now if you just

	participate in this for one more time everything's going to be fine." And you kept thinking oh, our reputations, they're so important to us. We'll keep doing that just because it gives us another chance to make our reputations okay.
Kyle	We didn't know how horrible they were, what their intentions were. I said the mistake we made was believing the therapist, which, I think we should have been made aware that the therapist was getting coaching. And that wasn't fair.
Kyle	I told [the producer] I wasn't going to do it. And then they threatened to sue. So was that my free will? I mean, and I never got paid. I didn't get one penny.
Kyle	I said I'm not going to do that because I would never do that. And then he said, “If you don't do these things that we're telling you to do then we're going to sue you.” My partner's freaking out because we have assets, now we'll they come after us for our home?
Kyle	I'm a part now of this thing where they're trying to, they're literally trying to manipulate our behavior to create a show for them.
Mama Bear	They kept insinuating things. For instance, my son didn't think twice before about putting his arm around his mom's shoulders. [They would say] things like, “Do you think that they have a weird relationship?” [Adding] all of these comments in editing and editing the way my son spoke about him loving his mother.
Dahlia	I went to a deli, I grabbed a newspaper, I opened it up and on page three, there was a picture of me. It looked like it had gone through one of those face apps, you know where you can make someone look older.

Table 7

Compulsion to Correct

Dahlia	I had contacted a lot of the journalists that wrote that story and I was like, "You have the wrong story, this is not what happened." And none of them cared. They were like, "Oh we'll call you," or like, "No we're not going to cover this story again." At first, I just could not understand how a journalist could blatantly write the wrong thing about somebody, not retract it, not take the article down. I asked a couple publications to take the articles down, and I realized they must live in some kind of bubble where they can't afford to think about the people they write about as human beings.
Dahlia	And I would just write for hours and hours. There's so much stuff on the Internet written by me about this event and a lot of it's very repetitive. I got into a very repetitive state.
Dahlia	Then all of a sudden, this incident really was my life, there wasn't a whole lot going on outside of it. Maybe the occasional show, the occasional gig. But it was so vital, I felt like I had to keep telling this story until everyone knew it was bullshit.
Dahlia	Definitely the fixing of my reputation. Also I felt like because I had this behind the scenes look at how the media operates, and that because media is such a powerful force in our lives, I felt I had to tell the world what happened. I felt like, and I still feel that way, millions of people saw this bullshit story about me. I want the same millions of people to hear the real story and compare them side by side. And then they can make their own decisions about what media publications they're going to support or what articles they are going to click on.
Dahlia	I had spent weeks actually reaching out to a lot of the media outlets being like hey you have the wrong story. And they essentially didn't really care.
Dahlia	I started doing blog posts on all the reporters that wrote fake things about me and then I wrote about them and I posted their pictures, and I said here's what they got right, here's what they got wrong.
Dahlia	Fuck my life. There was no escaping this false narrative. It was getting so absurd. I was done. I started tweeting all the writers of the pieces that were printing lies about me. No one cared. I started calling around to look into a publicist that could do damage control. No one seemed up for the task. All I could do was go online and let everyone know the reports were bullshit.

Dahlia I couldn't stop searching myself on the Internet at this point; I was obsessed. I would find the lawsuit coverage translated to English from other countries. A report in Italy referred to me as a "useless and unhealthy performer."

Dahlia And I feel that this story is important and want to keep telling this story over and over again so people get it. But I want to see change.

Dahlia I think because it's so traumatizing a lot of people are not fighting back the way I'm fighting back. I do still think it needs to change. I think when someone calls up a publication and says, "Hey, you wrote something wrong about me," I believe that media outlet is obliged to have a conversation about it, check the facts and see if a retraction needs to be made.

David When we are dealing with something like misrepresentation in the media, and the issuance of an order misrepresenting you, the publication of the process to try to reverse and undo that is very time consuming and it consumes your life.

David I went to the Internet and went to [a website] and basically posted a rebuttal to each and every allegation of the disbarment order. And I posted a video of a hearing of me with bar prosecutor who is no longer employed with the state bar. I think I had something to do with that.

David I have perfected the record and documented the truth. And I mean, including, I filed several complaints [on a website] about the [State] Supreme Court and the state bar, it's on there. I uploaded a video of a bar disciplinary proceeding. Thankfully that I got videotaped.

David I'm not going to let them off the hook and be like, you know, they were absolved from their obligation because there was evidence available that disproves.

Aria I wished I could just take the thoughts of everyone who saw me in the media, or heard about me, or saw it in the paper, and just respond to those thoughts, to each person, or tell each person the truth. But I didn't know who all had that opinion. There's probably somebody today still thinking, "Oh yeah that girl Aria, that accident, that was too awful that she did that."

Aria When people are ugly, God doesn't like when they were doing that. I wanted to say, "No, it wasn't like that." It was just portrayed like this because they saw it in the news so they were basing it on how it was once again portrayed. With that, I felt so powerless because I could not go

	up to everyone unless I went down to some news station and said, “Could you please put me on, please?” So I could explain it one time. You can't do that, but I wanted to explain myself.
Dekker	I just want my story out there, myself. That's what I'm going to do. The books, the YouTube, you know, that's why I went to that media thing last night.
Dekker	I know that whenever I meet somebody, sooner or later if we're going to have any kind of business relationship or anything, I'm going to have to explain to them and counter all this stuff in the media.
Dekker	I just want to have business cards made up. I'd be giving out a little card, you know like when you meet someone, they like to google you, like for dating? They can use my card, and go to my website first, before they see all the bullshit articles. If I'm talking to a girl at the bar and we exchange numbers, she says, "Ok what's your last name?" I know it's a lost cause at that point, unless she's incredibly understanding and smart. So I'm just going to give her the card. And then she can look at the website and see my side of it first.
Kyle	I would go after all the social media and I actually fought back. I created all these online accounts pretending to be other people saying what a horrible way that the network treated these people. You need to boycott all the advertisers. So I fought back.

Table 8

Desire to Withdraw, Even from Life (Suicidal Ideation)

Olivia	I feel a little isolated. And I feel bad because people don't understand why I pull away. They just think I pull away because I don't care.
Olivia	I thought I was at a point where I wasn't going to be alone anymore. Or that I could allow people into my world. And I'm back to pushing people out of my world again. So you get lonely. It's always waiting for that next shoe to drop.
Dahlia	My demons started getting the best of me. "Should I just kill myself?" I thought.
Dahlia	I knew that I would never do it, but the desire to die at this moment was very real. The suicidal thoughts were persistent and I had to start admitting to myself and anyone who would listen that I was getting sick in the head over this.
Sterling	Even after I took accountability my whole community was still like, "Go kill yourself." But for a while I was like--am I a horrible person? Do I deserve this? Is killing myself like the only way to right the situation?
Sterling	I've definitely considered killing myself. I didn't, haven't gotten too far with it. I don't know how. I looked at where the nearest gun store was on Google but I didn't go there. Now one time when I was really down I called the hotline and waited, making small talk. It's run through my mind.
Vittoria	Having to deal with that on top of other things, I took a hundred steps back into myself. I didn't want to be seen by anybody except members of my immediate family.
Vittoria	I began to resent everything around me. And then I withdrew.
Aria	I just didn't want to be seen or heard. I didn't act anymore. I just didn't want to be seen or heard.
Aria	I just wanted to hide. I didn't want to be known or seen or heard. I didn't want to be portrayed in any kind of way on the outside at all.
Aria	I felt like I just want it over with. I just wanted to get away from everything.
Mama Bear	I hid in my house. I went on medication. I became like reclusive.

Table 9

Feeling Stigmatized, Contagious, or Radioactive

Olivia	So to protect my child and pretty much anyone, I isolated myself. I used the term that being around me is like being around kryptonite because it feels like if you get involved with me, things blow up around you.
Olivia	When the book was done, we were waiting for it to come to print and I thought, “Wow OK now it's done. I can start rebuilding my relationships and my life. And pull my child closer and not be afraid that kryptonite is going to blow up on him.” Man was I wrong, all this shit.
Sterling	I think they're just afraid because I might be radioactive. They don't want any, they don't want to get Chernobyled. They don't want the radioactivity on them. So yeah I mean I can't. It's very hard to find work.
Sterling	Any entertainment industry opportunity, any bad thing you do, and it's like, “Oh you shouldn't be given this opportunity, it should go to someone with more worthy.”
Sterling	Disappointed in my friends who are too afraid to stand up for us because they're afraid of getting harassed.
Mama Bear	It took my confidence away. It destroyed me, made me feel dirty and ugly.
Grace	I started to believe I had no worth, and believe I was just not a worthy person or human being.
Vittoria	It felt like somebody had written something against my name and nobody wanted to associate with me.
Vittoria	My whole image, a perception that I've been built over the years. Just became erased. Not just erased. It was mocked and labeled as if there is an unwritten label that reads “don’t touch.” That aspect was the most traumatizing.
Vittoria	Sometimes I sit in my quiet place and ask, “What did I do wrong?” Because I felt like I was being treated like a fugitive.
Vittoria	The fallout from that incident made me feel like I was a “persona non grata.” Nobody in the past five years, from my past life from my last workplace ever contacted me or ever wrote a single mail to me since that time.

Table 10

Silencing

Kyle	What was odd was that they kept threatening me and I couldn't say anything about it. I couldn't respond to the comments either.
Kyle	What's awkward about this is that I wish I could talk about it. Because I'm the type that I want to show people the mistakes I've made and how I've learned from them but I can't with this one because the threat of a lawsuit, just even that it would cost me five thousand dollars to hire an attorney if they ever heard I was talking about it. I feel like if I could talk about it, maybe that's what this is? If I could share the damage they did, you know then I feel like I can go on with it all.
Kyle	I had to think about even before I talk to you. I'm like, how am I going to say whatever I want to say? You know, there's a fear. A fear that they're still there, that they would come after me.
Mama Bear	After I went to [the media publication], I received a note from them. I received a letter from them stating that, if I open my mouth again, they would sue me for over one hundred thousand dollars for breach of contract.
Dahlia	He wouldn't let me out of the case unless I signed a nondisclosure. I couldn't sign a nondisclosure because this was my reputation and I knew that there was absolutely no way for the life of me that I could pretend that none of this ever happened. It would be like me disrespecting myself.
Dahlia	For better or for worse, [pop] tributegate was now my identity. There were always going to be people who had questions. If I couldn't talk about it on social media that would seriously stunt my ability to educate the public and to undo the damage the [publication] did to my reputation. I found [the attorney's] request for my silence to be completely unreasonable. Beyond that, talking about it was keeping me alive.
Dahlia	[I thought] I'm going to call all the media outlets and we're going to get this story straight. The problem is that the guy who sued me would not drop the case unless I signed a nondisclosure saying that I would never speak about it again. So what he expected from me, the man who sued me, was that he expected me to just drop it, pay my legal fees, never talk about it again, never address all the headlines and to just let all that media stuff sit out there as is.
Sterling	Frustrated, voiceless. Couldn't stand up for myself. Every word out of my mouth was automatically a lie. Sadness. Defeated.

Sterling One message was from a former friend. This woman had just started seeing everything, clicked on Instagram and assumed it was all true and sent me this message that, “I read your accountability statement. I could tell it was all bullshit. It's clear at this point you've raped several women and your responsibility now is to find a way to live life where you can be satisfied without creating art. You've lost your privilege to have a voice in our culture.”

Sterling It takes one person to say, “Oh he's lying. Clearly all bullshit.” And then everyone doing their, “Yeah, clearly bullshit. He's a psychopath, it’s clearly a textbook example of a false apology.” I was that.

Table 11

Impediments to Healing

Kyle	How can we rebound from this if we can't talk to anyone? How can we how can we stop this from ever being seen?
David	Socially, the common theme and abuse by people or groups, and misrepresentation by the media, is this effort to isolate you and prevent you from having support.
Sterling	For the longest time I tried to tell myself this, I did toxic behavior and she had a right to call me out. This is all happening for a reason but the further away I get from it, I'm not sure. … Certainly, it was very hard to make any comedy for a long time because, I mean I do make comedy to sort of escape and process my depression and stuff, but when you're in a total depressive pit, I just can't find anything funny. So it definitely got me off from my one outlet for trying to process my life and depression.
Sterling	Supporters of this type of shaming say the goal is rehabilitation and behavioral improvement, but I can't imagine anyone rehabilitating themselves while going through what I'm going through. You can't really focus on self-improvement in constant fight-or-flight mode.
Dahlia	The very thing that gave me strength is something that's fearful now, it's more like a procrastination. Like I'm fearful of, like a big part of a music career is dealing with the media. So I am fearful of being subjected to that abuse again.
Dahlia	To restore my reputation, speaking about the case was actually a necessity. I would go insane if I could never talk about it publicly again.
Briana	I had a therapist in [my town] that I had been seeing and when I was released, a week or so after, I was able to get in contact with her and she met with me. She sat with me for like three hours and listened to me. I lost my health insurance about a month or so later because I lost my job at [the hospital].
Briana	After a while, I moved and I didn't have a therapist I was seeing. I tried calling around to a couple therapists. Some wouldn't see me because of the legal cases that were going on, and they didn't want to be in a position where they'd be subpoenaed. I couldn't even get help.
Vittoria	I admit I am still very emotional about it because, I still can't figure it out. I still feel like I am still in the hole, but I'm just trying to find my way

	gradually. You know, trying to climb out of the hole. I am not there yet, so I can't look back yet, because the journey's still ongoing.
Vittoria	That has made me withdraw from everything. It's almost like this incident has resulted in me not being able to do things that would change my circumstances.

Table 12

Strong Negative Emotions or Beliefs

Mama Bear	That fear became anger and that anger became something else. I didn't necessarily think about hopelessness, I thought about revenge.
Mama Bear	I think he needs to be accountable because you know what? He may do something like this to another mother and child, and that child could be hanging in a bathroom by his neck because somebody like [the celebrity host] did this.
Mama Bear	I'm not finished with [the celebrity host]. I'm not. I'm just waiting for the time, but I'm going to have my say with him. I'm not finished with him.
Mama Bear	I didn't show [the episode] to anybody. I didn't. Normally you go on a show and you're like. “Look I was on the show. Look look look look!” I hid in my house. I went on medication. I became like reclusive. I started drinking more. It was bad. It was dark.
Mama Bear	Take action. I know that I was attacked again for taking action, but I still took the action because at the end of the day, I did let the world know that was not OK. If somebody does do it to you in a reality show, take action. Go to the press. Don't be afraid of them. They're going to threaten you. Screw them. Don't let it rip you down, because it can take you all the way down.
Kyle	Angry, rage, vindictive. I have thought about like, how I can get back at them. Now there's a strong sense of vindictiveness.
Dahlia	Despair, hopelessness, anger, fury, suicidal at one point, determined, pissed, distraught, traumatized, I think those are the main ones. Devastated yes. Definitely horrified. Let me think. Outraged. If I could sum it up in one word, I would say outraged.
Dahlia	And I remember [a journalist] from FindLaw.com tweeted on it… And people were commenting like, “Oh is she still harping about this?” As if I was in the wrong for being upset about it.
Dahlia	All the anger, rage, hurt and defamation hit me in the chest. I could barely breathe.
Dahlia	Even though everything was crashing down, and even at the lowest, lowest, lowest, lowest point of it, I felt determined to fight it.

Dekker	My personal reaction to being given a tainting label is to fight back even more.
Dekker	What I have come to is, that for better or worse, it gets me very riled up now to have the label repeated. Very riled up.
Briana	I remember talking to my therapist and saying, “I don't, I know that I felt hope and joy before but I'm so far removed from that, I don't know if I'll ever feel it again.”
Briana	I told her, “I want to believe that I will, I have to believe that I will but I just can't, being in such a dark place it feels like it's never, ever going to happen again, like it's impossible it'll happen.”
Sterling	I sort of feel just like high school again, where I suffered extreme untreated depression, where I wake up every day miserable and I don't know the answer to make it stop. Just trudge forward hoping that there’s a light at the tunnel I can't see.
David	It's brought about depressions, at times, hopelessness, as it would anyone.
Vittoria	I went into this period of depression. And then I went into a period of mourning, mourning that which I had lost. Grieving over it. I still grieve.
Vittoria	It was a combination of confusion, depression. Then there were a lot of bottled up emotions--it was anger.
Aria	There were just a lot of negative things. I kind of shut down because of it, because of that.
Grace	I started spiraling down a darker dark hole because the toxic shame, I just couldn't continue to pretend.
Grace	Feeling more and more deeply shamed, I started to internalize that toxic shame.
Grace	Shame. The biggest shame I had, because all that really matters to me is my children and their well-being, I had such immense guilt on my shoulders for allowing the media. I did blame myself.

Table 13

Disconnection/Numbing, Detachment

Kyle	The only word that comes to my mind right now is just numb, like disconnected. I had to disconnect from it because I felt if I'm remembering it right, I was bracing. I felt like I was bracing for something.
Dahlia	All of a sudden for about six months life had gotten really grey. I felt like I was living in a movie, I was just like observing myself in some fictional world, it was just too much for me to wrap my head around.
Dahlia	I was at a point it was like a year later I had to ask my friends if it really happened to me, or if I imagined it. I went through that phase. Like did this really happen? They are like, “Yeah, it really happened.”
Aria	I had to find a place like away from all the noise. I withdrew from a lot of things.
Aria	I just stopped school because I guess that I was numb. It felt like the world that I saw at first was different to me in a way. And that hurt.
Aria	It's really hard to explain what this place is. It's like a tap out place. Like a place of that feeling when your alarms going off and you can snooze it or you could turn it off or wake up. It's like that feeling of wanting to turn the alarm off and keep the lights off and stay in the bed.
Aria	I moved from that city. I moved back to my parents’ house temporarily. I literally feel like I shut down, like if your lights were on and you flipped them off. I didn't really speak to friends. It hurt a lot.
Aria	I don't want to think about the future. I don't want to think about anything. I just wanted to have that moment to feel good myself, to feel peace, to feel happy, maybe to not think too much about the world around me.
Aria	I think I was trying to mask the pain. All I could think about at the time was, I want to smoke again. I just wanted to smoke. It allowed me to get away from it all. I wanted to laugh. I wanted to have those joyful moments, those experiences.
Aria	I can see how it was my way of trying to self-soothe, trying to self-medicate. I was trying to find that peace when I felt like I didn't have it. I was trying to give myself that tranquility when it didn't exist around me.

