SURVIVOR LEADERS: A GROUNDED THEORY INQUIRY INTO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA SURVIVORS

A Dissertation

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

---

by

WENDY LYNNE MILLS

Dr. Jeni Hart, Dissertation Supervisor

MAY 2010

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

SURVIVOR LEADERS: A GROUNDED THEORY INQUIRY
INTO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA SURVIVORS

presented by Wendy Lynne Mills,

a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Jeni Hart

Professor Kim Anderson

Professor Carol Maher

Professor Brendan Maxcy

Professor Stephen Whitney

Dedicated to my research participants, with my deep gratitude, admiration and affection.

"It's an honor to listen to the truth of someone's life" (Bass & Davis, 1993, p.33).

The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. Isaiah 50:4 (KJV)

I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. Philippians 3:13 (NASB)

Bass, E. & Davis, L. (1993). *Beginning to heal: A first book for survivors of child sexual abuse.* Harper Perennial: New York.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been a long road, and I have had good company. I give thanks for the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, particularly my committee. I am deeply grateful to Jeni Hart, my advisor, for believing in my unusual topic and allowing me to do a grounded theory study. Her feedback made me a better writer and a better person. My committee members brought varied perspectives and enriched my understanding, and I thank them for the time and care they gave this project: Kim Anderson, MU School of Social Work; Carol Maher, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis; Brendan Maxcy, Indiana University School of Education, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies; and Stephen Whitney, MU School of Educational, School and Counseling Psychology.

In addition to my committee, there are many others who have encouraged me in this process. My heartfelt thanks to: Kirsten Havig for her insight regarding study design, even though it caused me to have to completely rewrite chapter three; Kim Anderson for recommending *The Resilient Self* and changing the way I understood child abuse, years before this study began; Carrie Reich for her insightful counsel, scholarly and otherwise, during the last year of this process; Lori Wilcox for her perceptive peer coding; Cara Wylie for her wise, timely, and detailed feedback on the findings; and Rich Burgess and John Schuler for their thoughtful commentary on the conclusions and implications. I have been blessed by my amazing, resilient students at Fulton Academy 2004-2009 and Lewis and Clark Learning Center 2009-2010, who asked over and over "Are you a doctor yet?" to keep me going. Their pride at my completion of this degree means more than anything else. As Lewis and Clark Learning Center Teacher of the Year Rich Burgess says of our students, the Board of Education signs my paycheck, but I work for them.

My church family from New Wine Fellowship in Fulton, Missouri steadfastly supported me through this process, and I am blessed by Pastor Bill and Terri Newton and

the rest of the congregation for your prayers, encouragement and friendship. For those with whom I share a pew, my thanks for holding me accountable and covering me with grace: Andre Cook, Angel Wilmsmeyer, Kristen Finke, Robbie Smith, and Chelsea Smith. Thanks also to Barbie Bryan and Linda Hall your prayers—they helped.

For my study participants, I am humbled by your willingness to open your hearts and let me look around. Your courage and generosity amaze me. I am so glad you are there for kids.

"Our great need is heart-preparation. Luther held it as an axiom: "He who has prayed well has studied well." We do not say that men are not to think and use their intellects; but *he will use his intellect best who cultivates his heart most.*"

EM Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*, retrieved at http://www.oldlandmarks.com/embpow12.htm April 6, 2010

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SURVIVOR LEADERS: A GROUNDED THEORY INQUIRY INTO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA SURVIVORS

Wendy Lynne Mills

Jeni Hart, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Most research about childhood trauma focuses on the damage it causes. Some research delves into how resilience and posttraumatic growth can mitigate the effects of trauma and how survivors may thrive in the aftermath of trauma. However, no previous research has examined how childhood trauma shapes leadership. This grounded theory study explored the influence of traumatic experience in childhood on the professional practice of school leaders. Four study participants, all former or practicing principals, took part in two individual interviews. The first interview focused on the participants' childhood experiences of trauma including physical, emotional and sexual abuse; physical and emotional neglect; family violence; as well substance abuse and alcoholism of parents. The core category of survivor leader emerged from the data. Survivor leaders arise from abuse and neglect, combined with intelligence and opportunity. They demonstrate resilience and posttraumatic growth in their commitment to use their powers for good by being student advocates and protectors, though they also exhibit lingering indicators of abuse including symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and unhealthy coping strategies. Despite these issues, however, the survivor leaders in this study were a deliberately hopeful group. Undergirding the core category are four themes: loner who seeks to connect, from ignorance to penetrating insight, a soft place to fall, and a voice for the voiceless. The core category reflects who the survivor leaders are, and the underlying categories reflect what the survivor leaders do. The results of this study suggest a need for further study into the newly

identified phenomenon of survivor leadership. Noted implications for education and practice include the importance of educating school leaders on the long term effects of childhood trauma to enrich their understanding of the staff and students in their care.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Early in my career in school administration, I had a conversation with one of my teachers about a little girl who had recently enrolled in our Title I preschool program after being placed in foster care in our community. The child in question had been removed from the custody of her biological parents due to sexual abuse. The teacher and I discussed the little girl's academic and social development and the apparent effects of her abuse history. The teacher asked sadly, "What will become of her? What kind of life is she ever going to have?" I wanted so badly to say, "Well, *I* grew up to become *your boss*, and she might, too." I could not say it then; I did not realize it at the time, but that was the moment I found my dissertation topic.

I did not have the voice to speak up in that moment with that teacher, but I have it now. I no longer hesitate to own all of my history, including abuse in childhood. Even though the education profession is filled with kind, caring adults who recoil from abused children because their experiences are too painful to acknowledge, I am in favor of facing those experiences with compassion rather than pity, because "not all children who have been exposed to adverse conditions develop pathologies as adults" (Anderson & Danis, 2006, p. 2) and "there is no bona fide evidence that certain events, even horrific events... are inevitably linked to enduring negative psychological outcomes" (Kirschman, 2004, p. 166). In fact, not only is it possible to survive difficult experiences without becoming damaged or defective, it is also possible that "surviving a traumatic incident can make you stronger for having incorporated a powerful event into your life. It can connect you

more deeply with others and more deeply with parts of yourself you may not have known existed" (Kirschman, 2004, p. 184). Rather than viewing abused children as destined for disaster, I favor viewing abused children in terms of potential; they can grow a mighty heart for helping others. The experience of trauma and the ensuing trajectory of recovery influence all aspects of a person's development; "[A] traumatic event…may appear later in all sorts of guises—both symptomatic and creative" (Terr, 1990, p. 25). Trauma can impel children to seek expressive outlets (Wollin & Wollin, 1993) and trauma influences the way painters paint and the way writers write (Terr, 1990); it is reasonable, then, to explore how trauma influences how leaders lead. The experience of surviving trauma is intensely personal (Anderson & Danis, 2006; Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Terr, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993) and leadership is influenced and shaped by a variety of factors (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Burns, 1978; Hackman & Johnson, 2000; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 2000; Lencioni, 2002; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Yukl, 2006). It is possible that trauma survivors who grow up to become leaders may lead in ways that are unique. This study will explore how childhood experiences of trauma influence the practice of school leaders.

The process by which people rebound and recover from painful experiences is known as posttraumatic or adversarial growth, in which the individual is not only still standing, but standing stronger (Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Positive changes, noted as a measure of adversarial or posttraumatic growth, include "enhanced self-efficacy, increased community closeness, increased spirituality, increased compassion, increased faith in people, lifestyle changes, enhanced family closeness, and material gain" (Linley & Joseph, 2004, p.12). Out of this

spirituality, faith in people, and compassion, comes a desire to help others (Kirschman, 2004); coupled with an affinity for the school setting (Terr, 1990). Trauma survivors who are also school leaders may engage in leadership practices influenced by the experience of trauma and the ensuing posttraumatic growth.

Statement of the Problem

Although there is a staggering amount of research documenting the ways traumatic experience can damage (e.g., Abdulrehman & DeLuca, 2001; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Blume, 1990; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Terr, 1990), less research has considered how traumatic experience can strengthen or temper (Almedom, 2005; Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Wollin & Wollin, 1993) and no research has explored how childhood trauma may influence the adult leadership practices of survivors. In addition, there is much to be gained from understanding traumatic experience as a springboard for personal and/or professional growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Trauma survivors live with a rich appreciation of just how good, and bad, life can feel. They may be more fully alive than individuals who have not been similarly challenged by trauma (Almedom, 2005; Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). "In adulthood, the psychological awareness of resilient survivors ripens into a penetrating *understanding* of themselves and other people" (Wollin & Wollin, 1993, p. 67). Very often, however, resilient survivors do not openly discuss their experiences (Blume, 1990; Lawson, 2002; Terr, 1990) and their stories are un-mined resources. Because traumatized children often feel strong attachments to school (Terr, 1990), it is reasonable to assume

that they may seek careers in education, including educational leadership. By examining the professional practice of school leaders through the lens of traumatic experience and posttraumatic growth, we may move some of this *understanding* from tacit to explicit knowledge, thereby generating knowledge for the entire organization and by extension, the profession (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Context of Trauma, Resilience and Post-Traumatic Growth

Some things are difficult to look at without flinching. It is difficult to think about some of the terrible things that happen to or around children; but these events shape the children they touch, and there is much to be learned. Therefore, "we cannot respond with our own mortification to the 'shame' of others" (Terr, 1990, p. 121). Instead, we must consider the experience of trauma in childhood (Anderson, 2006; Blume, 1990; Lawson, 2002; Linley, 2003; Wollin & Wollin, 1993) and the ways that trauma shows itself in the lives of survivors.

Terr's (1990) work began in the absence of scholarly work regarding the influence of psychic trauma in childhood. She found that "[a] person probably will not become fully traumatized unless he or she feels utterly helpless during the event or events" (p. 8), but if this experience of powerlessness does occur, trauma influences children's sense of time, of meaning, and of themselves. However, when exploring childhood trauma, most research focuses on the damage done; for example, "studies have shown that many children who have been exposed to acts of violence between their parents or parental figures are more maladjusted than are those from nonviolent families" (Anderson & Danis, 2006, p. 1). In fact, most research does not even look for positive

changes resulting from traumatic experiences. For example, Linley and Joseph (2004) "did not identify a single study that considered adversarial growth in children" (p. 19).

There are other ways of thinking about trauma. "Exploring how persons grow and prevail in the aftermath of violence and traumatic events is a relatively new trend" (Anderson & Danis, 2006, p. 3). This perspective is new, but promising. It is important to explore not only the negative effects of difficult experiences, but we must also seek to understand the ways in which those same difficult experiences can fortify and increase an individual's capacity (Linley & Joseph, 2004) for learning, loving and leading.

The potential for positive change arising from trauma is framed in terms of resilience and posttraumatic growth (Almedom, 2005; Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). "Rather than studying what makes people sick, psychologists are looking at how people struggle well and bounce back from adversity. This field of study is called 'resilience' (Kirschman, 2004, p.175). Resilience allows people to withstand trauma and resist (Anderson & Danis, 2006); even if they cannot stop the event, they can resist the negative influence. It should be noted that resilience is not about stoic or unrealistic denial that a trauma has occurred; rather, resilience is about honest acknowledgement and determined buoyancy (Kirschman, 2004).

While resilience is the absence of impairment, posttraumatic growth is the presence of a deliberate transformation in which individuals become more than they were prior to or without the trauma. Posttraumatic growth is different from resilience. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) held resilience allows traumatized individuals to continue functioning reasonably well after the distressing events, but posttraumatic growth is more

than resisting the harmful effects of trauma. Rather, posttraumatic growth recreates the survivor as someone stronger, wiser, and deeper than before.

Essentially, trauma can tear people down, but they can then build something greater from the wreckage (Almedom, 2005; Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Kirschman (2004) alluded to this process in working with firefighters in critical incident debriefings, telling shell-shocked firefighters, "This…will change you, but it doesn't have to damage you" (p. 182). Not only are trauma survivors not damaged, they are often improved for having endured and survived (Almedom, 2005; Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). "[T]he frightening and confusing aftermath of trauma, where fundamental assumptions are severely challenged, can be fertile ground for unexpected outcomes that can be observed in survivors: posttraumatic growth" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1). From this fertile ground, survivors bloom into something strong and beautiful through the process of dealing with challenges that transform them into something greater than before (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Exposure to trauma will essentially deepen survivors' capacity for empathy, their hunger for meaningful and challenging work, and their sense of connectedness to others who share those values (Kirschman, 2004).

The extent to which individuals experience posttraumatic growth is influenced by several factors. Ironically, those who suffer more extreme trauma also experience more extreme growth in response to the experience; this is not always true, of course, but it is often the case (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Linley and Joseph found that "greater levels of perceived threat and harm are associated with higher levels of adversarial growth" (p. 15). Gender and age also appear to be part of the dynamic that determines the degree of

growth following trauma (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Although there are confounding variables, it does appear that women may experience posttraumatic growth more extensively than men, and younger people tend to experience posttraumatic growth at a greater rate than older people (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Of particular interest to this study is the finding that higher levels of education coincided with higher levels of posttraumatic growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004), since the research participants are all employed in jobs that require at least one graduate degree. Thus, it was possible I might find evidence of posttraumatic growth in my research.

Finally, individuals who placed a greater influence on the importance of spirituality and faith tended to do much better in the aftermath of trauma (Wollin & Wollin, 1993) as "[r]eligious activities and intrinsic religiousness were both positively associated with growth" (Linley & Joseph, 2004, p.16). Organizational leadership benefits from members of the organization feeling connected to something greater than themselves (e.g., Bolman & Deal, 2003; Burns, 1978; Gronn, 2002; Kirschman, 2004; Lencioni, 2002; Rogers & Oakes, 2005; Yukl, 2006); possibly personal leadership from surviving to thriving also benefits from a sense of connectedness and purpose (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Wollin & Wollin, 1993).

Abuse survivors and distributed leadership

There is a legal expression, *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, which means that just because one thing follows another, it does not mean they are related. In research, this translates into the tenet that correlation does not imply causation. Despite this, however, early in my doctoral program I began exploring the connection between a specific life experience and wondering how it influences the way I do my job. I began this research

while working as the principal of Fulton Academy, an alternative school serving a two generation grade span, from early childhood to GED. Some of my doctoral program colleagues conducted a leadership study on the Academy and found that staff and students participated in distributed leadership. Some of the characteristics of distributed leadership are ongoing collaboration and consultation, shared decision making, decreased emphasis on the formal administrative role as leader, and increased emphasis on the formal administrative role as facilitator. I connected my colleagues' findings and my observations about the way I do my job with the following from my personal reading. "Adult incest survivors who attain positions of power and authority in their work are likely to be affected by their incest histories. They may feel ill at ease with their authority..." (Blume, 1990, p. 52). That thought echoed and prompted me to see other potential connections. Based on my experiences, there seemed to be many common characteristics of adult survivors that correlate with and may influence my leadership specifically and possibly distributed leadership more broadly.

Abused children are trapped in a world where they know that something is wrong but everyone pretends that things are fine. Because we learn to doubt our own perceptions, we grow up to check our understanding of a situation against other people's, to be sure of what is real. This tendency predisposes us to a participative style of leadership because of our propensity for asking for and responding to feedback, and relentless reflection on how we might do better (Blume, 1990; Lawson, 2002).

Another characteristic of adult incest survivors is the expectation of being invisible (Blume, 1990), based on the childhood experience of existing only to meet the needs of an adult. Formal leadership roles such as the principalship require regular

exposure to the spotlight, but these experiences can be minimized when the spotlight is shared through distributed leadership (Sebring, Hallman, & Smiley, 2003). When asked to present, I always include students and audiences adore them. Our school staff meets weekly and whoever needs to lead the meeting is the one to lead the meeting; I deliberately never sit at the head of the table. I thought this was about being egalitarian but it may be about feeling unworthy. Additionally, adult survivors' sense of invisibility causes us to believe that we will not be remembered if we are not present, so we build our organizations for the work to carry on without us (Gardner, 2000). When I started thinking about the possible relationship between my childhood and the way I do my job, I went back and re-read my definition of leadership written during one of the first classes of my doctoral program. Interestingly, I wrote "It's the moments when I am invisible that I feel I have really done what I am there to do."

A third characteristic of adult survivors is the attraction to high needs populations. We "value being needed because [we] can't imagine being wanted" (Blume, 1990, p. 246). Among the Fulton Academy staff, we shared a history of sexual assault, domestic violence, adolescent felonies, addicted parents, childhood abuse, suicide attempts in our immediate families, and murdered loved ones. I think all that trauma was why we were where we were, and possibly why other people seek work that allows them to help those most in need, because "fixing things can help you 'fix' yourself" (Wollin & Wollin, 1993, p. 144). The late Lt. R.E. McKee of the Fulton Police Department was a tremendous advocate for abused children as well as an early supporter of my inquiry into this area, pointing to his own mother's suicide and his own and his sister's career paths as evidence of the need of traumatized children to grow into careers in the helping

professions, postulating. "You can't unf--- your own family, but maybe you can unf--- someone else's" (R. McKee, 2007, personal communication).

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of my study was to explore how the experience of trauma in childhood influences the professional practice of school leaders of B-21 (early childhood through GED) organizations. Wollin and Wollin (1993) found difficult experiences in childhood could foster the development of skills and strengths that might not otherwise have appeared in that individual. Further, the experience of trauma can initiate the process of posttraumatic growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004), where an individual is transformed to someone greater than before the trauma. Therefore, I entered the research with the assumption the school leaders interviewed for the study would evidence some aspects of resilience or posttraumatic growth in their lives and in their professional practice. The hope is that the lessons of this research will strengthen the assertion that "resilience can be learned" (Kirschman, 2004, p. 175) and leadership is influenced by many life experiences.

Research Question

The central question this grounded theory study explored was: How do childhood experiences of trauma influence the professional practice of school leaders? As a public school principal and a child abuse survivor, I was aware of the potential for sensitivity to suffering in others, the need to help others, as well as a host of negative sequalae associated with surviving trauma. After reviewing the literature, I included the following ancillary research question:

1. To what extent do posttraumatic growth and/or resilience influence the professional practice of the research participants?

Method Used to Address the Research Questions

Grounded theory was determined to be the most appropriate method for this research inquiry because "its purpose is to identify complex and hidden psychosocial processes with the goal of developing…theory" (Anderson & Danis, 2006, p. 4, citing Glaser, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

I created a semi structured interview outline consisting of open ended questions to serve as a baseline for each interview. I did allow the participants to dictate the direction of the interview, with some participants gravitating to one aspect of the questions and other participants responding differently, as might be expected. Two interviews were conducted with each of the participants. The first interview focused on the participants' experiences of trauma in childhood and the second interview emphasized the values, habits and guiding principles of the participants' professional practice. Once data were collected, the interviews and observations were transcribed and analyzed by coding to indicate emerging themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Giske & Artenian, 2007). From the emerging themes, a core concept (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of survivor leader was identified.

Limitations of the Study

As is the case with any qualitative research, the findings of this grounded theory study cannot be generalized to the general population of all adult survivors of childhood trauma or even the greater population of school leaders. The thoughts and experiences of the study participants are portals to the world of the survivor leader and as such, the study

serves to expand the understanding of what it means to be leader. This study, like all others, does contain limitations. The first limitation was the focus on only four school leaders within Missouri public school B-21 settings. The experiences of the individuals within the study varied and it is reasonable to assume that the experiences of individuals in the general population would vary as well. However, the details regarding the childhood experiences and the professional practices of the school leaders in the study have been shared so that others might determine the extent and appropriateness of transferability to another milieu. Another limitation of the study is, paradoxically, a lack of prior research into the influence of childhood trauma on adult professional practice. The dearth of available information indicates a need for the inquiry, but building a road is curious business and I may have missed some major landmarks. Phenomena that were overlooked in this study will be revealed only by further study, though this work does provide a place to start.

While any qualitative study captures the specific experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the participants at a given moment, this study may be limited by the relatively small number of interviewees and by the selection process, essentially a convenience sample of school leaders known by me or by my doctoral program colleagues. A more geographically and culturally diverse sample may have yielded different core concepts and different theory may have emerged from the data. The time constraints of the study are an additional limitation, for the two interviews of each participant were difficult to schedule as most of the interviewees were practicing public school administrators with very full schedules. Further, it is possible that the participants' perceptions prior to the

interviews were shaped by the fact the study was seeking to understand how their trauma history influenced their professional practice.

Finally, my own status as a practicing principal and as a trauma survivor constituted both a potential limitation and a strength of the study. My own trauma history was useful in disarming study participants as disclosure was an instant rapport builder. However, my status as a child abuse survivor may have influenced my interpretation of the data, hoping to find evidence of enhanced capacity for caring and effectiveness of leadership in adult survivors of childhood trauma. Although the emerging theory was constantly checked against the data to limit the effect of researcher bias, my experiences and beliefs cannot be discounted as influencing a study of this nature. Consequently, an exploration of my assumptions is necessary for assessing the transferability of the findings to other contexts.

Assumptions

I have a tremendous personal and professional stake in the belief that trauma can make one stronger, wiser, kinder or simply more aware. This conviction guides me in my own posttraumatic growth and also in the way I mentor my alternative school students and staff members as they negotiate their own trauma histories and attempt to make meaning in the wreckage of their lives. I began the study as a principal of a unique alternative public school setting, possibly the only building in the state with our particular grade span and program configuration. We had a daycare for children of teen parents and school employees, the Parents as Teachers program, Early Childhood Special Education, Title I Early Intervention preschool, alternative school programs for grades 6-12, and a GED program.

The alternative school title means different things to different people (Jeffries, Hollowell & Powell, 2004), but Kellmayer (1995) identifies ideal alternative schools as existing separately from traditional high schools, offering work for credit, and having administrators who encourage the school's success by welcoming visitors to study the school and giving feedback as well as publicizing positive information about the school. Our school was structured to follow those guidelines. Other characteristics that differentiate alternative from traditional schools are that students must interview to request placement; sign a contract specifying their responsibilities; participate in life skills classes emphasizing real world skills, including job seeking and keeping (Jeffries et al., 2004); and must attain 80% mastery of all course material (Byrne, 2004). All children who came to school in our building were there because they had been identified as at risk of school failure. In that setting, I saw the influence of trauma on a daily basis and frequently counseled students whose abuse experiences mirror my own. My history and my work environment kept me vigilant for signs of trauma.

My bias as a trauma survivor and observer had the potential to cloud my analysis of the data because I very much wanted there to be a silver lining to the things my students and fellow trauma survivors have experienced. I began the study with the assumption the childhood experience of trauma would yield both positive and negative effects in the lives of survivors. I also assumed school leaders who experienced childhood trauma would have varying degrees of insight and awareness regarding the influence of the traumatic experience personally and professionally. Finally, I assumed study participants would enhance their understanding of their own posttraumatic growth through the interview process.

Definition of Terms

B-21 Organization—public school district serving children ages birth-21 in educational programming from Parents as Teachers to GED.

Childhood—any time before the person permanently left home to live away from his/her family of origin.

Distributed Leadership—style of leadership characterized by ongoing collaboration and consultation, shared decision making, decreased emphasis on the formal administrative role as leader and increased emphasis on the formal administrative role as facilitator (Sebring, Hallman, & Smylie, 2003).

Parent—an adult from the school leader's childhood who had or would be expected to have a caregiver role.

Parentified Child—a child who assumes the role of caregiver or responsible adult in the family when the parent is unwilling or unable to fulfill this role (Payne, 2001).

Posttraumatic Growth—the ability to experience a traumatic event as a catalyst for positive change, making one greater than before or without the trauma (Almedom, 2005; Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Resilience—the ability to experience a traumatic event without being damaged in the process (Wollin & Wollin, 1993).

School Leader—any certified staff member who supervises other school personnel and works in a public school setting.

Transformational Leadership—style of leadership characterized by a commitment to the greater good and manifested in reciprocal influence among leader and followers (Burns, 1978).

Trauma will be defined as any of the following:

(a) natural disasters such as flood/tornado/hurricane/earthquake/fire; (b) potentially life-threatening injury/illness, experienced by the school leader or someone close to him/her; (c) death of a sibling, parent or others who resided in the home; (d) abuse/neglect experienced by school leaders or someone close to them; (e) substance abuse/alcohol abuse of one or both parents; (f) domestic violence between parents; (g) mental illness of one/both parents; and/or (h) any other event not specifically detailed above but identified by a potential participant.

Significance of the Study

I had mixed feelings about the ramifications of exploring the influence of trauma on leadership practice. In the early days of my contemplation of the topic, I searched WilsonWeb for full text articles related to incest and schools. I found an article about handling parent objections to controversial school library materials and an article about intergenerational effects of incest on parenting style—nothing about how incest affects the practice of educators, although it is estimated that one in three girls and only slightly fewer boys experience some form of sexual abuse (Blume, 1990).