Briana	It just felt chaotic inside my body and I didn't know I was really detached from myself, and then also hypersensitive at the same time. That was a really confusing place to be, emotionally and physically confusing.
Briana	If my body really, really felt the magnitude of it all and really connected with it at the time, I felt like I would go insane. I would completely detach from reality and lose my mind and so, to not get to that point, I had to numb myself. I was just in a state of shock for a long time.
Briana	I think it was just a natural survival response to detach from it at first. I'm seeing my picture on TV and having people say my name and talk about this horrible experience that I survived, but I'm seeing it through a lens like I am disconnected from it because I can't truly feel it. Otherwise it would be too overwhelming.
Vittoria	I went into a state of dissociation.
Vittoria	Sometimes, I wish I could just wake up from this dream. And just realize that it was just a bad movie that I was playing a role in. But, I'm living the movie. I'm really playing it out.
Vittoria	I felt like I dropped into this hole, I couldn't make sense out of it because everything was happening all at once, or too fast.
Vittoria	At first, I was in a state of denial saying that this is not happening. Then I got to the point where I had begun to acknowledge that this is really happening.

Table 14

Others Do Not Understand (Tend to Minimize)

Olivia	I think that unless you have experienced it, you don't know [what it's like].
Olivia	If the onslaught was as relentless as this has been, I don't know how, how someone else would do it. I've had people say to me, repeatedly about this, "I couldn't handle what you've been handling."
David	People say, "Oh well this happens all the time. Get over it, move on." And I say that that doesn't wash with me.
David	I never fully understood when celebrities would talk about how they were misrepresented or mischaracterized in some of these tabloids. I never fully understood or appreciated it until that happened to me.
Mama Bear	Nobody understands how this [affected me]. I've told people and they don't understand how this affected me.
Mama Bear	Get over it. Get over it. Get over it, really? It's only television. Really? You get called a pedophile in front of millions of people.
Sterling	Some people are just like, "Why don't you just ignore the trolls." But I am a sensitive person. If one person is calling me a rapist that would be unbearable, let alone 100.
Dekker	People say, "Get a normal job, just be quiet." It's what they say. I'm not going to do that, then I can't rebuild, I can't get myself, my identity back.
Dekker	A publicist told me to leave my Twitter account, take down my website and play the game. Be a repentant criminal and be sorry for what I did. And, you know, play the game. He wanted to take away that little bit of power I do have.
Aria	It was really hurtful. I felt my family didn't even really understand the impact. They didn't really understand what I was going through. I felt like no one understood what I was going through.
Aria	And my uncle said, "Hey, how are you doing since the accident?" I said, "I'm making it." He said, "So what do you do, like shock therapy or something to get over it?" When he said that, I just felt like that was so dismissive. I'm sure he was probably like, "Oh, I didn't know it was that deep." Because they didn't really know.

Aria	When you go to your family and feel like no one really understands because they don't know the depth of it, that made it even more hurtful.
Aria	I was in pain. I didn't have anyone, I didn't have friends, I didn't have family, no one understood. Everyone was looking down on me.
Aria	I was able to call [my dad] and really kind of vent out how I felt. He said to me on the phone a couple days ago, “Daughter, I never knew that this had that much of an impact on your life, I never knew it was that deep to you.” I think it's because I was shut down and I was so hurt that maybe I didn't really express it.
Vittoria	Sometimes when opportunities come, people are like, “Look it's time to just move on. Look what has happened has happened. You've got to live your life; you've got to move on. You have to discover new paths, break new grounds.”
Vittoria	I couldn't share that with anybody. I felt people would judge me if I explained to them.
Dahlia	Sometimes I have people like, “Oh she’s milking the publicity, when is she going to move on?”

Table 15

Avoidance (Triggers)

Mama Bear	I didn't show [the episode] to anybody. I didn't. Normally you go on a show and you're like, “Look I was on the show. Look look look look!” I hid in my house. I went on medication. I became like reclusive. I started drinking more. It was bad. It was dark.
Mama Bear	[The celebrity host] went on [another TV show] and reanimated and did some sort of mock thing between me and my son that, to this day I've not seen it. Because my family and friend begged me not to look at it and to this day, I haven't seen it.
Kyle	[I thought] I just don't want my mother to see this. If we can prevent my mom from seeing this, I'll be fine…I'm fine with the rest of the world if we can just prevent my mother… The worry was that when someone threatened to use the media to disparage your image, you don't want your parents to be disappointed in thinking that there's something wrong with you when there's not. It caused her great distress too.
Dahlia	I started to feel that my choice to follow my dream and to do the same thing I'm passionate about like got me into trouble. And that music almost started to feel like a hot stove.
Dahlia	The media basically punished me for being a 40-year-old woman who was also a singer. They punished me for it, so I do get very apprehensive about music. I couldn’t listen to music at my house for a few years.
Dahlia	If I make music I’m going to want to go out there and do it which means I’m going to have to face all the things, sexism, I’m going to have to face all the ageism and I’m going to have to face all the misogyny. And I actually want to do that, but there is an underlying procrastination that makes it difficult on many days to even pick up a guitar and write a song.
Vittoria	I never did figure out what was wrong with me because since this incident, I find it very difficult, even when I have the opportunity, to look for a job. I'm not keen anymore.
Vittoria	I found myself not wanting to do anything about my career and I couldn't explain it to anybody.
Vittoria	I don't want to relive the process because whenever I seek for a job, I feel that people will google my name up or will check LinkedIn, employers

	will ask for references. I don't want to relive all of that. So that has made me withdraw from everything.
Dekker	Believe it or not, those people at the gyms Googled me. I have weights at home, so I lift weights at home. I have to go outside and do it myself instead of trying to go up the normal chain of command.
Olivia	I don't [read the posts] anymore. I can't, I can't, I was literally making myself mentally and physically sick.
Briana	I remember, just days after my release and the false accusations from police, my brother and my family said [about the news coverage], “Don't even bother. Don't read it. For one thing, it's bullshit and inaccurate. Especially do not read the comments, do not read any comments at all.” And I listened to them at first.

Table 16

Impact on Economic or Material Well-Being

Sterling	They found my day job which I didn't even like, but I needed to make money. They messaged my day job over Instagram. I was let go.
Sterling	Getting dropped by a manager and an agent. They said, you know, "We support you but with everything going on it doesn't make sense for us to represent you right now.'"
Olivia	It's impacted on me financially. I wrote a book so what they do is every time my publishers would get a story about me or about the book … [the blogger] would bang out five or six or seven negative stories. To the point where my publicist is like, "You know, really? What do we do?"
Mama Bear	It's taken me years to get the confidence to come back into the [professional] arena. I was a full-on [professional] before and I had no problems being in front of the camera… had no issues before.
Mama Bear	After that incident, my heart was not there anymore, I thought the industry was disgusting. I was disgusted with the people and how could this have happened. I've worked in this industry, so it just took that away from me. I didn't want to do what I loved.
Mama Bear	The reason I wanted to do this show also is because I wanted to come back into the [professional] arena here in Los Angeles. I had come from that in New York and I wanted to get back into it, so I was also looking at this as something that was going to revitalize my career. It turned out to be the exact opposite.
Mama Bear	It took all my confidence away as a [professional]. This embarrassed me as a [professional]. I stopped working as [a professional] and I had to work in stores because I was so embarrassed. I was so horrified and mortified.
David	I had been consumed with and embroiled in litigation to try to restore my rights, and it's affected me financially, emotionally.
David	It's brought about depressions, at times, hopelessness, as it would anyone and it's further exacerbated my financial distress because of the cost.
David	All the time that I was spending dealing with all this stuff, it's time that I'm not spending trying to make money in other ways, even in a non-legal way.

Briana We couldn't return to work or work wouldn't communicate with us because of what was being reported on the media.

Briana I was just finishing the residency of the training program that I was doing at the hospital but I was in the process of starting another position in [the hospital]… after what was being said about me, [the hospital] disconnected from me. I no longer worked there.

Briana All the opportunities I had moving forward just disintegrated.

Briana Professionally, I couldn't work. Emotionally, I wasn't sure when I would return. Even if none of this was reported in the media, I probably would have returned to work because that's what grounded me.

Briana We spent over one hundred thousand dollars in attorney's fees to protect us. Even after the guy was caught, our lawyers continued working with us to help protect us in the media and the public and protect our rights as victims.

Vittoria They were saying, “You know what? These things happen in life and people misrepresent, they say things about you.” I was wondering what they were talking about. It was after that visit that I received an email from the organization that my appointment had been terminated.

Vittoria I felt it more in my career because I felt like I can't start anything again. It’s like, “Well how do I start? Wait, where do I begin? How do I get back on the lane of my career?” Because that was what my life was built around. My career was the area of my life that I was most proud of. Having accomplished so much without anything, having come this far, and in such a manner. Given the environment that I grew up in so that's a real trauma. [It’s] something that I’ve still not been able to get my head around.

Vittoria I’ve had to wait and watch what others get to be in their career, and when others really get to the top, it feels like I lost it my entire whole career. So I'm now at the bottom of that ladder.

Vittoria I've lost jobs. Psychologically, I'm almost a wreck. You know, financially I can't even start talking about it, emotionally, wow, it's massive.

Vittoria I don't want to relive the process because whenever I seek for a job, I feel that people will google my name up or will check LinkedIn, employers will ask for references. I don't want to relive all of that. So that has made me withdraw from everything. It's almost like this incident has

resulted in me not being able to do things that would change my circumstances.

Table 17

Changes in Lifeworld

Mama Bear	I work with children. I want to work more with children. I couldn't go for jobs that dealt with children.
Mama Bear	To this day, my son is afraid to put his arms around me in public.
Sterling	I don't think I'll ever be able to direct a big budget movie. Any movie I direct, it will probably be me scrounging for money, trying to do a shoestring budget thing. That means that all the things that made me happy and so forth, with the awareness that I'm not going to get to my dreams, it's very sad.
Sterling	I really want to go do standup but I'm afraid, like so many people I've never met only know me as horrible right now. What if I get on even a small comedy show, someone recognized me and the audience would start yelling "Rapist!" How do I respond to that? I don't know, I might as well just not do standup at all.
Sterling	For some reason I still have some kernel of hope that over time the truth shows through. And I've had people who care about me like, "Maybe don't count on that." You know, like, "Rapist isn't exactly a label that washes off in time. Maybe it's better to find a way to express yourself where you can be more behind the scenes."
Dahlia	I started spending a lot of time on the Internet because dealing with the outside world became so challenging that I spent an extraordinary amount of time on Facebook. A lot of people unfriended me, but I had a really great core group of people that supported me online, to just stay as sane as possible. Even though I was going insane, I did think that at the time [I got] very mentally sick from it all. I also started a blog. I blogged about it.
Dahlia	My relationship with music has totally changed and that's something that I'm working on. My day to day life has gotten a lot better but my relationship to music is what has changed the most.
Aria	I have not been in a play or anything since that happened. I stopped school for years. I actually was doing music during that time and I stopped for years. There are quite a few things that I put on pause. I just stopped.
David	The way that it's impacted me is …my life consists right now of pretty much working day and night, when other people were out with their significant [others] and friends, enjoying life, I'm out working. Around

	the clock, on the weekends, the week, the weekdays blur, merge with the weekends.
Briana	I think that [returning to work] would have been healing for me to be able to have a purpose and meaning. It might have taken a little time but certainly not as long as it took because of the re-victimization and public lies about me. It took me a year to return to work because my biggest fear was that people would recognize me, and not trust me with their care. I literally put my hands on people to help promote healing and positive energy and health. If people think that I am some shady, deceptive person, how could they ever trust me? How could I effectively do my job and help them?
Vittoria	It felt more like a personal mission to make it work. Up until that time, all I knew was that work, so I gave it the whole of me. There were a lot of things tied to the job. For me, it was more like a calling. I felt it was not just a job. It was more like I was doing something that mattered to the society. [Afterward] I found myself not wanting to do anything about my career and I couldn't explain it to anybody.

Table 18

Losses, Mourning and Grieving

Mama Bear	I was grieving the loss of my career.
Vittoria	I went into this period of depression. And then I went into a period of mourning that which I had lost. Grieving over it. I still grieve. I'm still grieving because I still wish that I could go back and just pick up from what went wrong, and just go back to my life before it all happened.
Sterling	Many tears have been shed. I remember pretty soon after the first call out. I didn't even know how bad it was going to get but I could tell a major chunk of my life has gone away.
Sterling	Any entertainment industry opportunity, any bad thing you do, and it's like, "Oh you shouldn't be given this opportunity, it should go to someone with more worthy." I still have ambitions and dreams. I want to direct movies, I want to act and I was on track to accomplishing all the dreams I had since I was 5 years old. Now I don't think I will ever be able to act on a show without there being a huge uproar and me being fired.
Briana	I think, one of the biggest, most difficult things in the first year. It was a huge loss of the life that we had before, it was completely gone. We were mourning the death of our lives and the lives that we thought that we would have, that we had worked hard for and planned for. Everything we envisioned for our lives, everything changed. Even now, every joyous moment and celebration is still met with all of this pain and trauma.
Briana	There's still a lot of moments that we grieve that life we had hoped for, that was taken from us without any of our control.
Briana	I didn't know if I'd ever be able to restore my reputation. I feared that no one would ever be able to trust me and that was really hard because that was the one of the biggest things that I could take pride in before this all happened. Professionally, I cared about people and I wanted to help them. I had always worked hard to be the best professional I could be, so I had the best chance at helping others. And all of what was being reported on and all the lies, they took that all away. That was just really, really hard to try to even face, to come forward again.
Dahlia	[Music] was taken away from me, it was like losing a piece of my soul, it was like losing a limb almost.

Dahlia	Suddenly, all of my professional accomplishments for twenty years got buried underneath these bogus headlines.
Dahlia	At many points, it just felt like life as I knew it was ending.

Table 19

Threat of Ongoing or Future Harm

Olivia	And then if, if a story is written about my book or about me or [my co-author], you can make comments. They go into those and they make comments, and I have to follow along and send things to the editors and go, “These are crazy people, could you please take those down?”
Olivia	Police won't do anything about it. And it's sad because what has to happen? So fuck, does somebody have to die before something is put into place that people aren't allowed to use their social media status, their blogs, their Twitter feeds or all this other crap to destroy somebody's life? Does somebody have to die and then we can make it like Megan's Law, you know what I'm saying? Why do we have to get to that point before we realize that this is bad? Not because it's happening to me, because it happened to so many other people, because it's happening period.
Mama Bear	Who knows if this could affect my jobs in the future? Because it could, especially if it’s working with children.
Mama Bear	And here's the thing. It's still out there. It airs, every time it airs and I know it's airing, my blood pressure goes up. I get the same feelings all over again. And [it’s been years]. It still causes my body to go into a panic attack when I see it. I start shaking.
Dekker	When I go out the door every day and I interact with people, it's always in the back of my mind. Is this person going to find out what's said about me in the media? You know, I'm always thinking that. It's always there in the corner of my mind.
Kyle	I know that it's sitting on the Internet. I've thought about running for politics and I thought, “Okay so this is sitting there on the Internet, it could be used against me at any time.” So yeah, it holds me back.
Kyle	I thought the only way it could actually harm me is in the future, making choices like career decisions, that could come back to haunt me. And I'm still kind of living in that fear.
Kyle	This week I was thinking about wanting to run for mayor of [small town]. I think somebody's going to bring that up and then I just think, you know what, I'll just tell the truth.
Kyle	I wonder if they're going to come after me like a lawsuit threat again. So in that way it kind of inhibits me from being courageous in certain areas in my life, just thinking to have to muster that whole thing up again.

Kyle	It makes me feel a little bit scared only because I know this person who watched that is somebody that's into social media, somebody that could, at any minute, try to create me trouble. It's like if somebody had dirty pictures on you. These aren't dirty pictures but it's character assassination.
Kyle	I just get scared that all of a sudden [an influencer] will want to blog about it. Because he has a very popular blog in my industry. It's weird having something, it's almost like a threat, because it's not nudie pictures, it is something you can share and not have a legal consequence. But it's probably to me far more destructive than nudie pictures.
Sterling	We've experienced every kind of emotional assault and are still afraid of that happening in the future.
Sterling	People think a callout is just something that happens on Instagram and you move on. But it affects every aspect of your real life—socially, romantically, professionally, financially, emotionally, even physically, all my anxiety-induced vomiting. And the effects continue for years.
Grace	Despite the pain and anguish I've felt over the years, I do not fear future harm from past media misrepresentation.
David	It's abuse, it's legal abuse, it's financial abuse, psychological abuse, physiological abuse. It's sort of a living nightmare where I'm not living a normal life.
Dahlia	I believe that the harm done to my reputation has been so great, that the only way to minimize it is now to make it a part of me. The story will never go away, nor will the Internet footprint.
Briana	I am fearful every time I see a police car and I don't want to speak to officers. I'm afraid of them and I never thought that I'd be in that position. I don't know if I'll leave the house one day and media's going to swarm again because something else comes up.
Briana	I felt always like if it wasn't the kidnappers who were going to come after me again, if it wasn't the police and the FBI and media, it was going to be some lunatic from wherever who hates women and [becomes, in their mind] a part of saving the world from people like me.
Briana	I was the poster child of the problem with society today, the problem with millennials, the problem with women. How am I supposed to know what people will do with that, how far they'll go?

Briana	This was an exposure to a level of hatred and people taking matters into their own hands, feeling like they're entitled to do so. It opened me up and my family up to being threatened on a whole new level.
Briana	Nothing felt safe for me. I don't think that will ever fully go away. But at the same time, you have to tell yourself that you're safe because you were under the public eye so much, like in a way, it's kind of a protection. If (my partner) and I were to be attacked again then this would be all over the news and whoever attacked us could more easily be caught.
Vittoria	Any time anybody [searches], for my name, when you just want to do a quick search on me, that's the first thing that you find out.
Vittoria	It's the article written about a US funded project. So any individual within the developmental world would have access to that article. Continuously, that's the first thing that comes out about me.
Vittoria	It's like I don't want to relive the rejection, I don't want to relive the experiences of the past, for this issue to come up.

Recovery and Healing

There were certain common themes in the arena of healing, redemption, and growth.

Interpersonal Support. Perhaps the most powerful refrain was having support from family, friends, healing professionals. The power of being-with, or mitsein, was essential to healing. Vittoria explained, "Social support was actually at the core of my ability to cope." She described the importance of having family support because they love you unconditionally and do not judge. Affirming the importance of social support, Mama Bear said, "Thank goodness that I had people around me to see the bright part of it." Briana shared, "The biggest thing was support from my friends and family and my partner. Those are the things that I know that I'm really lucky in, and that other victims and survivors might not have that."

> If I'm not feeling well, I'm having a hard time, or having a hard day, it was helpful just to admit it. My partner and I, we were really empathetic and compassionate towards each other. There were moments where I would be the strong one, or he would be the strong one, or we both were just having a hard time, like, today's a wash. I'm not going to get up. The biggest thing I'm going to do today is get out of bed, eat, and that's okay. (Briana)

Mama Bear, Olivia, Vittoria, and Grace described getting strength and motivation to recover from their children. Several also mentioned the importance of their trusted, lifelong friends in their healing journey. Olivia added that outside perspective can be helpful too.

> You have to have hope. You have to have someone that's not associated with what's going on. A fresh set of eyes because someone that loves you, that's your friend or your family or your colleague or whatever, really can't give you the aspect of what is going on to the rest of the world.

Professional Therapy. This is the healing role a therapist can play. Briana explains, "Going to therapy was absolutely one of the things that helped the most." She also references self-reflection, which is a tool of mindfulness. "After a lot of self-reflection and therapy, I connected with myself again, realizing that these are the things that I'm proud of and the things that I worked hard for and I can still be myself, I don't have to hide." Dekker, Sterling, Olivia, and Dahlia also stressed the importance of their therapists. Although Dahlia did not get into therapy right away, she explains why. However, she found it incredibly healing when she did. Her advice to others is, "Get a therapist right away. If there's something I would have done differently, I would have got straight into therapy, I just didn't have the skills to actually research a therapist and pick up a phone."

Spirituality. Vittoria, Mama Bear, Grace, and Aria referenced their religious beliefs, or spirituality, as a primary source of strength for them. Grace explained the resources that helped her heal and cope.

> Number one, God. I praise him above everyone, and I credit God for my health, my strength and my kids' health, for their strength. God number one and the strength, the strong connections my family all have. We all are very, very, strongly connected.

Olivia said, "I've made it as long as I've made it through all the things that I've gone through because I have a very strong belief in God. So, it's my faith that keeps me going." Aria's faith in God was also essential for her healing path. Although once seemingly stuck in a truly

dark and dismal place, in hindsight, she credits God for helping her pull through. “For me personally, it's if you have faith in God, He can get you through anything. What seems impossible to you is totally possible with God.”

> It makes me so angry, but I also know God has a huge plan, that there's a couple of things that have kept me sane. One is God knowing that there's no way I would have had these kids if He didn't have a huge plan for my kids and I, to help people in some monolithic manner that's going to be eye-opening. (Grace)

> And I made that conscious decision to trust, put all my trust and faith in God knowing He's going to help guide the way. And let go and never put my trust and faith in fellow human beings, I don't. Because we're all broken and imperfect people in varying degrees. And I, yeah, that's when I started to feel far more powerful and got to probably more than I ever did. (Grace)

Nature and Animals. The emotional value provided by nature and animals was also a source of strength and healing for some. Olive found comfort in her dog. She said, “The thing that probably kept me together, the thing that kept me together was, it's crazy, my dog. She’s my therapy dog.”

Dahlia stated that when she thought about suicide, her concern for her cat’s welfare played an important part in helping her keep perspective. She explained,

> I had adopted two senior cats and even when I was suicidal, I just thought about the cats. If I end my life what’s going to happen to my cats? You know, they’re like my children so that was actually the number one thing that got me through.

Briana described how accepting her feelings, being mindful, and savoring life in nature contributed to her well-being.

> It's okay to not be okay and doing whatever I can to connect myself to positive energy. So a lot of that would be my pets, my animals or being out in nature was really helpful. Just to be able to feel the energy of the world and what it has to offer, and the joys of being alive, and having a chance at life and taking the time to acknowledge it, say it out loud, even if it was something as simple as a pretty bird that I've never seen before but taking the time to acknowledge and appreciate it, was helpful.

Medication/Substances. Grace, Sterling, and Mama Bear went on antidepressants which helped them make it through their darkest moments. Dahlia turned to alcohol to numb her feelings for a period of time. “Sobriety went out the door. I needed to maintain that dull feeling at all times because I was not ready to feel how I really felt about the situation.”

> I would constantly need to go to a bar. If I didn’t have a glass of wine in me by 2 pm, I needed one. I would go to a bar but I would always make sure I would go to a different bar each time. I would tell the bartender my story; anyone could hear the story one time and be fascinated. I think for this first six months I had to keep my emotions dull at all costs, I wasn't ready to actually feel the totality of what had actually happened. (Dahlia)

She also turned to cannabis. “I smoked a ton of marijuana. A ton. Because everything felt so surreal that I didn't want to really feel anything.” Aria also used drugs. “I think I was trying to mask the pain. All I could think about at the time was, I want to smoke [marijuana] again. I just wanted to smoke. It allowed me to get away from it all.” She wanted to find some peace. “I wanted to laugh. I wanted to have those joyful moments, those experiences.” Looking back on it, she understands why she did it. “It was my way of trying to self-soothe, trying to self-medicate. I was trying to find that peace when I felt like I didn't have it. I was trying to give myself tranquility when it didn't exist around me.”

Mama Bear explains, “When I first dealt with it, I had to deal with it while on medication, I had to be medicated, that's how bad this was.” However, now she’s in a different place. “I'm not on antidepressants anymore because now I work in the industry of recovery. I work in holistic recovery. I've dealt with this now in a holistic fashion.”

Physical Endeavors. For some, they use physical fitness as an outlet for healing. Dekker works out at home. Olivia discovered aerial silks.

> [I’ve been doing] aerial silks and found that it just stretched my body enough that my pain went away. And not only did my pain go away, my strength grew, I felt my strength growing, my confidence grew, I made a whole new group of amazing wonderful friends.

For Grace, living a healthy lifestyle is foundational. This impacts not only herself, but her children.

> Healthy, healthy lifestyle is also been absolutely the most significant, I believe, in keeping us all mentally, physically, healthy and resilient because I'm an ethical, mostly plant-based, predominantly raw vegan. I climb about 50 miles a week.

They are all athletic as well. Grace and her children have run marathons of varying lengths.

Creative Pursuits. For some participants, they expressed themselves through creative outlets. Briana says, “I painted, then had other creative outlets that were healing.” Aria went back into creating music and performing.

> So long story short, I'm finally back at school to finish that degree, my undergrad that I started years ago. I have two classes left. I do things from video directing to working on music to writing music. I perform. There are a lot of things I do now. I'm able to get back to me, into that place of freedom that I once had and love. (Aria)

Dahlia created and directed a music video with lyrics that expressed a healing message. During the video, she depicted her MHM story by showing some of the demeaning headlines on the screen, then she portrayed her anguish with a moving, emotional performance. In true story form, you see the character arc where Dahlia finds renewed strength and decides to take her life back. There is a scene where Dahlia gets a tattoo, a real tattoo, that has her age on it. When I told her that I had watched the video link she sent and I found it moving, she responded.

> I’m getting emotional now. It was such a beautiful experience to just be able to put it into art. It was my first time directing like I directed it and came up with the concept and it’s the actually the only time I’ve been in the driver’s seat for a music video. The [major publication] and all those articles were so mean-spirited, and it was designed to shut me down and make me not want to sing and hide under a rock. But just the fact that I did the opposite, and just like getting that [tattoo]. Probably my favorite moment that I’ve ever had in any music video that I’ve done was that moment I was getting that tattoo with my age tattooed on my wrist, with the lyrics “feel no shame.” It was part of the transformation and part of the healing. It was a huge part. And also telling the story, I wanted people to really understand where I was really coming from. (Dahlia)

Making Sense of Things / Acceptance. The biggest concept that helped people cope and recover was to make sense out of something that otherwise did not make sense. For Briana, this included "being able to talk about it, reading and writing about it, being honest about it." Other supportive people in her life helped facilitate this. "Whether or not some of my family and friends really wanted to hear about what I was going through, they were really kind in listening to me." Grace, Dahlia, Dekker, Mama Bear, and Briana all either wrote books or are in the process of writing their stories. Grace is grateful she started writing right away because otherwise she would have remembered only a more sanitized version of her experience. She said, "I will immediately try to glean out the good. I'll reframe it into something good. I'm so grateful I started really writing a lot after I had the eight. I wrote so many details about all of the horrible experiences."

Writing helps people make sense of their lives, especially the emotional or traumatic situations (Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Foley, 2017; Pennebaker, 1997). When people cannot make sense of unfortunate events, it is difficult to heal, and the wounds stay raw and open. MHM is a monumental experience to grasp because it is an undeserved humiliating event, and it is outside the realm of what human beings expect. Aria explains, "I tried the entire time I was trying to make meaning of it, but at the time I couldn't find anything. All I knew was what was inside of me. What was in front of me was I was hurting." She had a mountain of confusion. "Normally I'm good at figuring things out, figuring out what I could have done differently so I could learn from it, learn whatever the lesson is. But in this case, I could not."

> Usually in everything there's a lesson that I can figure out or pick up on. There's a Bible verse that relates to it that I can [use to] help someone. In this situation, I could not help myself. I could not find something besides, well, maybe this is a part of my testimony for later? I mean there was nothing I could figure out. (Aria)

Participants also made sense out of things by trying to educate themselves about media psychology and processes; for example, the process of public shaming, the motives behind trolling, what drives television networks. Grace explains, “They villainize because they know it's going to increase the ratings.”

> And it's just something I want people, the public, to really learn about. Like you cannot believe anything out there at all. It's probably just lies, propaganda, catastrophizing anything, sometimes they just pull out lies out of thin air because they know it's going sell. You know it is. Negative will always prevail, unfortunately, in regard to sales, more than being positive.

Sterling explains what he has learned. “Public shaming is like a snowballing effect and usually the punishment does not fit the crime.” He explains that he is “still trying to figure out how to make some sense out of all that. I don’t know that social media shaming is this new thing as a culture. We’re going to have to figure out that responsibly.” Discussing the situation with others has been helpful to him. “Anyone I’ve actually sat down and talked about this with agrees that this sort of went off the rails very early on in the shaming process.” Sterling has found a way to understand why the people are doing what they are doing.

> I feel like I'm intelligent and I can sort of put things into perspective. Like I'm aware of the cultural trends and know it makes sense to me that I'm being held up and people are projecting their past traumas onto me and their traumas are valid and I, you know, I even empathize with the people who told me to kill myself because I don't think they're telling me to kill myself. I think they're telling someone who hurt them to kill themselves. I feel like I can at least my intelligence to rationalize and makes sense of everything. (Sterling)

Briana reached a point where she needed to read and understand what people were saying. This was part of her process to make sense of things.

> As hard as it is, when I was reading through a lot of the bad articles and the comments and the messages that were sent to me, it was helpful to see it because, whether or not I saw it, I certainly felt it. It was there. It's not like, just because I don't see it, it doesn't exist. It was helpful for me to be able to really get the big picture of everything that was going on, and process it, and reprocess it. I think talking about it whenever we can is empowering because, especially when it's been on the media and recycled and through so

> many different people, all these different people have had a chance to talk about this experience, and oftentimes it's inaccurate in small ways, or in big ways. (Briana)

Briana also stresses the importance of acceptance, pointing out that there is nothing you can do about what has already happened.

> You kind of have to be humble in it and accept it, the situation you're in, to have compassion for yourself and to just go, “It's going to take a while, it might take a long time and it's going to be really hard, but there's a lot to live for and there's a lot of good.” It just takes a lot of effort to see it at first, and then it gets easier. (Briana)

Aria shares a similar refrain.

> I feel like I've come to a place of peace and love and forgiveness over the entire thing. And that definitely comes from my faith as well. Just that sense of just letting go and having that peace. I think overall that played the biggest role in my life of having the peace I have today. (Aria)

Kyle creates his own meaning. “I can de-escalate the potential negative impacts on my life pretty quickly within seconds because I can feel myself creating meaning. I have talent to de-escalate the meaning, generate the meaning.” Aria explained that one thing she learned was that maybe what happened was not purposely intended to hurt her.

> The real lesson is that sometimes it's not always about self. It's not always about you. Maybe the media wasn't trying to say let's get [Aria] today. Maybe it wasn't really that bad. Now they could have done a lot better. But I think for me, just coming to a place of just forgiving and letting go, I think helped me gain that power back. (Aria)

Kyle came to the conclusion that, “the people who saw it just didn't know who I am anyway, so it doesn't really matter.” Dekker also refuses to let the media portrayals carve out his identity.

> The media misrepresentations--I don't let those define me. I know that they're out there and I know that whenever I meet somebody, sooner or later if we're going to have any kind of business relationship or anything, I'm going to have to explain to them and counter all this stuff in the media. So I already know that going in and I know 10 percent of people are not going accept it. But you know, it's made me feel more secure than ever.

> The way I look at it I just have to like, let it go, just accept it that it was a mistake I made, and that my partner and I made, one more time just believing in other people. Believing that everyone has your best at heart isn't necessarily a reality. (Kyle)

Although this situation is still negatively impacting Vittoria's life, she is nonetheless seeing it as an opportunity to have a fresh start.

> It's still ongoing, I'm still upset, still on the journey of rediscovery, to find who I was and to begin to find meaning from the incident. It is an opportunity to reinvent myself, to begin to build, to say this is who I want to be, to begin to write a new narrative. That's the good part of it. (Vittoria)

> Just taking those little moments of gratitude and to name and appreciate the beauties and the joys of life. But also, to still be honest with myself about the hard times I was going through, that was helpful. I think it's helpful to just self-reflect in any way you can, whether you talk to someone or you write about it. (Briana)

> There were already false reports and lies out there and that's all they [the media and public] have to go on. They might not be aware of it, but they might be perpetuating the lie all over again. That's where it can get kind of tricky and I don't fault people in the media for that. That's why it's important for us to be able to say what happened in our way to the fullest extent that we can because no matter what, people can have the best intentions but it's still going to be cut and edited and put in to a story that is not cut and edited by us, the people they are writing about. (Briana)

Post-Traumatic Growth

For some, enduring the fiery tribulation of MHM can be a springboard to post-traumatic growth. A few themes emerged from the participant interviews.

A Clearer Sense of Self. Sterling summed it up. "Being so ruthlessly shamed I think helped me find a better sense of self-worth." Briana says, "I changed a lot but then I also haven't changed. I'm the same person in a lot of ways. I guess some of the things about myself have become more rooted and even stronger."

> I've certainly been forced to learn how to not care what other people think about me as much, because I do care what people think. I mean, I'm a human. Just figuring out that public opinion isn't always correct, and I need to find something deeper within myself to motivate me. Not necessarily, you know, getting a lot of Instagram likes because I think that's where I was deriving a lot of my self-worth from as an Internet comedian. When things did well on the Internet and went viral, to me, that was like, "Oh I did something

> right. I'm a valid person." I think that was a little unhealthy. So I've been forced out of that world. (Sterling)

> After a lot of self-reflection and therapy, I connected with myself again, realizing that these are the things that I'm proud of and the things that I worked hard for and I can still be myself, I don't have to hide. I think in some ways, I'm even more sure of who I am now. Some of the things that I have been working on and wanted to keep working on then, I'm even more determined to grow and learn from. (Briana)

> Since my friends and family knew the real me, though the world all around only knew of this false identity, I felt like I was fighting [over one decade] for the death of that media made up false identity and the revival of my true self. I never quit on myself. I knew truth would surface over time. By taking control over my life, sharing the truth about my real self, and refuting the media's misrepresentation of me, my true identity is now alive and well; though stronger, and more resilient. (Grace)

A Stronger, Better Person. Mama Bear, a highly sensitive woman by her own description, explained that this experience helped give her a thicker skin. Dahlia explains, "I'm a completely different person because of it. There are some positive things, I would say the number one way it has changed me is that I always listen to my intuition now."

> One thing I know for sure is, if anything happens negatively, traumatically in the future in whatever extreme, we can figure it out through rock bottom. You realize you can climb out of it so I know that as hard as anything can be, that we can get through it and lead a happy life. (Briana)

> I think I've become much stronger than I was. I was a strong person when I went to prison, in the Marines and all that, but I am so much stronger now. When you go through Marine boot camp, you really can't be intimidated after that. But I just ten times'd more than that, 100 times more. (Dekker)

> I do think it's made me a better person in the long run, even though it was a horrific event. Just the fact that I survived it, I'm kind of amazed at what I can handle that life has thrown me. But I felt this loss of identity. It was like I had to completely lose myself to build myself back up again. It was almost like a death and a rebirth in a way, but it took a long time. (Dahlia)

> I have my own rules, my own code of honor. I have all these rules, that I'm very moral, and you know one thing I learned? You just have to keep going and trusting yourself no matter what anybody else says. (Dekker)

> What came from it is being able to give strength to others. Like no matter what you go through, like, you will get through this. I think that's my biggest message of all out of all this. (Aria)

Deeper Insights. Sterling developed an enriched voice for his writing and his experience deepened his understanding of himself and his view of humanity. He stated,

> I'm grateful for being kicked out of this extreme leftist community because I think that was part of what was hurting my mental health. It's so ruthless and black and white. And stepping back from that and realizing every human being is an ambiguous mixture of good and bad, I think that helped me become a better writer. Again, I think I have a healthier outlook on humanity now that I've been forcibly ejected from a militant social justice group, not that I feel any less strongly about progressive values or stuff like that. I just now realize not everything is black and white. You know, it's just learning, being forced to come to my own conclusions about what do I value about myself.

Kyle came into his experience already knowing that he could generate his own meaning to distressing experiences. This ability helped him on his road to recovery. While he was blind-sided that professionals would have in them to intentionally want to deceive and destroy the reputations of others for money, Kyle has mined his experience in search of a bright side: At least he has gained new insights and will be more filtering of people's motives.

Aria explained how she has come to realize that a person can only control her personal perception.

> One thing you can control is you and how you perceive the outside of world, and how it affects you. The internal is what you have control over, and I think it took me a while to get here. And it's funny saying that after I just cried my eyes out five minutes ago. But it's true. (Aria)

After Mama Bear's MHM experience, she explains, "I went to [a religious center] and I prayed…that brought the good. It brought me back to my spirituality, it made me understand humans more."

Positive New Perspectives and Increased Appreciation. For Aria, after she weathered the storm, her experience ultimately built her faith.