In the quantitative methods class for my doctoral program, I learned that if there is nothing in the literature in the last 5 years, it may signal a blind spot, or people do not think it is important. The issue of incest and its influence on victims cannot be unimportant. As a culture, we think it is everyone's job at school to teach kids to say no to tobacco and alcohol and drugs. Though we disagree on whether to accomplish it through abstinence or condoms, we think it is everyone's job to protect kids from sexually transmitted diseases. On the subject of incest, however, we are silent; I very

rarely acknowledge my own survivor status except to other survivors because even kind people tend to reflexively withdraw. I am apprehensive to mention it at all, but I also feel obligated. Statistically, I know I am so blessed to have attained this level of education and professional success, especially given my childhood experiences, and I felt obliged to use the privilege to speak for those who did not escape so easily.

Sociologist Lonnie Athens, who survived intense family violence during his childhood, devoted years to the study of why people commit violent crimes. Rhodes (1999) found Athens sought to understand violent behavior because "[c]reative people choose careers born of childhood preoccupations. Athens understood that his full childhood of violent experiences—the most detailed, intimate case study he would ever collect—was too valuable, and earned at too high a price, to waste" (p. 28). I have spent many years reframing my abusive childhood in terms of posttraumatic growth and I have been a principal during most of that time. It has been my privilege to know some very determined kids. There were caring adults who encouraged me along the way and now it is my turn to encourage students in similar situations. As they have struggled with their own abusive or otherwise invalidating families, we have had many conversations where we acknowledge their challenges. Those conversations usually with conclude with a statement such as,

> Those hard times can show you who you really are. Those hard times will give you a mighty heart for other people's suffering. Those hard times will teach you things that most other people don't know. The kindness I am showing you now was given to me years ago by people who probably don't even remember me; I can't pay them back because they don't need anything from me. Instead, I get to give that kindness to you, and someday you will get to give that kindness to someone who needs it.

I said that dozens, possibly hundreds of times, before I learned there was a body of research known as posttraumatic growth. Knowing that this phenomenon had a name strengthened my commitment to paying it forward.

During my oral comprehensive examination, I was asked if my own experiences of childhood trauma might limit my ability to conduct this study effectively. I acknowledged that there is a trade off; my own abuse history might interfere, but it is that same history that makes people comfortable confiding in me. Back in October 2007, I already knew who some of my research participants might be and I had a vague idea of their histories. With them in mind, I replied: "Their stories need to be told, and I'm the one they will tell them to." And so they have, to my amazement and endless gratitude. They reinforced that "[t]rauma can scare us speechless. On the other hand, staying well seems to require translating our experiences into language" (Kirschman, 2004, p. 188).

The survivor leaders stories contained herein make a compelling case for the courage to engage in previously unexplored issues. Some children who experience trauma become mired in addiction, mental illness, delinquency, promiscuity, or silence (Abdulrehman & DeLuca, 2001; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Blume, 1990; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Terr, 1990). However, some children thrive, even in the face of trauma (Almedom, 2005; Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). B-21 organizations face decreasing funding and increasing accountability for the success of all students. There are children with so much and children with so little; fair or unfair, that is the reality of public education. We do not have any children to waste and must confront realities that impede optimal development for all students. How can we

call ourselves the most powerful nation in the world when our schools regularly fail a significant portion of our students? There is no acceptable loss margin in education; every child deserves our best effort, including our willingness to understand how trauma survivors might thrive and how we as a profession might tap that potential. Because of my own abuse history, I do my best work as a principal with children and adults who have survived abuse or other forms of trauma. The most shameful and painful experiences of my life have allowed me to reach some students I otherwise would not have understood. By exploring the potential of trauma survivors as school leaders, we may reframe our profession's understanding of what happens to traumatized children when they become adults.

Summary and Overview of the Remaining Chapters

The purpose of the study was to explore how the experience of trauma in childhood influences the professional practice of school leaders. An introduction to research in the areas of trauma, resilience and posttraumatic growth have been reviewed, although no research regarding the influence of posttraumatic growth on leadership practices was found. Therefore, the focus of my research was to discover the core concepts about childhood trauma and school leadership that emerged from the data collected in interviews of school leaders who experienced trauma in childhood. From the core concepts, new theory was created, grounded in the data.

In the following chapters, the specifics of the study and its findings will be presented. In Chapter Two, relevant literature regarding trauma, resilience, posttraumatic growth and leadership will be further reviewed and synthesized. Chapter Three sets out the design of the research project; the data collection and analysis methods; and the

safeguards employed to ensure the credibility, consistency, and trustworthiness of the study. The limitations of the study are also addressed. The findings from the study are reported in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five contains a summary of the study as well as a discussion of the implications of the findings for educational practice that seeks to understand the influence of trauma and posttraumatic growth on the practice of survivor leaders. Finally, I give recommendations for further research based on new questions raised in my study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This study is based at the intersection of research regarding the influence of trauma on children, the phenomena of resilience and post-traumatic growth, and the form and function of leadership. There is a lot of room at this intersection; I have discovered no prior research seeking to understand the ways in which childhood trauma may influence adult leadership practices. Research in this area is overdue, because "the frightening and confusing aftermath of trauma, where fundamental assumptions are severely challenged, can be fertile ground for unexpected outcomes that can be observed in survivors" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1), and these outcomes warrant better understanding.

Childhood Trauma

The Nature of Traumatic Experience

Trauma may appear in many different guises including abuse, accidents, and injuries (Terr, 1990) and a child need not experience the event firsthand to be traumatized; being a witness is traumatic in and of itself (Kirschman, 2004; Rhodes, 1999). Being hit by a car or having one's mother beaten by one's father are different experiences, but both are characterized by one of the most important indicators of trauma, the feeling of being completely helpless to stop or change the awful experience that is occurring (Terr, 1990). Trauma also coincides with powerlessness (Wollin & Wollin, 1993), in that "an overwhelmed child immediately feels during a traumatic event that he (sic.) has no options" (Terr, 1990, p. 35). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) characterized

trauma using an earthquake metaphor to describe the devastation wrought by trauma and its devastating aftermath; trauma shakes its survivors to the core and may crumble their foundations or their most basic beliefs about who they are and how their lives work. This loss of understanding and subsequent rebuilding process brings significant emotional distress (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002; Wollin & Wollin, 1993).

Short and Long Term Effects of Trauma

Victims of childhood trauma display a marked seriousness of affect (Terr, 1990), possibly because trauma such as abuse cause children to stop being children, regardless of their chronological age (Arnsworth & Stronk, 1999; Miguel, 2004). Children who bear adult burdens may feel many years older than they actually are and may feel as if they are responsible for the adults in their families (Wollin & Wollin, 1993). This feeling of being old beyond their years is known as being parentified; children who are parentified cannot bear being treated as children (Payne, 2001). They do not play in the light-hearted way that normal children play and often exhibit grim, repetitive play (Terr, 1990), if they play at all.

The absence of childlike demeanor is problematic when adults speak to parentified children as if they are typical children, especially in a school setting. "To the student who is already functioning as a parent, this is unbearable" (Payne, 2001, p. 106). Students are then forced to choose to respond to the parent voice either with their own parent voice or their child voice. Although responding in the parent voice is often construed as disrespectful, students often choose this option over responding in the child voice because "if the student uses the child voice, he/she will feel helpless and therefore

at the mercy of the adult. Many students choose to use the parent voice because it is less frightening than memories connected with being *helpless*" (Payne, p. 107, italics added).

Childhood trauma is not something that one simply outgrows (Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002). It is often perceived as setting the stage for a lifetime of problems (Abdulreheman & DeLuca, 2001). "It is amazing how long and how destructively the inner fires set burning during childhood will continue to spark" (Terr, 1990, p. 64). The scholarly literature of several disciplines thoroughly catalogs the short and long term damage to survivors of trauma. Feinauer, Mitchell, Harper and Dane's (1996) review of the literature found adult survivors experienced trouble sleeping, relating to others sexually or emotionally, managing stress, being present in the moment, feeling connected to others, developing and maintaining good mental and emotional health practices, avoiding substance abuse or eating disorders, and trusting others.

Adults who were abused as children can be expected to have difficulty with romantic and platonic relationships as well as limited interest in community life (Feinauer et al., 1996). Further, such adults were more likely to have emotional problems and difficulty relating to others due to feelings of "hostility, emotional withdrawal, and anxiety" (Abdulreheman & DeLuca, 2001, p. 199), without knowing when or how to express these feelings. Indeed, any kind of trauma can and often does result in psychological and physical distresses (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002; Wollin & Wollin, 1993).

Role of Schooling in the Lives of Traumatized Children

Although traumatized children are vulnerable to a variety of physical and emotional difficulties (Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002; Wollin & Wollin, 1993), there is one

area where traumatized children often do well: school (Payne, 2001; Payne, 2006; Terr, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). The power of schools to limit or mitigate the deleterious effects of trauma in childhood (Payne, 2001; Payne, 2006; Terr, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993) is of particular interest to this study because the interview participants were traumatized children who, by virtue of their career paths, chose to never leave school.

The stereotype of the traumatized child as a poor student or a behavior problem is not borne out by the research. Mowbray et al. (2004) characterized most of the adolescent children of mentally ill mothers as "socially and academically competent" (p. 212); while some children of mentally ill mothers struggle in school, many shine. Interestingly, even children traumatized *at school* can do well in school. In Terr's (1990) landmark examination of the effects of childhood trauma, she conducted longitudinal studies of the children kidnapped on their school bus and held captive there for over 24 hours. Despite the terror of the kidnapping and its association with the school environment, only 4 of the 25 children studied were having serious school issues 4 and 5 years after the kidnapping (Terr, 1990).

Although the literature thoroughly catalogs the challenges of trauma survivors (e.g., Abdulrehman & DeLuca, 2001; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Blume, 1990; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002), many survivors of childhood trauma thrive in school, possibly because "the healthiest part of these youngsters' lives was school" (Terr, 1990, p. 193). School can be the safest place in children's world; it is often the only place where a routine exists, where the roles of adults and children are clearly delineated, where adults mean what they say. School may well be the only place where life makes sense (Payne, 2001; Payne, 2006; Terr,

1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). For example, Mowbray et al. (2004) found adolescent children of mentally ill mothers reported high levels of attachment to their schools. Children flourish when they are provided with order and stability so schools have the opportunity to fill an important void in the lives of traumatized children, and in many cases, children respond positively to school.

The relative success of traumatized children does not end in the B-12 school setting; higher education is attainable as well, as evidenced by Abdulrehman and DeLuca's (2001) study of the long term negative effects of childhood sexual abuse. Their use of undergraduate university students as research participants raised the issue of homogeneity of the sample as a limitation of their study. The undergraduate university students were not representative of the general population because "individuals most affected by the abuse experience were prone to be filtered out by the educational and social system" (p. 195). However, Abdulrehman and DeLuca (2001) cited Finkelhor's (1979) resolution of the homogeneity issue, noting "individuals who survive child sexual abuse can be vulnerable to its effects and at the same time reach university level" (Abdulrehman & DeLuca, 2001, p. 195).

The Damage Model vs. the Challenge Model

Those who survive a traumatic experience are not necessarily damaged by the experience (Abdulrehman & DeLuca, 2001; Kirschman, 2004; Terr, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). Instead of considering trauma in terms of a damage model, Wollin and Wollin (1993) framed traumatic experience in terms of a challenge; trauma is a hurdle rather than a roadblock. For example, children of mentally ill mothers can and often do turn out alright; "if reasonably adequate resources are present, competency outcomes are

generally satisfactory, even in the context of chronic, severe stressors" (Mowbray, Bybee, Oyserman, Allen-Meares, MacFarlane & Hart-Johnson, 2004, p. 206). Further, even children who suffer sexual abuse do not always mire themselves in addiction, prostitution, or continuing the cycle of abuse (Blume, 1990). To be certain, the potential for problems is real, but there is considerable documentation that even the trauma of sexual abuse in childhood does not always cause severe problems over the lifespan of the survivor (Feinauer et al., 1996).

In fact, the same difficult experiences that have the potential to cause damage may also be the impetus for growth (Kirschman, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). Therein lies the "general paradox of this field: that out of loss there is gain" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 6). Such gains are framed in the concepts of resilience and posttraumatic growth.

Resilience

Resilience is "playing a poor hand well" (Kirschman, 2004, p. 181). While it is true the experience of trauma is often characterized as life-altering (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002), it need not be viewed as necessarily life-limiting or life damaging (Abdulrehman & DeLuca, 2001; Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Kirschman, 2004; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). A child who is abused over and over, sexually or physically, may be vulnerable to pathological manifestations of anger. Possible ways of acting out this anger include identifying with the aggressor and becoming an abuser, always remaining a passive victim, or seeming to do pretty well most of the time, with occasional self-destructive behaviors (Terr, 1990). However, not every troubled child goes on to develop full blown mental health problems or addictions

(Abdulrehman & DeLuca, 2001; Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Blume, 1990; Terr, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). Childhood trauma may be ameliorated by factors such as "genetic(s), good life experiences, care and concern from certain family members, social and financial changes in the family's life, a healthy constitution, and luck" (Terr, 1990, p. 64). The power of kindness to allay the effects of trauma and foster resilience is unmistakable; Kirschman (2004) found that "the primary thing that keeps people resilient is caring and supportive relationships" (p. 176).

Anderson and Danis (2006), in their study of adult children of battered mothers, found that adult children had deliberately chosen to battle the powerlessness stemming from the abusers' treatment of their mothers and themselves. As children, they developed coping mechanisms so they might tolerate the situation and these techniques grew "into *adaptive strategies that the participants used throughout their lives*" (Anderson & Danis, 2006, p. 6, italics added). The adaptive strategies the participants use throughout their lives evolve into career choices. In fact, many survivors of childhood trauma go on to seek service-oriented professions because "restoring themselves by responding to suffering in others, resilient survivors champion the underdog (and) dedicate themselves to causes" (Wollin & Wollin, 1993, p. 184).

Anderson and Danis (2006) also noted the importance of tangible work in the context of resilience, finding that survivors "did not give up trying to better their lives and wanting to make a difference for themselves and others. They engaged in volunteer work, advocated for others, entered helping professions, and encouraged their children to do the same" (p. 10). In helping professions, resilient survivors demonstrate they "are optimistic…they accept emotions and trauma as the cost of doing business and deal with

them. They value what they have—friends, family, jobs, religious beliefs, faith in humanity…" (Kirschman, 2004, p. 181). Resilient survivors strive to make a better life not only for themselves but for others as well, due to a feeling of connectedness to all humankind (Wollin & Wollin, 1993).

Posttraumatic Growth

Trauma is an emotional wrecking ball and survivors must climb from the rubble and rebuild. Survivors literally reconstruct their lives from the broken pieces and when they manage to build something greater than before, this phenomenon is known as posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Posttraumatic growth is different from resilience. Tedeschi and Calhoun held resilience allows traumatized individuals to continue functioning reasonably well after the distressing events, but posttraumatic growth is more than resisting the harmful effects of trauma. Rather, "(p)osttraumatic growth…has a quality of transformation…it involves a movement beyond pretrauma levels of adaptation" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 4). This movement occurs through "changes may arise that propel the individual to a higher level of functioning than that which existed prior to the event" (Linley & Joseph, 2004, p. 11). Exposure to trauma "will actually increase their compassion for the human condition, fortify their self-esteem for doing tough and important work, and reinforce the pride they have in their professional family" (Kirschman, 2004, p. 182).

The extent to which an individual experiences posttraumatic growth is influenced by several factors (Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004, Terr, 1990). Paradoxically, the survivors who exhibit the greatest posttraumatic growth have often endured more acute traumatic experiences (Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004). Linley and

Joseph found that "greater levels of perceived threat and harm are associated with higher levels of adversarial growth" (p. 15). The extent to which individuals grow in the aftermath of trauma also appears to be influenced by gender and age. More study is needed, but early findings indicate women are more amenable to posttraumatic growth than men and young people exhibit more traits of posttraumatic growth than older people (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Also, the advantages of education and financial security enhance the potential for posttraumatic growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Finally, faith and spirituality make a difference. Those who emphasized a higher power and practices such as prayer were better able to withstand trauma (Wollin & Wollin, 1993) and more likely to exhibit signs of thriving or growing in the aftermath of trauma (Linley & Joseph, 2004).

Characteristics of Adults Who Experienced Childhood Trauma

Professional Lives

Because traumatized children often do well in school (Terr, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993), they may do well in the workplace, but this is not to say they are not influenced by what happened in the past. The nature of the human condition is complicated; individuals may contain contradictions, including a paradox of struggle and triumph (Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004, Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Blume (1990) found "adult incest survivors who attain positions of power and authority in their work are likely to be affected by their incest histories. They may feel ill at ease with their authority" (p. 52) due to a sense of unworthiness (Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002).

Abused children are often trapped in a world where they know that something is wrong but everyone pretends that things are fine (Blume, 1990; Lawson, 2002). Because these children grow up living a charade, they learn to doubt their own perceptions and they grow up to check their understanding of a situation against those of others to be sure of what is real (Lawson, 2002).

Another characteristic of adult survivors is the expectation of being invisible (Blume, 1990; Lawson, 2002), based on the childhood experience of existing only to meet the needs of an adult. In the workplace, adult survivors' sense of invisibility causes us to believe that we will not be remembered if we are not present, so we build our organizations for the work to carry on without us.

A third characteristic of adult survivors is the attraction to serving others in need (Blume, 1990; Lawson, 2002; Terr, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). This need may be a manifestation of *active resistance* (Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2006) that allows the survivor to strike back against oppression. The affinity for serving others also arises from the survivors' need to make the world better not only for themselves, but for everyone (Wollin & Wollin, 1993).

The Nature of School Leadership

If organizational culture can be defined as *the way we do things around here* (Schein, 2000), leadership might be similarly defined as *who decides what needs to be done around here*, or more elegantly, "leadership is a process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers" (Gardner, 2000, p. 3). Less

elegantly but perhaps more succinctly, "leadership is like pornography—I know it when I see it" (B. Maxcy, 2005, personal communication).

There are many facets of leadership and different styles that meet the need of organizations in order to provide *requisite variety* (Morgan, 1997; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) or diverse perspectives (Larson & Ovando, 2001; Lencioni, 2002). The literature introduces a variety of frames (Bolman & Deal, 2003) and metaphors (Morgan, 1997) for organizations, different lenses (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005) for policy analysis, and different research paradigms for inquiry and evaluation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Patton, 1997; Preskill & Torres, 1999).

Just as each organizational frame, policy analysis lens, and research paradigm accentuates and obscures different perspectives, so do different approaches to leadership. Although certain approaches may be less effective than others in given situations, there is no one best way to lead any more than there is one best way to analyze an organization, an educational policy, or a research question (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005; Morgan, 1997; Patton, 1997; Preskill & Torres, 1999). If there were only one best way to lead and build a high performing team, anyone could do it; such endeavors would not be topics of sufficient depth for scholarly research. For the purpose of this research, I will be discussing the leadership theories that seem to be most germane to my research questions: distributed and transformational leadership. A discussion of why these theories were most pertinent to my research questions appears below.

Leadership and Trauma Survivors

Leading a school to desired change is simply too much for any one person to do (Lashway, 2003). The undertaking of leadership might be described as overwhelming (Lashway, 2003) and in this way, leadership is similar to trauma in its capacity to confound and exhaust (Terr, 1990). In an age of increasing accountability, and the tasks are too specialized to for any one person to have all the necessary expertise so other school staff join forces to accomplish the work at hand (Bottery, 1996; Elmore, 2000; Lashway, 2003; Spillane et al., 2002), each working in the area of his or her strength. Elmore (2000) Distributed leadership reconceptualizes leadership as enacted by all members of the organization. The principal is important but as designer of the school leadership rather than the *chief doer* (Lashway, 2003). While other organization members have more knowledge in other areas, the principal is the expert at building the team to optimum performance (Elmore, 2000).

Educational leadership practices may be described as both shared (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 2000) and transformational (Burns, 1978) in that there is ongoing adjustment reflecting the changing needs of students and of society. For this reason, the transformational and distributed styles of leadership best fit with the constructs of trauma, resilience, and posttraumatic growth. Leaders who experienced abuse as children may be predisposed to espousing a transformational leadership model, as survivors of childhood abuse frequently experience feelings of shame and worthlessness (Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002) and strive to compensate by giving their best and bringing out the best in others. Blume (1990) found that often, "whatever self-esteem (they are) able to muster is based not on…belief in (their own) self-worth but on what (they) can do for others" (p. 152).

Survivors of childhood trauma tend to develop a propensity for asking and answering hard questions (Wollin & Wollin, 1993); such behavior is a function of the psychological phenomenon of resilience, but it also fits the model of transformational leadership. However, the gift of being able to initiate and manage difficult conversation constructively is found only in some trauma survivors (Wollin & Wollin, 1993); adult trauma survivors may have difficulty with conflict and try to avoid it (Woititz, 2002).

Transformational leadership promotes personal and organizational change through "vision building, individual support, intellectual stimulation, modeling, culture building, and holding high performance standards" (Leithwood et al., 2000, p. 37). Abuse survivors as adult leaders can be particularly adept at this style of leadership as they can be counted on to the point of appearing infallible and have a tremendous capacity for inspiring loyalty (Blume, 1990). Through transformational leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2003), leaders can rally followers by developing a common vision, strengthening school culture, and providing intellectual stimulation, which is congruent with many of the characteristics of trauma survivors. Abuse survivors are often perceived as "uncannily wise" (Blume, 1990, p. 80) for their ability to discern the emotions and needs of others. The ability to understand what other people need and value gives trauma survivors in leadership roles particular insight, making them especially capable of tapping into the symbolic and human resource frames (Bolman & Deal, 2003) to create organizational change from the inside of each individual (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The determination of the survivor that fuels posttraumatic growth (Kirschman, 2004; Lawson, 2002; Linley, 2003; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Wollin & Wollin, 1993) may

also foster change in those around them, manifested as transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Leithwood et al., 2000).

Distributed Leadership

Leading a school to desired change is simply too much for any one person to do (Lashway, 2003). The undertaking of leadership might be described as overwhelming (Lashway, 2003) and in this way, leadership is similar to trauma in its capacity to confound and exhaust (Terr, 1990). In an age of increasing accountability, and the tasks are too specialized to for any one person to have all the necessary expertise so other school staff join forces to accomplish the work at hand (Elmore, 2000; Lashway, 2003; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001), each working in the area of his or her strength (Elmore, 2000). Distributed leadership reconceptualizes leadership as enacted by all members of the organization. The principal is important, but as designer of school leadership, rather than the *chief doer* (Lashway, 2003). While other organization members may have more knowledge in other areas, the principal is the expert at building the team to optimum performance (Elmore, 2000).

Distributed leadership is a pragmatic approach, deemphasizing formal roles and emphasizing getting things done (Barry, 1991; Chirichello, 2003; Elmore, 2000; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 1999; Lashway, 2003), and also draws from an organizational resource model, associating leadership with the multidirectional flow of influence (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2005). Leaders practice in messy, complex situations (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Even the strongest leaders are constrained by the limitations of the organization, but even ineffective leaders will exert considerable influence—good or bad—on the lives of teachers and children

(Schlecty, 2000). Because the work we do affects children and families, the stakes are high. The world is too complicated and the needs are too great, so leaders must "institutionalize their leadership…they must create or strengthen systems that will survive them" (Gardner, 2000, p. 12). By building cultures that outlive them, leaders lead even when they are gone (Schlecty, 2000).

Paradoxically, it takes a strong leader to empower other organization members (Barry, 1991; Elmore, 2000). Distributed leadership is not a matter of simply delegating tasks nor does it involve minimizing the leadership of the formal leader; rather it is about multiplying the capacity of each individual and lifting the entire organization on the combined strength of all members (Spillane et al., 2001). Within the paradox of distributed leadership, a strong leader builds a team in which trust, autonomy, and vision are shared, manifesting as distributed leadership (Barry, 1991; Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Chirichello, 2003; Elmore, 2000; Scribner et al., 2005; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 1999; Lashway, 2003; Yukl, 2006). "Barnard (1968) observed that the 'authority of leadership' is not confined to those in executive positions, thus acknowledging that leadership may be exerted by anyone in an organization" (as cited in Ogawa & Bossert, 1995, p. 226).

When decision-making is shared, as in distributed leadership, conflict is regarded as an expected sign of progress (Barry, 1991; Chirichello, 2003; Elmore, 2000; Spillane et al., 1999; Spillane et al., 2001; Lashway, 2003). Conflicts are to be expected and an affirmation that people are growing and being challenged professionally (Lencioni, 2002; Schein, 2000; Tierney, 1988). Just as "teachers in a rapidly changing world cannot be content with teaching a fixed body of knowledge, but must be rather more concerned

with teaching pupils to learn how to learn, to ask rather than accept" (Bottery, 1996, p. 191), leaders in a rapidly changing world must teach school staff to ask rather than accept as well. Without open discussions of different points of view, leadership teams do not function as well (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Lencioni, 2002).