> What seemed like it was the ultimate, “I cannot go through this,” what felt like, “I don't want to wake up tomorrow,” what felt like, “I'm not loved. I'm not kept, no one's caring what it felt like,” [seemed] impossible for me to bear, was possible with God. (Aria)

> I would say it's an opportunity, a rare gift of starting all over. It's a rare gift. Not everybody would have that opportunity. That comes with a lot of pain. Forgive me if it sounds too graphic, but it's a sacrifice, of both tears and blood. Obviously huge sacrifices because you're starting all over again. No friends, no finances. It's like everything is starting from nothing, from zilch. (Vittoria)

> I have a better view of the world as a whole. I've seen some extreme negatives that I would have hoped to have never seen, but I've also seen the amazing amount of support and love that people can give. Although sometimes I'm saddened by some of the experiences, I'm also very hopeful and grateful to other people that inspire and support and can give you hope and love. (Briana)

Fortified Personal Boundaries. Briana explains, “I'm a lot more sensitive to people and their energy and who I invite in and who I don’t. Hopefully that will make us good parents and help us in a lot of other situations moving forward.” Dahlia said, “I have developed a zero-tolerance policy for ageism, misogyny, sexism or any kind of -ism.” This was an evolution for her. “Before this had happened, I had people in the industry be like, “Oh you’re too old,” and now I have zero-tolerance for that.”

> Now I won’t even associate with people who say that. I don’t associate with people who body shame. If I have a casual friend and they make body shaming comments about somebody I don’t even want to be friends with that person. Now there’s a very large portion of the music industry that I will not even interact with because I have zero-tolerance for that. (Dahlia)

> Now when I get that intuition about people places or things, I listen to it, and I don’t question it. If my gut says don’t go that audition, don’t hang out with that person, don’t take that job, even if things look fine on the surface I listen to my intuition. (Dahlia)

A New Purpose--Helping Others. For some of the participating survivors of MHM, helping others has always been part of their identity. This experience, however, provided new fuel and new direction. For others, a new purpose emerged. Grace will be sharing her story to help others. She says, “By me speaking my truth and sharing with others my experiences of the false narrative being spun by the media, I can help prevent harm being inflicted onto others in

the future." Aria also considers it a beautiful thing to now have a story to be able to provide comfort to others. "I'm now using what hurt me in a good way to help others." Grace explains that her "focus is on helping others, as opposed to myself. That is the secret to happiness. Getting over yourself, out of your head, and trying to make a positive impact in other people's lives."

> It feels like it would be a better contribution to society for me to continue talking about this. And to remain accountable. I don't want to deny I've ever hurt anyone. But I remain firm. I've never forced someone against their will to do anything, and in any way I can use my platform to show people what psychological torture public shaming is, especially since shaming is increasingly weaponized by people who are searching for social justice, I would like my platform to advocate in whatever way helpful. (Sterling)

> I think a lot of times we go through things so that we can help others get through it. It's kind of like, if I can carry that heavy cross on my back so that I can help millions, even though I had to go through the pain, then it's worth it. (Aria)

> I've now seen this secret about how the media operates, like we all know that the media is kind of messed up but I got an actual back stage pass to it. I knew that there was a responsibility to communicate this, to let other people know how it operates, both with the media and the legal system. (Dahlia)

> For the longest time I kept thinking, "Is this random? Does it have purpose?" And I feel that speaking up both about the lawsuit, what I went through in the legal system, and what I went through in the media, it's almost like my life's work now. Like it's more important to me than the music now. (Dahlia)

Dahlia explains how driven she is to make change. She does not want to be silenced because her MHM experience has become a platform for creating change. "I don't want to live in a society where we can just drag someone and change their lives with a click-bait headline. I want it to be a conversation, and this feels like a really good place to start."

> It makes me feel grateful that I stood my ground and stuck to my guns. A lot of people have told me that I should move on, not talk about it, change my name, distance myself from the media articles, but beyond the book, all the legal work I've done and stuff, I just feel like this is a story I need to tell over and over and over until the public gets it, and until members of the media get it too.

For some, this experience also launched a new purpose unrelated to MHM. Dahlia championed a new law against legal abuse. Mama Bear became an advocate for children. She

explains, “This [MHM experience] infuriated me so much, that's why I went out there and I became an advocate for children that are molested. I would never have done that.”

> It's been really motivating and inspiring to see other survivors speak out and talk and what that's done for us is priceless. If we can [we’d like to] pay it forward and do our part in keeping the conversation alive, and to increase awareness about what it's like to be in these situations. (Briana)

Kyle also wanted to share his experience with the hope it would help others. He described the need for changes to prevent more people from being harmed, including requiring ethics boards over reality shows. He describes his motive for participating in this study. “I wanted to participate just in the hopes that somebody reads what you're doing and says, ‘Hey you know what? This is wrong. People in powerful positions shouldn't be doing this.’ That's why I wanted to participate.” He would like to see changes made, including an ethics hotline for those participating on reality shows.

> [The producers] should have been required by some kind of governing board as a reality program to provide me that information when I applied to know that if at any time anything has happened…ethically…I should have had a lifeline. They should be required to provide that. Because I would have called it every time and met with them. (Kyle)

Olivia, Dekker and David expressed their concerns about how First Amendment rights are being violated by misrepresentative media, and something should be done about it.

> All I know is something has to be done regarding the laws around social media, blogs...I don't believe our first amendment right, freedom of speech, was meant for exploitation, hate speech, and humiliation. Many people have committed suicide over the words that are written hidden behind these faceless names, something needs to be done to stop this. (Olivia)

Several participants pointed out that although disparaging media has harmed them, they have also had positive experiences with the media. They give credit to the many ethical, caring media professionals and organizations that fact-check and have done excellent journalism. All of the participants acknowledge that the media has the power to do the right thing, to change the world for the better. Once in the media, you are known. You can potentially parlay your

notoriety into something positive. Briana says, “There's a lot of good in media and the reporting and the fact that we've been so exposed, and we're out there allows us to have a platform to maybe speak to other victims.” Grace acknowledges that she also has the opportunity to help others that she would not have had. “There's many different components and aspects to what I've been through. I believe God is going to use my kids and I to help people significantly in this world. I see it unfolding already.”

More Sensitivity for Others. As might be obvious, going through this experience creates a new level of empathy for others who are being disparaged in the media. It makes one question whether the story being told is even the true story. Grace says that she believes very little of what is said about people in the media. Although I did not ask this question directly, it seems that it motivated people to be more civil and sensitive online themselves. Sterling said, “I sort of contributed to this other person's call out which I feel bad about now.” David used to gloss over complaints by celebrities when they were upset by how they were portrayed in the tabloids. Now he gets it. “I never fully understood or appreciated it until that happened to me.”

Dahlia has become tuned in to age-shaming and body-shaming in a whole new way.

> If someone makes an age shaming comment about themselves or about somebody else, I speak up. If somebody makes a body shaming comment about themselves, I’m like please don’t talk to yourself that way, I speak up each and every time now. (Dahlia)

Briana explains how her experience has given her more empathy and understanding when dealing with her patients.

> I think in some ways it's helped me going through trauma and having to be so transparent about it, has helped me working with a patient to deal with pain and injury. Being in really difficult times in my life and having that experience myself--trauma is trauma, no matter the degree, or where it's at, or how it happened, the bodies process trauma the same way--having that experience myself has helped me to dig deeper with some of my patients about how the trauma is affecting them. (Briana)

Increased Fearlessness. Several participants describe how this experience has filled them with a newfound boldness. Dekker said that although he was a marine and thought he was fearless before, now he is 100 times more so.

> I'm not scared of anything. I'm literally I'm not scared of anything. Ten cops can surround me yelling, I tell them to fuck off in a calm way. Like fuck you. I'm not scared. You can arrest me. You could take me to jail. You could hit me with a baton, I'm not scared. I'm never going to be scared. So it's a very good asset. (Dekker)

Dahlia discloses that she used to have a fear about revealing her true age. After what she has been through, now she has no worries at all.

> Basically, calling out the media saying this is wrong, you have no right to shame us for our age… I spent my thirties lying about my age and before this incident happened. I'm lying about my age a lot to the point where I couldn't remember what I told anybody about how old I was that day. This made me really stand up against ageism. [Now I am] unashamed and unapologetic about my age. (Dahlia)

Mama Bear explains that it took her years to get to this point, but now she would look forward to publicly debating the celebrity host that tried to take her down. He no longer has power over her. She is strong enough now. "He can't do anything to me and I'm not afraid of him. I'm not afraid of anybody anymore. It's really interesting what he has done to me now. I have absolutely no fear on pretty much anything now."

> I would never have … become an advocate for this now, had I not been completely destroyed in the media, where I have no fear, I have no fear of anything now. I am fearless so I don't care. I will go forward and I will fight for it, for children in the future. I have changed laws now because I have become fearless. Thank you [celebrity host], you created a warrior. (Mama Bear)

> Believe you have it within you. That you can do it again and with well-wishers, even if you have just one person on your bandwagon, you have that belief in you, that drop of encouragement, that drop of positivity can actually grow into something massive. And when you look back through the years, you will be grateful. Yes, you will be grateful. (Vittoria)

Quantitative Results

Although this study primarily focuses on qualitative results using a hermeneutic phenomenological framework, a quantitative element was also used to provide triangulation regarding verifying reported trauma by these participants. To gain additional insight about whether MHM is experienced as a traumatic event, 11 additional participants filled out the trauma scales, for a total of 22. In this process, a chi-square test of independence was conducted on each scale to see if there was a significant relationship between the results of each survey and age.

PDHO and Age. The null hypothesis is that age is independent of the scale. In order to reject the null hypothesis, the significance must be < .05. In this case, the significance is .147, which is greater than .05, so the null cannot be rejected.

CES Scale and Age. In order to reject the null hypothesis, the significance must be < .05. In this case, the significance is .801, which is >.05, indicating there is no relationship between age and the CES results.

Gender and PDHO. A chi-square test was run to text a relationship between gender and each scale. For the PDHO and gender, in order to reject the null hypothesis, the significance must be < .05. In this case, the significance is .413 which is >.05, so the null hypothesis is not rejected, meaning there is no significant relation between age and the PDHO results.

Gender and CES. A chi-square test was run to text a relationship between gender and the CES. In order to reject the null hypothesis, the significance must be < .05. In this case, the significance is .198, so again, there is no relationship between the variable gender and survey results.

Table 20

Results from the PDHO

Statistics						
		1. To what extent did you experience a sense of being stripped of your humanity by the media?	2. To what extent did you feel exploited and used like an object by the media?	3. To what extent did you feel humiliated by the media?	4. To what extent did you feel that you were denied control over your story by the media?	5. To what extent did you feel that your personal life was thoughtlessly invaded by the media?
N	Valid	22	22	22	22	22
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.36	3.73	3.82	3.91	3.77
Median		4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Mode		4	4	4	4	4
Std. Deviation		.790	.550	.395	.294	.612
Variance		.623	.303	.156	.087	.374
Sum		74	82	84	86	83
Percentiles	25	3.00	3.75	4.00	4.00	4.00
	50	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
	75	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00

Table 21

Results from the Centrality of Events Scale

Statistics

		6. I feel that this event has become part of my identity.	7. This event has become a reference point for the way I understand myself and the world.	8. I feel that this event has become a central part of my life story.	9. This event has colored the way I think and feel about other experiences.	10. This event permanently changed my life.	11. I often think about the effects this event will have on my future.	12. This event was a turning point in my life.
N	Valid	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		4.1818	4.3182	3.82	4.45	4.68	4.64	4.50
Median		4.5000	5.0000	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Mode		5.00	5.00	5	5	5	5	5
Std. Deviation		1.00647	.89370	1.332	.858	.716	.658	.964
Variance		1.013	.799	1.775	.736	.513	.433	.929
Minimum		2.00	2.00	1	2	2	3	1
Maximum		5.00	5.00	5	5	5	5	5
Sum		92.00	95.00	84	98	103	102	99

A correlation test for association was conducted to find whether there was a significant relationship between two trauma scales, the Centrality of Events scale and the PDHO scale.

H_0 – The null hypothesis is that there will be no significant relationship (>.05) between the severity of the PDHO scale and the Centrality of Events scale.

H_1 – The alternative is that there will be a significant relationship (<.05) between the severity of PDHO scale and the Centrality of Events scale.

Table 22

Pearson Correlation

Correlations

		Q28Q32	Q35Q50
Q28Q32	Pearson Correlation	1	.560**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007
	N	22	22
Q35Q50	Pearson Correlation	.560**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	
	N	22	22

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In order to reject the null hypothesis, the significance must be < .05. In this case, the significance was .007, showing a strongly significant relationship.

Conclusion

The quantitative results from 22 participants, and the lived experience of 11 participants were presented in living color. There was no difference in responses mediated by gender or age ranges. Common meanings, shared practices, and emergent themes arose out of the existentials of ‘Dasein’ as the horizons of understanding fused in the foreground. Participants shared their anguish and heartbreak as well as the ways they found strength for healing and coping. In some cases, participants experienced post-traumatic growth. Chapter Five will discuss the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

This study addresses the questions about the nature of the lived MHM experience, about whether MHM should be considered a traumatic experience, whether the MHM experience for trauma survivors is different than the MHM experience for non-trauma survivors, and what are the shared meanings and common practices of those who have been through it. Langdridge (2007) defines phenomenology as a discipline that "aims to focus on people's perceptions of the world in which they live in and what it means to them; a focus on people's lived experience" (p.4). In researching the lived experience of 11 participants, I have immersed myself in their lifeworld stories, followed the links, watched the videos, or read the books about their experiences as they shared them. This is consistent with hermeneutic phenomenological research as it welcomes biographies, logs, diaries, journals, art, and other artifacts as sources of insight for lived experiences (Van Manen, 2018). I have acknowledged my own pre-understandings and prejudices by framing them as lenses, or filters of expectation. At the same time, I have assumed that my lenses might produce no such manifestations at all, so, as if searching for a lost ring, I have metaphorically looked behind the furniture and under the rugs, to make sure it really is, or is not, there. What I have expected has borne out. I will briefly summarize beginning with the five hermeneutic existentials.

Materiality and technology. Stiegler (1998) points out that one of the transformative transactions of technology is that it creates “a mirror effect whereby one, looking at itself in the other, is both deformed and formed in the process” (p. 158). This could not be truer than when one looks upon the misrepresented image of oneself as projected to the world. One might think, it looks like me. It talks like me. They used my name to label this virtual avatar of me, but it is not me at all. It is a molded, twisted, misshapen, silly putty creation made out of my image. To

look upon it or read about it, I see similarities. Yes, I see my face, but in the disparaging way it has been stretched and framed, it lacks the me-ness of me. Nevertheless, that representation somehow holds power over me, as if, in the contrast between me and my avatar me, I am driven to reduce the tension and make us one. Dahlia describes her obsession with correcting the story. Grace explains that she found herself morphing into the fictional character created by the media. "I kind of became that character slowly, while feeling more and more deeply shamed…I became morphed into…this false narrative, false identity."

Perhaps how we see ourselves represented in the media seeps into our mental representations of ourselves. Studies on the "proteus effect" reveal that the characteristics individuals see in the virtual avatars they choose can have influence over their offline behavior (Yee et al., 2009; Yee & Bailenson, 2007). A study by McCain et al. (2018) found that people try not to embody the avatar qualities they find undesirable. Whether these forces involve the influence of priming, reducing cognitive dissonance, symbolic interactionism, or some other psychological construct, the presented versions of our images may very well have influence upon us, a concept I call "mediated representation assimilation." It is fitting that Stiegler (2008) admonished people to take the reins in their digital domains because he predicted that they would be confronted with the possibilities for new controls, new judgments, and new selves that arise out of the cybersphere.

Spatiality. When someone has been delivered a media proclamation that they are no longer worthy to be embraced as a part of the cared-about community, or society in general, it infects every corner of that person's world. One's safe haven, the home, suddenly does not feel safe anymore. It has been transformed into a command center for survival; even the look of it has changed. The tubes of media technology that delivered the message of public disdain and

rejection remain right there, in the same home, reminding the targeted one there is no escape. It follows the target. Offensive or terrifying messages can break through the safety wall of the home via email, the smart phone, in social media, on TV, in the print news at any hour of the day. Olivia explained that every time she hears a notification alert on her phone, her body shudders. Yet, she needs her phone and her alerts for support and survival. It is her constant companion. This makes it difficult to find a space where she, or anyone, can truly escape.

Every time the target goes in public, there is concern about whether they will be recognized, hated, or harmed. Sterling wonders how someone knew when he and Skye rode their bikes to the local café. Briana wonders how the media knew to fly helicopters over the hospital when she arrived, and if someone unsavory will try to come find her at work. Survivors of MHM often have to confront space-related stressors they never had before. These include concerns that strangers might be outside the house, paparazzi might be lying in wait, or law enforcement officials or child protection workers might knock on the door to respond to false reports. The experiences of the MHM survivors reveal significant, unwanted changes in their lived spaces.

Corporeality. The experience of MHM can be all-encompassing, including the toll it takes on physical well-being. Some participants experienced distress in the deepest parts of their physicality, wondering if their bodies would even pull them through this. Dahlia discloses, “All the anger, rage, hurt and defamation hit me in the chest. I could barely breathe.” She was so psychologically exhausted, she describes sleeping for almost a month. “The anger was also physically manifesting as I could no longer lift my right arm above a 50-degree angle. I was also frequently breaking out into full body rashes.”

Briana explains that there were times “where I just felt like my whole body systemically was shutting down, that things weren’t functioning properly in my digestive system, my body

temperature regulation, my sweat." She continues, "I felt like my whole body was going to disintegrate." Some participants needed to be medicated, or they self-medicated, either to numb their feelings, or to hold them safe from the darkest spiral of what Heidegger (1927/1962) calls "being-towards-death." The participants shared how their anxieties manifest as abnormal levels of fatigue, vomiting, diarrhea, weight loss, pain in the chest, rashes, hair loss, muscle tightness, and increased physical pain in a variety of ways.

Temporality. With the participants of this study, their relationship with time changed. It became all mixed up. David explains, "Sometimes I wouldn't even know what day it was, what day was next. I would think it's Thursday, Friday or vice versa. The weekdays blur, merge with the weekends." Time was described as compressed, feeling as if no time has passed at all, and as if the MHM experience is still happening. Time goes fast, time goes slow, time is a merger between the past, present, and future. Time is wasted when what could have been years of productivity has been exchanged for time spent trying to get back to what once was. When MHM occurs, it can feel as if years of one's positive life's work have been erased. Vittoria felt like she lost 12 years of her life. All the years spent studying, working, building, practicing, sacrificing to get from one step to the next, and the next, to accomplish a dream, is suddenly wiped clean. Life is made of time and how it was spent. When all one's accomplishments are dismantled and invalidated, time feels stolen. Stolorow (2015) explains that with traumatic experiences, time becomes stuck.