An effective team is crucial for the optimal functioning of distributed leadership. It is imperative that school leaders reap the full benefit of the collective wisdom of the team by making it clear they want the team to question and challenge (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Elmore, 2000; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Lashway, 2003; Lencioni, 2002; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Although it can be difficult to disagree, team members must trust one another enough to acknowledge areas of conflict (Lencioni, 2002) so everyone feels heard and invests in whatever course of action the group chooses in order for things to improve (Bruffee, 1999; Brunner & Schumaker, 1998). Avoiding difficult conversations is pointless as it prevents problems from being solved; we avoid conflict for no purpose because "silence does not create comfort" (Larson & Ovando, 2001, p. 90).

Transformational Leadership

In the process of communicating about ideas and how best to proceed, team members must trust one another (Lencioni, 2002) and as trust grows, so does influence. In this way, enacted leadership tends to morph from distributed to transformational (Spillane, et al., 1999), in which "communication and influence flow in both directions" (Gardner, 2000, p. 3). "With transformational leadership, the followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader, and they are motivated to do more

than they originally expected to do" (Yukl, 2006, p. 262). Facets of transformational leadership most valuable in schools are charisma, inspiration, and vision; intellectual stimulation; and individual consideration (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 2000).

Burns (1978) characterized leadership as "the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers" (p. 425). The focus of transformational leadership is on the personal commitment of members, leading to an enhanced capacity to reach the goals of the organization (Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Spillane, et al., 1999). Burns identified intended change as the goal of transformational leadership.

In a reciprocating relationship, leaders and followers are simultaneously leading and led. The educator/philosopher John Dewey sought to build a reciprocal relationship between experts and common citizens so each may learn from and teach the other (Rogers & Oakes, 2005); through the lens of transformational leadership theory, experts and citizens may be interpreted as leaders and followers in an ongoing, simultaneous give and take process of teaching and learning. Leaders become learners and followers become empowered. The process of letting go of leadership so it might settle across the group members is a transformational approach in that there is "a rich and pulsating *stream* of leadership-followership forces flowing through the whole social process" (Burns, 1978, p. 437). In this reciprocity model, "leadership is thus a subtle process of mutual influence fusing thought, feeling, and action to produce cooperative effort in the service of purposes and values embraced by *both* the leader and the led" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 339).

Summary and Conclusion

Childhood Trauma

Children may be traumatized in childhood through a direct experience such as abuse, accidents, and injuries (Terr, 1990) or children may be traumatized vicariously through exposure to the trauma of others (Kirschman, 2004; Rhodes, 1999; Woititz, 2002). Trauma imparts a sense of powerlessness in children (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002; Wollin & Wollin, 1993).

Leadership and Trauma Survivors

While some leadership research alludes to connecting to the greater good (Burns, 1978) or to stretching leadership across all members of the organization to empower them (Sebring et al., 2003), there has been no research conducted describing the relationship between exposure to trauma, posttraumatic growth, and the adult leadership practices of the trauma survivor. Therefore, this study will begin to address these gaps by exploring the influence of childhood trauma on the professional practice of school leaders in public B-21 organizations.

In Chapter Three, the methodology for this grounded theory research study will be discussed. The design for the study, processes for data collection, and methods of analysis will be described. Chapter Three will also include the ways in which fit, work, relevance and modifiability of the study were addressed.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The goal of this grounded theory inquiry was to explore the influence of traumatic childhood experience on the practice of school leaders in B-21 organizations. In this chapter, the research design and methods are described. The selection and characteristics of research participants, types of data collected, and the multiple means for data collection and analysis are explained in detail. Additionally, methodological rigor is established through addressing credibility, transferability, dependability and trustworthiness.

Methodological Rationale

"Quantitative research methods…are used to examine questions that can best be answered by collecting and statistically analyzing data that are in numerical form" (Waigandt, 2003, p. 10). Questions believed to be "best answered" in this way have often included inquiries regarding organizations in general, as most research in these areas has been directed by a positivist paradigm (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Positivism assumes an impartial, independent reality that may be investigated or discovered by a detached researcher seeking facts (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). Therefore, positivists "adhere to an objectivist…ontology and an objectivist epistemology" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 6). Such inquiries into leadership and organizations examine hypotheses through analyzing variable data from a sample population to generalize findings to other populations (Heck & Hallinger, 1999).

The quantitative method provides an enticingly logical and precise appearance, but one must consider the source of statistics. As noted by English economist Sir Josiah

Stamp, "You must never forget that every one of these figures comes in the first place from the village watchman (sic.), who just puts down what he damn well pleases" (quoted in Patton, 1997, p. 251). Hypothetico-deductive methodology works well in sciences, such as medicine and agriculture, but does not apply as neatly to questions about human behavior because "in a true experiment you keep constant every cause you can think of except one, and then see what the effects are of varying that one cause. In the classroom you can never do this" (Pirsig, 1979, p. 200). Further, even statistical results that require rejecting the null hypothesis do not necessarily guarantee a true sense of knowing; "even a strong relationship between variables does not necessarily mean the variables are causally related" (Waigandt, 2003, p. 13).

Even inquiries that might first appear to be answered by the simplest of quantitative measures can quickly become more complicated. Patton (1997) offered the challenge of counting the Million Man March on Washington, D.C. as a stultifying example. When trying to determine how many were in attendance during the day-long march, what counted? It was possible to use the number of all people present at a given moment during the event, but it was also possible to use the total of all people present during any moment during the event. Also at issue was whether or not to count media, tourists and other observers in tallies, or just people who were actively participating; this example reinforces just "how complex a simple question like 'how many' can become" (pp. 245-246).

There are, of course, advantages to approaching a topic quantitatively, particularly a topic as potentially personal as past traumatic experiences. Public B-21 education is staffed predominantly by women and traumatic experiences of women often involve

sexuality (Blume, 1990; Miguel, 2004; Terr, 1990). Because "each participant or interviewer may have different boundaries for what he or she considers public, personal, and private" (Seidman, 2006, p. 107), special consideration must be given when inquiring about how one's intensely personal experiences influence one's public, professional life, as "the mantra of the researcher is…'to do no harm'" (Bray & Bilham, 2007, p. 2). The privacy and relative anonymity of quantitative methods such as survey questionnaires facilitates disclosure of experiences such as childhood sexual abuse (Lange, De Beurs, Dolan, Lachnit, Sjollema, & Hanewald, 1999) and participants may find it easier to reveal such sensitive information on paper rather than in a personal interview (Tang, 2002).

Consideration of a Qualitative Approach

While a quantitative approach may afford research participants a greater degree of privacy that may yield greater openness, there are also advantages using a qualitative methodology to explore the influence of past trauma on school leader practice. The qualitative method offers opportunities of nuance that are not as readily discerned through a quantitative approach (Merriam, 1998). "Qualitative research methods are used to examine questions that can best be answered by verbally describing how participants in a study perceive and interpret various aspects of their environment" (Waigandt, 2003, p. 10). Because the participants subjectively construct their own understanding, multiple perspectives of truth are possible, differing dramatically from the objective, big "T" truth of the positivist paradigm. In contrast, "the hermeneutic tradition…argues that there is no objective or single knowable external reality, and that the researcher is an integral part of the research process, not separate from it…This approach follows a subjectivist ontology

and epistemology" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 6). The subjectivist ontology and epistemology implies a journey of sense-making, and such an approach dovetails with the process of knowledge creation for individuals within an organization and for the organization as a whole. Further, posing questions invites the reflection necessary for knowledge creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) as participants tell their stories because "while you cannot change the past, you can change the way you understand it" (Wollin & Wollin, 1993, p. 207).

Grounded Theory Approach

The grounded theory method was devised in an attempt to elevate social research to the status of real, hypothetico-deductive science (Giske & Artenian, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Wilson, 2008) by providing an explicit and precise method for collecting and analyzing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Wilson, 2008). In contrast to the hypothetico-deductive science it seeks to emulate, grounded theory is rooted firmly in data "systematically obtained through 'social' research" (Moghaddam, 2006, p. 53). In a grounded theory study, "one must be willing and able to stay open to the experience of the participants, to live with degrees of chaos until the concepts emerge, and then be able to conceptualize. This requires hard work combined with creativity" (Giske & Artenian, 2007, p. 78.)

Grounded theory research is conducted from a variety of critical constructs. After publishing *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Strauss (1967) continued that effort individually, working from different constructs (Charmaz, 2000; Moghaddam, 2006; Wilson, 2008). Glaser continued to focus on a positivist stance, working with an understanding of researcher as objective observer (Charmaz, 2000; Moghaddam, 2006;

Wilson, 2008), whereas Strauss gravitated to a "pragmatic epistemology into empirical inquiry through grounded theory" (Moghaddam, 2006, p 53). However, despite their ontological and epistemological differences, Glaser and Strauss have not greatly diverged on the basic processes of grounded theory research or the need for constant comparison through intertwined data collection and analysis (Moghaddam, 2006).

As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this grounded theory research was to explore the influence of traumatic childhood experience on the practice of school leaders in B-21 organizations. The study's purpose had to be posed "in a sufficiently open way to encompass the entirety" (Giske & Artinian, 2007, p. 69) of the participants' experiences and their process of making sense of these experience in the work context. The data collected from participants was used to "build, rather than test theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 9).

The question of how childhood experiences of trauma might influence the professional practice of school leaders has not been previously addressed in the literature. For this reason, the grounded theory method was particularly appropriate for this study, because "identifying an overlooked area is the first thing to do. The process of generating a grounded theory begins with discovering an unnoticed area to investigate (Moghaddam, 2006, p. 54). Grounded theory research seeks to generate new theory arising from or grounded in the data. Such theory is inductively derived and illuminates existing phenomenon in the area being studied (Glaser, 1999; Moghaddam, 2006).

Research Questions

The primary question addressed by this study was: How does traumatic childhood experience influence the practice of school leaders in B-21 organizations? One

of the touchstone characteristics of trauma is the feeling of being powerless or helpless (Kirschman, 2004; Payne, 2001; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Terr, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). As a childhood trauma survivor and as a principal of a school designed to serve marginalized populations, I was keenly interested in the way power was used in my own practice and curious if other school leaders noticed similar connections between childhood experience and professional practice. To address this question regarding the influence of traumatic childhood experience on the practice of school leaders, I posed the following research question:

1. To what extent does posttraumatic growth and/or resilience influence the professional practice of the research participants?

Design of the Study

It is particularly important to embark upon a grounded theory study with an open mind and a willingness to let the participants take the research where it needs to go (Giske & Artenian, 2007).

> The first step in grounded theory is to enter the substantive field for research without knowing the problem. This requires suspending your knowledge, especially of the literature, and your experience. The researcher must take a 'no preconceived interest' approach and not ask questions that might be on his mind (Glaser, 1998, p. 122).

In fact, the grounded theory method is most strongly indicated in areas of study that have yet to be investigated (Samik-Ibrahim, 2000). Such a positivistic, tabula rasa approach seems difficult if not impossible, as we tend to study topics that interest us (Rhodes, 1999). Grounded theory is built on the responses of participants and "focuses on making implicit belief systems explicit" (Moghaddam, 2006, p. 52), thereby fostering organizational knowledge creation or learning (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2000).

Literature Review

It should be noted that the literature review for a grounded theory study is conducted slightly differently than in traditional types of research. Typically, a literature review generates a hypothesis in the mind of the researcher, who then tries the hypothesis against real world experimentation or exploration. In grounded theory, however, the real world exploration comes first (Moghaddam, 2006). Some hold that Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocated against conducting a literature review prior to data collection in a grounded theory study, for fear that the existing literature might influence the researcher's understanding of the data, though in fact a literature review increases the researcher's awareness of a topic and opens rather than limits understanding (Wilson, 2008). Because reviewing the germane literature "reveals current thinking in the area" (Moghaddam, 2006, p. 54), it is, in fact, recommended (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and creates a backdrop of understanding or literature sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, Moghaddam (2006) cautions that the literature review should not yield any theory in the mind of the researcher, as the theory must emerge from the data collected in the field.

With these caveats in mind, a preliminary search of the literature was conducted for gaps and a scarcity of information about how childhood trauma might shape the leadership practices of school principals. During the data collection and analysis phases of the study, additional literature was reviewed on the topics of post-traumatic growth, resilience, trauma, power, and leadership. This was done to "weave…findings into the body of already existing knowledge" (Giske & Artenian, 2007, p. 78).

Population

The population for the study was comprised of four school leaders from B-21 learning organizations who experienced a shame-based trauma in childhood. A shame-based trauma included experiences such as physical and/or sexual abuse, domestic violence in the family home, or mental illness or addiction of someone residing in the family home. Because one of the defining elements of trauma is the emotional experience of powerlessness (Terr, 1990) and the experience of powerlessness is compounded by the secret nature of particular traumas (Blume, 1990), school leaders who experienced shame-based traumas were identified as particularly rich sources for study.

Selection of Participants

School leaders in B-21 organizations who were personally known to the researcher were contacted via email with a recruitment letter (See Appendix A). "(G)iven that grounded theory explores complex phenomena where often little understanding exists, the selection of participants is particularly critical" (Moghaddam, 2006, p. 57). A brief description of the project and a somewhat optimistic timeline for interviews were given. Those interested in being interviewed were asked to respond. Some recipients forwarded the email to other school leaders not known to the researcher and additional potential interview participants were identified through this snowball sampling (Merriam, 1998). Of the thirty potential participants initially contacted, the researcher received responses from nine potential interview participants indicating a willingness to participate in the project. Four additional participants volunteered individually to the researcher after inquiring about the researcher's dissertation topic in social settings. Ultimately, the four respondents who personally volunteered and actively sought participation in the study

were determined to have experienced a shame-based trauma in childhood and those four were interviewed for this study. Two women and two men, all Caucasian, participated in the study. Interview participants ranged in age from early thirties to mid fifties and their years of experience in administration varied from two years to two decades. Upon selection for the study, each participant received an confirmation letter and consent form (See Appendix B).

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was guided by grounded theory methods as described by Strauss and Glaser (1968). A combination of data collection methods were employed including individual interviews and observations to engage or encourage conversation that has a purpose (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Merriam, 1998).

The purpose of a qualitative research interview is to discover "what people really think and feel" (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 7). I tried to create a safe environment to discuss their childhood experiences and ponder how those experiences may influence their leadership practice. I gave participants the option of being interviewed in their offices or in remote locations; I assured participants their interviews would be transcribed in a different part of the state to help protect their privacy. Additionally, I disclosed my own status as a survivor of incest, sexual assault, domestic violence and bereavement to help establish rapport, because "quality and content of interviews depend to a great extent on the rapport developed between researcher and participant, there must be high levels of sensitivity in asking questions and focus on the dynamics in the interaction between them" (Giske & Artinian, 2007, p. 70). The process of being interviewed may also be a

form of *participatory research* (Krueger & Casey, 2000) in that the experience of participating in the interviews may foster reflection and discussion among colleagues, thereby encouraging the conditions from which knowledge creation arises (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Because of the sensitive nature of the interview topic, I strove to find a balance between helping participants feel comfortable speaking freely and reflectively, without being intrusive or overly upsetting by fixating on the past traumatic experiences being recalled during the interview (Giske & Artinian, 2007). It was also important for me to remain cognizant of the need to take extra care to avoid a therapeutic relationship; although researchers and therapists may ask similar kinds of questions, "the researcher is there to learn, not to treat the participant" Seidman, 2006, p. 108). The initial interviews focused on the participants' childhood experiences, beginning with asking why the participants felt led to participate in the study (See Appendix C). In keeping with grounded theory method, I let the comments of the participants determine the direction of the conversation (Giske & Artenian, 2007; Glaser 1998). I used prompts such as "what was that like for you?" or "is there a story you could tell me that captures the essence of your childhood experience?" (Seidman, 2006). The second interview focused on the participants' adult work lives, the challenges therein, and their strategies for addressing those challenges (See Appendix D). After each interview session, each participant received a debriefing form (See Appendix E).

Procedure for Analyzing Data

The processes of collecting and analyzing data are crucial to the quality of grounded theory research because grounded theory is by its very definition grounded in

the information given by the study participants, the meaning is "mostly based on the researchers' interpretations" (Moghaddam, 2006, p. 61). Data collection and data analysis are conducted simultaneously in grounded theory research through the method of constant comparison and theoretical sampling (Giske & Artinian, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Wilson, 2008) in which the emerging theory is continuously checked against the data to ensure that the data drives the theory, instead of having a theory and looking for data to fit the theory.

Fit, Work, Relevance and Modifiability of the Study

The integrity of a grounded theory study is built on fit, work, relevance and modifiability (Glaser, 1978, 1998). Of these criteria, fit is the most essential for evaluating credibility (Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003) as the categories must fit the data, rather than the other way around (Giske & Artinian, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Fit was ensured by keeping the emerging categories in constant confrontation with the data Giske & Artinian, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), allowing the theory to emerge from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Moghaddam, 2006).

Work is the ability of the grounded theory to explain the data, use the data to predict what will happen, as well as interpret what is happening in the field of study (Glaser, 1998). The researcher let the data guide the theory rather than the other way around, ensuring that the resulting theory would truly reflect the data or work as a grounded theory (Giske & Artinian, 2007).

Relevance is the process by which the core problems and the integral processes of the subject area are allowed to emerge from the data; the strength of a study's relevance allows the grounded theory to have "good grab" (Giske & Artinian, 2007, p. 69). For

example, the category of loner who seeks to connect arose from the participants' repeated references to being outsiders or having no one to whom to turn for help as children, in addition to their propensity for shared leadership, mentoring and being mentored as adult professionals.

Modifiability is a more ephemeral criterion because of the ongoing fitting and refitting of categories to data in grounded theory. New data brings the possibility of new ideas which may modify the theory so the process is ongoing (Glaser, 1978). In the case of this study, the participants all grew up in the Midwest and participated in Christian faith organizations, beliefs, and/or practices. For that reason, the category a soft place to fall included information regarding the importance of faith in God in the lives of the participants as children, as adults, or both. However, future studies may include more demographically diverse participants who may have different religious beliefs; other spiritual ways of knowing would still fit within the theory.

Theoretical Sensitivity

The process of constant comparison of the data against emerging theory (Merriam, 1998) allows the researcher to move from thinking literally about the data to thinking conceptually (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical sensitivity was enhanced by the reading of related literature (Giske & Artinian, 2007; Wilson, 2008) regarding the experience and influence of child abuse (Arnsworth & Stronk, 1999), resilience (Anderson, 2006; Wollin & Wollin, 1993), post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), leadership and power (Burns, 1978; Yukl, 2006).

The review of related literature provided me with a sense of pre-understanding and this theoretical sensitivity informed data collection. For example, I prepared a pool of

potential questions that might be asked of participants, depending on their comments. One such question, "How are you alike and different from your peers?" was written knowing that trauma survivors often feel they are somehow different from others (Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). However, it is important to let the data guide the theory rather than fit the data to theory, so the process of constant comparison assured that my initial ideas would either be supported by data or be replaced by ideas that were (Giske & Artinian, 2007). Since the grounded theory method by its nature forces the researcher to work at a conceptual level (Moghaddam, 2006), this helped me avoid imposing pre-existing ideas that were not supported by the data.

Theoretical Sampling

As categories began to emerge from the data, I asked questions to seek out more information regarding particular aspects of the interview participants' experiences in childhood and as school leaders. This was done to saturate the emerging categories and discern relationships among them (Giske & Artinian, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Moghaddam, 2006). For example, after a couple of interviews in which participants mentioned being recruited into school administration, I began to ask other participants if they had actively sought roles as school leaders, or if a mentor had recruited them. Additionally, I began asking participants what they would tell me if we were not recording the interview, on the advice of a participant who had a story she wanted to share but did not want it heard by anyone by me. Although the theoretical sampling process might have been be expedited by sampling only for what I need, the sensitive nature of the interview topic dictated that I listen to what the participants wanted to share

about their painful experiences, without attempting to redirect or shorten their conversations with me (Giske & Artinian, 2007).

Interviews were transcribed for review. Transcribing was chosen over merely taking notes to provide richer data for coding, as taping captured nuances such as pacing, emotional affect and exact wording. Additionally, information that did not seem relevant during the interview was later discerned as being meaningful upon further review of the data. The transcripts "became a source of theoretical sampling in the selective coding process" (Giske & Artinian, 2007, p. 71).

Coding and Analyzing

In grounded theory work, the processes of coding and analyzing occur simultaneously and concomitantly (Giske & Artinian, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), allowing the theory to emerge from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Moghaddam, 2006). It is crucial to the integrity of a grounded theory study that "predetermined ideas should not be forced on the data by looking for confirmation of previously established ideas" (Moghaddam, 2006, p. 55). Though I discuss the various aspects of coding sequentially below, the process was less linear (Giske & Artinian, 2007; Merriam, 1998) and more chaotic (Moghaddam, 2006; Wilson, 2008) than the presentation here suggests in an effort to remain faithful to the methodology most likely to facilitate a genuine emergence of theory grounded in the field data (Glaser, 1992).

Open Coding

Open coding allowed me to review the collected data and begin to understand it conceptually (Moghaddam, 2006). After conducting each interview, I logged a memo of information that resonated or haunted after the interview ended. Transcripts of the first

interviews were hand-coded during the initial reading by simply using key words in the right hand margin (Giske & Artinian, 2007), going through the transcripts line by line (Moghaddam, 2006; Wilson, 2008). An attempt was made to code every possible thought or experience expressed (Moghaddam, 2006) so as to generate the maximum number of potential codes for eventual pruning (Glaser, 1978). During this portion of the coding and analysis, I reviewed the post-interview memos and created additional memos to chronicle emerging patterns, questions, observations and themes. (Giske & Artinian, 2007; Moghaddam, 2006). At this stage, I also wrote a reflection intended for use as a proem (See Appendix F). Once transcript analysis began, the memos were organized around only one main idea per memo to expedite the eventual sorting process (Glaser, 1978), as my understanding of themes and groups changed throughout the process (Wilson, 2008).

Axial Coding

The second stage of coding, axial coding, was not included in Glaser and Strauss's (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Wilson, 2008) but Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommended this stage to assist with tying the bits of data together in a unified way, even before the core category emerges (Wilson, 2008). However, Glaser (1992) held that axial coding invites conceptualizing too early in the process, which might lead to fitting data to the theory, rather than generating theory to fit the data. Charmaz (2000) concurred that the process of axial coding focused the researcher on the terms rather than the experience of the interview participants. For these reasons, I opted against the axial coding process, choosing instead to continue working with open coding and collecting data until the core category emerged (Wilson, 2008; Glaser, 1992).

Identifying the Unifying Experiences of Survivor Leaders

The processes of open coding and memo writing gave rise to the question "What is this (sic.) data a study of?" (Glaser, 1978, p. 57). While open coding simply expresses what is happening in the data, conceptualizing begins the process of identifying relationships and patterns within and among the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Through ongoing review of the interview transcripts and memos, the core category of survivor leader simply emerged from the data (Glaser, 1992; Wilson, 2008). I discerned the core category of survivor leader and deemed it appropriate and fitting as a core category because it overarched all other categories, appeared throughout the data, existed at an level of abstraction that lent itself to further scholarly research, and became more powerful when considered in the context of other concepts from related disciplines (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The survivor leaders exhibited desired characteristics, such as shared leadership (Barry, 1991; Gronn, 2002; Lashway, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2000; Sebring et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 1999; Spillane et al., 2001), resilience (Almedom, 2005; Bass & Davis, 1993; Fredrickson, 1992; Terr, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993), and posttraumatic growth (Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Norlander et al., 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), but they also evidenced lingering effects of their traumatic experiences (Bass & Davis, 1993; Fredrickson, 1992; McElroy, 1992; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002).

Naming the Core Category

Grounded theory studies require the researcher to be both methodical and innovative in order to identify and connect the concepts that ultimately give rise to the

theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Different concepts emerged under the umbrella of the core category including loner who seeks to connect, from ignorance to penetrating insight, a soft place to fall, and a voice for the voiceless. The concepts all related to the core category arising from the data, that of the survivor leader. In addition to uniting all of the concepts, the core category also had "grab" (Giske & Artenian, 2007, p. 73). The participants did not live in the past and were no longer victims, but their trauma experiences were clearly part of their personalities, values and priorities; in this way, they were survivors. At the same time, they assumed oversight of the education of thousands of students and the supervision of hundreds of staff members. On the job, the participants were focused and determined advocates. In this way, they were leaders. The way they led was so entwined with their survival of childhood trauma that their leadership was unique; they were survivor leaders.

Selective Coding

Interview transcripts were further reviewed during the process of selective coding, in which only characteristics relating to the core category were identified (Giske & Artenian, 2007, Moghaddam, 2006). This stage of the data analysis was particularly taxing as there were many possible ways to organize the onslaught of memories and characteristics of survivors. Giske and Artenian accurately observed, "Living with…chaos is important when doing grounded theory, and it is necessary to go through so that the participants' main concern and how they resolve it can emerge from the data and not be forced" (p. 73).

The Conceptualization Process

After interviewing, transcribing, and coding, I was finally faced with the task of making sense of all of the data. In the chaos of grounded theory, the use of metaphor (Wilson, 2008) or a visual model (Giske & Artenian, 2007; Moghaddam, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) can greatly expedite the process of getting the information to gel. After all, "if you can't draw a picture of it, you don't really understand it" (R. Payne, 2008, personal communication). While searching for the appropriate written or visual metaphor, I continued with selective coding. As this process evolved, theoretical sampling and theoretical memo writing were conducted to assure theoretical saturation (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) by providing the abstract category with sufficient depth and dimension (Moghaddam, 2006). When no new properties of the categories could be identified in the data but the integration and density of the grounded theory were intense, the conditions for theoretical saturation were met (Giske & Artenian, 2007; Moghaddam, 2006), though grounded theory is always subject to modification as new data are considered (Glaser, 1978).

Theoretical Sampling, Theoretical Coding and Conceptual Representations

Moghaddam (2006) advised that "keeping the theory in a state of permanent confrontation with data is the work of theoretical sampling" (p. 57). When data seemed not to fit within a particular category, I considered whether the category was faulty or if the data in question substantiated a new, different category (Wilson, 2008). Theoretical coding "relates the concepts of a theory to each other in a clear and distinct way" (Giske & Artenian, 2007, p. 75). While open and selective coding identified the variations among data, theoretical coding ties the data back together in a conceptually elegant way.

This is achieved through further review of memos and also through the use of evolving conceptual maps or models (Giske & Artenian, 2007; Glaser, 1978). For a true conceptual fit, the theory needs to explain the how the concepts build the core category and also needs to have "relevance and grab" (Giske & Artenian, 2007, p. 76).

Methodological Rigor

In grounded theory work, meaning arises from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) so the methodological integrity or rigor was particularly important to ensure the data analysis truly revealed the views of the interview participants (Erlandson et al., 1993). The qualities of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are key in establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility is the extent to which the researcher is able to create an accurate picture of the participants' experiences during the analysis process. As such, credible research must provide reconstructions that are credible to the participants and findings that ring true to their understanding of themselves and their experiences. Credibility ensures the participants' perceptions were truly captured and expressed throughout the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In order to meet the standard of methodological rigor for accuracy and credibility, this study relied upon methods of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), peer examination (Merriam, 1998) and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Triangulation. The study's credibility was enhanced by the participation of multiple participants to provide multiple sources of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The

reoccurrence of common themes across participants with varying childhood and adult experiences strengthened the internal validity (Merriam, 1998).

Peer examination. Peer coding was used to further strengthen the credibility of the study. A peer researcher without a history of childhood trauma and without a background in B-21 public education reviewed a random sample of interview transcripts to determine if she identified emerging themes similar to those identified by me. There were 115 single spaced pages of transcripts. An initial review of the transcripts revealed that it generally required the first two or three pages of the transcript for participants to open up and begin speaking openly about their childhood trauma. For this reason, random samplings occurred after page four of each transcript with approximately four pages being extracted from each of the eight interview transcripts.

The final sampling of transcripts provided to the peer coder contained no identifying information for the participants but did contain the participant number, interview number and page number to allow for an accurate cross-reference to the original transcripts. In total, 29 pages or 25% of the transcripts were reviewed by the peer coder. Copies of interview questions and research questions of the study were also provided to give a contextual overview. Due to geographic distance, the peer coder and I discussed the findings of the peer coding as well as the alignment of categories and emerging themes. There was 92% congruence between my coding and that of the peer coder, although the incongruous item may have been a function of our dissimilar backgrounds. My peer coder identified an additional theme I had not recognized; because she is an agriculture policy researcher and not an alternative school principal or a trauma survivor, certain facets of the participants' experiences seemed unusual to her, but not to

me. We were able to reconcile the discrepancy based on my knowledge of the related literature and my coding of all the data, as opposed to her coding of a subset of the data. We agreed on all other findings, which strongly confirmed the trustworthiness of the identified concepts.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing was utilized through ongoing consultation with my dissertation advisor. In addition, a professional peer with a background in school leadership provided feedback on findings and implications. The peer debriefing process involved discussions of the research process and exploring my emerging thoughts and questions regarding the data (Erlandson et al., 1993). Peer debriefing helped me bring concepts into focus, notice facets of data I had overlooked, expose my own assumptions, and stay true to the grounded theory method It allowed opportunities to: explore working hypotheses that were emerging, probe into this researcher's biases, analyze materials more thoroughly, test working hypotheses, and discuss the emerging methodological design (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Transferability

Transferability is the applicability of the research findings to other participants or in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In the context of this research, transferability refers to the ability of the research findings to fit other survivor leaders or to the literature on resilience and posttraumatic growth. The findings of this research may be used for analytic generalizations in other research contexts as the I provide theory grounded in the data with a detailed depiction of the context in which they are found to have occurred (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick, rich descriptions of the participants' experiences were provided so future researchers can determine the

transferability to their projects (Merriam, 1998). Other researchers will have sufficient information to determine if the findings of this study are germane to their specific research context and/or their study participants.

Dependability

The quality of dependability ensured the findings would be comparable if the research were replicated with same or similar participants and circumstances (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The dependability of this study was strengthened by using an audit trail documenting my emerging understanding of the categories emerging from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability

The last aspect of trustworthiness was the principle of confirmability, whereby my conclusions could be traced back to the original data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My post-interview reflections and coding memos throughout the data analysis was available for confirmation at any time by my advisor (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Researcher's Biases

A researcher must openly acknowledge one's biases in the interest of establishing credibility for the findings of a study (Merriam, 1998). My own biases and assumptions have been disclosed throughout the design, conduct, and analysis of the research as freely acknowledged "hurdles I encountered after venturing into new territory and the consequences of taking my deeply ingrained and often subconscious…perspectives with me" (Wilson, 2008, p. 4).

One of the recurring themes of the EdD program has been the need to candidly discuss difficult topics (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Lencioni,

2002). To be a leader, we have been taught, is to be willing to enter the danger (Lencioni, 2002) and work on righting the wrongs of our society through living and working purposefully (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). Coupled with this is my own need as a trauma survivor to reframe my experiences in a way that replaces the legacy of shame with pride in my own resilience (Anderson, 2006; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). Further, initial conversations with potential interview participants to discuss the viability of such a study indicated similar needs of other childhood trauma survivors, now school leaders, to have a forum to share their experiences in ways they cannot in their roles as school leaders. One potential interview participant partially disclosed his own abuse history after learning of my research interest in a casual conversation after a professional meeting one evening. He expressed an interest in being interviewed for the study in that conversation and phoned early the next morning to remind me of his interest, urging me to hurry up and get started because "our stories need to be told."

My experiences as a trauma survivor were a double-edged sword. While our stories needed to be told and I was the person to tell them to, I wanted very much to find that the thing that made me bad at pretty much everything else might actually make me better at my job and that the same might be true of others. Further, I assumed that everyone wanted to see the good that could come out of bad experiences. One of the basic tenets of grounded theory research methodology is that the researcher should have no agenda (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and this was a particular challenge.

Wilson (2008) found that her experiences as a nurse both threatened and strengthened her abilities as a researcher. Because her "nursing attitudes were second nature, they were harder to identify" (Wilson, 2008, p. 10), she sometimes struggled to

see beyond her nursing training, but this same training was useful in that it prepared her to see each "informant as an individual" (Wilson, 2008, p. 10). In the same spirit, I believe that my experiences as a child abuse survivor are a threat and an asset in my efforts to research this topic. Though my own experiences were acknowledged and perceived as a potential threat to the trustworthiness of this study (B. Curs, 2007, personal communication), they were also a strength because disclosing my own history to the interview participants built rapport and allowed participants to feel comfortable speaking freely. As I said during the oral defense of my written comprehensive exams, "the interview participants have stories that need to be told, and I am the person they will tell them to." I know I am the person to whom they will tell their stories, because most of my professional life turns on getting people to talk to me about difficult issues. I am often told I am easy to talk to because I understand; such hallmarks of resilient trauma survivors who exhibit "a penetrating understanding of themselves and other people" (Wollin & Wollin, 1993, p. 67).

Summary

I have included rich, thick descriptions (Merriam, 1998) to maximize the degree of transferability (Giske & Artenian, 2007) of the findings so those wishing to do so might have adequate information to determine the appropriateness of such an application. The experiences of the participants and the implications for their professional practice will be detailed in the findings so that others may determine to what degree these findings are representative. Although considerations of transferability typically include comparison of findings, the lack of previous research in this area makes comparison of findings difficult.

A grounded theory study must meet certain criteria to satisfy methodological rigor. Among these criteria are concepts that arise from the data and are systematically linked. Further, the relationships among and within categories must be sufficiently rich and saturated, while still acknowledging conceptual outliers. Finally, the theory emerging from the data must seem significant and must be integrated into scholarly discourse (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this chapter, evidence of methodological rigor has been provided in the processes used to collect and analyze the data.

The true measure of "good" research is the usefulness of the resulting information (Patton, 1997) and the enriched knowledge of the organization and the individuals within it (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Preskill & Torres, 1999). If educators and others who work with children see their professional practice as enriched by difficult experiences, this may encourage us to see traumatized children and adults in terms of their potential contributions instead of their damage.

The intention of this grounded theory research study was to explore the influence of traumatic childhood experience on school leaders in B-21 organizations. I have discussed the design for the study, processes for data collection, and methods of analysis. Also, I have included the ways in which fit, work, relevance and modifiability of the study were addressed. In chapter four the results will be presented from the grounded theory study that explored the influence of traumatic childhood experience on the practice of school leaders in B-21 organizations.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, the results will be presented from the grounded theory study that explored how the experience of childhood trauma influences the adult leadership practices of school leaders. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first section, surviving, addresses each of the subcategories that emerged from the data provided and (Giske & Artenian, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The subcategories from the data are loner who seeks to connect, from ignorance to penetrating insight, a soft place to fall, and a voice for the voiceless. The first section explores the ways the participants demonstrated resilience and posttraumatic growth during their childhood years of trauma exposure. The second section, leading, also addresses the subcategories in terms of how the childhood coping strategies evidence themselves in the participants' professional practice as school leaders. The third section discusses the core category of survivor leader, and the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Grounded theory studies require the researcher to be both methodical and innovative in order to identify and connect the concepts that ultimately give rise to the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Different concepts emerged under the umbrella of the core category, including ignorance of the inappropriateness of their childhood experiences, evidence of resilience and post-traumatic growth, isolation and powerlessness during childhood trauma, gratitude for refuge and kindness, and faith in a higher power. The different facets of the core category all speak to who the survivor leaders *are*, while the subcategories speak to what the survivor leaders *do*. The

subcategories of loner who seeks to connect, from ignorance to penetrating insight, a soft place to fall and a voice for the voiceless all unite in the core category of survivor leader. Each of the subcategories highlight aspects of surviving and leading and the concepts all related to the core category arising from the data, that of the survivor leader. In addition to uniting all of the concepts, the core category of survivor leader also had "grab" (Giske & Artenian, 2007, p. 73) and captured the essence of the participants' experiences (Anderson & Danis, 2006), as discussed in the surviving and leading sections.

Surviving

Loner Who Seeks to Connect

As children, the survivor leaders were often physically alone and emotionally isolated. They described themselves as loners and expressed feelings of abandonment; they usually had no one to talk to and no one to listen. They relied on themselves to make the best of their situations and they relied on God to give them some comfort in their barren existences. Some of the participants went to church and some did not, but sooner or later, they all found God.

Alone. The survivor leaders unanimously expressed overwhelming feelings of isolation and loneliness during childhood; in my margin notes for coding, the words I wrote most frequently in all four transcripts related to these feelings:

> *What epitomizes my childhood...was I just wanted to mind my own business. I didn't really need [my family]. I never felt...like they cared if I came or went. I mean the whole bunch of 'em...never acted like it mattered to them. Because I always took care of myself... I always felt like I was on the outside looking in. I always felt like I was never a part of it... I just never did and it's me I know. It's part of my problem but I've never felt like I was part of anything...I feel like there's this secret handshake, that private club that everyone else is in that I'm not part of.* (Participant 2, Interview 1, Page 7, 10)

> *There's one teacher I think could have found me...but as far as a teacher making a difference or making a connection with me. Never.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 9)

> *When I was a child, I was the strong one and I had to go internally for strength and to God for strength and so everything was very internal.* (Participant 4, Interview 2, Page 6)

Although the survivor leaders recalled strong feelings of loneliness during childhood, they all experienced success in the social hierarchy of school. They were cheerleaders, varsity athletes, student leaders, and good students. However, the balm of school popularity could not soothe the feelings of being alone; the survivor leaders fit everywhere, and nowhere. One participant changed schools frequently due to family upheavals:

> *I've always been pretty much to myself... You know I had to know how to, one, survive on my own, and then also to meet new people and then to relate to people.* (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 5)

His size, strength and skill gave him instant credibility as an athlete in each new school, though he did not feel connected as a perpetual "new kid." However, the participants who attended the same schools systems throughout their school careers did not seem to *feel* any more connected, though they probably *looked* connected:

> *I lettered in varsity sports; basketball, football, and track through high school and junior high. But I never really cared...about winning. To me it was all about camaraderie and getting in shape. Going out and hanging out with my friends and partying afterwards. You know when you're in high school...going out after a football game, that was the best. But I never really, I didn't really care. I didn't ever remember the games.* (Participant 2, Interview 1, Page 6)

> *I had lots of friends and I didn't want to commit to any social circle. When I was in 5th or 6th grade, and I can't remember which, I had a birthday party and invited every friend that I had and so from a variety of social circles and we had a slumber party and we all stayed the night in my basement. And I'm talking there were probably 30 plus girls there but they were from all different social circles so even I remember being there and not knowing where do I fit because I considered them all to be my friends and I talked to all of them. Play with all of them. But*

> *they all rallied around. I mean our sleeping bags were all set up around their group or their social circle. And I didn't know where I fit because they were all my friends and I really wanted them all to be happy and have a good time but as far as it's my birthday and now where am I supposed to be.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 5)

From Ignorance to Penetrating Insight

As children, the survivor leaders experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse, but like most children who experience abuse from an early age, they did not know the abuse was wrong. They thought it was normal. However, as they grew up, they began to realize what was happening in their families was not happening in all families. Also, within the context of an abusive family, the ability to read nonverbal cues is a matter of survival; being able to predict what is about to happen is the next best thing to being able to control what is about to happen. Since their family situations were often out of control, the participants learned to discern.

Minimizing. The three participants who experienced sexual abuse minimized all aspects of the trauma they experienced growing up. Participant 4 was almost apologetic at the beginning of her first interview because she felt what had happened to her might not have been "bad enough" for her to be an appropriate interviewee for the project:

> *My traumatic experiences may not be very traumatic compared to a lot of people so but you know I'll just talk to you about my things.* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 1)

However, she immediately disclosed being left alone at night at age 4 or 5 and spoke of crying at the door, begging her father not to go. Although she would not waste one second in hot lining a parent who did this to another child, she seemed accepting of it being done to her:

> *I didn't know any different [than being left home alone as a preschooler so my father could go out drinking] but that's the first thing I remember [that was traumatic].* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 1)

Similarly, Participant 1 downplayed his mother's drug use, stating more than once that "it wasn't that bad." He also excused his uncles' drug use, including their practice of getting him high with them before he had even started kindergarten:

> *Well, [getting high with my uncles at age 5] wasn't anything too strange because I didn't know any different... at the time there wasn't much to it, it was pretty standard.* (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 2)

Participant 1, when questioned, was quick to defend his mother and her friends, assuring me he had not witnessed adults having sex, so it wasn't that bad:

> *They were doing the drugs around me but they didn't do anything else.* (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 3)

Participant 2 also characterized his experiences as "easy" because he believed his brothers were physically abused more frequently than he was:

> *[My dad] was completely hands-off on me. I mean, totally. Like hardly [ever and mostly] ...because I had done something stupid...and so he like physically held my arms out and made my brother punch me repeatedly. And that's the kind of person he was. See I had it easy because he ignored me.* (Participant 2, Interview 1, Page 2)

Although Participant 2 was physically and emotionally abused by both parents and by older siblings, he did not recognize the wrongness of what had happened in his family of origin. Although he spoke of dealing with students who had similar experiences and reported hot lining parents for similar actions, he persisted in minimizing the abuse and was critical of his own feelings about the abuse:

> *How I feel...a lot of it is...I've convinced myself is like self pity, poor me and all that kind of stuff.* (Participant 2, Interview 1, Page 5)

In stark contrast to the other survivor leaders, Participant 3 described her sister's behavior and its effect on her in vivid detail:

> *[My sister] was very mean to me at home when we were younger and by mean I mean disrespectful, abusive, took advantage...It was horrible. Just when I felt like I had figured out who I was and where I was and how I fit in and was getting to know myself as a person, she would pop up. And by pop up I mean something would happen and she would sabotage my self-image...[As a child and as a teen], I had no idea who I was. No clue.*
> (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 1-2, 16)

Additionally, Participant 3 evidenced an early understanding that her sister's behavior toward her was not normal:

> *[There was a moment when I realized my sister's treatment of me was not normal]. Probably when I was in 9th grade and I had a really good friend who had an older sister that was somewhat dysfunctional and she was living at home. She had a baby. The baby was living there. She was in high school. You know all of that so she wasn't, they weren't the perfect dream family. They had their fair share of problems. They shared a bathroom. Their rooms were downstairs and they had a Jack and Jill bathroom in the middle where they shared a bathroom. And the two of them, they weren't fabulous, famous friends because there were several years between them but they got along and they got along in a normal relationship. [Interviewer: And you saw what, how sisters act?] Yeah. Exactly. And I think that you know my solution or answer to a lot of this was to just not be around once I got old enough and I could flee the situation on my own. I spent a lot of time with my best friend who lived on the other side of town and she had a younger sister and an older brother and they got along wonderfully. Wonderfully.*
> (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 5)

A Soft Place to Fall

As children, the survivor leaders felt unsafe in their homes. Their parents were either physically or emotionally absent, and violence was commonplace. However, all of the participants managed to find places of refuge during their childhoods.

One anchor I could cling to. Two of the participants had grandmothers who were nurturing, supportive, and loving; one participant spent a great deal of time at the home of a friend and the friend's parents functioned as emotional and spiritual foster parents:

> *Pretty much the main relationship I ever had was with my grandma. She was always there no matter what. You know, when dad was gone and mom was doing a lot of different things and so on, pretty much every weekend I would stay with them, my grandma and grandpa in [town], and they would take me back to school on Monday, no matter where I lived. And that was good. I mean, I lived with her for a couple of years in high school and even into college at different times I was back and forth. So it was always kind of my one safe spot and one safe person, you know…she was the one who was always there…Without her…it would have been a mess. Just because, like I said, that was my…one anchor I could cling to no matter where, you know whatever was going on, I knew that I could count on that.* (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 7)

> *[If I had not had my grandmother, my childhood] would have been very rough. Very rough. Because I wouldn't have had anybody.* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 6)

> *[I] spent a lot of time with my best friend's family. Her parents are my parents…I think the ability to get away from it [helped me survive]. I mean honestly to get away from it. And far enough away that I felt safe. That [my sister] wouldn't interfere with that relationship. Probably haven't given it a lot of thought but by going to my friend's house on the other side of town there wouldn't be interaction. I mean there wouldn't be interaction with her. [Interviewer: And your sister didn't have interaction with her at school.] Exactly, exactly. And none of her friends, I mean you know she hung out with people mostly from our high school or from a high school that was downtown but she didn't hang out with people from this high school so there wasn't a chance that there would be overlap and I just needed to have my own thing. Which is why I went to school out of state because I needed to have my own thing.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 6, 8)

A fourth participant sought shelter in the world of books, as I did as a child, reminding me of Mark Twain's observation "Books are for people who wish they were somewhere else." School was also an important refuge for the participants as children and they remained aware of school as a safe haven in their practice as school leaders:

> *I loved school. I loved school and why wouldn't you? School was a place where you got real meals and I mean I still to this day still love school lunch. I always have because you have such a variety of foods you know. I loved school. I was successful in school. Did very well in school. It was a calm place. Secure place. Place that I could be sure of being safe. So school was a place I loved being… I went to visit my very first year here with the ladies that serve lunch and talk to them about how important they were and how important their job was because you know when some of these children are coming to us, they're not having meals at home and they need to understand how important they are to those kids and*

> *giving them what they need. Those basic needs to begin with but also just a smile and letting them know they care.* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 5/Interview 2, Page 8)

Faith also provided a refuge for the survivor leaders, as children and as adults. All four participants grew up in the Midwest and espoused a Judeo-Christian belief system. Although the role of organized religion varied in their faith, the belief in God's goodness and forgiveness gave hope in their bleak lives:

> *Faith was a part of our lives, all of our lives, from the time I can remember...My grandmother was very faithful...We always went to church, went to Bible school. Even in those rough times when all that turmoil was taking place, we...went to church...God has always been there, just always been there for me...I find a lot of peace and calm and that's what I pray for. As a building principal everyday when I sat down at lunch I bowed my head and I prayed for calm and peace and the strength to do everything that I needed to do to help these children...so that's...what saw me through* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 7, 13)

> *I didn't feel like I needed [church]. But I think, thankfully so, being around people like you, and some other people that, as I kind of, I found a church that I feel, that actually has the right message and it says you know, hey, you screwed up and you will screw up. But there's also another side of it...so especially recently, that's been a very big thing. That's helped immensely. I feel like there's a lot of weight off of me.* (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 10)

When the participants were asked what life would have been like for them without that safe person or place, their faces exhibited a deep, wordless grief as they imagined childhood without that lifeline. They felt they would not have been able to survive without that refuge, even though none of the participants who connected to people talked to their safe person about the abuse while it was happening. It was enough to have someone who acted appropriately and showed a little kindness.

A Voice for the Voiceless

As children, the survivor leaders did not talk about the abuse occurring in their homes. The number one rule of dysfunctional families is not to tell, and they didn't. They

suffered alone and coped as best they could. Even as adults, they had not talked in detail about their childhood experiences. During the interviews for this research project, three of the four participants disclosed sexual abuse they had never discussed with anyone, ever, and the telling seemed to be a relief:

> *It feels good [to talk about the trauma].* (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 17)

> *You can't hide from [the past]. Period. You cannot hide from it. No matter, no matter how far you run or how far you try and bury it or how much you try to pretend it didn't happen, you cannot hide from it. And so just to say yep this is part of who I am. This is part of something that happened to me and this is how I dealt with it and I'm going to move on but I'm not going to forget you know what happened because it's part of what makes me who I am.* (Participant 3, Interview 2, Page 6)

Leading

Loner Who Seeks to Connect

As adults, the participants' childhood sense of loneliness and determination manifests as a proclivity for shared leadership with staff, students and stakeholders as well as an emphasis on collaboration with peers and mentors.