> Experiences of emotional trauma become freeze-framed into an eternal present in which one remains forever trapped, or to which one is condemned to be perpetually returned through the portkeys supplied by life's slings and arrows. In the region of trauma all

> duration or stretching along collapses, past becomes present, and future loses all meaning other than endless repetition (Stolorow, 2015, p. 133).

In the worst moments, thoughts of the future are boiling in the anguish of "what might have been." Imagining a future after MHM can feel like having all flickers of hope sucked into a place in space with a gravitational force so intense, no light, or matter, or hope, can escape the black hole. Furthermore, there are likely new wounds in the future because humiliation, naming, shaming, and flaming lives and thrives in perpetuity on the Internet. Petley (2013) sums it up like this, "The Internet's transnational character and its use as an archive extend naming and shaming through time and space" (p. 384).

Relationality. The amount of information I received about the impact of MHM on survivors' relationships almost tipped me over. I tiptoed into the mitsein for a quick peek but fell into a world of relational wonder. I already understood that people will feel forsaken by some faction of society--that is the nature of public humiliation. This concept of relationality, however, was caked with concern and care for how the MHM might harm friends, family, and loved ones. It has an impact on children, on parents, on partners, and even on pets. Grace explains, "A lot of my guilt was centered around [my son], seven-years-old. I have a picture with him pointing at the paparazzi. There were hundreds, every single day." She worried about him. Olivia worried about her son, Mama Bear about hers. Vittoria was concerned about how her MHM experience impacted her children too. When MHM darts cross the barrier from personal attacks to threaten the well-being of loved ones, the intensity seems to skyrocket. There was a common worry about being a burden, about being unable to be present, about friends feeling pushed away when it was actually an act of protection. "If I could do everything alone and not have anything that I do affect anyone else, I would be moved differently. I would process things differently," Olivia

explains. “But I see that everything I do affects everyone around me. Even my friends.” Briana confirms. “I just always felt like I was a burden to everyone. My family and friends were super supportive, but they were watching me struggle and I felt like I didn't want to have to burden them with that.” She did not want to be a negative presence. “Socially it was hard. Being in social situations was a trigger for me. I didn't know what people thought of me, believed about me.”

Relationships were sometimes threatened, damaged, or destroyed. Trust was violated, people did not understand, friendships were lost. Developing new relationships with people is now met with caution. Grace explains that someone “tried to sue me to take away my parental rights for my children. And of course, we won over her.” Nonetheless, experiences like this left her guarded about people’s motives. “I had so many opportunists, parasitic opportunists trying to do whatever they could to either monetize off of this caricature, or to gain some type of notoriety.” The ability to date, to find love, to experience human belongingness and intimacy, and to have a family, all of these normal life experiences that make life worth living almost feel out of reach for the unpartnered survivor of the MHM experience. The destruction of one’s reputation can make love seem like a delicious fruit dangling within the reach of everyone else in the world, but not the MHM survivor. David says, “It's hard to really put yourself out there to develop friendships or romantic relationships when you're in the midst of all this chaos. It's just it's so cruel and inhumane.” At the time of this study, though it has been years since her MHM, Dahlia still is not ready to date. Sterling explains, “Romantically I can't date…It only takes one glance at my Instagram for any sane woman to say no.” Dekker confirms that he would like to be married and have children. “It’s made it much more difficult. I had at least three or four people I would've had relationships with right now, except for the articles.” Certainly, society

understands that public humiliation and shaming can result in the loss of one's reputation, but as revealed in these lived experiences, some survivors are also concerned about being sentenced to a life without a fair opportunity to find love.

Common Meanings and Shared Practices

Summary of Expected Themes

The themes of humiliation, trauma, and powerlessness were expected to emerge because they arose out of my own life experience and were framed as lenses. Participants consistently described the ways in which their misrepresentations were humiliating and traumatizing. Every participant expressed a violation of agency, a loss of control, and a sense of powerlessness. Participants used words like "assaulted," "killed," "destroyed," and "attacked" to describe how they felt they were treated by the media, or in social media. The lifeworld's existentials describe the tremendous toll MHM took on relationships, the sense of belonging and being accepted by the world, and the obstacles presented in forming new relationships. The survivors experienced changes in how they experienced their life spaces, distortions to their traditional relationships with time, and a variety of ways that anxiety and distress manifest themselves on their physical bodies.

Summary of Emergent Themes

Harman (2007) explains that new or unexpected meanings can emerge in phenomenological research because discussing the phenomenon pulls "something forgotten into visibility" (p. 92). There were 14 new themes that emerged.

Violation of expectations, shock. A strong recurring theme among the participants was a sense of betrayal, a violation of expectations, and a sense of shock. Dekker tells his story. "The roommate of the ex-girlfriend tried to paint this picture in the media. She did a great job that I

was some kind of weirdo because they put that stalking label on me. And now you've got this label that everybody looks down on. That was devastating." Even for those who chose to be in the media like Dahlia, Kyle, Grace and Mama Bear, there was an expectation that they would be represented in a fair way. Mama Bear sums it up. "I was completely floored. I never would have expected this in a million years, that that's the angle they would have taken." Kyle asks, "Was it as bad as I anticipated? I mean one million times worse. Because what they did is they highlighted every bad moment that they could. And what I was in shock about was how could, why would someone do this?"

There was also misrepresentation involving deception and coercion, particularly from those who participated in reality TV. When told they needed to behave a certain way, Kyle describes how his wife said, "We're not going to do it. Then [the producers] said we signed a contract, and we said, 'No, no we didn't.'" He continues, "That day Kara and I talk, and I'm like, 'Can you believe they threatened to sue us?'…I'm a part now of this thing where they're literally trying to manipulate our behavior to create a show for them." He explains the coercion. "They forced us with threat of lawsuit to do and behave in certain ways or they would sue us for $2 million. They said that verbally to us many times" (see Table 6).

Compulsion to correct. Dahlia explains, "I felt I had to tell the world what happened. I felt like…millions of people saw this bullshit story about me. I want the same millions of people to hear the real story and compare them side by side." She explains that she was obsessed with trying to correct the story. "I felt like I had to keep telling this story until everyone knew it was bullshit. I just feel like this is a story I need to tell over and over and over until the public gets it, and until members of the media get it too." David confesses, "I went to the Internet and went to [a website] and basically posted a rebuttal to each and every allegation of the disbarment order."

Dekker is writing his own book; he put up a web site and tries to send people there to hear his story first. “I just want my story out there, myself. That's what I'm going to do. The books, the YouTube, you know.” Kyle tried to correct misinformation using alter egos to point out the injustice. “I would go after all the social media and I actually fought back. I created all these online accounts pretending to be other people saying what a horrible way that the network treated these people.” Aria says, “I felt so powerless because I could not go up to everyone unless I went down to some news station and said, ‘Could you please put me on, please?’ So I could explain it one time. You can't do that, but I wanted to explain myself.” David sums it up. “When we are dealing with something like misrepresentation in the media, and the issuance of an order misrepresenting you … the process to try to reverse it consumes your life” (see also Table 7).

Desire to withdraw, even from life. One of the known impacts of public humiliation and shaming is the desire to withdraw from the rest of the world (Mann et al., 2016). This was an important theme among MHM survivors as well. Aria explains, “I just wanted to hide. I didn’t want to be known or seen or heard. I didn’t want to be portrayed in any kind of way on the outside at all.” Aria just wanted the ordeal over. “I never thought about the action [of suicide], but I thought, ‘Would everybody be happier if I wasn't here?’ It's interesting to hear myself talk about it. It probably sounds suicidal the way I'm saying it, but I felt like I just want it over with.” Dahlia explains, “I knew that I would never do it, but the desire to die at this moment was very real. The suicidal thoughts were persistent.” Sterling reveals, “I've definitely considered killing myself. I haven't gotten too far with it. I don't know how. I looked at where the nearest gun store was on Google but I didn't go there.” Mama Bear considered suicide for a moment as well. Fortunately, all these people had the strength to carry on (see Table 8).

Feeling contagious or radioactive. Beyond feeling rejected by a group of people that mattered to the participants, the MHM seems to catalyze a stigma that invoked a sense of contagion. Olivia expresses concern that what is happening to her will spread to those she loves and with whom she associates. She explains, “I used the term that being around me is like being around kryptonite because it feels like if you get involved with me, things blow up around you.” Grace calls her image “radioactive.” Sterling elaborates. “I think they're just afraid because I might be radioactive. They don't want any, they don't want to get Chernobyled. They don't want the radioactivity on them.” Vittoria explains it like this, “My whole image, a perception that I've been built over the years, just became erased. Not just erased. It was mocked and labeled as if there is an unwritten label that reads ‘don’t touch.’ That aspect was the most traumatizing” (see Table 9).

Silencing. Participants often felt silenced, either through legal threats, embarrassment, feeling misunderstood, or feeling as if fighting back would only result in increased personal harm. Fricker (2007) speaks about “hermeneutical injustice” where unequal power relations result in injustice for those who lack the social advantages and resources needed to make sense of their experiences. When someone is publicly shamed or humiliated before a mass audience, their status has been lowered to the point where their defense of themselves is automatically discounted. Sterling explains that he felt “frustrated, voiceless. Couldn't stand up for myself. Every word out of my mouth was automatically a lie.”

Dahlia discloses that an attorney would not let her out of a case “unless I signed a nondisclosure. I couldn’t sign a nondisclosure because this was my reputation and I knew that there was absolutely no way for the life of me that I could pretend that none of this ever happened.” Kyle explains that being able to speak about what happened would have helped him

get past the experience. “What was odd was that they kept threatening me and I couldn't say anything about it. I couldn't respond to the comments either.” He was not allowed to do that. He continues, “I had to think about even before I talk to you. I'm like, how am I going to say whatever I want to say? You know, there's a fear. A fear that they're still there, that they would come after me” (see Table 10).

Impediments to healing. Healing from distress is difficult enough on its own. MHM is made particularly challenging because its very nature reduces potential social resources. Kyle asks, “How can we rebound from this if we can't talk to anyone?” David explains,” Socially, the common theme and abuse by people or groups, and misrepresentation by the media, is this effort to isolate you and prevent you from having support.” Briana explained it would have helped her heal if she could have gone back to work sooner, but the MHM resulted in her being fired from her job. She lost her insurance in the process and had to pay out of pocket. Sterling’s outlet for battling depression and strengthening his mental health was comedy, but the community shaming called for him to be de-platformed from the very thing that could help him. He adds, “I can’t imagine anyone rehabilitating themselves while going through what I’m going through. You can’t really focus on self-improvement in constant fight-or-flight mode.” Dahlia was so distraught she could not even find the energy to seek out a therapist. Vittoria explains, “That has made me withdraw from everything. It's almost like this incident has resulted in me not being able to do things that would change my circumstances” (see Table 11).

Strong negative emotions or beliefs. Although there are forces trying to silence the misrepresented ones, at the same time, a known response to humiliation is anger and the urge to fight back (Hartling et al., 2013; Lindner, 2009). Kyle felt, “angry, rage, vindictive. I have thought about like, how I can get back at them? Now there's a strong sense of vindictiveness.”

Dahlia explains that she fought back and that was part of her journey. “I think because it’s so traumatizing a lot of people are not fighting back the way I’m fighting back.” Dekker explains that when people try to misrepresent him, his urge to fight back is even stronger. Sterling shares that his fight is not motivated by taking down his detractors, but about his principles. “We are trying to fight, like I still care about progressive values.” Mama Bear had her son to fight for. “That fear became anger and that anger became something else. I didn't necessarily think about hopelessness, I thought about revenge.” The mama bear in her came out. “I've feared for my reaction. My reaction could have been a lot worse” (see Table 12).

Disconnection/numbness or detachment. The participants describe feeling surreal, as if they were in a movie. Vittoria discloses that she was dissociating. Kyle says, “The only word that comes to my mind right now is just numb, like disconnected. I had to disconnect from it because … I felt like I was bracing for something.” Dahlia explains, “I felt like I was living in a movie, I was just like observing myself in some fictional world, it was just too much for me to wrap my head around.” Vittoria shares, “Sometimes, I wish I could just wake up from this dream. And just realize that it was just a bad movie that I was playing a role in. But, I'm living the movie. I'm really playing it out.” Grace describes it as living a nightmare. Briana reveals, “If my body really, really felt the magnitude of it all and really connected with it at the time, I felt like I would go insane.” She continues, “I would completely detach from reality and lose my mind and so as to not get to that point I had to numb myself. I was just in a state of shock for a long time.” Others also described feeling the need to stay numb. Mama Bear, Sterling, and Grace discuss using prescription antidepressants, for a while. Aria and Dahlia describe turning to substances or alcohol, at least for a time (see Table 13).

Others do not understand. People standing on the outside looking in do not seem to grasp the depth of the anguish and the negative life impact for these survivors. David shares, "People say, 'Oh well this happens all the time. Get over it move on.'" This same example was given by several participants. Others may mean well but make unhelpful suggestions to participants like "change your name," "simply stay off social media," or "just ignore the trolls," as if it was that easy. Mama Bear explains, "I've told people and they don't understand how this affected me." Olivia echoes, "I think that unless you have experienced it, you don't know [what it's like]" (see Table 14).

Avoidance. Avoidance is a common symptom associated with PTSD (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Stein et al., 2014). Mama Bear shares, "Normally you go on a show and you're like. 'Look I was on the show. Look look look look!' I hid in my house. I went on medication. I became like reclusive." Mama Bear was afraid for people to see her episode. Dahlia began to avoid music. "I started to feel that my choice to follow my dream and to do the same thing I'm passionate about like got me into trouble. And that music almost started to feel like a hot stove. I couldn't listen to music at my house for a few years." Vittoria explains that she was triggered by the thought of searching for a new job. "I don't want to relive the process because whenever I seek for a job, I feel that people will Google my name up or you know will check your LinkedIn, employers will ask for references. I don't want to relive all of that. So that has made me withdraw from everything" (see Table 15).

Impact on economic or material well-being. After MHM, career could be impacted by the damage to one's reputation, by the loss of self-confidence, by pressure on the company or agency, by depression or loss of motivation. Briana explains, "Professionally, I couldn't work. Emotionally, I wasn't sure when I would return. Even if none of this was reported in the media, I

probably would have returned to work because that's what grounded me." Due to the media misrepresentation however, she was let go. Sterling was fired under pressure. He explains, "They found my day job… They messaged my day job over Instagram. I was let go." He was also dropped by a manager and an agent. He explains, "They said, 'We support you but with everything going on it doesn't make sense for us to represent you right now.'" Mama Bear tells how she lost motivation, "After that incident, my heart was not there anymore, I thought the industry was disgusting. I was disgusted with the people and how could this have happened. I've worked in this industry, so it just took that away from me. I didn't want to do what I loved." Vittoria lost momentum in her rising career, Dahlia was no longer getting paid singing gigs, Dekker had trouble getting hired by anyone at all, and David's career as an attorney was annihilated. When jobs are lost, careers are derailed, and potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars could be spent trying to seek a legal remedy, the real-world impact of MHM on career and finances is monumental (see Table 16).

Changes in lifeworld. Each one of the participants shared stories that included unwanted changes in their lifeworlds. There were examples of major life alterations, changes in career, changes in relationships, changes in decisions about where to go and where, changes in online behavior, changes in daily routines, changes in how free time is spent, and changes in plans for the future. With survivors of MHM, these changes are not insignificant. Dahlia explains, "At many points, it just felt like life as I knew it was ending" (see Table 17).

Losses, mourning, and grieving. Mama Bear explains that she was grieving the loss of her career. Vittoria explains, "I went into a period of mourning that which I had lost. Grieving over it. I still grieve. I do grieve. I'm still grieving because I still wish that I could go back and just pick up from what went wrong, and just go back to my life before it all happened." Briana

shares her heartache as well. “It was a huge loss of the life that we had before, it was completely gone. We were mourning the death of our lives and the lives that we thought that we would have, that we had worked hard for and planned for.” She continues, “Everything we envisioned for our lives, everything changed. Even now, every joyous moment and celebration is still met with all of this pain and trauma.” Dahlia explains her pain, “[Music] was taken away from me, it was like losing a piece of my soul, it was like losing a limb almost.” Mourning for the loss of life as it might have been, for the death of a positive public image, or the annihilation of one’s narrative identity is a disembodied and unacknowledged form of grief. There is no body to bury, no wake, no public rush of support. Scholars have described disenfranchised grief as a type of mourning where social support is withheld due to the unacceptable or inexpressible nature of the loss, yet traumatic media misrepresentation and identity annihilation are yet to be considered as precursors to disenfranchised grief (Bailey, 2018; Doka, 1989). The participant experiences revealed a media-induced type of grief that has yet to be acknowledged (see also Table 18).

Threat of ongoing or future harm. The world of someone who has been publicly shamed or humiliated appears to be a world that feels more filled with danger. This is not unlike the survivor of other forms of trauma, especially interpersonal trauma, where the worldview includes increased concerns for safety (Blevins et al., 2015; Hobfoll et al., 2020). Olivia describes feeling as if the sanctity of her home was violated, and as if she was being hunted, always waiting for the next shoe to drop. Kyle describes feeling more guarded, Briana and Grace learned to constantly be on the lookout for those who might want to potentially cause harm. Sterling explains, “It felt like we were unsafe in our home, and when we tried to leave our home I was looking around. I was like, ‘Is someone here that person? Did they see us come in on our bikes?’ And it’s scary if they recognized us while we were just going about our lives.”

Mama Bear explains, “It's still out there. It airs. Every time it airs and I know it's airing, my blood pressure goes up. I get the same feelings all over again. And [it’s been years]. It still causes my body to go into a panic attack when I see it. I start shaking.” Dekker says, “When I go out the door every day and I interact with people, it's always in the back of my mind. Is this person going to find out what's said about me in the media?” Kyle worries about whether he could run for a local political office. “I thought the only way it could actually harm me is in the future, making choices like career decisions, that could come back to haunt me. And I'm still kind of living in that fear.” He continues, “I wonder if they're going to come after me like a lawsuit threat again. So in that way it kind of inhibits me from being courageous in certain areas in my life. Just thinking to have to muster that whole thing up again.” Sterling explains, “We've experienced every kind of emotional assault and are still afraid of that happening in the future.” (See also Table 19.)