Connected. The participants were much more successful at feeling connected as adults. They expressed feelings of relief at knowing other people had similar experiences to their own childhoods:

> *One thing I liked about administration...talking to the kids, knowing that you weren't alone. I'm not the only one that's seen or done [things] so you know I'm thankful for that.*
> (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 19)

The participants recognized the importance of creating and maintaining bonds with colleagues, friends and loved ones:

> *[I coped by developing] ties with other people. Creating a support system and I think from that helped me to improve my self-worth. I think that you know if you don't have that around you and you know that you need that going out and finding it.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 8)

> *I have a really good support base now so I have my husband, I have my children, family, so I get a lot more of my strength and being able to cope with things through doing things with my grandchildren or you know being with my husband and doing fun things with him. So that would be probably how it's different. I didn't, I really coped with it myself internally when I was a child and now I feel like I have a good support system.* (Participant 4, Interview 2, Page 6)

The participants were also able to ask for what they needed from their support system; they could articulate if they were seeking advice or if they simply needed a sympathetic ear:

> *[It's important to have] the few close professional friends...when things get hard. I think when it's about kids..., there are teachers you can have a conversation with or the building social worker is a great sounding board...I think that I have gotten really good at letting people [if I want advice or if I just need to vent]...this is the role that I want you to play...a sounding board where...I just need to vent to get it off my chest, or do I want some ideas from you...I think that's something I've gotten better about because sometimes you want ideas but other times you just want to get it off [your chest]. I think it's important obviously to keep confidentiality in check you know as far as who you can talk to. But when things get hard, it's just seeking out that confidant or that person.* (Participant 3, Interview 2, Page 3-4)

Participants found mentors who were older, wiser and more experienced, and benefitted from their encouragement and support, much in the way children in healthy families benefit from the guidance of parents:

> *I have a mentor that I've had for years that...I'll bounce things off of...I'll call him up and say you know this is something...that I'm thinking about and...just want to see what you think...definitely he's my professional mentor and a very good friend so I do that...*
> *[When I am not sure what to do about a situation on the job], I go and visit with the superintendent...depending on what it is, if it's something that I think...one of the other [people in similar positions] might have had experience with I might go visit with one of them. But definitely bounce it off of somebody else...I'll just say "now I'm just thinking out loud...this is what I'm dealing with and I could go either way here. I can see some multiple things here but just to get your thinking on...this." So usually I go to somebody else.* (Participant 4, Interview 2, Page 10)

Shared leadership. The survivor leaders' practice of connecting extended from an individual to an organizational level. The participants actively sought collaboration and input from stakeholders in their schools:

> *I always tried to provide the opportunity for people to criticize or to question...what we're doing and through that process whether it be through emails or newsletters or phone calls...If you allow people to have the opportunity to say a lot of times they may criticize but they'll also say but you're doing this well...I think that's with your staff or with kids or with parents or anybody. As long as you provide the opportunity, they'll let you know what you're doing right and what you're doing wrong...I always knew I was doing the right thing at least as far as I was doing it for the kids.* (Participant 1, Interview 2, Page 9)

> *I always did a parent survey to get parent perceptions about our school...let's say a parent has a perception that their children are not safe at recess time...then that's one of two things, either there's some reason for that...we don't have enough people out there watching students or else the teachers are busy talking to one another and the parent goes by and sees that or it's a wrong perception and we need to educate the parent and inform the parent about we always have three people at recess, we always make sure...whatever the facts are. So I would say I ask for input and perceptions from others.*
> (Participant 4, Interview 2, Page 11-12)

Additionally, the survivor leaders' practice of connecting with colleagues helped them connect with parents as well:

> *I would say my strength in leadership would be [calming down] parents...that are angry; had really good success with that. Whenever parents would come in and be angry getting ready to go to the TV station or whatever and saying you know come in and let's talk about it. Really talking about we're all here you know we're all here for your child and sit down and get to that first and then they usually left quite, you know really happy and saying we're all on the same team you know for this child so that would probably be my leadership would be being able to bring people together to be on the same team. Whether it's staff or parents and staff or whoever.* (Participant 4, Interview 2, Page 3-4)

The opportunities to connect with others seemed to yield a great deal of personal and professional satisfaction to the survivor leaders:

> *We had this group that met on...Friday afternoons. It was like a think tank. A whole bunch of people. Everybody was invited...basically we were the [steering committee] in the building even though we weren't [official]...We were the people*

> *who showed up on Fridays and talked about educational issues and it was...passionate, it was so pure and wonderful and I loved it.* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 4)

From Ignorance to Penetrating Insight

Within the context of an abusive family, the ability to read nonverbal cues is a matter of survival; being able to predict what is about to happen is the next best thing to being able to control what is about to happen. Since their family situations were often out of control, the participants learned to discern. As adults, the survivor leaders as adults have a keen awareness of the unspoken thoughts and intentions of others, citing their reliance on intuition and their ability to read between the lines. The participants referred to a sense of "just knowing" about things, including knowing they were meant to work in schools

It's a calling. Paradoxically, although most of the survivor leaders were unable to realize they were not supposed to be abused or neglected, they did realize they needed to work in education.

> *This is what I was meant to be. This is a calling and I really truly feel like it's a calling...and I'm here for a reason...Teaching's always been a calling to me...to serve kids.* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 14)

> *[Becoming a teacher was] like this natural thing. I taught swimming lessons [in college] and it's just so natural for me to take on this role and I don't know why because it's almost genetic it seems but kept gravitating towards helping other people...rather than just doing my own thing you know. Which I wanted to do. I really wanted to be that guy who just did his own thing... I really wanted to be a professional musician and I was having some success but not enough to support myself...instead...I was teaching swimming lessons and then they're calling me and asking me to do more and then I'm teaching life guards how to be life guards.* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 15)

> *I think [being an educator is] what I always knew that I was supposed to do...I really don't think I chose to go to education. I think it was something I was supposed to do. You know I like to work with kids. I think it's important that there are adults around that understand where kids are coming from and look out to*

help kids in a variety of ways. Not only to help them learn and to discover their education but also to help them...along the way because being a kid is hard. (Participant 3, Interview 2, Page 1)

I just chose [education] because...it started out...because of athletics. They kind of went hand in hand. I wanted to maintain both of those but then it seemed, we went from the beginning it was something to do before football practice and ended up getting priorities straight and you know I wanted to be a teacher that could coach, not a coach that could teach. And so that was the biggest thing. Like with...my football coach in high school he was an elementary PE teacher and he was well-renowned not just in our district but the state in general for his teaching not for his coaching. I mean he set all kinds of records coaching as well but he was sought out as a teacher and so that was obviously a big influence because I was a football player so he was directly an influence on me. And so I was kind of following in essence I guess kind of following his footsteps and then it just kind of rolled from there... because I had moved around so much and done a lot of things, that was something I could kind of hang on to. He was there and you know it worked out well just personally, athletically, and academically, all the way around.
(Participant 1, Interview 2, Page 2)

Who, me? The survivor leaders spoke of being called to be teachers, but three of the four did not understand themselves as being called to be administrators. Three of the four participants had been sexually abused and had also witnessed personal violence perpetrated upon their loved ones; these three were recruited into administration, somewhat reluctantly. Yet, just as they assumed extra responsibilities in their families of origin, they stepped up and served in their schools.

It was actually about late July my fourth year there I believe, the principal left last minute to go to [another district] and so that position was open and...I had the certification for that and so I became principal. (Participant 1, Interview 2, Page 1)

I never intended to be an administrator...but then the high school principal died two weeks into school which forced [the curriculum director] into the high school principal's position and I had my administration degree and so did several other people but for whatever reason the board and the superintendent came and asked me then to move into that...administrative position. I didn't even seek it out. No, didn't even seek it out and so you know that door was open and of course I didn't say no. (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 10)

Participant 4 was not only approached for her first job in administration, but she was tapped for her second job as well.

> *The superintendent retired and some shifting around and I was asked if I wanted to be the elementary principal…my heart was always in elementary so I was like yes that's exactly what I would like to do so I did that for four years.* (Participant 4, Interview 2, Page 2)

I had already interviewed the other three participants and had learned two of the three had similar experiences with being approached and asked to apply for jobs in administration. Because this had happened to me in two of my three administrative jobs, this information resonated with me. During the interview, I mentioned this to Participant 4, who offered the following speculation:

> *[I wonder if being recruited for administrative jobs rather than seeking them is] more of a pattern or if it's just because of the background and how we reacted. The overachieving profession part and trying to please others part that gets us noticed.* (Participant 4, Interview 2, Page 3)

While Participants 1 and 4 were recruited for specific vacancies that needed to be filled quickly, Participant 2 was recruited in a more general sense, and answered the call very slowly. It was over 10 years from the time he was first approached by his superintendent to the time he became an administrator:

> *The superintendent…approached me about being an administrator [when I had been teaching for about 10 years]…but…this goes into my whole…background. I literally could not imagine someone having that much confidence in me…I just…laughed…and he was very put out that I laughed and I said are you nuts, oh my God, no way!…He lives in [the area] and at one point I thought about going to him and saying that got me thinking [about being an administrator] but…12 years before it happened.* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 1)

Participant 2 initially rejected his superintendent's suggestion he pursue a career in school administration, but he was prompted again, years later, by a peer:

> *So [at the Friday afternoon think tank when the staff would get together and brainstorm how to help the failing principal and how to improve our school, I*

> *was] talking about something and this woman looked at me and she said "*You *ought to be the principal. Why can't you be the principal?" And it seriously had never occurred to me since ten years before when [the superintendent] had said that.* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 4)

Although Participant 3 was clearly traumatized by the years of physical and emotional bullying by her older sister, she differed from the rest of the survivor leaders in that she did not witness personal violence upon her loved ones, she did not experience sexual abuse, and she did not wait to be invited into school administration.

Discernment. Regardless of how they got to an administrative role, the school leaders all seemed to have a sense of "just knowing" regarding their buildings:

> *[I know something in my building needs to change because] I go off of... intuition. [I ask] does it make me feel comfortable...walking through that situation just the feeling that it gives you in your gut of are the kids safe? Are all the kids protected? And the answer to both of those is no and so you know just taking a look at how is this helping or hurting kids, and then making a change to it because of that and so really how do I know? Not because the kids tell me per se because they don't necessarily know that they can do that yet. I don't think they're at the age where they feel the ability to do that. But to put myself in their place, their position.* (Participant 3, Interview 2, Page 7)

In addition to "just knowing" about their buildings, the participants had a sense of discernment about the unspoken thoughts and intentions of others. By its very nature, intuition is difficult to explain; one just knows because one just knows. Intuition might be attributed to a keenly honed ability to read nonverbal cues of others. In childhood, intuition helped the participants predict, prepare for, and sometimes avoid abuse; as adults, it made them careful to look below the surface. One participant shared the following observation that resonated with me, because I had similar experiences:

> *[There was a colleague I did not trust because] she was so...just a weird kind of nice, you know? She's forcefully nice. And that freaks me out a little bit...because it doesn't seem genuine to me and although she's doing all the right things and saying...the right things, there's really an agenda behind the niceness and I've always been able to sense that.* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 2)

A Soft Place to Fall

In addition to seeking solace with grandparents, friends, and the escape of a good book, school was also an important refuge for the participants as children and they remained aware of school as a safe haven in their practice as school leaders:

> *School was a place where you got real meals ... I went to visit my very first year here with the ladies that serve lunch and talk to them about how important they were and how important their job was because you know when some of these children are coming to us, they're not having meals at home and they need to understand how important they are to those kids and giving them what they need. Those basic needs to begin with but also just a smile and letting them know they care.* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 5/Interview 2, Page 8)

As adults, the survivor leaders are adamant about making school a safe place for children and adults, particularly on the issue of bullying by staff and students. They use their power gently, but do not hesitate to protect someone being victimized. This was evidenced in their efforts to assist a failing principal and also in their persistence in following up on child abuse/neglect reports; they are attuned to the suffering of others and reach out regularly.

> *[Kids don't misbehave] because they're trying to be a jerk or they're trying to avoid something, you know there may be that underlying cause, whatever it is and just to stop and sometimes take five minutes to say hi and engage somebody. Make them realize they're a person and not just...somebody walking up and down the hallway. That goes a long way. And I think it's just like I said a lot of people they just don't feel like they have that time but you know a lot of times if you spend that little bit of time up front it's going to save so much time and hassle on the back side and you know I think just slow down, take a breath, and talk to these people. Because...they've got experiences, they've got needs, we just need to find out what all those are.* (Participant 1, Interview 2, Page 6)

A Voice for the Voiceless

The children who suffered in silence grew into adults who became determined child advocates and speak freely and forcefully for students. Although the participants

had not disclosed their own abuse experiences, they made frequent references to ways they managed to speak for their childhood selves through the students in their care.

> *I've never talked with anybody about...the deeper stuff. I would make mention like on the surface level...we need to make sure that we're aware of where these kids come from and some situations they might be in...I suggested that we all...get on the bus and go through a couple of our bus routes and see where these kids are living...We need to deal with [kids who are not on the honor roll or living in nice houses] and that was always my biggest thing, trying to make that connection...we've got a range of kids and we need to touch them all.* (Participant 1, Interview 2, Page 8, 17)

A survivor leader who was bullied as a child now actively seeks out "those gray kids, the ones you don't see" because she herself tried to disappear to cope with the abuse.

> *As a teen I would describe myself as a gray. I was gray. I didn't want anybody to notice me...I didn't want teachers to know my name or to call on me or to notice me.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 5-6)

> *Interviewer: I'll bet it's hard for a gray kid to get away from you in your building.*
> *Respondent: Absolutely.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 10)

The survivor leaders held a shared disdain for adults who tell kids "these are the best years of your life" because in many cases, they are not, and for a traumatized child, that statement can evoke feelings of despair.

> *[A lot of adults tell kids] this is the easiest time in your life...and I'll specifically say the opposite to kids. A lot of adults will tell you that this is the best time and the easiest time in your life and they're lying; it's not true.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 9)

The survivor leaders share an understanding of just how hard it is to be a child, and this understanding tempers the way they lead. That said, the survivor leaders' empathy and advocacy does not manifest itself as lowered expectations; specific references were made to the need to maintain high standards of academic performance and behavior, because that is the way out of abuse and dysfunction.

Even when it's hard, [I don't believe in] lowering expectations or standards but always being there and caring for them and I think that's rewarding when's that realized...by the student. (Participant 3, Interview 2, Page 2)

Where kids get sent to the principal and start playing the poor me card, that didn't work, you know? OK, I can sympathize but that's not an excuse and I think that really helped...
I would say, you know, I was in that exact same situation and this is how I dealt with it or these are the people that I talked to and the places I went...for the most part, explain...biggest part is explain it's not an excuse. You know, while I sympathize and it's definitely the last thing I'd wish on anybody, to let them know I understand...that those things go on. But how can we make that situation and more importantly make them a better person despite what's going on? You know, how can they rely on themselves? And make better, because ultimately they're the ones making these bad decisions in school. Yeah, there are influences obviously that are there that are making them or they feel they are maybe not justifying it but trying to tie the two together and my thing is to try to separate those two things...I understand mom and dad were doing that at home, that doesn't give you the right to cuss out your English teacher...(Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 6, 14)

I understand where you're coming from so let's talk about it and let's see how we can make it better on the other side you...We can't use it as an excuse; we can use it...to get it better on the other side. (Participant 1, Interview 2, Page 5)

Survivor Leaders

"Resilience is the will to accept the discipline of an art form in order to shape your pain into 'something else'" (Wollin & Wollin, 1993, p. 175).

"René Magritte was not made creative by his mother's suicide in the Sambre River. He was already going to be a painter. And he was going to be good. What his mother's suicide did to Magritte was the same thing that (Edgar Allen) Poe's mother's young, tragic death did to him. It set the theme for a life's work…" (Terr, 1990, p. 187).

Survivor leaders arise from abuse and neglect, coupled with intelligence and opportunity. They choose or are chosen to turn their traumatic experiences into a passion for serving as an antidote to the past. The interview participants were doubly tasked with surviving their childhood adversity by turning it into something positive, and with managing the double edged sword of survivorship in their arenas of professional practice.

They might have been leaders even if they had not been abused, but they, without question, lead differently because of their experiences. One of the survivor leaders attributed her childhood abuse with shaping her leadership:

> *I just think I have a heart for people and I just I don't know if that would have been the same heart for people you know if I hadn't have had tough times as a child. It's just so important for me to make sure that every child that comes to us has what they need. Has safety. Has somebody that cares about them. You know to me that relationship and that education are the things that are going to get that child beyond you know if it's poverty that they need to get out of. If it's a situation that's abusive to them in their home, I really feel like that our relationships as adults with those kids and the education...are going to be able to get them out of that so I feel like you know that that was instilled in me through, I don't know how I learned that [laughs] but instilled in me as I grew up that if I could you know have that good education I could be anything that I want to be and so that's probably as a leader...just trying to help people be all they can be.* (Participant 4, Interview 2, Page 6)

Types of Trauma Experienced by Survivor Leaders

The participants of this study experienced a full spectrum of physical, emotional and sexual abuse by parents, older siblings and cousins, and uncles; physical and emotional neglect; domestic violence between parents/step-parents; alcoholism/substance abuse by parents; and poverty. Descriptions of their experiences included:

> *I was about five or six [when I first started getting high with my uncles, who were in high school]...I distinctly remember sitting on the arm of the chair, and one of my uncles was sitting beside me. We were all passing the bong around and he took my hand and he set it in his lap, he just kind of took it and I didn't even know what was going on. He did it three or four times and then I looked over and he had his pants down.* (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 1, 3-4)

> *[My father held my arms] and made my brother punch me repeatedly. And that's the kind of person he was...He would do stuff like we would all just be eating cereal in the morning before school and he would just sit there and stare at one of my older brothers. Just stare at him. Then he would just walk, it was random. You never knew what was going to happen. He'd just walk over and just BAM you know just knock his cereal bowl, and hit him, cereal bowl, cereal, literally on the ceiling he hit it so hard. For no reason. My brother didn't say a word to him. Just he hated, he hated this one brother of mine. And he'd scream, "Now clean that shit up!"*(Participant 2, Interview 1, Page 2)

I know that one day I was, she was being mean to me. Beating me up. Hurting me and nobody else was home. No adults were home. I was running from her to get away from her and we had not gotten dressed for the day yet. It was in the summer and I had my pajamas on which was just a t-shirt and so I went to the front door and she actually shut the front door and locked it behind me. And then opened the garage and wanted me to walk, and with a ranch-style house where you had to actually walk in front of the entire house over into the garage and we lived next door to a boy that was my age and that we were friends, nothing more than friends but you know they were boys who were in the neighborhood who could have been outside playing and the idea was for me to walk to the garage to go inside and so I think it made me feel. I was constantly in fear. Didn't know when she was going to be my friend. When she was going to be mean, physically or emotionally...When I was in high school I remember getting out of the shower and going into my bedroom to get ready and her taking a picture of me with my breast, my boob exposed and then took that picture and threatened to show it at inopportune moments.
(Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 2)

[My mother was at work that night and my father left me home alone so he could go out drinking]. I remember the door closing and you know it was dark and I was very frightened and I really don't remember what happened after that other than I know...I was standing there crying with the door closed and asking him not to go and he left and left me there so and I don't know if I was 4 or 5 but that was probably the first memory I have of something unpleasant there. (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 1)

In addition to the specific incidents of abuse and neglect referenced above, some of the participants acknowledged additional events after the recorded portion of the interview had ended. Although my gratitude for the participants' candor is expressed elsewhere in this document, I was touched that they chose to disclose the additional information to me, because they had not told anyone else previously. One participant reported that his father had been infected with pubic lice due to his mother's infidelity, and as a first grader, he had to help shave his father's pubic hair. Another participant reported the family folklore that she and her older brother were always playing naked in the bed together; she could only dredge up hazy recollections of this activity, but acknowledged that her first sexual encounters as an adult seemed eerily familiar and she

realized she had been having sex with her brother. Despite the pathos of their memories, the participants seemed philosophical about their experiences and embraced the possibility the trauma had helped them become leaders, as evidenced in the following comments during their interviews:

> *I think everybody's...past whether it be positive or negative or anything in between is going to affect what you do today and you know today's going to affect tomorrow.*
> (Participant 1, Interview 2, Page 9)

> *I bet a lot of people in education in general have had some sort of tragedy you know that's happened that's sort of led them down this path of helping people...I think all of your life experiences you know help you become the person you are regardless of whether you're a mail carrier or a principal or a minister or whatever...I just...never thought about those experiences being good.* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 13, 16)

> *I just thought hey there may be something to this, the reason that...we go into a serving kind of...profession because of things that have happened to us in our childhoods so it kind of intrigued me.* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 1)

> *[The trauma is] something that I haven't talked to a lot of people about but it's very close to my heart and had a lot to do with who I am today and what I became and overcame and what I look for when I work with kids.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 1)

One of the ways in which the trauma shaped the participants was the necessity of being self reliant and mature beyond their years, laying the groundwork for adult leadership.

Parentification

Being a principal is much like being the parent of hundreds of children and having dozens of spouses. For those in this study, the idea of functioning in a parental role was something to which they were accustomed due to their childhood experiences. The participants were parentified in that they functioned as adults because the adults in their families were not able to assume that responsibility. As children, the participants felt not only that they were on their own, but that they were responsible for others:

> *[My mother and I each] just basically took care of ourselves.* (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 12)
>
> *[My mother] relied on me. I was the other adult. I took care of the children. I took care of the baby. My sister was 6 years younger than me, my brother was 10 years younger and so pretty immediately I became the other adult in the household... I was like the mother to my brother and sister; I pretty much raised them while she worked... I think the main thing is that I just felt like I was an adult and I had to be an adult. I mean...everything in my family has been framed with I'm the strong one and I have to handle things and when my mother couldn't handle things, she relied on me...Still, my whole family... I'm the one that's supposed to take care of things and be the strong one for the family and so that hasn't changed.* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 1-4)

Most often, the parents of the participants were not able to meet the needs of the participants as children, but there were also examples of the participants' parents being deliberate in their refusal to nurture and support the participants, as in this recollection of Participant 2, whose father failed to acknowledge his birthday, except to use it as a justification to withhold any future financial support:

> *Here's what [my father] did for my 21st birthday. He sent me a card. Not a birthday card. A card. Actually a note I should say, in an envelope. It was a card envelope though so I've got to think he was faking me out a little bit so. But it came right on [my birthday]. I was in college. He said it's your 21st birthday, you are now emancipated. Which meant he wasn't ever going to pay for anything for me again. Not good luck. Nothing. Not happy birthday. Nothing.* (Participant 2, Interview 1, Page 3)

The survivor leaders had recollections of guilt over *normal* childhood behaviors and trying to meet normal childhood needs, because they did not understand what normal was. They did not feel it was appropriate to have wants or needs as other children did. In the following excerpt, the participant relates a story in which she was hungry after school; the events arising from this normal, appropriate childhood desire for an afterschool snack brought tears of shame to her eyes over 40 years later:

> *[When I was in] 4th grade or 5th grade...I can remember coming home from school and going to the cabinet and there was a can of spinach there. This is...a*

> *time that really sticks out in my mind, so I ate that can of spinach because when you come home from school you're always really hungry and I remember the guilt I felt when I found out when my mother said that was dinner for the four of us…I still remember the guilt that I felt for eating the one can of spinach that was then going to be for my whole family and at the time, I, of course, didn't know that…It's very hard [to remember] and I mean it seems like a little thing. Part of what I think I've lived with all my life is I feel a lot of guilt and really unsubstantiated guilt.* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 2)

However, at times during childhood, the survivor leaders did manage to advocate for themselves and attempt to establish an appropriate parent/child boundary for responsibilities:

> *Finally, just about my junior year I said you know what, these kids behind me, I'm not their dad. I'm their big brother and I'll do big brother things with them but I'm not going to any more parent conferences. I'm not going…to make sure they do their homework every night and I'm going to have a life. I'm going to start doing stuff for me and that's it. I told [my mother] that. I said I'm done…She was making me breakfast every day, like I was the dad. I was the only one. I would wake up and she would make me eggs before I went to school…creepy.* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 10-11)

These preliminary efforts to create proper roles for themselves in their families helped the participants plant seeds of advocacy and protection of the students for whom they would be responsible as school leaders.

Resilience

Although the participants struggled with adult responsibilities as children, the survivor leaders exhibited many signs of resilience. Students who are abused or neglected are often stereotyped as academically and behaviorally unsuccessful, but this is simply not the case. In fact, "traumatized kids rarely do poorly in school" (Terr, 1990, p. 219). The participants in this study were gifted students, talented athletes and musicians, and well liked by their peers, though they were embarrassed to acknowledge their accomplishments during the interviews. Their modesty was so extreme that the survivor

leaders often appeared to be more uncomfortable discussing their successes than disclosing their experiences of sexual abuse:

> *I excelled at football from the very beginning so that not only gave me acceptance with other people but then I was, I was, you know, on a pedestal...that sounds pretty arrogant and I don't mean it that way...that gave me time to be around people and also a time to be looked at as something...* (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 11-12)

> *Respondent: I was pretty precocious and this is going to sound...this is the braggy part of the show I guess.*
> *Interviewer: It's not bragging. It's being honest. I mean, you are where you are in your career. You are where you are in your education. We've talked about how your children are...intelligent. It is what it is. It's not bragging, and I'm asking you to give me an accurate picture of what you were like as a child so it's okay that you were really smart.*
> (Participant 2, Interview 1, Page 8)

Although the participants, with some encouragement, would discuss their academic, athletic and extra-curricular accomplishments as children, they also noted that their accomplishments did not give them the sense of belonging or family closeness for which they wished:

> *I won this huge like Tri-Cities Science Fair award [in high school]. I was on the news and it was in the newspaper and all this shit and I was like God this is crazy but I had done something that had just occurred to me but [at that time it] was a huge big deal because no other high school kids were doing this [kind of science experiments at that time]... I was also...student body president and...I was in honor society and I was in all those things... I won more awards for athletics than any other member of my family, but I was considered the least athletic in my family... I always got good grades. I always...participated in stuff...I did the right thing...[but my family] just really thought nothing of me. And I was the most accomplished one in the family. I won awards all the time.* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 14, 18, 7)

Despite (or because of) their families' lack of encouragement and support for their many accomplishments, the participants chose to persist in their pursuit of excellence:

> *[When I was in fourth grade and my parents were getting divorced, I overheard the teachers talking in the hallway about how children from split families can't be successful like other kids] and that made me very determined that I was going to*

[be successful]. I never told anybody that I heard that conversation but really I know that sometimes negative things can really motivate you and at that point I was like "I'll show you because I can succeed and I will," so that was kind of a motivating time for me... I am very stubborn. Very stubborn. If you were to tell me, "oh you can't do that," " you can't get that done," or whatever, then that's when I would show you, yes I can. So I had...that innate stubbornness in me...which is seeing things through and making sure that I can do it. (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 5, 13)

Protectors

Because the participants' parents were not physically or emotionally present, they were often unable to protect the participants from abuse or neglect. Having been left to fend for themselves, physically and emotionally, the participants developed the habit of finding and protecting those in need:

I ended up...being kind of the protector of the other kids, whether they were younger or my age...I kind of became the mother of the neighborhood...I can remember one time...some of the boys, throwing darts...and sticking them into the legs of the younger kids...I can remember one of the other children who...was an older sibling of some of the others, the two of us...stopped them and...sent them on their way and stood up to them so I think that kind of bled into part of the whole... teaching... and...nurturing thing. (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 3)

At times, the survivor leaders felt deep sadness over their inability to protect others in the family from abuse.