Power and powerlessness. Media is often referred to as the most powerful influencer on earth. Participants were asked about the role of power and powerlessness in their stories. Aria expressed her powerlessness in her explanation of how she tried to live a perfect, upstanding life full of service. Yet, when her MHM experience happened, it was out of her control. “In this situation, I felt so powerless and the pain was in the fact that there was nothing I could do about it.” Kyle expresses his frustrations. “They used the fact that they had attorneys, that they had [the cable network] behind them, and that they had the power of storytelling, that they could do whatever they wanted to with our images. Which left us that we had no power.” Mama Bear went to an attorney to try to seek a remedy against a celebrity host that she feels destroyed her reputation. She was told that since she signed an agreement, she had no power to contest them in court. The contract stated the production company had the right to tarnish her image. Mama Bear

took things into her own hands and went to an entertainment publication to complain. “Nobody took me seriously. When I did go to [the media publication], they went over into the [host’s] court. So, women have a power imbalance. And it’s, again, men in Hollywood abusing women. It’s the #metoo movement as well.”

Briana felt powerless against the police department, the media, and public mob. “This was an exposure to a level of hatred and people taking matters into their own hands, feeling like they're entitled to do so. It opened me up and my family up to being threatened on a whole new level. Nothing felt safe for me,” she explains. Furthermore, after her male perpetrator was caught, there was a new level of powerlessness when the media immediately focused on what could have happened for him to have lost his way so dramatically, a humanizing narrative, compared to how they framed her story as a female victim. Media, social media, and Internet media are independently powerful in their ability to impact a human life, but when they combine with a unified message, they multiply the power of the message (Couldry, 2002, 2016; Freedman, 2015; Friberg-Fernros et al., 2017). Few private individuals have the resources to fight a fair battle against the media. Even if an individual wins a lawsuit against a media organization, it does not fully erase the damage done. The imbalance of power between media institutions and individuals is vast.

Identity and well-being. MHM impacts both narrative identity and well-being in intersecting ways. To further understand the MHM experience as it relates to identity, participants completed a scale measuring whether survivors of MHM experienced dehumanization, objectification, or humiliation, all three of which are related to the sense of self. Twenty-two participants filled out a five-question PDHO scale for a total of 110 answers. Out of these, 86 answers, or 78.18% indicated *to an extreme extent*; 17 answers, or 15.45% indicated *to*

a great extent, and 7 answers, or 6.36% indicated *to some extent*. With a scale of 0 to 4, none of them had a mean less than 3. In other words, 100% of the participants reported having experienced dehumanization, objectification, and humiliation as a result of their MHM. Although with so few participants this is not generalizable to a larger population, it does support the expectation for this sampling.

In addition to the quantitative results, the interviews provide robust examples of the ways the participants were dehumanized, objectified, and humiliated. For example, as if speaking to the celebrity host that misrepresented her, Mama Bear says, "You took my image, you took my son's image and you exploited a lovely mother-and-son Latin cultural team, and you exploited my body. You changed the look of my body and made me more voluptuous." Mama Bear was outraged. Dahlia says, "Like I knew the media twisted the facts, but I didn't know they could blatantly lie. I feel like we're nothing more than words on a paper to entertain, to get people to click." Dekker spoke about the newspapers changing the facts to make them more interesting to sell more papers. Kyle explains, "I felt 100% used and exploited and objectified." Similarly, David says, "I felt a lot of emotions. I felt exploited, misrepresented." The participants consistently expressed feeling as if they did not matter as individuals. Rather, they felt like objects of content that media professionals used as a means-to-their-own-ends. This is a classic illustration of objectification. According to Kant (1963), using someone as a means-to-an-end rather than as an end-in-himself is to deny that person dignity, to humiliate him, to impede his personal agency, and to strip him of his very humanity. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights built its charter on principles opposite of those manifest by those who humiliate and exploit others in the media for personal or organizational gain. The preamble recognizes that "the inherent dignity…of all members of the human family is the foundation of

freedom, justice and peace in the world" and there should be "fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person."

Traumatic or highly distressing events often create turning points in a person's life story (Baerger & McAdams, 1999). The purpose of the Centrality of Events Scale is to measure the impact of a stressful event on personal identity and to see if the meaning of the event extends to other experiences in a person's life (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006). Bernard et al. (2015) asserts that when traumatic events serve as pivotal moments in our life stories, those events are likely to be central features of our personal identities. With this in mind, the participants were asked to take the Centrality of Events Scale. This is a 5-point Likert scale with values ranging from 1 to 5, with 5 being *strongly agree*, and 3 being *neutral*. Anything over a 3 could indicate that the participants felt their MHM experience had a central impact on their lives, and consequently, their identities. The mean was 4.37, or 87.4%. In other words, the results of the CES support the expectation that survivors of MHM found the experience to have been a key event in their lives.

When individuals are publicly shamed, they see themselves through the sneering, jeering eyes of the community (Taylor, 2015). Consistent with the findings, participants shared stories describing ways in which their identities were impacted by the MHM. Dahlia reveals, "This experience changed me so much. I experienced such a loss of identity for so many years." Dahlia explains that she began to believe what was being said about her. "All these media outlets shamed me. So yes, I did [buy into it]. Maybe I am this old and ugly singer, and I need to hang it up?"

Mama Bear says, "It destroyed me, made me feel dirty and ugly." She explains that she began to question everything in her life after her MHM experience. "Are you a bad mother? Are you too sexy for your age? Should you cut your hair and look worse than you do?" Mama Bear

even colored her hair and tried to change her look. Similarly, Aria explained that before her MHM event, she was bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, active in the community, and always helping others. After the event, her community started looking down on her instead of supporting her, and it impacted her. “It’s like everything changed because I changed. It changed me.” She became someone her parents did not recognize. “I started getting involved with things that I would have never done before, very negative things, because I was hurting so bad. I got in with the wrong crowd and I started smoking marijuana. This was so different from who I was.”

Vittoria explains, “I lost the sense of who I was. I wasn't sure of who I was anymore. I wasn't sure of what I was.” She describes her thoughts at the time.

> Besides my self-image, what I felt really it killed was all that I stood for, my years of hard work, my accomplishments, my reputation and to an extent my future, I felt that the legacy built from my career thus far has been ruined and killed to an extent. I should also mention that when I think of my legacy, it was the same as my identity, all of which I felt died as a result of that article.

As Vittoria illustrates, the public shaming and humiliation also seemed to have an extirpating impact on the life accomplishments of its victims. Regardless of the years of hard work, sacrifice or paying dues to achieve what they have with their lives, for some like Vittoria, Dahlia, Sterling, and David, it was as if their MHM experiences had the effect of expunging or invalidating their preexisting slates of life accomplishments. When your career is the bedrock of your sense of self, and when a public humiliation or shaming incident wipes all your life achievements off the whiteboard of your life, how do you even begin to plan for the future?

Life story theory and MHM. Here is a review of the components of the life story theory of narrative identity in light of the MHM experience. In each case, the *will* of the participants was violated when they were misrepresented and thrown under the bus. This put an obstacle in their paths which impeded their free *agency* and ability to control their own destinies as they

wished. *Communion*, or social belongingness with others, was negatively impacted. This is unfortunate because it is through the mitsein, or being-with-others, that people find enriched meaning in life (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lambert et al., 2013). MHM is a negative event, or *contamination sequence*, often referred to as a powerful experience that impacts the narrative identity (Berman, 2016; Santiago et al., 2013; Tolin & Foa, 2006). The contamination sequences in life stories are often associated with maladaptive emotional responses, including depression and reduced self-worth (Adler & Poulin, 2009; McAdams et al., 2001), unless people find a way to make positive meaning out of it.

Meaning-making in the life story theory of narrative identity would occur when the MHM survivor gains insight about how their MHM experience could be integrated into the life story. Avoiding or denying that this distressing experience happened might be likely to keep wounds from healing. However, if the survivor can find a way to reframe the negative MHM experience in a positive way, the survivor might be able process it easier and integrate it into his or her life story. Janoff-Bulman (1992) explains, "By engaging in interpretations and evaluations that focus on the benefits and lessons learned, survivors emphasize benevolence over malevolence, meaningfulness over randomness, and self-worth over self-abasement" (p. 133).

Explorative narrative processing involves mining a traumatic experience for the lessons and new insights that can be learned, especially about oneself (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Examples of explorative narrative processing came out in the interviews. Sterling explains that he now realizes that "every human being is an ambiguous mixture of good and bad. I think that helped me become a better writer. I think I have a healthier outlook on humanity now." Aria shares an insight she had. "One thing you can control is you and how you perceive the outside

of world, and how it affects you. The internal is what you have control over, and I think it took me a while to get here." The last component is creating a *positive resolution*. Creating a positive resolution after a contamination sequence is known as a *redemption sequence.* Generating a redemption sequence after a public shaming, or MHM, is difficult because there are significant impediments to the healing process that may not exist in other forms of trauma.

In spite of this, several of the participants showed indicators of post-traumatic growth. In order to understand how MHM can influence well-being, this is a quick refresher on the conditions that contribute to flourishing. According to the PTM Framework main publication (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018b), the relevant factors that contribute to well-being are as follows:

- safety and security;
- positive relationships within partnerships, families, friendships and communities;
- to have some control over important aspects of our lives, including our bodies and emotions;
- to meet basic physical and material needs for ourselves and our dependents;
- to experience some sense of justice or fairness about our circumstances;
- to feel valued by others and effective in our social roles;
- to engage in meaningful activity and, more generally, to have a sense of hope, meaning and purpose in our lives. (pp. 149-150)

Diener and Tay (2015) would add SWB, economic and material well-being, social and institutional support, and physical health to their list of relevant factors for adults in this context. Well-being among the participants was impacted in various ways by different participants. Social support systems were deconstructed, physical health was impacted, lives were filled with uncertainty, sorrow, and fear. Places and spaces that were once sanctuaries for comfort

sometimes became unsafe places to avoid. Participants experienced a sense of mourning for their losses, from lost careers to lost dreams to lost love. Rather than feel a sense of justice or fairness, they felt injustice and sometimes, betrayal, even institutional betrayal. Participants expressed sadness about feeling unvalued by a society or community in which they were once a cherished member. For some, dreams were destroyed, hopelessness came in waves, and the meaning and purpose that once drove their lives was now swept into the sea. Some individuals withdrew, isolated, hid, slept, wept, and cried out for help, only to have no one listen or care. For some, depression was so strong they tried to detach from the anguish-filled realities of their lives. Even finding help became a monumental task for some.

> I eventually got therapy but in this first six months, things felt so overwhelming I really couldn't do much. It was like I lost my ability to get anything done. Something as simple as researching a therapist and finding out which therapist to go to and calling them just felt too difficult. And I wasn't going to doctors either…making the trip just got too difficult. There was a long period of time when I could only handle one appointment a day. Like if I went to go see a friend for lunch, that wiped me out so much I couldn't do anything else. (Dahlia)

For the survivors of MHM in this study, economic and material well-being was negatively impacted. To state it succinctly, MHM was shown to have a significantly negative impact on well-being.

Trauma and distress. There is no one clear definition of psychological trauma or extreme distress. However, I found multiple means by which to detect indicators of trauma or distress related to having experienced MHM. First, I administered two separate trauma scales, the PDHO and the CES, both of which indicated that all participants experienced trauma according to their own scores. Using triangulation as a form of validation, a Pearson's correlation was conducted between the two trauma surveys, showing a strong significant relationship at the .01 level. Although with $N=22$ it is not generalizable, it supports the

likelihood that the participants' personal descriptions of trauma were indeed experienced as traumatic.

The symptoms of PTSD according to the DSM-5 include four symptom clusters: (a) intrusive re-experiencing of the trauma, (b) avoidance and emotional numbing, (c) negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and (d) hyperarousal or hypervigilance. These symptoms must last for over a month and result in an impairment of healthy life functions. The ICD-11 defines trauma in three symptom clusters: (a) reexperiencing, (b) avoidance, and (c) a sense of current threat that results in hypervigilance. The ICD-11 includes CPTSD, describing it as "a disorder which arises after exposure to a stressor typically of an extreme or prolonged nature and from which escape is difficult or impossible" (p. 200). I argue that MHM is traumatic, prolonged, and escape is indeed difficult. According to the ICD-11, CPTSD includes the three core symptoms of PTSD as well as other impairments such as "difficulties in emotion regulation, beliefs about oneself as diminished, defeated or worthless" (p. 200). Some of the symptoms of PTSD revealed by the participants include

- Persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs about oneself, others, or the world.
- Persistent, distorted cognitions about the cause or consequence of the traumatic event(s) that lead the individual to blame himself/herself or others.
- Persistent negative emotions (e.g., fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame).
- Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities.
- Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others.
- Persistent inability to experience positive emotions (e.g. inability to experience happiness, satisfaction, or loving feelings). (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 272)

The interviews were rich with revelations about the way in which the MHM life experience was rife with indicators of extreme distress, consistent with the general patterns of distress outlined in the PTM Framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018b). From feelings of detachment to the inability to feel positive emotions to self-blame to persistent negative emotions, examples were presented like an abundant buffet. Brewin et al. (2017) explain that trauma symptoms also include diminished interest in activities, detachment from others, and emotional numbing, examples of which were repeatedly disclosed by participants (see also Tables 13 and 15). Aria describes replaying scenes, Dahlia describes obsessing, Briana describes nightmares, all of which are common indicators of PTSD's criterion "intrusion." For most participants, the original MHM experience happened years ago, yet there is still intense or prolonged psychological distress. This is unsurprising since MHM is typically protracted and repetitive in nature due to the permanent attributes of the digital footprint. According to the DSM-5 Criterion F, the duration of the disturbance for Criteria B, C, D, and E (intrusion, avoidance, negative alterations in cognition or mood, and arousal) must be present for more than one month (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, pp. 271-272). For this sampling of participants, this requirement was met in spades.

Briana, Olivia, Dahlia, and Sterling described having "marked physiological reactions" (see Table 4). In Table 15, the participants' statements highlighted examples of "avoidance of or efforts to avoid distressing feelings or reminders," whether it was through avoiding reading blog posts and comments about themselves, refusing to re-watch misrepresentative TV episodes they were featured in, not applying for jobs for fear of reliving the past negative experiences related to the MHM, not listening to music, not dating, or even avoiding former life aspirations connected to the MHM (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 271; see also Table 15).

In the DSM-5, Criterion D is defined as “negative alterations in cognition and mood associated with the traumatic event” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 271). This consists of seven symptoms, six of which have naturally presented themselves during the interviews. For example, “persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs, expectations or emotional states” are documented in Table 12. Briana experienced “persistent negative emotional states.” She explains, “I remember talking to my therapist and saying, ‘I know that I felt hope and joy before but I am so far removed from that, I don’t know that I will ever feel it again,’” and that “being in such a dark place it feels like it’s never ever going to happen again, like it’s impossible that it’ll happen.” Dahlia describes her emotional states as involving “despair, hopelessness, anger, fury, suicidal at one point, determined, pissed, distraught, traumatized.” She adds that she felt devastated, horrified, and outraged. Mama Bear also describes her intense negative feelings with the words “horrified” and “mortified.”

Accompanying these negative beliefs or emotional states is a wrapper of deep anxiety and possibly fear. Heidegger (1927/1962) distinguishes between the two, claiming that fear requires a definite “entity within-the-world” (p. 231). In other words, people are afraid of a specific thing. Anxiety, however, is the emotional experience when the entity one faces is “completely indefinite” (p. 231). Nothing is clear or certain. The expected future is like a cumulonimbus cloud, or a thunderhead, filled with chaos and confusion. The storm has occurred, and it is coming again. Clarity is gone, and all that reigns is confusion. Sterling explains, “I wake up every day miserable and don’t know the answer to make it stop. Just trudge forward hoping there’s a light at the end of the tunnel I can’t see.” These could also be representative of Criterion D’s “persistent ability to experience positive emotions.”

Another criterion of the PTSD diagnostic list includes “persistent distorted cognitions

about the cause or consequences of the traumatic event(s) that lead the individual to blame himself/herself or others." Grace describes internalizing toxic shame "because all that really matters to me is my children and their well-being, I had such immense guilt on my shoulders for allowing the media. I did blame myself." She explains, "I started spiraling down a darker dark hole because the toxic shame, I just couldn't continue to pretend." Vittoria describes a period of depression and always looking for someone to blame. David explains that it "brought about depression, at times, hopelessness, as it would anyone." Participant statements from Criterion D's category "markedly diminished interest in or participation in significant activities" are highlighted in Tables 8 and 15, and "feelings of detachment or estrangement from others" can be found in Table 13. Several participants also described what the DSM-5 refers to as "depersonalization" (p. 272). This involves feeling as if one were in a dream or a movie, or of time moving slowing.

Criterion E of the PTSD diagnostic criteria is described as "marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with the traumatic event" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 272). Manifestations of this include "irritable behavior or angry outbursts (with little or no provocation)" which emerged from the interviews. Dahlia discloses, "And I would start yelling at my friends, like I lost a couple friends in that period because I snapped on them, so the trauma part of it became very overwhelming around that point." Vittoria explains how she was filled with resentment, looking for someone to blame. Aria, Grace, and Dahlia exhibited different forms of "reckless or self-destructive behavior," a common response to trauma as outlined by Criterion E. Other diagnostic indicators of PTSD-based "arousal" according to the DSM-5's Criterion E include "hypervigilance," "problems with concentration" and "sleep disturbances." Briana had disturbing dreams, Dahlia had unusual sleeping patterns and could not focus, and all

the participants shared or exhibited concerns about trusting others or danger in the future (see Table 19). Sterling references how difficult it was to make life progress in fight-or-flight mode. Grace describes her hypervigilance similarly. “I was under attack, so mine is fight, flight, frozen. I'm a fighter, so I would have my fighting up non-stop. I was in defense mode from day one, utilizing every defense mechanism you can even fathom in the book.”

Olivia describes being tired, fatigued, exhausted. Vittoria explains, “I was operating like a machine. I was just doing what I needed to do, spend my energy, and at night I would just collapse from tiredness, that was the routine.” Dahlia describes being able to only accomplish one activity per day, at times, and sleeping away an entire month. Briana discloses, “That was really hard, being really tired and then always feeling like you have to fight, and your body is always in trauma and fear and on alert.”

Criterion G makes it clear that the response to the traumatic event must be “significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.” Psychological and physical exhaustion made a recurring appearance. Briana shares,

> I was so exhausted most of the time, the energy to hold myself together, just to get up out of bed and do the normal activities of living, just any of the getting up and brushing your teeth, like the normal little daily functions, felt like they were requiring the energy it takes to run a marathon.

Additional examples of impairment to life functioning are evident in the well-being lenses of each interview, as well as in Tables 5 and 16. To summarize, the experience of MHM is so traumatic and all-encompassing, it can impair various aspects of functionality including the ability to work, socialize, take care of oneself, take care of one’s family, and it can impede one’s ability to advance and flourish in life.

The emotional pain of mass humiliation is more than psychologically debilitating. In its own way, it is a brush with death. It is not the death of the physical body, although the

suffocating anguish could ultimately end physical life if one chooses suicide as an escape from the fractured self (Baumeister, 1990). Rather, the flames of humiliation flickering within can fuel a surreal, incomprehensible, unexpected, undeserved dissolution of the self that took a lifetime of experiences to craft into a unified whole. The coherence of the narrative identity in life story is the mortar that holds life meaning together, and public shaming or humiliation is the wrecking ball (Bernard et al., 2015; Berntsen & Rubin, 2006). Ezzy (1998) argues that a narrative identity supplies "a subjective sense of self-continuity as it symbolically integrates the events of lived experience in the plot of the story a person tells about his or her life" (p. 239). When the unified narrative identity becomes the subject of a public reputation massacre, psychological blood is spilled and there is "a catastrophic loss of innocence that permanently alters one's sense of being-in-the-world" (Stolorow, 2008, p. 16). This is the nature of trauma. The life story is hijacked, ruptured, and co-opted by forced infusions of fiction, friction, and confusion. The self becomes a broken jar. The pieces and parts of the self-understanding no longer fit seamlessly together.

Neimeyer and Levitt (2000) explain that trauma is manifest not only when there is a violation of expectations, but when there is a deviation from expected unfolding of events. This creates a confusing, disorganized sequence that cannot be readily assimilated into the life narrative that already exists. Barak and Leichtentritt (2014) describe how the rupture in the stream of events makes it difficult to properly process reality, and to synthesize the past, present, and new expected future. The future becomes an unsafe thing to envision. In some cases, survivors of MHM will even experience what Freeman (2000) calls "narrative foreclosure" where it feels as if the world is shattered, the reputation is not reparable, and there are no more chapters to be written in the survivor's book of life.

Although the self understands that it has been misrepresented and that the loss of social status and dignity originated from information that was untrue or unfair, when there is an acceptance or internalization of that humiliated, devaluated identity, the result is identity annihilation (Fernández et al., 2015). Identity annihilation conveys perhaps the most intense psychological agony a human can bear (Hartling et al., 2013; Klein, 1991; Otten & Jonas, 2014; Torres & Bergner, 2012). According to Joffe and Sandler (1967), psychological pain sets in when one discovers disturbing disparities between the perceived self and the ideal self. Psychological pain is related to a fear or awareness of the disintegration of the self (Bolger, 1999), including a negative change in the beliefs about the self (Orbach et al., 2003; Shneidman, 1998).

Psychological pain has been identified as the most frequently stated motivation for suicide (Chávez-Hernández et al., 2009; Reisch et al., 2010). Shneidman (1998) found a relationship between psychological pain and suicide, especially when one was humiliated, deprived of belongingness and affiliation, unsupported or unprotected in a time of need, unable to vindicate oneself of undue blame or criticism, or unable to feel psychologically safe (see also Meerwijk & Weiss, 2011). Survival is difficult for those humiliated in the media who feel as if they have been thrown off a boat into shark-infested waters due to the misrepresentations of their characters. It is especially devastating when they grasp for flotation devices and there seems to be an intentional united effort by media professionals and the cybermob to ensure all life preservers stay out of reach. The expectation of a humane response is shattered as those desperately trying to stay alive in the water realize there is a financial incentive or entertainment value for those in power to enable voyeurs to watch them drown. Mama Bear said it first. “We were like chum for shark.”

If this seems dramatic, a pack of recent articles that appeared in popular media since I started this research underscore the grim reality that the public sees a relationship between reality TV and suicide (Gibb, 2019; Lee, 2019; Mitchell, 2019; Nilsson, 2019; Spencer, 2019). While these are not scholarly works and they make no scientifically supported claim of correlation between humiliation on reality TV and suicide, it is interesting to note that the articles focus on who and what to blame. Consultants, experts, media professionals and lay people attribute the cause of the tragedies to the failure of the psychologists to properly screen out individuals with mental defects from appearing on their shows. The deceased participants are described as people who had mental health conditions, low self-esteem, suffered from depression in the past, or were simply too weak to cope. In other words, there is active victim-blaming but little or no review of the media's storytelling decisions that may have given rise to the television participants' psychological agony. By focusing on the character flaws of the victims rather than the circumstances which may have contributed to the traumatic MHM, the media is committing the fundamental attribution error. I argue that by shaming the reality TV participants on the episodes, then blaming them after their deaths as having been psychologically unsound, the media professionals avoid accountability for their own media framing decisions. In good news, media organizations are increasingly providing aftercare and educating participants on social media (Nilsson, 2019). While these are positive steps for media organizations to take, the education should really be directed within the organization, educating producers, directors, editors, and executives alike on the importance of taking care not to villainize, misrepresent, degrade, shame, or humiliate the subjects of the media in the first place. This would be far more ethical and effective at preventing psychological trauma and suicide than trying to do damage control after it is too late.

The indicators of PTSD, also known as threat responses by the PTM Framework, are present in the life experiences described by the participants, providing support that MHM can be a traumatic experience. Both the DSM-5 and the ICD-11 have labeled the less severe versions of these disorders "acute stress disorder" (ASD). ASD has similar symptoms as PTSD and CPTSD, including "a daze, a sense of confusion, sadness, anxiety, anger, despair, overactivity, stupor and social withdrawal," (WHO, p. 200) but are expected to be gone within 3 days to a month (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; World Health Organization, 2018). No single participant interviewed in this study had symptoms for such a short period of time.

The Essence of Traumatic MHM

Using both qualitative and quantitative means, the results of this study show strong support for the hypothesis that MHM can be traumatizing. I argue that MHM can be traumatic, should be considered as a potential precursor to PTSD in both the DSM-5 and ICD-11, and should therefore be considered for inclusion in the next DSM under Criterion A. Currently, Criterion A requires "exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 272). I claim that the DSM-5 note, "Criterion A4 does not apply to exposure through electronic media, television, movies or pictures, unless this exposure is work related" (p.274) should be revised. I call for the American Psychiatric Association to consider the traumatic impact of identity annihilation in the media to be included in PTSD's Criterion A in the next iteration of the DSM.

Although traumatic MHM shares many of the same symptoms or threat responses with PTSD and CPTSD, there are also characteristics that make it unique. For this reason, I will now define what I see as the essence of traumatic MHM (see Table 23). Traumatic media humiliation or misrepresentation can be intentional or unintentional. It must involve the misrepresentation of

an individual's character, story, or situation and create concern about, or have a negative impact on reputation, identity, career, or life purpose. The target must feel driven to correct or cancel misrepresentation, regardless of whether they actually take action to that effect. There must be a serious violation of expectations. These are often expressed as feelings of mortification, shock, or disbelief. Traumatic MHM must involve a sense of unfairness or injustice. MHM commonly includes feeling betrayed by an individual, media organization, community, or society itself.

Table 23

Essential Patterns of Traumatic Media Humiliation and Misrepresentation

Misrepresentation (Intentional or unintentional)	• Misrepresentation of character, story or situation • Negative impact on reputation, identity or life's work • Victim is driven to correct or cancel misrepresentation
Violation of expectations	• Feeling mortified, shocked, in disbelief • Sense of unfairness or injustice • Feeling betrayed by an individual, media organization, community or society itself
Humiliation or shaming	• Lowering of status, standing, or credibility • Exposure to public or professional ridicule • Made to seem stigmatized, unworthy, contaminated
Powerlessness or loss of control	• Denied control over story, its correction or its removal • Dehumanized, objectified, exploited or used • Unable to stop the threat of ongoing or future harm
Negative impact on temporal well-being	• Unwanted changes in the lifeworld • Losses (i.e., finances, career, dreams, relationships, opportunities) • Difficulty achieving restoration
Psychological distress or trauma	• Strong negative emotions, or emotional detachment • Grieving or mourning loss of past life, reputation, life's work, or life legacy • Serious enough to impair to healthy life functioning

The MHM experience must result in a perceived lowering of status, standing, or credibility in some realm of society that is meaningful to the target, and involve exposing the target to public or professional ridicule. The targets of MHM may also be treated as if they are stigmatized, unworthy, or contaminated. MHM will include a sense of powerlessness or lack of control over the target's media representations, including being denied control over how the media is presented, being unable to secure corrections to the misrepresentations, or being powerless to achieve the removal of the misrepresentative media. The target will feel humiliated, dehumanized, objectified, exploited or used, and will be faced with a real concern about ongoing or future harm.

MHM will have a noticeable impact on the temporal well-being of the target. This is evidenced by unwanted changes in the lifeworld, a negative impact on economic or material well-being, and tangible losses such as finances, careers, dreams, relationships, opportunities, or invalidation of past achievements. There will be difficulty achieving the restoration of these losses. Finally, traumatic MHM will result in a serious feeling of psychological distress or trauma evidenced by strong negative emotions such as sadness, anger, rage, revenge, horror, mortification, depression, self-blame, loss of self-worth, or negative changes in the sense of identity. Other indicators of psychological trauma associated with MHM include feeling disconnected, emotionally detached, or desiring to numb. The seriousness is indicated by an impairment to healthy life functioning. MHM-based psychological distress or trauma also entails a sense of grieving or mourning over the loss of reputation, life's work, life as it used to be, or life legacy as a direct result of the media misrepresentation.

This construct definition is not meant to be a diagnosis, and traumatic MHM should not be thought of as a psychological disorder. Rather, this construct is clarified by these common

patterns for three purposes. (a) to assist those who have experienced MHM understand that their reactions are normal, (b) to help media professionals understand the potentially serious consequences for the misrepresented and humiliated subjects of their stories, and (c) to set the stage for a dialogue between academics and clinicians concerning the need to consider traumatic MHM, including public shaming, as potentially traumatizing agents. Although I argue that media humiliation, misrepresentation in the media, severe public shaming, and victim-blaming can all have a traumatic impact on narrative identity and well-being with responses mirroring symptoms in DSM-5 definition of PTSD, the trauma of MHM still has distinct characteristics from PTSD and CPTSD.

In the cases of both PTSD and CPTSD, the traumatic injuries occurred in the past; they are history-pointing traumas. In the present, those survivors may experience flashbacks, triggers, and other symptoms or threat responses, but they can work on recovering because the traumatizing wound or wounds are in the past. However, due to the potentially permanent and expanding digital footprint of stories on the Internet, when an individual has experienced MHM, the psychological trauma of MHM is not likely to remain in the past. In fact, with MHM, the potential recurrence of traumatic psychological injuries can extend from the past through the present and into the future. Survivors know that the Internet makes it possible for the distressing misrepresentations to follow them forever, and this is a terrifying thought.

Traumatic MHM may share a set of symptomatologies with CPTSD in that it may have consisted of multiple traumatic events that contributed to a “mental death” (Ebert & Dyck, 2004), but unlike CPTSD, it is a future or forward-pointing trauma. MHM includes a reputational death that can rapidly expand virally and thereby increase the magnitude of the psychological injuries. A study by Combs et al. (2010) revealed that the experience of

humiliation increases with the level of publicity of the humiliating event, thereby potentially intensifying the distress. With PTSD and CPTSD, survivors understand their primary injuries were in the past and they can focus on healing from their histories and moving forward with their lives. To the victims of MHM, there appears to be no escape and no end. Instead of dealing with the triggers of PTSD and CPTSD, these victims are continually being psychologically re-injured with each new iteration or publication of their humiliation (see Tables 3 and 19).

Table 24

Traumatic MHM Comparison Chart

	Past	**Present**	**Future**
Trauma (PTSD)	A single trauma or wound occurred in the past	Survivor is able to work on healing	Trauma is behind them ←
CPTSD	Multiple traumas or wounds in the past	Survivor is able to work on healing	Trauma is behind them ←
Traumatic MHM	Single or multiple wounds in the past	Survivor is able to work on healing, but it is complicated because new wounds may also be occurring in the present	Trauma is ongoing → New trauma wounds occurring → New trauma wounds anticipated in future →

While the MHM experience presents itself as a traumatic experience on various levels, it is different from PTSD, and it is different for survivors of trauma as well.

Victim-Blaming and Shaming. For the participants whose MHM involved victim-blaming, additional distress blooms in a field of burning anguish. Herman (1997) asserts that the study of trauma must acknowledge the tendency to shame and blame a victim, and to render a victim invisible. Aria reveals exactly that. “I felt very lonely. I felt like I was an enemy. I felt

blamed. I felt accused, falsely accused." She continues, "I felt invisible. I felt like my needs were invisible. Because … people were probably thinking, 'Oh she hit those poor people. Like what time was it? Was she drunk?'" Aria shares how painful it was to her when people would blame the accident on her own behavior even though she had no control over being hit by a drunk driver. Describing her lived experience during the interview, Aria explains that people would "hear the news and immediately say, 'Oh well you know what? Wonder what she's done to make that come on herself like that?'" This is an example of just world beliefs in action.

Briana experienced this as well.

> They get people saying, "Well she must have deserved it, this is karma and if all this stuff happened to her, then she must have been a really bad person," and that's their reasoning and justification of "Well, that's why it happened to her, and it would never happen to me, because I'm a good person. She must be a bad person and so she deserves that."

Briana found herself in a position where she struggled with those sentiments, wondering, "Am I a bad person and I deserved this? Did I give people reason to believe that I'm a shady person? What did I do?" When an individual's most traumatic events are not socially validated but instead used as weapons for shaming and degrading, the result is the silencing of the victim. This casts the traumatic experience into the realm of the unspeakable. Yet, it is through speaking, writing, and sharing the story with others that survivors can regain a sense of meaning in their worlds (Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Herman, 1997).

Retraumatization. Participants who had experienced past trauma before the MHM also expressed feeling a magnification of the trauma. Aria explains that her psychologist told her about PTSD, but it was "based on other things I had experienced in my past, and how this situation was something that was so traumatic, maybe it just shook something up in me that triggered emotions from past events." Olivia discloses that she was a trauma survivor before her MHM experience. "I didn't even know it existed, reoccurring PTSD, so it's, you know, when

your body is just assaulted so much that it just doesn't stop it, it rolls into a reoccurring--it's like PTSD on steroids." When asked whether she was diagnosed with PTSD as a result of the MHM, she answers, "It's re-trigger I think. If there's recurring PTSD, I have recurring, recurring, recurring PTSD."

Dahlia also expresses that, as a survivor of past trauma, her MHM experience had an amplifying effect.

> To me it felt like full-blown PTSD but I was never officially diagnosed. I did have a pretty traumatic childhood. I had been living with these traumas and maybe not maintaining them in the healthiest way, so this incident kind of blew all of that and amplified it a thousand-fold.

The PDHO scale was originally designed to measure the feeling of dehumanization, humiliation, and objectification in rape survivors. With all participants showing a presence of dehumanization, humiliation, and objectification, the same feelings as rape survivors, the argument could be made that those who suffer from MHM might describe their experience as having felt raped by the media. Dahlia mentioned it. "I don't mean to minimize rape, but it was almost like a rape in a way. But like a rape of my identity and a rape of my life." Sterling speaks about how his comedy partner expresses her feelings regarding the public shaming. "In her video, one thing people got mad at Skye about was she described this as more traumatizing than her own rape. Which I believe her." Furthermore, when a rape survivor is not initially believed or validated, or if the rape disclosure receives negative initial reactions, the victims of rape are more likely to suffer from long-term trauma effects, including the increased likelihood of developing PTSD (Littleton, 2010; Wilson et al., 2018).

In my own story, I was trafficked under conditions of force, fraud, and coercion. I provided strong documentation to producers, including my case number with a national human trafficking agency. In spite of this, the producers took the trafficking elements out of my story

and misrepresented it as free choice, which resulted in an enormous bonfire of social media engagement. This was good for the network, but it became a firestorm of victim-blaming, shaming, and flaming against me. At that point, I felt as if the media had become accomplices to my predators, expanding on what they started, now extending my complete humiliation to the entire world. I, too, felt raped by the media. I was retraumatized. Aria explained how even though she had traumatic experiences in the past, her MHM felt worse to her because the past traumas were private. In her MHM experience, she was exposed to the whole world. I contend that the MHM experience for trauma survivors is different from non-trauma survivors in that MHM could be a catalyst, not only for victim-blaming and shaming, and for retraumatization related to the mishandling of their survivor stories in the media, but also for the reactivation and amplification of past traumatic experiences, even if they are unrelated to media.

Road to Recovery. This study also explored the common meanings and shared practices of those who have made progress towards recovering from MHM. There were recurring themes among the participants in their healing journeys. The primary source of strength was social support. Professional therapy was also foundational for many of the participants. Some were prescribed antidepressants; a few temporarily self-medicated or numbed themselves with marijuana or alcohol. Other common methods or practices for recovery included using emotional support animals; using creative outlets; taking time in nature; trying to live in the present; being mindful and savoring the positive moments; engaging in physical endeavors; and turning to faith and spirituality.

Scholars show that psychological well-being is enhanced when survivors integrate the traumatic experience in the context of one's life story to give it new meaning (Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Hill et al., 2015; Pennebaker, 1997). This is no small feat when the MHM

experience hijacks the consistency of the life story and seemingly inserts a new but false narrative. As the PTM Framework argues, meaning and narrative are fundamental to healing, therefore finding a way to give meaning to such confusing narratives can assist with recovery (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018b). Another important theme that emerged on the recovery path is the importance of trying to make sense of what happened (Herman, 1997). To do this, some participants tried to study more about entertainment laws or free speech laws, how the media works, or what would motivate journalists, producers, bloggers, or social media shamers to behave in the way that they do. Educating oneself on the psychology or systems used to cause such disastrous outcomes in one's life can be a means of processing what happened. Sterling read about the experiences of others and sought academic articles on public shaming. Dahlia dove into understanding legal abuse, the issues of age-shaming and objectifying women, and she tried to untangle certain systemically harmful practices of the media. Dahlia explains, "I felt like because I had this behind the scenes look at how the media operates, and that because media is such a powerful force in our lives, I felt I had to tell the world what happened." For Dahlia, understanding what really happened and telling her story helped her make sense of things. This gave her a way to infuse the negative experience with positive new meaning.