The humiliation I felt [when my little brother stood up to our dad for beating our older brother]...like oh my God my little brother is way braver than I am. He's protecting [our brother and I am not]. (Participant 2, Interview 1, Page 2)

[The abuse of my little sister] was traumatic because I was the one that was supposed to be protecting and taking care of ...my sister...I was babysitting and it was neighborhood boys that took her off and...sexually abused her...I know that happened to her and that was traumatic for me because that was, I mean, I felt responsible like I was her protector and I didn't protect her that day. (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 16-17)

The need to protect others extended even to the hypothetical. When participants were asked if they would change anything about their growing up experiences, they were

generally accepting of their past experiences and thought only of the happiness and wellbeing of others:

> *In some ways I wouldn't change anything because that's made me the person I am today. Obviously I would want things to be a little, if I was able to, easier or simple to get to this spot. But you know, I wasn't, I never was hungry, I never was homeless, I was never those type of things so I don't know...I might not change anything. I mean, I would change some of the things I saw. Obviously...the abuse of* other *people, I would definitely change that.* (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 17)

> *I just wish...[my mom could have been happy]...she got pregnant...with some sailor on leave kind of guy...and they ended up getting married and I guess I wish she were happy. She's never been happy and I don't know that she ever could be because she had a terrible childhood, like a lot of people did in the Depression...but I just wish she could have been happy.* (Participant 2, Interview 1, Page 14)

There was one notable exception in the responses to the question about changing anything from childhood. Participant 3, who was bullied by her older sister, differed from the other survivor leaders in more than one way. First, she did not have younger siblings or other young relatives who experienced similar abuse; she was her sister's only known victim. Further, Participant 3 did not ponder the question about whether or not she would change anything from her childhood, as the other participants did. She did not hesitate to answer, and her answer evidenced a desire to protect herself, by erasing her sister's very existence:

> *[If I could change anything about my childhood], I'd be an only child.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 10)

Participant 3 differed from the other participants in other ways as previously mentioned; she was the only participant not to disclose attempted or actual perpetration of sexual abuse and she was the only participant not to witness acts of physical violence perpetrated upon other family members in her home. However, despite the differences in

willingness to protect herself, even hypothetically, Participant 3 as well as all other participants showed a strong interest in protecting students and staff in their practice as school leaders:

> *[When kids come to me with a problem], I listen and I'm truly listening to what's going on with them...giving advice or telling them that I'll take care of it. But I think I go definitely a step further in that I make sure that they're aware that I'm going to do something but if it continues to happen, they have to let me, the same adult, or the same person know again because otherwise I won't know that it's not been fixed... I maybe overemphasize that because it kills me when kids think that they don't have anybody to talk to or that they've talked to everybody and nobody's doing anything when in reality it's my hope that the adults are doing something, that the child just hasn't gone to the same adult twice. So I think it's made me become extremely sensitive to that, that part of things or that particular problem in a child's life because realistically all children are bullied in one way or another by somebody...I think...no, I* know *[I went into education]...to help support kids but also to find those kids. The gray kids. To help support those kids because nobody found me. Why am I crying? This is horrible.... I mean really I think that's why. To find the kids that need to be found...* (Participant 3, Interview 2, Page 4, 9)

> *I think all experiences sort of influence the way you are but as far as...how I lead I just [pause], I just don't enjoy people being beat up on no matter if it's...of course it doesn't ever get physical in our world but...people certainly do get beat up on...in different ways...I just don't...like the dog piling that sometimes happens and I find myself defending someone I don't even like. Just because I'm not...going to sit by and let someone be dog piled. You know I'm not going to let someone get ganged up on or picked on or something like that.* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 10)

> *I love to problem solve and try to figure out how can we do[the budget cuts we have to do] and still take care of our kids educationally but not cut positions so that's...[being] a protector...definitely a protector...[Also] I tell the substitutes or the new teachers when I'm showing the videos on recognizing signs [of abuse] and I say if I'd had this video I might have recognized the signs with those [former students of mine]... I always tell substitutes and new teachers when we do the training that...it might help you to recognize signs that will help to stop that person...I feel very strongly about that.* (Participant 4, Interview 2, Page 5, 8)

Using Their Powers for Good

As adults, the survivor leaders are passionate about protecting others and referenced this in a variety of ways through their interviews. Being in a position of

authority and influence over others gives the survivor leaders the opportunity to combat their childhood feelings of helplessness and they take the prospect very seriously. As school leaders, they are able to exert their influence on the lives of students as well as on the perspectives of their staff members. Having had the experience of powerlessness to change their situations as children, they use their power as adults carefully and wisely, seeking opportunities to help students and also help teachers help students:

> *[I know I am doing a good job] when [I'm] able to help open a teacher's eyes to a child's particular circumstance or situation so that they can better reach them because they are with the kid way more than I am and so to share something with them or to give them another idea or another way to look at things and to have them change and grow in order to help kids is a huge thing that lets you know you're doing a good job. Because you're using your powers for good.* (Participant 3, Interview 2, Page 10)

> *The rewarding part is just knowing I make a difference...even if it's a small one. Whether it be ...taking Christmas to a family that...was unexpecting and making that difference...just to saying hi and putting my arm around someone in the hallway and knowing that it meant something. That was always really good. I like that...helped me being an administrator...I felt like I could do good things for kids.* (Participant 1, Interview 2, Page 2, 15)

> *As an administrator I tell teachers and counselors, "Be so careful with what you say to kids because they trust you. They trust you and they listen to you."* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 14)

> *I had to really do some searching about...where my personal ethics come from because it wasn't from my fucked up family, that's for sure, because they didn't give a shit and I do have [a code]... with great power comes great responsibility.* (Participant 2, Interview 1, Page 8)

Walking Tall, With a Limp

The survivor leaders have deep compassion, keen awareness, quiet wisdom, and mighty strength. However, it must be acknowledged that their enormous hearts show signs of brokenness, even decades after the abuse.

PTSD and dissociation. All four participants exhibited some sign of PTSD, from exaggerated startle responses to avoidance of situations reminding them of their own abuse experiences:

> *[My sister's bullying] influenced my self-image and self-esteem significantly. I have a lot of [long pause] fear of situations. Fear of rejection and I still carry that around.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 6)

> *I still hold onto a lot of that from the past so it takes very little for [my sister] to say for me to pull up all of that...she wants to host Christmas this year which would require us to stay at her house... and there's no way...there's no way I could spend that much time that close to her. No way.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 11)

In addition to struggling with contact family members associated with past abuse, the survivor leaders also had difficulty when their jobs put them in situations reminding them of their own childhoods:

> *This kid...was [in my office], not really in trouble, just kind of in trouble. He's talking about his dad and how much trouble he's going to be in and his dad...called him out in the hallway. He was like, yeah my dad called me out in the hallway and...grabbed him by the shirt and he kept repeating...because he had like gotten in trouble..., "don't you understand," he smacked me, "don't you understand," and he hit me with his other hand and it was like. I was like well how did it make you feel? He goes I kept thinking "just not the water, not the water." I said well what does that mean? ...He said his dad when he's really mad and he's done this to his brother, he puts his brother's head under the faucet, turns on hot water and just pounds on his back while his brother's head is under scalding hot water. So, I almost lost it, [remembering my father with my brother] just because of course then I'm putting myself in this kid's position. You know this helpless kid with this bigger adult, older brother, and it's like oh my God, I'm going to lose it! Of course you know we took care of it, hotline, and all that kind of stuff. But then I was, I really was okay and I thought I wouldn't be the rest of the day but so much happens during the day that it's easier for me to go okay that was then, that was awful but it's in a nice little box now...At least I remember stuff. It's not, sometimes like in my childhood I would compartmentalize it so much that it was like a wall that I couldn't see anymore and that was it. It went away. Well not really but I really couldn't access it very easily you know. Those feelings...would come up and I wouldn't understand what was happening....* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 8-9)

[My husband] knows when he comes in he has to make noise and let me know he's there because if he comes up behind me, I scream...that startle response. If anybody comes in and I don't hear them because I'm absorbed in whatever I'm doing. I'm totally engrossed. If they come up behind me and say something that voice shocks me and I just, I scream, just a frantic scream....and I've always been that way. I've always been very jumpy. Very jumpy. (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 18)

The participants also indicated a tendency to dissociate or "check out" emotionally:

I'm embarrassed to say, but I...compartmentalize a lot of things. And I'm not very emotional..I just, I do that...it's like okay, I'm in this mode, I've got to do this and I take care of that in this mode... I really emotionally compartmentalize so I mean I'm not pleased that I do that but that's what I do...I detach, basically. (Participant 4, Interview 2, Page 5-6)

As adults, my siblings and I all got together at Christmas. We were all like either in college or just out of college. I think only one of us was married [at that time]....we were all having fun and then all of a sudden they just started dog piling on me. I mean not physically but started really like all this making fun of the fact that I had terrible allergies growing up...so I was always blowing my nose...they were just relentless...really making fun of me and imitating me and all this. And I hadn't even done anything. I thought we were just...there [for a nice time]. And I got up and I laughed...and I went back to one of the back bedrooms...and I just shut the door and I picked up a book and I started reading. And about five minutes later a couple of them came in and said "that was the most bizarre thing, you got up like a robot and just walked away." And in my head I hardly even remembered what happened. I mean literally they had to remind me why they were concerned about my behavior because of what had happened. I think that's what I do, [shut things out]. (Participant 2, Interview 1, Page 13)

I kind of compartmentalize...a lot of stuff...I'm getting even better at it. I thought I was good at it before [but I have gotten better]. (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 8)

Unhealthy coping strategies. Two of the three participants who disclosed sexual abuse specifically stated they had never told their spouse, and it is my understanding the third participant had not done so, either. A secret of that magnitude is a chasm. Further, all of the participants exhibited some degree of unhealthy coping strategies.

[I dealt with stress growing up] with alcohol. That was, you know, not the right thing, but it was, that was my escape and continues to be from time to time...The

> *biggest [way of coping is] I shut down, just won't talk...I just internalize everything. I don't yell and scream or throw things...even through [my divorce], I don't do that. I just kind of swallow it down and I let it eat at me for a while... Just one of those things where I, once again I, I can deal with everything on my own, I don't need anybody else for any reason.*
> (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 9, 10)

Two of the four participants acknowledged they drank too much and a third acknowledged that fear of becoming an alcoholic kept him from drinking very much or very often, so alcohol was still an important factor in his life, though it manifested as abstention rather than overindulgence. In addition to issues with alcohol, the group also had issues with other life activities. Two of the four specifically mentioned struggling with overeating and two of the four disclosed problems in their sex lives.

People pleasing, then and now. Although alcohol and food were, at times, problematic for the participants, the strongest craving seemed to be for approval:

> *I was a very passive child. I was the one that...other kids would tease that I was teacher's pet because I was...always wanting to please...the teachers. Always wanting to do everything the right way and so that was who I was...Just always very people pleasing kind of thing... Still even into adulthood I have a tendency to never say no about things and to try to over accommodate and over do for others because you know if I say no I can't help someone with something or do something then I just feel a terrible guilt you know. So I think that's a part of the whole thing. Whatever this whole thing is, I think that's a part of it.* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 4, 2)

> *I really never felt like my accomplishments were to impress anybody [or] to try to get attention because I knew it wouldn't work. In fact, I had the exact opposite. My mother constantly called me a loser...in front of everybody she would say "you're nothing but a loser."* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 18)

> *I'm ultra sensitive to anything that comes out of anybody's mouth. I mean like even now when I have job performance issues if I should have a job performance issue or if I should have any kind of corrective nature all you have to do is mention something and look at me and it's over. I'm done, it'll be fixed and never happen again kind of a thing because I'm that sensitive to making sure I'm doing the right thing to avoid getting to the point where it's uncomfortable.* (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 13)

The participants who are still practicing administrators all showed signs of workaholism:

> *I'm driven, really truly just driven. I'm definitely...a workaholic...I have an addictive personality. I mean that is basically the underlying and I know there's a lot of reasons for being a workaholic...and that I'm sure comes from that whole background and...wanting to please others. Wanting to the best job I can and have people recognize "oh wow" and that kind of thing so I'm sure that's part of that whole thing. I think it's also an escape from relationships. When you're a workaholic and you work constantly it, it takes you away somewhat from relationships and that's not a good thing.* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 9)

> *[I get up and go to work at 4 am] because I can't keep up with [my boss's] expectations... I'm still trying to deal, how to deal with her.* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 12)

The survivor leaders felt their need for approval did lessen somewhat as they matured as leaders, however:

> *[When I first became a principal],...I was always, not necessarily concerned but I was more aware of what other people thought...I was asking questions but yeah I think it might have been seen as a lack of confidence or a lack of knowledge and some of it was [because I was hired at the last minute to fill in for a principal who left in July] and I felt like I was playing catch up but you know I was always concerned about hey am I doing the right thing. What are people thinking? You know that sort of thing... [As an experienced principal], I was going to do what's best for kids and as long as I was doing that, what people thought wasn't as important because you know if they're not thinking that's right then maybe they're not in the right spot...so I felt a lot more confidence...as far as being a leader...Making those decisions...it was this is what we're going to do and you will be on board or you know you won't be here very long because you know I had that passion to do that and then again after awhile had the confidence to do that to so I guess those two kind of meld together.* (Participant 1, Interview 2, Page 3-4)

> *At the beginning [of my administrative career], I was very much always trying to please everyone...trying to make sure...everybody was happy...to a fault. [I] hadn't gotten that understanding of the way things are going to be best for everybody is to hold people accountable for what they need to be doing and that's really helping them.* (Participant 4, Interview 2, Page 4)

Anger, absent and otherwise. The participants tended to minimize not only the abuse they experience in childhood, but also the anger they felt in response to the abuse. In some cases, there seemed to be true reconciliation, and in some cases, the veneer of

acceptance was quite thin. Participant 1 did not acknowledge any anger to the uncles who abused him:

> *[The uncle who attempted to molest me and I have contact now] and we get along great.[I have never confronted my uncles about getting me high as a preschooler or attempting to molest me]...well, not sincerely...just kind of jokingly...they laughed about...a couple of times when I was [smoking marijuana with them when I was four or five years old and they were in high school], I would like put my head between my legs and run backwards. You know, just stupid kid stuff, but hell, I was high, I didn't know. And it was just something, they were entertained by it, you know. I think [the uncle who put my hand on his exposed penis]……you know, no harm, no foul, is probably what I'd say, you know everybody is happy and healthy and everything at this point so no harm done.* (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 5)

However, the statement about everyone being healthy and happy is not supported by the facts. By the participant's own admission, he lost his position as a school leader due to an extramarital affair precipitated by his inability to emotionally connect with his wife. Despite his great success as a school leader, he was actually unemployed at the time of the first interview and at the time of the second interview, he was working in a job that would be held by an undergraduate student in a stronger economy:

> *There's people out there that aren't as good as I am and I should be in that chair helping those kids...but you know...I've got to clean up some messes before I can...do that again so.* (Participant 1, Interview 2, Page 7)

Conversely, Participant 1 was able to acknowledge his anger toward his mother's selective memory about his growing up experiences:

> *[My mother has] a different version of the past and it's amazing at different times she'll literally say that "you were so spoiled" you know, or "you had it so easy" and things like that. It really, that's when I get angry because, you know, you did a lot for me but I did a lot for myself, too. She made like one payment, like one month, my freshman year of college, the one payment of anything she ever made in my education, and she still talks about how she helped put me through college...I just shut down and change the conversation, or I leave. I'm not going to get into that discussion, you know? But yeah, that's when I get angry, when she alludes to talking about how easy I had it and [laughs] just how I had everything I ever wanted. It's kind of strange...[I had it easy, except for getting high with my*

uncles and the one trying to molest me and mom being an alcoholic and a drug user]...Exactly. (Participant 1, Interview 1, Page 7-8)

The survivor leaders expressed frustration at the selective memories of their aging parents, but chose not to confront them, opting instead to continue to sacrifice themselves to take care of the family:

You know my mother now is like "oh we had so much fun. The kids were all just wonderful and it was just so, wasn't your childhood great?" Yeah, it was great. Like I'm going to tell some Alzheimers'd out 82-year old, no my childhood was a frickin' misery every second because you know it was either you or him or an older sibling who you'd coerced into beating me up to make me tougher...It's unproductive though. I mean to me talking about it with her would be completely selfish and self-indulgent you know. (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 15)

Participant 3 was again an exception to the group; she had an interest in revenge as a teenager and as an adult, could not forgive her sister for abusing her:

At one point in time...Geez this is horrible. But I felt like truly I had finally gotten her back which is horrible but she had just got a new car and at that point in time Honda Preludes were really popular and she had gotten rid of her Monte Carlo and gotten a Honda Prelude. And she had had it I don't know maybe a week and she had done something that was...just horribly mean to me and I don't even remember what it was but I was doing my escape. Walk around the house. Cry, maybe scream. But just get out and get some air and I was walking around the house and I kicked her car when I walked by it because it was parked in the driveway...I took my foot up and pushed it and left a big dent in her car and I was like "Oh" but then I was like well nobody will know I did that because nobody's out here. Nobody saw me and didn't tell her until we were adults that I kicked her car. She thought that the whole time and I remember seeing her cry like she had been violated because she thought that the neighbor boys were playing basketball and hit it and wouldn't admit to it and didn't own up to it and so on and so forth when in reality the whole time I knew and I just sat there thinking, "I did it. I did that. That was me." Not even feeling guilty about it. Feeling like I'm going to get caught and she's going to really, really retaliate. Yeah. To the point where I might die kind of a thing so that's probably part of the thing that I didn't tell her until we were adults. When I told her was when she was trying to make things right with me, for historically you know. Didn't mean to do that. Felt horrible that she did that. That she treated me like that. She knew she was horrible but we need to move forward from this and you know that kind of thing. You know the big all out forgiveness... She really wanted to let it all go and I couldn't. (Participant 3, Interview 1, Page 12-13)

Optimism and hope. Despite the myriad of sad and painful experiences in their collective histories, the survivor leaders were a deliberately hopeful group. They were aware of their optimism and embraced this part of their makeup:

> *I really am a very positive person... and I think...that comes from...[being] thankful for the blessings we have and always [knowing] that there are people out there that are hurting more than you...much more...so I think...that has led me to be a very positive person and see the positive side of things... I know it...must be part of [being a trauma survivor].* (Participant 4, Interview 1, Page 9)

> *[I try to focus on the positive and]...don't focus on that bad stuff all the time. It's going to be there. Do what you can about it but if you can't change it then don't worry about it you know just do what you can. Do the right thing and keep going...Most of the things around us are good, let's focus on those. And I tried to very much do that and put a smile on my face and go on.* (Participant 1, Interview 2, Page 4)

The survivor leaders felt grateful to have survived their childhoods and strove to make the most of those past experiences:

> *I used to think that when I...almost died as a kid that something had happened to me...some sort of spiritual thing...I used to imagine, like actually have visions and stuff as a child...talking to spirits and that sort of stuff and it was just like is that real? It was never something I shared because it was like, what am I going to tell mom, "Oh yeah, Jesus appeared to me and was talking to me today"? [Interviewer: Did he?] Yeah, that's my memory of it...that Catholic image of Jesus...appeared to me and it was just like unprompted. I wasn't like praying or anything. I was just by myself...of course. In the room that I shared with two brothers that weren't in the room at the time and just all of a sudden it was right there...I [was] 8, 9, 10. That only happened once but other bizarre stuff like that where...I just thought...I'm being watched over...[At the same time, I am embarrassed because] it's like [I think I am] so important [that God would watch over me]. But I always felt like, because I felt [watched over], I sort of have an obligation to do something with it.* (Participant 2, Interview 2, Page 16-17)

As a group, they have done something with it. They have turned degradation and violence into advocacy and service. They have become survivor leaders.

Summary

Chapter Four described the findings from study to explore the participants' childhood experiences of trauma as well as their adult professional practice as school leaders. Common themes emerged in both the childhood experiences as well as adult leadership practices, and each theme was defined and illustrated with examples from the data. The core category of survivor leader emerged from the data, as well as underlying themes of loner who seeks to connect, from ignorance to penetrating insight, a voice for the voiceless, and a soft place to fall. The survivor leaders in this study were passionate child advocates, simultaneously protecting students and holding them accountable. Further, the study participants actively sought to counteract the loneliness of childhood by connecting with mentors, colleagues and students. Although the survivor leaders in this study did not necessarily recognize that their childhood abuse had been wrong, they definitely recognized their calling into the field of education. As educators, they prided themselves on making their schools safe havens for students. Additionally, the survivor leaders in this study advocated for the students in their care, ensuring the needs of their students did not go unmet as their own needs had been in childhood.

Chapter Five will feature a summary of the findings and a presentation of conclusions and implications for education and practice. Finally, the recommendations for future research will be discussed in light of the findings and conclusions from this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

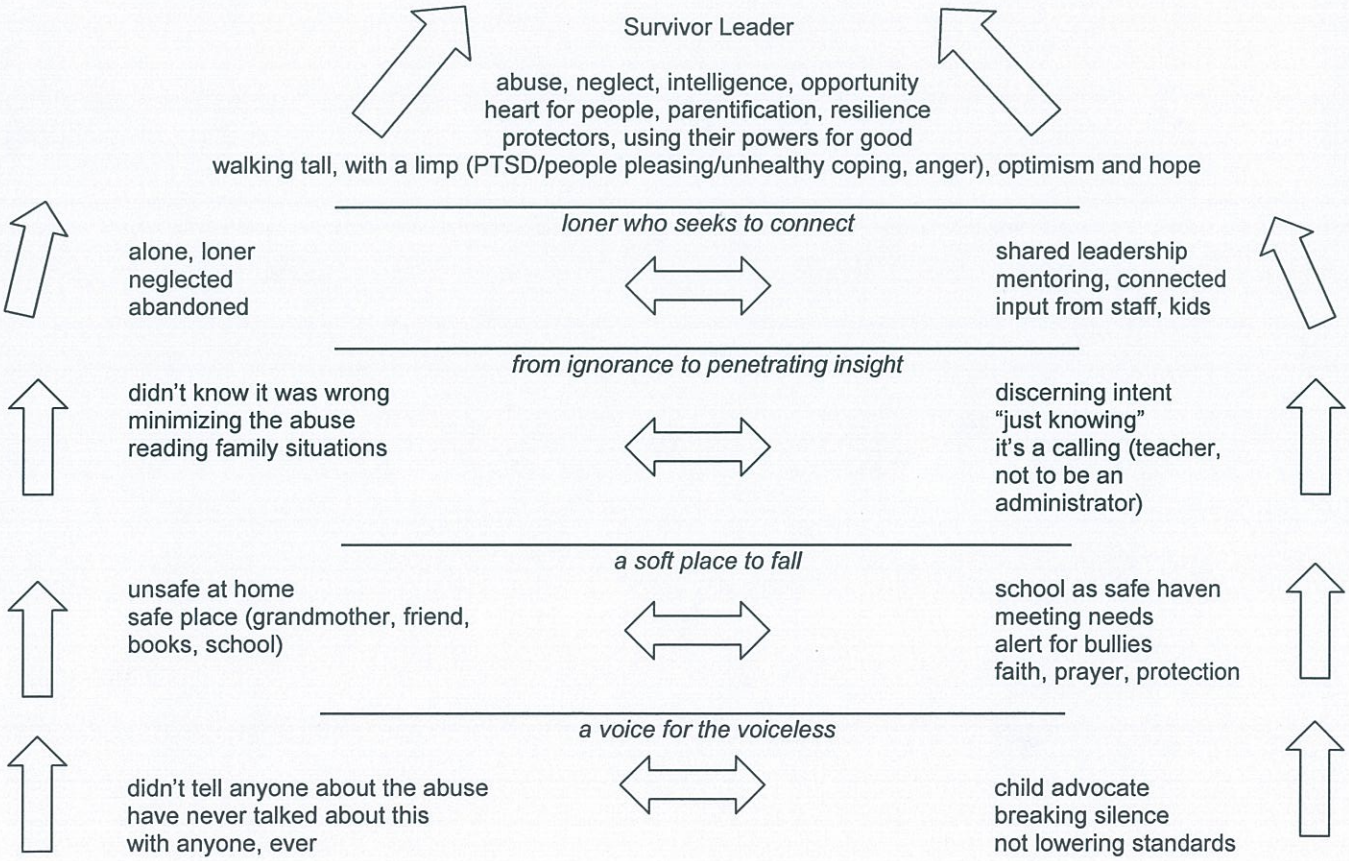
Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings from the study in the context of existing literature. Limitations of the study are then presented. A discussion of the implications and recommendations for practice, education and future study follows. Finally, conclusions of the research are given.

Summary of the Findings

Survivor Leader

The core category of survivor leader is addressed in the discussion of findings section of the chapter. A model of the core concept and underlying concepts appears below.



As presented in Chapter Four, surviving and leading as distinct concepts ultimately intersect in the core category. Undergirding the core category are four themes: loner who seeks to connect, from ignorance to penetrating insight, a soft place to fall, and a voice for the voiceless. The four themes are discussed below, culminating in a discussion of the core category.

Loner who seeks to connect. The participants spoke at length about their feelings of isolation during childhood. They identified themselves as loners and shared experiences of physical and emotional abandonment. During abuse, they had to disconnect or dissociate to escape the pain of what was happening. Such coping, though palliative in the moment, can become detrimental if the dissociation endures beyond the abuse, as survivors may have feelings of emptiness, isolation, or generally not being connected to others in any meaningful way (Fredrickson, 1992, p. 46). The participants felt they were on their own in the world most of the time during their childhoods and had to cope as best they could, though they all mentioned faith as being important as children, as adults, or both, to help them cope. As school leaders, these formerly isolated children evidenced a strong preference for shared leadership with staff, students and stakeholders. The participants also placed great value on the role of mentors in their professional lives.

From ignorance to penetrating insight. The participants disclosed a full spectrum of traumatic experiences including physical, emotional and sexual abuse, but like most children who experience abuse from an early age, they did not know the abuse was wrong (Bass & Davis, 1993; Fredrickson, 1992; Lawson, 2002; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002). The participants thought their experiences were normal at the time, but they realized over time they were not. Additionally, since their families tended not to talk about things openly,

the participants learned to rely on their intuition to read situations (Blume, 1990; Terr, 1990, Wollin & Wollin, 1993). As adults, the survivor leaders as adults have a way of "just knowing," as exemplified by their reliance on intuition to guide them regarding the needs of their schools as well as their confidence in their ability to discern.

The ignorance of childhood persisted in some aspects of the participants' sense making, in that they consistently minimized their sexual abuse experiences; the three participants who experienced sexual abuse minimized all aspects of the trauma they experienced growing up. One participant was apologetic at the beginning of her first interview because she felt her information might compromise the project because her experiences might not have been "bad enough," though in fact she disclosed multiple experiences that would have met the standard for abuse/neglect under state law.

Despite their inability to see the inappropriateness of what was done to them as children, the participants did clearly see they were meant to become teachers, expressing a sense of having been "called" or "destined" to be teachers. However, the participants did not feel the same calling to be administrators; three of the four were specifically recruited into school administration, citing a lack of confidence or lack of readiness until called into service.

A soft place to fall. The participants were not physically or emotionally safe in their families of origin. Their "caregivers" were abusive, or absent, or too incapacitated to parent. The participants commonly witnessed personal violence among loved ones during their childhoods. Fortunately, however, each participant managed to find refuge by visiting the home of a friend or relative, by escaping into books, and by trusting in God to love and protect them as their parents could not. School was also an important refuge for

the participants as children and they remained aware of school as a safe haven in their practice as school leaders.

The participants exhibited a range of emotions during the course of the interviews and they tended to become emotional at different times in response to different questions, but one question in particular yielded uncannily similar responses. When I asked the participants what life would have been like for them without their safe person or place, each of them looked unbearably sad as they pictures their lives without that refuge. Although none of the participants who connected to people talked to their safe person about the abuse while it was happening, it was enough to have someone who treated them kindly and took an interest. As adults, the survivor leaders translated that experience by being unwavering about making school a safe place for children and adults, especially when it came to bullying. The survivor leaders were passionate about protecting colleagues and children in need.

A voice for the voiceless. The participants did not talk about the abuse they experienced while it was happening; in many cases, they had not talked about it at all, with anyone, until they were interviewed for this study. Those same children who endured wordlessly found ways to speak for the students in their care. A survivor leader who often did not have enough food in her home is particularly appreciative of school food service workers, recognizing them and reminding her staff that many of the students do not get enough to eat and depend on school to keep them fed. A survivor leader who was bullied and tried to make herself invisible to avoid being abused now deliberately seeks out students who try to be "gray" (i.e., invisible), telling them it is hard to be a kid and she is there to help.

Although the survivor leaders are well aware of just how hard it is to be a child and this understanding informs their leadership, they are quick to recognize the fine line between helping and enabling. The participants supported high standards of academic performance and behavior, because they knew other abused children needed good social and academic skills to rise above the abuse. Without question, the participants were unanimously child-focused and driven by meeting the needs of the whole child.

Survivor leaders. The subcategories provide emotional and theoretical underpinning for the core category of survivor leader. The participants in this study, survivor leaders, were abused and neglected as children, but grew wise and kind in response to their suffering. They developed deep and generous hearts for helping others. Because they were not children even during their childhoods, the survivor leaders in this study were uniquely prepared for the responsibility of school leadership. They rose above their traumatic experiences and resolved to use their influence in schools to protect children, advocate for the marginalized, all while holding students accountable for their decisions in order to achieve the best possible outcome for the students. Despite their determination and dedication, the survivor leaders did show lingering effects of trauma such as difficulty with overworking and other unhealthy coping strategies, symptoms consistent with PTSD, and unresolved or unacknowledged anger. Despite these struggles, optimism and hope were clearly evident in these survivor leaders.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are discussed in light of the literature regarding trauma, resilience, and posttraumatic growth, as well as the absence of previous research on the influence of childhood trauma on adult leadership practices. They are organized around

the research questions that guided the study. The topics addressed include the nature of trauma experienced in childhood and influence on the leadership practices of the participants. The discussion also highlights the findings regarding core category and the underlying themes within the core category of survivor leader.

Question 1. What kinds of trauma were experienced in childhood by the research participants and how are these experiences framed?

The participants of this study experienced a gamut of physical, emotional and sexual abuse by parents, older siblings, cousins, and uncles; physical and emotional neglect; domestic violence between parents/step-parents; alcoholism/substance abuse by parents; and poverty. Although many of the stories shared were troubling, some resonated more than others. One participant, as a first grader, had to help shave his father's pubic hair when his father had pubic lice due to his mother's infidelity. One participant, as a preschooler, was left at home alone at night so her father could go out drinking; she remembered standing at the door, crying and begging him not to leave, and being afraid. One participant could vaguely recall many instances of lying in bed with her older brother, playing naked in the bed, and realized she had been the victim of incest. The three participants who had experienced sexual abuse also witnessed acts of personal violence perpetrated upon their parents, siblings, or other close family members. The same three participants witnessed at least one parent in one or more of the following: using cocaine, using marijuana, abusing alcohol, and/or experiencing delirium tremors. The fourth participant was chronically terrorized by her older sister through physical bullying and psychological bullying through actions such as photographing her leaving

the bathroom with her breast exposed after showering and threatening to show the picture to boys at school.

Despite the pathos of their memories, the participants seemed philosophical about their experiences and felt they had helped them become who they are (Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Norlander et al., 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). In the context of the study, the participants embraced the possibility the trauma had helped them become leaders (Almedom, 2005; Bass & Davis, 1993; Fredrickson, 1992; Terr, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993).

Parentification. Part of the experience of abuse is the cessation of childhood (Arnsworth & Stronk, 1999) or being parentified, that is, forced to take the role of an adult an a chronologically inappropriate age (Payne, 2001). The survivor leaders were uniquely suited for school leadership, because being a principal often feels like being the parent of hundreds of children and having dozens of spouses. They functioned as adults because the adults in their families were not able to assume that responsibility. As children, the participants felt not only that they were on their own, but that they were responsible for others (Bass & Davis, 1993; Fredrickson, 1992; Lawson, 2002; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002). As school leaders, they continued their lifelong practice of assuming responsibility.

Question 2. How does posttraumatic growth and/or resilience manifest in the professional practice of the research participants?

The experience of trauma is often assumed to be life changing (Terr, 1990) but trauma does not have to be damaging or destructive (Anderson, 2006; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). For the study participants, their traumatic experiences served as a catalyst for

growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Their stories have not previously been told and it is hoped that viewing their leadership practices through the lens of survivor leadership will allow their tacit understanding may become explicit knowledge, generating knowledge for the entire profession (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

The essence of survivor leadership is woven together by the participants' shared ignorance of the inappropriateness of their childhood experiences, evidence of resilience and post-traumatic growth, isolation and powerlessness during childhood trauma, gratitude for refuge and kindness, and faith in a higher power. The core category captured the duality and mutuality of the participants' identities as survivors and leaders (Anderson & Danis, 2006) and did so using a concept that was meaningful and memorable (Giske & Artenian, 2007).

Walking tall, with a limp. The survivor leaders, as a group, are caring, insightful, resilient people. That said, their abuse experiences have taken a toll; effects of the trauma were apparent even 40-some years after the actual events. All of the participants showed signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including exaggerated startle responses, avoidance of situations that reminded them of their own abuse experiences, dissociation, and keeping the secrets of their childhoods. Additionally, all of the participants exhibited some degree of unhealthy coping strategies. "Most survivors are cope-aholics, people who cope with whatever is thrown at them without reliance on others. They do not seek out sympathy for their pain and feel undeserving if it is offered. They are especially averse to sympathy from others…" (Fredrickson, 1992, p. 171). The participants struggled either with eating or drinking to excess and all four participants struggled with overworking to the point it affected their relationships with their loved ones.

Workaholism was also a stronghold for all four participants; trauma survivors thrive on activity and staying busy to keep themselves from feeling (Bass & Davis, 1993) and the principalship is particularly well suited for keeping one busy. Overworking seemed particularly troublesome because even though the survivor leaders craved alcohol or food in varying degrees, they all acknowledged their deep longing for approval. Fortunately, the need to please people seemed to ease as the survivor leaders gained experience and confidence in their roles as leaders.

In addition to issues with food, alcohol and approval, the participants struggled with anger about the abuse they experienced, mostly because the anger was unexpressed, as is typical in abuse survivors (Bass & Davis, 1993; Fredrickson, 1992; Lawson, 2002; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002). One participant was in frequent contact with an older relative who had attempted to molest him as a preschooler, but the participant said he and the relative had never talked about the abuse because it didn't matter. Another participant cited his mother's advanced age and failing health as reasons not to discuss the abuse. The survivor leaders elected to put the family's needs ahead of their own, just as they had as children (Bass & Davis, 1993; Fredrickson, 1992).

For all the sad and painful experiences in their collective histories, the survivor leaders were a purposely optimistic group (Wollin & Wollin, 1993). They cultivated their hopefulness and sought to make the best of their difficult childhoods, citing a need to do something with the lessons they learned as children (Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Norlander et al., 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The "something" they did was to become survivor leaders.

Because survivor leadership has not previously been identified, many questions arise, beginning with the very definition of survivor leadership. Based on the findings of this research, a survivor leader experienced trauma in childhood and mitigated the deleterious effects of trauma by resilience (Wollin & Wollin, 1993). Over the years, the survivor leaders experienced posttraumatic growth (Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Norlander et al., 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) and sought careers in education. Although the survivor leaders appeared to be professionally successful, their situations demand further exploration. To some extent, they are able to heal themselves by healing others, giving support and protection where needed. However, there is a point of diminishing returns on self-sacrifice, and survivor leaders struggle with boundaries, as do many adults from traumatic childhoods (Blume, 1990; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002). Survivor leadership had not been named prior to this research and at the time of this writing, only the four participants have a language to even discuss their status as survivor leaders. That said, they exert a tremendous influence on the lives of thousands of students and hundreds of staff members; understanding the strengths and challenges of their leadership is important for those whose lives they touch and for the profession of school leadership.

Resilience. The participants struggled with abuse, neglect, and adult responsibilities as children, but they exhibited many signs of resilience. It is often assumed students who are abused or neglected will have academic and behavior problems at school, but this is not the case. In fact, "traumatized kids rarely do poorly in school" (Terr, 1990, p. 219). The participants in this study demonstrated resilience in their roles as gifted students, talented athletes and musicians who were well liked by their peers

(Wollin & Wollin, 1993), though they were embarrassed to acknowledge their accomplishments during the interviews. Their modesty was so extreme that the survivor leaders often appeared to be more uncomfortable discussing their successes than disclosing their experiences of sexual abuse (Blume, 1990; Lawson, 2002; Terr, 1990). Although the participants, when prompted, would acknowledge their academic, athletic and extra-curricular accomplishments as children, they also noted that their accomplishments did not give them the sense of belonging or family closeness for which they wished (Bass & Davis, 1993; Fredrickson, 1992; Lawson, 2002; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002). Despite (or because of) their families' lack of ability to offer encouragement and support for their many accomplishments, the participants chose to persist in their pursuit of excellence (Terr, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993).

Protectors. Because the participants' parents were not physically or emotionally present, they were often unable to protect the participants from abuse or neglect (Bass & Davis, 1993; Lawson, 2002; Woititz, 2002). Those experiences taught the participants the importance of protecting others (Rhodes, 1999; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). The survivor leaders felt deep sadness over their inability to protect others from abuse during childhood and seized any opportunity to protect others, even hypothetically. When participants were asked if they would change anything about their growing up experiences, they expressed a desire to change the abuse and unhappiness experienced by others, but not for themselves. There was one notable exception in the responses to the question about changing anything from childhood. Participant 3, who was bullied by her older sister, differed from the other survivor leaders in more than one way; she did not need time to ponder the question and her immediate answer was that she would have

been an only child. Not only did she want to undo the abuse, but she wanted to undo the abuser as well. Participant 3 differed from the other participants in other ways; she was the only participant not to disclose attempted or actual perpetration of sexual abuse and she was the only participant not to witness acts of physical violence perpetrated upon other family members in her home. However, despite the differences in willingness to protect herself, even hypothetically, all participants showed a strong interest in protecting students and staff in their practice as school leaders.

Using their powers for good. As adults, the survivor leaders are passionate about protecting others and referenced this in a variety of ways through their interviews. Being in a position of authority and influence over others gives the survivor leaders the opportunity to resist their childhood feelings of helplessness (Anderson & Danis, 2006; Bass & Davis, 1993; Fredrickson, 1992; Payne, 2001; Terr, 1990) and they take the prospect very seriously. As school leaders, they have the power to change the lives of students. Having had the experience of powerlessness to change their situations as children (Bass & Davis, 1993; Fredrickson, 1992; Payne, 2001; Rhodes, 1999; Terr, 1990), they use their power as adults mindfully and gently (Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Norlander et al., 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), seeking opportunities to help students and also help teachers help students.

Limitations

As is the case with any qualitative research, it is not the intent of this study to be generalized to the general population of all adult survivors of childhood trauma or even the greater population of school leaders. The limitations of this study should be considered when discussing the findings, drawing conclusions, as well as stating

implications for future research and practice. Following is a discussion of limitations related to the method, context in which the study occurred, and the researcher. The potential impact of the study itself as an intervention and the qualitative nature of the study are also addressed.

Limitations Related to Methods

Some limitations are specifically related to the methods employed in the study. The participant mix and lack of prior research to inform the inquiry constituted limitations that are discussed in the following.

Participant mix. The first limitation was the focus on only four school leaders within Missouri public school B-21 settings. The experiences of the individuals within the study varied and it is reasonable to assume the experiences of individuals in the general population would vary as well. However, the details regarding the childhood experiences and the professional practices of the school leaders in the study have been shared so that others might determine the degree and suitability of transferability to another situation. The participants were two men and two women, with a range of years of experience in education and in school leadership. The types of trauma experienced by the participants varied somewhat, but interviews revealed that three out of the four had experienced sexual abuse and witnessed domestic violence and/or physical abuse of loved ones, and the fourth participant disclosed a different form of trauma, bullying by an older sibling. The three participants who had been sexually abused also had other commonalities not shared by the fourth participant; they were unwilling or unable to express anger at their abusers and they were recruited into administration rather than

seeking it. Thus, future research should explore whether or not the type of trauma influenced the findings.

Lack of prior research. Another limitation of the study is the lack of prior research into the influence of childhood trauma on adult professional practice in any field, let alone educational leadership. The shortage of available information points to a need for the study, but this research only serves to establish a starting point for future studies. Potential findings that were unnoticed in this study will be revealed only by further study, though this work does provide a much needed first effort.

Researcher-Related Limitations

Finally, my own limitations as the researcher created potential limitations for the study. First, my own status as a trauma survivor and a practicing school leader served as both an asset and potential limitation. As an insider, I understood the thinking of the survivor leaders, but I also may have been blind to facets of their experiences. In addition, my own experiences and relationships also potentially affected the level of participation as well as interpretation of data. While the study was designed to limit the effect of researcher bias, the experiences of the researcher cannot be discounted as influencing a study of this nature. Second, my assumptions upon engaging the study are important for determining transferability of this study to other contexts. As noted in Chapter One, I approached the study with a strong belief about the importance of resilience and posttraumatic growth, as well as a belief in the proclivity of trauma survivors for shared leadership practices. My bias as an abuse survivor and practicing school leader potentially influenced my understanding of the data. As I began this study, I assumed the participants would have experiences similar to my own, both in childhood

and as principals. I also assumed the participants would exhibit signs of resilience and posttraumatic growth, as well as some residual difficulties with coping and relating. I did find facets of these phenomena, along with unexpected nuances, and this was strongly confirmed by my peer coder, whose background was deliberately dissimilar to my own.

Although any qualitative study captures the specific experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the participants at a given moment, this study may be limited by the relatively small number of interviewees and by the selection process, essentially a convenience sample of school leaders known to me or to my doctoral program colleagues. A more geographically and culturally diverse sample may have yielded different core concepts and different theory may have emerged from the data. The time constraints of the study are an additional limitation, for the two interviews of each participant were difficult to schedule as three of the four of interviewees are still practicing public school administrators with very full schedules. Further, it is possible that the participants' perceptions prior to the interviews were shaped by the fact the study was seeking to understand how their trauma history influenced their professional practice.

Implications and Recommendations

This research explored the influence of childhood traumatic experience on the adult professional practices of school leaders. The primary conclusions from the study have been organized in relationship to their relevance to practice, education and future research.

This study began with the desire to understand how traumatic experiences in childhood influence the professional practice of school leaders in B-21 organizations. Understanding the nature of trauma, resilience, and posttraumatic growth, I also sought to

understand how these concepts manifested in the practice of school leaders. The findings of this study have implications for public B-21 education, higher education and potentially other professions, as well as implications for researchers. While the implications for these groups are related, they will be discussed separately in order to highlight specific recommendations and opportunities.

Implications for Leadership

Child abuse survivors are often perceived as damaged goods (Abdulrehman & DeLuca, 2001; Blume, 1990; Browne & Finkelhor,1986; Fredrickson, 1992; Lange et al.,1999; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002), but the survivor leaders offer an opportunity to reframe (Bolman & Deal, 1993; Wollin & Wollin, 1993) their abuse experiences as strengthening their leadership abilities. The experiences were bad, but yielded good through the resilience and posttraumatic growth of the survivor leaders. The survivor leaders emphasized collaboration (Barry, 1991; Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Elmore, 2000; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Lencioni, 2002) as well as their accountability to those they lead (Burns, 1978). The survivor leaders also evidenced an overt effort to build trust and rapport within their organizations (Burns, 1978; Barry, 1991; Gronn, 2002; Lashway, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2000; Sebring, et al., 2003; Spillane, et al., 1999; Spillane, et al., 2001).

Other strengths noted in survivor leaders included their ability to see importance in all stakeholders. Often leaders forget about certain stakeholders (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005), but survivor leaders described how they value those who are often overlooked, such as support staff, disadvantaged parents, and struggling students. They seek to engage those stakeholders in working for a common goal (Bottery, 1996; Ogawa

& Bossert, 1995). Their genuine concern for all members of the organization facilitated building a positive culture and climate (Bensimon. & Neumann,1993; Yukl; 2006) necessary for all students to thrive. Because school was a safe place during their difficult childhoods (Terr, 1990), the survivor leaders sought to make school a refuge for the students in their care.

Survivor leaders also demonstrated a keen awareness of the environment, climate, and intentions of others (Blume, 1990; Wollin & Wollin, 1993). Although this intuitiveness may arise from a childhood spent pretending things were fine when they were not (Bass & Davis, 1993; Fredrickson, 1992; Lawson, 2002; Terr, 1990; Woititz, 2002), the willingness to read each situation afresh, rather than having a fixed understanding, is a benefit for leaders. "Skilled leaders and managers develop the knack of reading situations with various scenarios in mind and of forging actions that seem appropriate to the understandings thus obtained" (Morgan, 1997, p. 3). Additionally, the survivor leaders were masters of Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) concept of "Middle Up and Middle Down" management in knowledge creation because they are so intuitive and can easily speak and relate to all different types of people. Survivor leaders are able to act as a bridge to mediate and bring all sides together to develop a common vision (Burns, 1978).

The survivor leaders in this study are gifted with insight and advocacy. Their passion for bringing out the best in others (Wollin & Wollin, 1993) is transformational and powerful. Unfortunately, because survivor leaders wait to be recruited into school administration, there may be many potential survivor leaders who continue as classroom teachers. Without question, teachers who care deeply for students and hold them to high

standards are greatly needed; I do not mean to imply that a career spent as a classroom teacher is not meaningful. However, a principal or superintendent exerts influence over many more students than a classroom teacher, and the profession needs the best we can find.

Implications for School Practice

The participants in the study had not talked at length about their abuse or disclosed the extent of the abuse prior to being interviewed for this research. In the course of the interviews, the participants often shared experiences or feelings they felt were unusual, and they were surprised to learn many others had revealed similar experiences. For example, the participants who had alcoholic parents were completely unaware of the literature for adult children of alcoholics. They were unaware of the difficulties of adult children in handling conflict, setting boundaries, and maintaining intimate relationships (Woititz, 2002). Additionally, the participants, even those who had been sexually abused themselves, were unaware of the prevalence of sexual abuse or the short and long term effects, though it is estimated one in three girls and one in seven boys are sexually abused by age 18 (Bass & Davis, 1993). Given that the survivor leaders had collectively been responsible for the supervision of hundreds of employees and thousands of students, it was astounding for them not to have even a rudimentary knowledge of the research on the effects of trauma on children and adults.

My role as an alternative school/behavior management school principal gives me many opportunities for consultation with other principals about problematic student behaviors. Oftentimes I am amazed by the amount of information even smart people do not know. Once I was speaking to a dynamic, young assistant principal on the fast track

to a central office position. We were discussing an adolescent boy whose mother repeatedly tried to override school discipline consequences for increasingly disruptive behaviors. I noted that the mother's behavior was a common dysfunction for an alcoholic family, and the assistant principal asked if the mother was an alcoholic. I replied no, it was her ex-husband who was the drinker. "Oh," she said, "well now that they are divorced, the kid should be fine." I replied, not very diplomatically, "Are you kidding me?" but that is often my thought in response to the profession's blindness to the reality of traumatic experience.

Students attend school 7.5 hours a day for 5 days a week. For the other 130.5 hours each week, many of them live in a world that is ugly and dangerous. Domestic violence; alcoholism and addiction; physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect; and poverty all have an effect on children, as well as on the adults they grow up to be. It is professionally and personally irresponsible of us to not seek to understand the effects of trauma, as well as the strategies for mitigating those effects.

Implications for Future Research

While the findings of this study inform the general understanding of the influence of childhood trauma on adult leadership practices, they actually create many more questions and opportunities for further research. These opportunities include further research with these participants, other similar participants in similar leadership roles, and other similar participants in other professions.

Opportunities for further research with these participants. The study participants told only a fraction of their stories so several opportunities exist for further study to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of childhood trauma on their leadership practices.

This study painted a picture in very broad strokes; upon further reflection, there are many more questions to be asked and answered in regard to the participants' leadership practices and the way they are perceived by their supervisors, staff and students. For example, do others perceive them to be as insightful and child-centered as this research suggests they might be? Do their drive and focus earn them approval by peers and supervisors, or are they seen as sycophantic? In this age of standards-based education and high stakes testing, not a single participant mentioned standardized test scores as a measure of their effectiveness as a leader. This is a conspicuous omission and invites an inquiry into how the test scores of survivor leaders' schools compare to schools of similar size and demographic? Do the optimism and hopefulness evidenced in the survivor leaders' perspectives evidence themselves in the cultures of their schools? Do their staff and students feel their schools are positive learning environments? Further research would enrich our understanding of their leadership and the influence of trauma upon their leadership, as well as their leadership styles, strengths, and weaknesses. It would also be interesting to know what larger educational issues are most important to the survivor leaders. A case study with a particular student or group of students with whom they have worked would also provide a more thorough picture of their leadership styles and abilities. A case study with staff would also increase the body of knowledge about survivor leadership. Additionally, three of the four participants were specifically recruited into educational leadership roles; it would be interesting to delve into the motivation, as well as the backgrounds, of the individuals who recruited the survivor leaders into administrative roles.

Opportunities for comparative studies. One opportunity for further research is conducting similar studies for the sake of comparing and contrasting findings with other trauma survivors who are also school leaders. Several comparative questions have emerged for further exploration. Are there survivor leaders in higher education? In other professions? Would there be differences, and what might those differences be? What difference does the type of trauma make, if other aspects were the same? Does the nature of the leadership position, e.g., type of position, type of school, make a difference? In summary, several opportunities exist for further exploration of the influence of childhood trauma on adult leadership practices. Such studies could indeed further the understanding of the complexity of the human capacity to rebound, and be resilient.