Power. Participants found various ways to regain control and personal power. Grace took her power back when she "abandoned the false identity and became my real self again." Dahlia explains, "I was going up against these media publications who are technically more powerful than me. The [major newspaper] is very powerful. [Name] magazine is very powerful." She continues,

> But now that I am getting the real story out there, even though I have to tell my story to someone one person at a time, I'm finding my own power through that. So I feel like even though it's hard, it's difficult, nobody or no entity is more powerful than I am.

Some participants took control of their own stories through web sites, blogs, videos,

documentaries, appearing on credible investigation talk shows, or by writing books. Other participants are still on their healing journeys. Mama Bear has advice for people to take their power back.

> Don't let it take you down. Take action. I know that I was attacked again for taking action, but I still took the action because at the end of the day, I did let the world know that was not okay. If somebody does do it to you in a reality show, take action. Go to the press. Don't be afraid of them. They're going to threaten you. Screw them.

Vittoria used her intellect to take her power back, reminding herself that if she did it before, she can do it again.

> I took an objective look at myself, I asked if I was smart, if I was intelligent, if I really managed people, if I really succeeded at managing an organization, managing projects, managing relationships. So I would say to myself, "Okay, so if I'm asked to do this, and I have a case study before me, how would I address it?" When I realized that I could find solutions to these problems I felt good afterwards. I really knew what I knew, and I can still do this. It's still there. It's just that the opportunity has not come for me to draw from that bank of knowledge, to begin to solve problems again.

Dahlia explains,

> Before this experience…if I saw a lawyer, I would think, oh that person's more powerful than I am, or if I saw a celebrity, oh they are more powerful than I am. But I don't feel that way anymore. I feel that I am equally as powerful because I have a voice and I can keep telling this story. And even if I don't get the results that I want in this lifetime I know that enough people know about it that my story will live on. I actually feel incredibly powerful now, but it took a long time to get there. I feel like I can survive anything.

Power Threat Meaning Framework. Examples of power and powerlessness have blossomed in this study like a garden of lived examples. Media professionals, media organizations, social media influencers, and even the collective of users have an imbalance of power over the individuals' stories they wish to exploit or the individuals they wish to punish. Media professionals wield tremendous power in their ability to publish or broadcast, in their fact-checking decisions, in their selection of stories, in how they prime readers' or viewers' expectations before they even get to the content with their choice of story titles or promotional

trailers. Except in rare cases, the subjects of the stories are not allowed to see the media in advance or have any say in what the producers create, or how the stories about them are framed. Media professionals have the power to enrich or destroy lives with the words they choose, how they edit the narratives, their decisions to allow or not allow defaming posts or comments on their blogs, and their determination of newsworthy elements. Wellman (2016) underscores the almighty power of the media with their ability to decide which story elements "will be extrapolated and enhanced, and this process of selection and distortion of the event will be replicated throughout all stages of media coverage and distribution" (Wellman, 2016, p. 5). In Briana's story, for example, she was repeatedly compared to a fictional character in a movie. This association was so strong and easy to replicate, it not only became the predominant theme in her myriad of media misrepresentations, but the repetition of the false story meant the press failed in its opportunity to use its power to apply public pressure on law enforcement to find the real criminals. As a result, more people were victimized, and Briana was retraumatized.

All of the participants in this study were subjected to the fallout of false and misleading stories about themselves, violating their sense of "mineness," as Heidegger (1927/1962) calls it. The individuals they saw in these stories were not the individuals they knew themselves to be. This created a sense of derealization, or in Heideggerian terms, "uncanniness." The participants were "thrown" into circumstances over which they had no power. In example after example, the participants shared how they tried to correct or remove the false public narratives, but the media professionals refused to respond.

As a result of their powerlessness, those crucified in the media or social media felt, and in most cases continue to feel, a sense of threat. The targets were threatened with, and experienced, real harm. Examples include a loss of reputation, social exclusion, disconnection, loss of career,

loss of status, fear of being physically harmed, unwanted changes in the lifeworld, loss of dreams, threats to financial survival, and loss of opportunities to name a few. The threats and the meaning of the threats invite logical responses. These include strong negative emotions and beliefs such as anguish, anger, rage, a desire for revenge, humiliation, panic attacks, anxiety, loss of self-worth, self-blame, detachment, dissociation, the need to numb or escape, isolation or withdrawal, psychological overwhelm, avoidance, hyperarousal, the compulsion to correct the story, the urge to fight back, suicidal ideation, and more. Each story is unique in its "situatedness" and cannot be understood outside of its narrative, its context, or the individual's Dasein. The intensity of the distress will be influenced by the characteristics of the individuals, the nature of the story, the medium, the impact on the lifeworld, and the access that the individuals have to power-enhancing resources, including social support and therapy. In this regard, when considering how the DSM-5 determines PTSD based on a prescribed list of isolated symptoms that manifest after a narrowly defined list of potential traumatizing agents (which does not currently include MHM), the PTM Framework appears to be an appropriate and productive tool through which to understand these experiences.

Growth. Participants shared some of the ways in which this experience has provided a springboard for personal growth. Some reported deeper personal insight and healthier world views. Others reported a stronger sense of self, increased fearlessness, more fortified personal boundaries, positive new perspectives, and increased appreciation. Participants explained that the MHM experience has made them more sensitive to others who are experiencing life difficulties, and it lit a fire in them for helping others. In some cases, the MHM experience gave birth to new purposes unrelated to the MHM as well. In Heideggerian terms, the ability to give meaning to this experience would mean the survivors of MHM have "come-to-a-clearing." This does not,

however, mean that the participants are “healed” or “recovered.” It means they have found a way to reassign the meaning of the event and integrate it into their life stories. For most, the MHM experience still hurts. What happened to these people can never be undone, and it is still a source of threat and potential new wounds in the future. Highlighting the fact that people can experience post-traumatic growth is not meant to minimize the serious nature of the trauma.

Limitations

Due to the nature of this study, there are inherent limitations. Though researcher subjectivity was disclosed, it still contributed to the choices of which lenses to use and which questions participants should be asked. The study did not control for differences in personality types, social histories, emotional processing styles, or the media formats through which participants were misrepresented. These untracked independent variables may have shaped the nature and intensity of the survivor’s trauma. Furthermore, in the case of survivors of trauma or career loss, there was no clear way to disentangle the trauma effects of MHM from the other possible stressors. There was a broad variety of mediums through which the participants were misrepresented, making it difficult to clearly grasp the unique characteristics of the lived experience on any one specific type. For example, those on reality shows agreed in writing to appear on the shows, but they were purposely misrepresented, then prevented from publicly speaking about how they were misrepresented through the use of legal threats. Those misrepresented in television news, newspapers, social media, or legal publications had different experiences. The phenomenological part of the study was about the lived experiences of these participants. Although patterns and themes arose, there is no possibility of generalizing the lived experiences of a small group to the population as a whole. In the quantitative section, the number of participants was too small to generalize in a meaningful way. This study was also limited by

the variance in time that lapsed since the MHM experiences. Some participants were still experiencing new attacks in the media or social media; others reported MHM experiences that were over a decade ago.

Implications for the Future

Since I sought a purposive sampling through an advertisement and communications that asked for people who had been through a severe case of misrepresentation, it was clear that my sample would produce those who found the experience traumatic. Although there was an emphasis on understanding whether MHM was experienced as traumatic and whether it impacted narrative identity, in this study, the two short trauma surveys were related to identity. In future studies, longer, more standard trauma inventories could be used.

Future research could explore whether there is a difference between the experiences of those whose wrongdoings were exposed versus those who were unjustly humiliated. Other topics of exploration could include studying whether the experience is different for those intentionally and unintentionally misrepresented, whether extroversion versus introversion impacts the experience, whether those exploited for the financial gain of others have a different healing trajectory. More research is needed to identify strategies for recovery and best practices for practitioners assisting survivors of public shaming or traumatic media misrepresentation.

With all the media distribution venues that are eager to fill their pipelines with real or unscripted content, the time is ripe for media hegemonies to exploit private citizens. The power differential in these cases is so vast, private citizens have little opportunity to hold these organizations accountable. This study highlights the need for increased education, regulation, and ethics by and for media and social media organizations, media professionals, and social media influencers and users. Due to the all-encompassing nature of the negative life

consequences for survivors of MHM, including the potential for suicide, from a public policy standpoint, media professionals, academics, government agencies, attorneys, social media organizations and non-profit organizations, and survivors would do well to unite to study this topic, develop educational and prevention strategies, and create a regulating body with a code of ethics to prevent the unjust and reckless destruction of human lives by media professionals who are protected by powerful media entities.

Other implications for future study include opening a robust new conversation in academia to study the impact of the media on those who are the subjects or characters in the media stories. The unexplored possibilities are vast. For example, does playing an evil character, a hero, or an angel have an impact on an actor's real-world behaviors? Are losers of contest shows more prone to suicidal ideation? What is the lifelong impact of becoming a child star on YouTube? Does positive representation in the media after MHM have a mitigating effect on the negative impact of the MHM?

Conclusion

Eleven survivors of a traumatic MHM experience were interviewed using a hermeneutic phenomenological framework. Although there is no one set methodology to conduct hermeneutic research (Kafle, 2013), I was guided by the recommendations of van Manen (1990) which included turning to the nature of the lived experience, investigating experience as lived using the lifeworld existentials, engaging in hermeneutic phenomenological reflection and writing, maintaining a strong orientation to the research questions, and balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole. Additionally, to triangulate and validate the information, 22 survivors of MHM participated in two trauma scales as well. Results supported that MHM can be a traumatic experience with serious negative consequences on individual lives, identities, and

well-being. A construct was created to define the essential patterns of traumatic MHM, and common themes and meanings emerged. Although survivors of MHM display symptoms of PTSD or CPTSD, there are also distinguishing features that set it apart. The power, threat, meaning framework was also explored in this context and found to be an appropriate fit.

Common themes and practices for healing were manifest, along with experiences of post-traumatic growth for some participants. However, for others, the wound is still open, the journey is not over. The story of trauma, according to Caruth (1996) is a story that testifies to its endless impact on life, creating an "oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life" after the trauma (p. 7). In today's day and age, media organizations sometimes welcome producers, journalists, and bloggers to traffic in the humiliation and exploitation of human bodies and lives, even if only digitally. Nevertheless, traumatic MHM can have a catastrophic impact on a human life. As one participant, Sterling, explains, people "think a callout is just something that happens on Instagram and you move on. But it affects every aspect of your real life—socially, romantically, professionally, financially, emotionally, even physically, all my anxiety-induced vomiting. And the effects continue for years."

This dissertation makes unique contributions to the field of media psychology. First, this study focuses on the intersection of media and psychology in a novel way. Whereas most studies in media psychology study the impact of the media on the viewer or the user of the media, this study explores the psychological impact of being the subject of the media. This study symbolizes the opening of a new focus of research in media psychology, namely, studying the media experience through the first-person lens of the participants and subjects of the stories. Second, this study features trauma which is most often a topic for clinical psychology. Yet, media professionals who are using human subjects as content need to understand how, when, and why a

personal media experience becomes traumatic, and what it is like for the people they exploit to live through that experience. Although there has been limited work on how viewing disturbing media can contribute to trauma symptoms, this is the first study to integrate media and trauma from the first-person subject or participant perspective. Finally, viewing media as a potentially traumatizing agent, this research took a unique hermeneutic phenomenological look at the lived experience of the misrepresentation, humiliation, and victim-blaming of trauma survivors. The information in this research presents examples of media-generated retraumatization, and consequently calls for media professionals to become trauma-informed so as to handle survivor stories with proper sensitivity and care.

Margalit (1996) reminds us that a decent society does not humiliate its people. May a more decent society we become.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Communication

After taking the survey, participants will be given the option to participate in an interview that is recorded and transcribed. Instead of using the word ‘interview,’ the word ‘conversation’ will be used. The prompt will be written as follows:

> Understanding more about your experience is important to this study. Would you be willing to allow a researcher to have a confidential conversation with you? You can use a pseudonym.

If the subject checks yes, the following instructions will appear.

> Which would be the most comfortable way for you to have this conversation?
>
> By telephone
> By video call
> In person
>
> What is the best way to communicate about setting up the time for this conversation?
>
> By phone
> By text
> By email

Appendix B

Scheduling Email

In the communications about scheduling the interview time, the following information will also be relayed:

Thank you for being willing to participate in this study.

If there is anything you would like the researcher to read related to your experience, any links or videos you would like to share, or anything else you would like the researcher to see that would help provide understanding about your experience, please feel free to share it, either beforehand, or during the call. Send it to cmarie@email.fielding.edu. The conversation should take about an hour. Since you might wake up some past emotions, make sure you know a therapist you can speak to if needed afterward.

Which of the following dates works best for you?

Appendix C

Follow-up: Well-Being Check

The day after the interview, the participant will receive the following communication:

Hi (participant),

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your story with me. I know that wasn't easy but the information and insights you shared were very helpful. I'll be writing up your information in the next week and I will send you a copy of what I have written so you can check it for accuracy.

[A personalized, affirming sentence will be added here so the participant does not feel objectified by a form letter.]

Yesterday we talked about serious topics, so I want to make sure you are okay. I've attached a resource sheet in case you need extra support right now.

Kind regards,

Appendix D

Follow-up: Member-Checking

After the significant statements and descriptions are written up per participant, the participant will be emailed a copy to confirm accuracy. This is the communication.

Hi (participant!),

How are you doing? I want to thank you again for agreeing to share your story with me. I have written up what I felt were the most significant statements you made, along with my interpretation of your events and what they meant to you. Could you please read them over to make sure I have accurately captured the essence of how you experienced being humiliated or misrepresented in the media?

[A personalized, affirming sentence will be added here so the participant does not feel objectified by a form letter.]

If there is anything you feel could be worded better, or anything you would like to add, please let me know.

Kind regards,

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

Fielding Graduate University
Informed Consent Form

This is a research study on

The Impact of Media Humiliation and Misrepresentation on Narrative Identity and Well-being

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Christine Marie, a doctoral student in the School of Psychology at Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, CA. This study is supervised by Jerri Lynn Hogg, PhD. This research involves the study of how media humiliation and misrepresentation impact narrative identity and well-being, and is part of my Fielding dissertation. You are being asked to participate in this study because either you, or someone who knows about your story, has indicated that you have had an experience with media humiliation or misrepresentation. If you were referred by another person, that person will not be advised as to whether you chose to participate. Furthermore, you answered three questions which indicate that you indeed had the experience that I am looking to study.

Before you agree to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the information provided in this Informed Consent Form. If you have any questions, please ask the researcher for clarification.

Why is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experience of those who have gone through humiliation, victim-blaming, or misrepresentation in the media. The researcher is seeking to understand how such an experience impacted your well-being and sense of self, as well as what helped you to recover.

How Many People Will Take Part in the Study?

At least 30 people are being sought for the surveys, and 10 of those will have the opportunity to participate in conversational interviews.

What is Involved in the Study?

For those of you who volunteer to have a conversation with the researcher, you can have this conversation in the way that is most comfortable for you – in person, by video call, or over the telephone. This conversation will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy, but not video recorded. Examples of questions will include:

- Tell me about your experience where you were misrepresented, victim-blamed, or humiliated in the media.

- Can you share some of your thoughts and feelings from that time?

- Did seeing how you were misrepresented in the media impact how you saw yourself in real life?

- How did this experience impact your ability to be effective in life or in your career?

- Was there anything that helped you heal and cope?

How Long Will I Be In The Study?

The study involves a conversation to be arranged at your convenience. The conversation will last approximately 60 minutes. After the researcher writes up the notes about your interview, they will be emailed to you so you can confirm their accuracy or make suggestions. If additional clarity is needed, a follow-up call may take place that will be less than 10 minutes. The total time involved in participation is expected to be no more than 70 minutes.

What Are The Risks Of The Study?

The risks to you include a chance that you may experience some emotional discomfort during or after your participation. It is also possible that you will experience additional trauma, and that your feelings may be even more negative after participating in the study. Should you experience such discomfort, please contact the counseling services and/or therapists provided in the attached resource list. In an effort to minimize negative affect, the interview will conclude by exploring your strengths, by delving into the coping mechanisms you used to get through the experience, and by discussing what worked for you on you path to recovery. You can withdraw consent at any time without penalty.

What Are The Benefits To Taking Part In This Study?

You may develop greater personal awareness of the ways your experience impacted your life, as well as ways you have grown, as a result of your participation in this research. By really thinking about what happened and answering the questions, it may help you make sense of it all, perhaps even giving positive meaning to a negative life event. While one outcome to participation may be a sense of relief, it is not guaranteed.

What about Confidentiality and Protection?

Study-related records will be held in confidence. Your consent to participate in this study includes consent for the researcher and supervising faculty. Your research records may also be inspected by authorized representatives of the Fielding Graduate University, including members of the Institutional Review Board or their designees. They may inspect, photocopy, or print as needed, your records for study monitoring or auditing purposes. It's also possible that just parts

of your record may be photocopied or printed. All responses will be confidential as allowed by the communication or delivery method used.

As part of this study, the researcher may use direct quotes from you in publications or presentations. Identifying information will be removed if you wish. Nevertheless, since your unique story details and quotes from you are necessary for this research, it still may be possible for people to determine your identity. All materials will be kept in the survey database and Microsoft OneDrive with a strong password. The tape recordings will be listened to only by the Researcher and the Dissertation Chair. Any records that would identify you as a participant in this study, such as informed consent forms, will be destroyed by approximately three years after the study is completed. The results of this research will be published in my dissertation and possibly published in subsequent journals, books and presentations.

The security of data transmitted over the Internet cannot be guaranteed, therefore, there is a slight risk that the information you send to me via email will not be secure. The collection of such data is not expected to present any greater risk than you would encounter in everyday life when sending and/or receiving information over the Internet.

Participation In Research Is Voluntary:

You are free to decline to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time, either during or after your participation, without negative consequences. Should you withdraw, your data will be eliminated from the study and will be destroyed. The researcher is also free to terminate the study at any time.

Additional Information:

If you have any questions about any aspect of this study or your involvement, please tell the Researcher before signing this form. You may also contact the supervising faculty if you have questions or concerns about your participation in this study. The supervising faculty has provided contact information at the bottom of this form.

You may also ask questions at any time during your participation in this study.

If at any time you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, contact the Fielding Graduate University IRB by email at irb@fielding.edu or by telephone at 805-898-4034.

I have read the above informed consent document and have had the opportunity to ask questions about this study. I have been told my rights as a research participant, and I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. The Institutional Review Board of Fielding Graduate University retains the right to access to all signed informed consent forms.

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