The implications and recommendations involve key areas of practice, education and further research. These include reframing child abuse survivors as survivor leaders who typify resilience (Wollin & Wollin, 1993) and posttraumatic growth (Kirschman, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Norlander et al., 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The survivor leaders in this study are skilled at collaboration, inclusion, and discernment. They are also passionate child advocates, protecting students and ensuring school is a safe haven (Terr, 1990). There are also implications and recommendations for educational leadership programs in higher education as they prepare future principals and superintendents. School leadership programs should educate future principals and superintendents about the influence of trauma in the lives of the students and staff whom they aspire to lead. In addition, the need exists for training regarding the resources available for allaying the effects of trauma in the lives of survivor leaders.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore how the experience of trauma in childhood influences the professional practice of school leaders in B-21 organizations. There had been no prior research on the impact of childhood trauma on adult leadership practices, so the present study focused on school principals' experiences within the context of existing work in the areas of resilience and posttraumatic growth. The identification of the survivor leader creates many possibilities for deepening our understanding of what it means to be a leader. Perhaps first and foremost, survivor leaders need a language for thinking about their leadership, and a framework for understanding their experiences for themselves and in the lives of others. Additionally, conceptualizing survivor leadership offers implications for preparing and supporting school leaders as well as implications for further study.

Epilogue

I began this dissertation with a story from the early years of my career as a school administrator. We had just enrolled a little girl placed in foster care due to sexual abuse in her home and one of her teachers asked sadly what would ever become of this little girl, what kind of life could she ever hope to have? At the time, I did not have the courage to say what I was thinking, "I am healed by the grace of God and nothing is impossible for this child, either."

Two schools and many years later, I encountered a similar situation while writing this dissertation. Early in my first year at Lewis and Clark Learning Center, a K-12 behavior management program and alternative high school, I had a conversation with my high school program coordinator. Larry came to me to share concerns about one of the

little girls in our behavior management program. He works mainly with the older students so he was unsure about what to expect, but he was worried this little girl might have been sexually abused, because she was so shy and would not return his hallway greetings, though most children flock to him. I ticked off additional concerns of my own: she speaks so softly it is very difficult to hear her; she wears clothes that are several sizes too large so the shape of her body is disguised, she pulls her hair down over her face and peers out from behind it, she eats very little at school though she is overweight, she adores animals and talks happily to the school guinea pig while avoiding talking to people. Larry and I talked about the symptoms of abuse in various ages of children and we talked about some of our high school girls who showed behaviors consistent with abuse. Once we started talking, the list seemed endless. Larry asked how those behaviors played out in adulthood and we talked about eating disorders and substance abuse and relationship problems, but we also talked about resilience and hope. He pondered all that and asked, probably rhetorically, "So are they ever ok?" This time, I said, "Sure, some of them. I'm ok. They can be, too." I can't believe he was surprised, but he was. "You?" he asked. "Me," I said. "But here I am, for them."

References

Abdulrehman, R.Y. & DeLuca, R. V. (2001). The implications of childhood sexual abuse on adult social behavior. *Journal of Family Violence, 16*(2), 193-203.

Almedom, A.M. (2005). Resilience, hardiness, sense of coherence, and posttraumatic growth: All paths leading to "light at the end of the tunnel"? *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 10*, 253-265.

Anderson, K.M. & Danis, F.S. (2006). Adult daughters of battered women: Resistance and resilience in the face of danger. *Journal of Women and Social Work 21*(4), 1-14.

Anderson, K.M. (2006). Surviving incest: The art of resistance. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services, 87*(3), 1-8.

Arnsworth, M.W. & Stronck, K. (1999). Intergenerational effects of incest on parenting: Skills, abilities and attitudes. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 77(3), 303-314.

Barry, D. (1991). Managing the bossless team: Lessons in distributed leadership. *Organizational Dynamics 21*(1), 31-47.

Bass, E. & Davis, L. (1993). *Beginning to heal: A first book for survivors of child sexual abuse.* Harper Perennial: New York.

Bensimon, E.M. & Neumann, A. (1993). What teams can do: How leaders use – and neglect to use – their teams. In E.M. Bensimon & A. Neumann, *Redesigning collegiate leadership: Teams and teamwork in higher education* (pp. 32-53). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Blume, E.S. (1990). *Secret survivors: Uncovering incest and its aftereffects in women.* Ballantine: New York.

Bolman, L. & Deal, T. (2003). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bottery, M. (1996). The challenge to professionals from the new public management: Implications for the teaching profession. *Oxford Review of Education, 22*(2), 179-197.

Bray, J., & Bilham, S. (2007). *Utilizing a solution focused approach when interviewing vulnerable individuals.* Paper presented to Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Champaign-Urbana, IL.

Browne, A. & Finkelhor, D. (1986). Impact of child sexual abuse: A review of the research. *Psychological Bulletin, 99,* 66-77.

Burns, J.M. (1978). *Leadership.* New York: Harper and Row.

Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: objectivist and constructivist methods. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, second edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 509-535.

Chirichello, M. (2003). Co-principals: A double dose of leadership. *Principal 82*(4), 40-43.

Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2005). *Doing action research in your own organization* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology 13*(1), 3-21.

Crane, C., Reed, M. & Wilcox, L. (2005). *Analysis of enacted leadership at Fulton*

Academy. Unpublished doctoral program paper, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Darling, B. & Price, T. (2004). Students' perspectives on alternative, community, and correctional education schools and services (ACCESS). *Journal of Correctional Education,* 55(1), 69-76.

Davis, J.R. (2003). *Learning to lead: A handbook for postsecondary administrators.* Westport, CT: American Council on Education and Praeger Publishers.

Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational Leadership, 37*(10), 15-24.

Elmore, R.F. (2000). Building a new structure for school leadership. Washington, DC: The Albert Shanker Institute. Available online at http://www.shankerinstitute.org/education.html

Emerson, R., Fretz, R., & Shaw, L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Erlandson, D.A., Harris, E.L., Skipper, B.L. & Allen, S.D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Feinauer, L.L., Mitchell, J., Harper, J. M., & Dane, S. (1996). The impact of hardiness and severity of childhood sexual abuse on adult adjustment. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 24*(3), 206-214.

Finklehor, D. (1979). *Sexually victimized children.* New York: Macmillan.

Fredrickson, R. (1992). *Repressed memories: A journey to recovery from sexual abuse.* Simon & Schuster: New York.

Gardner, J.W. (2000). The nature of leadership. *Educational Leadership*, (pp. 3-12). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Giske, T. & Artinian, B. (2007). A personal experience of working with classical grounded theory: From beginner to experienced grounded theorist. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 6*(4), 67-80.

Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity.* Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. (1988). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. (1992). *Emergence vs. forcing: Basics of grounded theory analysis.* Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. (1999). The future of grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research, 9,* 836-845.

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Gronn, P. (2002). Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis. *The leadership quarterly, 13,* 423-451.

Hackman, M.Z. & Johnson, C.E. (2000). *Leadership in a communication perspective*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Heck, R. H., & Hallinger, P. (1999). Next generation methods for the study of leadership and school improvement. In J. Murphy & K. S. Louis (Eds.), *Handbook of research on educational administration* (2nd ed., pp. 141-162). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Heppner, P.P. & Heppner, M.J. (2004). *Writing and publishing your thesis, dissertation & research: A guide for students in the helping professions.* Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole-Thomson.

Holloway, C.C. (2005). Teaching as a secular calling. *Educational Horizons, 83*(2), 143-152.

Jeffries, R.B., Hollowell, M. & Powell, T. (2004). Urban American Indian students in a nonpunitive alternative high school. *American Secondary Education,* 32(2), 63-78.

Kaboolian, L. (1998). The new public management: Challenging the boundaries of the management vs. administration debate. *Public Administration Review 58*(3), 189-193.

Katzenbach, J.R., & Smith, D.K. (1993). The discipline of teams. *Harvard Business Review, 71*(2), 111-120.

Kirschman, E. (2004). *I love a firefighter: What the family needs to know.* New York: Guilford Press.

Lange, A. De Beurs, E., Dolan, C. Lachnit, C., Sjollema, S., & Hanewald, G. (1999). Long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse: Objective and subjective characteristics of the abuse and psychopathology in later life. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease,* 187(3), 150-158.

Larson, C. L. & Ovando, C. J. (2001). *The color of bureaucracy: The politics of equity in multicultural school communities.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lashway, L. (2003). Distributed leadership, *Research Roundup 19*(4), 1-6.

Lawson, C.A. (2002). *Understanding the borderline mother: Helping her children*

transcend the intense, unpredictable, and volatile relationship.

Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D. & Steinbach, R. (2000). *Changing leadership for changing times.* Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team: A leadership fable*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. New York: Sage.

Lindberg, F.H. & Distad, L.J. (1985). Post-traumatic stress disorders in women who experienced childhood incest. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 9,* 329-334.

Linley, P.A. (2003). Positive adaptation to trauma: Wisdom as both process and outcome. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 16*(6), 601-610.

Linley, P.A. & Joseph, S. (2004). Positive change following trauma and adversity: A review. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 17*(1), 11-21.

Marshall, C. & Gerstl-Pepin, C. (2005). *Re-framing educational politics for social justice.* New York: Allyn & Bacon.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (1995). Designing qualitative research (2nd edition). Newbury Park: Sage.

Martin, J. (2002). *Organizational culture: Mapping the terrain.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Maxcy, B., & Nguyen, T. S. T. (Forthcoming). The politics of distributing leadership: reconsidering leadership distribution in two Texas elementary schools: University of Missouri-Columbia.

McElroy, L.P. (1992). Early indicators of pathological dissociation in sexually abused children. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 16,* 833-846.

McQuillan, P.J. (2005). Possibilities and pitfalls: A comparative analysis of student empowerment. *American Educational Research Journal,* (42)4, 639-670.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

Miguel, J.V. (2004). *A life history assessment of early childhood sexual abuse in females.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Mills, W. (2005). *Reflective journal for ELPA 9476 Leadership Theory and Practice.* Unpublished doctoral program paper, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Mills, W. (2006b). *Putting the fun in dysfunctional: Alternative school empowerment.* Unpublished doctoral program paper, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Moghaddam, A. (2006). Coding issues in grounded theory. *Issues in Educational Research, 16*(1), 52-66.

Morgan, G. (1997). *Images of organizations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mowbray, C.T., Bybee, D., Oyserman, D., Allen-Meares, P., MacFarlane, P., & Hart-Johnson, T. (2004). Diversity of outcomes among adolescent children of mothers with m

Mulvihill, D. (2005). The health impact of childhood trauma: An interdisciplinary review, 1997-2003. *Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing, 28*, 115-136.

Nonaka, I., & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The knowledge-creating company*. New York: The Oxford University Press.

Norlander, T., Von Schedvin, H., & Archer, T. (2005). Thriving as a function of affective personality: relation to personality factors, coping strategies and stress. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping, 18*(2), 105-116.

Ogawa, R.T., & Bossert, S.T. (1995). Leadership as an organizational quality. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 31*(2), 224-243.

Patton, M. Q. (1997). *Utilization-focused evaluation: The new century text*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Payne, R. (2001). *A framework for understanding poverty (revised).* Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc.

Payne, R. (2006). *Bridges out of poverty: Strategies for professionals and communities.* Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc.

Pirsig, R.M. (1974). *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance.* New York: Harper Collins.

Preskill, H., & Torres, R. (1999). *Evaluative inquiry for learning in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rhodes, R. (1999). *Why they kill: The discoveries of a maverick criminologist.* Random House: New York.

Rogers, J. & Oakes, J. (2005). John Dewey speaks to *Brown*: Research, democratic social movement strategies, and the struggle for education on equal terms. *Teachers College Record, 107*(9), 2178-2203.

Samik-Ibrahim, R. M. (2000). Grounded theory methodology as the research strategy for a developing country. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research,* 1(1). [viewed 2 July 2008] http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-00/1-00samik-e.pdf

Schein, E.H. (2000). Sense and nonsense about culture and climate. In N.M Ashkanasy, C.P.M. Wilderom, & M.F. Peterson (eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Culture & Climate* (pp. xxiii-xxx). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Schlecty, P.C. (2000). Leading a school system through change: Key steps for moving reform forward. In *Educational Leadership*, pp. 182-201. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Scribner, J.P., Sawyer, R.K., Watson, S. & Myers, V. (2005, November). *Teacher teams and distributed leadership: A study of group discourse and collaboration.* Paper presented at the annual convention of the University Council for Educational Administration, Kansas City, MO.

Sebring, P. B., Hallman, S., & Smylie, M. (2003, April). *When distributed leadership is called back.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Sedney, M.A. & Brooks, B. (1984). Factors associated with a history of childhood sexual experience in a nonclinical female population. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 23,* 215-218.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Spillane, J.P., Halverson, R. & Diamond, J.B. (1999). *Distributed leadership: Toward a theory of school leadership practice.* Paper presented to American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Montreal, Canada.

Spillane, J.P., Halverson, R. & Diamond, J.B. (2001). Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Educational Researcher, (30)*3, 23-28.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: an overview. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, first edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 273-285.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tang, C.S. (2002). Childhood experience of sexual abuse among Hong Kong Chinese college students. *Child Abuse and Neglect.* 26, 23-37.

Tedeschi, R.G. & Calhoun, L.G. (2004). Post-traumatic growth: Conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychological Inquiry, 15*(1), 1-18.

Terr, L. (1990). *Too scared to cry: How trauma affects children...and ultimately us all.* New York: Basic Books.

Thomas, L. (2005). The fork debate. *Education Week, 24* (44), 39.

Tierney, W.G. (1988). Organization culture in higher education: Defining the essentials. *Journal of Higher Education, 59*(1), 2-21.

Tsai, M. Feldman-Summers, S., & Edgar, M. (1979). Childhood molestation: Variables related to different impact on psychosexual functioning in adult women. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 88,* 407-417.

Waigandt, A. (2003). *An introduction to research and statistics.* Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company.

Wilson, M. (2008). Snakes and ladders: reflections of a novice researcher. *Nurse Researcher, 15*(3), 4-11.

Woititz, J.G. (2002). *The complete ACOA sourcebook: Adult children of alcoholics at home, at work, and in love.* Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc.

Wollin, S.J. & Wollin, S. (1993). *The resilient self: How survivors of troubled families rise above adversity.* New York: Villard Books.

Yukl, G. (2006). *Leadership in Organizations* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

APPENDIX A

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled, "Survivor Leaders: A Grounded Theory Inquiry into Leadership Practices of Childhood Trauma Survivors" through the University of Missouri College of Education. The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of childhood trauma on adult leadership practices.

For the purpose of this study, school leader will be defined as any certified staff member who supervises other school personnel, childhood will be defined as any time before the person left home to live away from his/her family of origin, and trauma will be defined as any of the following:

- natural disasters such as flood/tornado/hurricane/earthquake/fire
- potentially life-threatening injury/illness, experienced by the school leader or someone close to him/her
- death of a sibling or parent who resided in the home
- abuse/neglect experienced by the school leader or someone close to him/her
- substance abuse/alcohol abuse of one or both parents
- domestic violence between parents
- mental illness of one/both parents
- any other event not specifically detailed above—if you remember it as being traumatic, it probably will fit the purpose of the study

Participation in this research project requires a 2-4 hour time commitment. During this time, I will ask you to participate in two face to face interviews. The interview questions are about your childhood experiences of trauma and about your professional practice as a school leader. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide to stop participating at any time without penalty. It is your right to refrain from answering any question you do not want to answer.

The potential benefits of your participation are several. First, you will have an opportunity to reflect on your experiences as a trauma survivor and a school leader. This reflection may help you to be a more effective leader by raising your awareness of areas of strength, and areas for potential growth. Secondly, many people report that they experience a sense of relief when given the opportunity to tell their stories. Lastly, your participation may benefit other school leaders. The potential risks of this study are experiencing discomfort as you talk about issues related to your childhood experiences of trauma and your professional practice as a school leader.

If you are interested in being interviewed as a part of this research, please contact:

Wendy Mills
316 NW 3rd Street
Blue Springs, MO 64014
(816)651-1784
wlmtx9@mail.missouri.edu

APPENDIX B

316 NW Third Street
Blue Springs, MO 64014

Date
Name
Address

Dear Name:

Thank you for considering participating in my study of the influence of trauma on the professional practice of school leaders. This study is being conducted as my doctoral dissertation research in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The findings from my research will be reported in my dissertation and potentially disseminated to a wider audience through professional and scholarly conferences and publications. This study will explore the influence of childhood traumatic experience on the school leadership practices and contribute the larger body of knowledge regarding resilience, post-traumatic growth, and leadership practices. This study will NOT be used as an evaluation of individuals or their performance in the workplace.

Because you experienced some form of childhood trauma, I believe your experiences may have influenced the way you lead as well. No studies have yet explored this question so your participation in this research will contribute to an important first look at the role of leader through the lens of survivorship.

Participation in this research project requires a 2-4 hour time commitment. During this time, I will ask you to participate in two face to face interviews. The interview questions are about your childhood experiences of trauma and about your professional practice as a school leader. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide to stop participating at any time without penalty. It is your right to refrain from answering any question you do not want to answer. The first interviews will be conducted no earlier than December 1, 2009 and the final interviews will be conducted no later than April 1, 2010.

The anticipated benefits from this study include advancing the understanding of how trauma in childhood, and/or the phenomena of resilience and post-traumatic growth may influence adult leadership practices. No research on this question has been conducted heretofore so participants have the opportunity to contribute to a first effort to explore these issues. Advancing the understanding of the influence of resilience and/or post-traumatic growth will be beneficial to the disciplines of educational leadership as well as social work as little research has been conducted which has focused on the influence of trauma on leadership practices of trauma survivors. Findings from this research could prove beneficial to the participants as individuals as you may identify aspects of your own experience as resilience or post-traumatic growth. Additionally, viewing leadership through the lens of the survivor may contribute to an understanding of trauma as life-changing but not necessarily life-limiting. Participation in the study will allow you to use

your traumatic experiences to help others and provide an opportunity for reflection and growth.

There are risks associated with participation in this study because recalling childhood trauma may be stressful or emotional for participants. Also, a breach of confidentiality regarding disclosures of childhood trauma may be stigmatizing for some participants. However, the study has been designed to minimize your risk and protect your confidentiality. My transcriber for interviews will be a peer from outside the field of education and outside the geographic area where interview participants live or practice. My peer coder for data analysis has been trained in the conduct of research that maintains confidentiality. Computer files containing identifying information will be password protected on my personal computer. Although the study has been designed to minimize the potential risks to participants, recalling difficult experiences from childhood may be troubling. The following resources may be helpful to you should the need arise:

Eastern Missouri

Washington Behavioral	(636) 239-2054
Psychiatric Care Consultants	(636) 390-4071
Bell Psychological Service	(636) 239-6787
Crider Center	1-800-574-2422
(not for profit, various locations; see www.cridercenter.org)	
National Alliance on Mental Illness	1.800.811.4760
(not for profit, various locations; see www.nami.org)	

Central Missouri

Complimentary Therapies	(573) 499-3875
Counseling Associates	(573) 874-8818
Morningstar Counseling Center	(573) 499-4572
(not for profit)	

Western Missouri

Independence Counseling Center	(816) 373-1777
Associated Behavioral Consultants	(816) 358-0712
Ochester Psychological Service	(816) 224-6500
Comprehensive Mental Health	(816) 254-3652
(not for profit, various locations; see http://www.thecmhs.com/index.html)	

Other Resources

National Hopeline Network	1-800-784-2433
National Suicide Prevention Hotline	1-800-273-TALK (8255)
http://www.christian-counseling-online.com/index.html	

Before you make a final decision about participation, I need to explain how your interview will be used in the study and how your rights as a participant will be protected. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from participation at any time you wish, including in the middle of the interview or after it is completed. If

you decide at a later time that you do not want me to use your interview or parts of your interview in our study, I will respect that decision. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any concerns or questions about your participation. You may reach me via e-mail at wlmtx9@mail.missouri.edu or telephone at any of the following numbers: 816-650-7709 (office) or 816-651-1784 (cell). You may also reach my doctoral dissertation advisor Dr. Jeni Hart at 573-884-4225. In addition, if you have questions, you may contact the Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Missouri-Columbia at 573-882-9585.

Your identity will be protected in reporting of my findings. I will use a code or pseudonym rather than your real name in all reporting of findings. I will maintain copies of all pertinent information related to the study, included but not limited to, video and audio tapes, instruments, copies of written informed consent agreements, and any other supportive documents for a period of three (3) years from the date of completion of the research.

If at this point you are willing to participate in the study, please complete the consent form on the next page. Keep this part of this letter for future reference. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Wendy L. Mills

Consent Form for the Influence of Childhood Traumatic Experience
on the Professional Practice of School Leaders

I, _____, agree to participate in the study exploring the influence of childhood traumatic experience on adult leadership practices being conducted by Wendy Mills. I understand that:

- This interview is for use in research which will be published.
- My participation is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw at any point in the study.
- My identity will be protected in reporting of the findings.
- All pertinent information related to the study, included but not limited to, video and audio tapes, instruments, copies of written informed consent agreements, and any other supportive documents will be maintained by the researcher for a period of three (3) years from the date of completion of the research.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

I, _____, agree for my interview to be digitally recorded for the purpose of transcription.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C
Start Questions for Interview 1
(Childhood Trauma History)

Why did you want to participate in this study?

What experiences from your childhood would you consider traumatic? Please tell me how old you were you when the experience(s) began and ended, the nature of the trauma, and your relationship to the perpetrator(s).

What was that like for you?

Is there a story you could tell me that captures the essence of your childhood experience? Was there a critical moment or turning point in your life?

How would you describe yourself as a child? As a teen? As an adult? What relationships have been important to you in surviving the trauma and persevering in life? How were they helpful? How did they impact you?

How did you deal with the hard times when you were growing up? What about now? Have religious, faith-based, or spiritual beliefs, activities and supports, (if any) been important to you in coping?

Do you think your experience of trauma influenced your development in any way? If so, how?

As a child, how were you alike and different from your peers? What about now? Are there any personal qualities and/or physical attributes that you may consider as innate or ones you were "born with" that helped you to survive the trauma and persevere in life?

Is there anything else about your growing up experience you think I should know?

What questions would you recommend I pose to other interview participants to help me understand childhood trauma?

Any last comments you wish to make?

What would you tell me if we were not recording?

APPENDIX D

Start Questions for Interview 2
(Leadership Practices)

Tell me about your career path from college graduation until present day.

Why did you choose the field of education?

What do you find rewarding about your job? What frustrates you?

Is there a story you could tell me that captures the essence of who you are as an educator? As a leader?

How would you describe yourself as a leader at the beginning of your career in administration? After settling into your role as a leader?

How do you deal with the hard times on the job?

In the first interview, we talked about hard times you experienced during childhood and some of the ways you dealt with those hard times. How have these strategies changed throughout your life?

Do you think your experience of trauma influenced your leadership in any way? If so, how?

As a leader, how are you alike and different from your peers? What is the most important thing you have learned in being a survivor of childhood trauma that might help other school leaders?

Have you encountered students whose childhood experiences are similar to your own? How has this been for you? Have you disclosed your own experiences to staff or students in those situations?

How do you know when something in your school needs to change?

What do you do when you don't know what to do on the job?

What questions would you recommend I pose to other interview participants to help me understand their role as leaders?

Do your colleagues know about your traumatic childhood experiences? If so, do you recall the circumstances under which you shared the information? If not, under what circumstances would you share the information with colleagues? With students or families?

How do you know when you're doing a good job?

Any last comments you wish to make?

APPENDIX E
DEBRIEFING FORM
Survivor Leaders: A Grounded Theory Inquiry
Into Leadership Practices of Childhood Trauma Survivors

PURPOSE

The goal of this grounded theory inquiry is to explore the influence of traumatic childhood experience on the practice of school leaders in B-21 organizations. This study is being conducted as my doctoral dissertation research in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The findings from my research will be reported in my dissertation and potentially disseminated to a wider audience through professional and scholarly conferences and publications. This study will explore the influence of childhood traumatic experience on the school leadership practices and contribute the larger body of knowledge regarding resilience, post-traumatic growth, and leadership practices.

AFTER CARE

The questions you answered included questions about your childhood experiences of trauma and also about your professional practice as a school leader. It is difficult to answer these types of questions, and your generosity and willingness to participate in this study are greatly appreciated. Your input will help contribute to the advancement of the field of resilience, post-traumatic growth, and leadership. Sometimes people find the subject matter of these interviews disturbing. If answering any of these questions led you to feel distressed and you would like to speak to someone about your thoughts, please contact one of the following:

Eastern Missouri

Washington Behavioral	(636) 239-2054
Psychiatric Care Consultants	(636) 390-4071
Bell Psychological Service	(636) 239-6787
Crider Center	1-800-574-2422
(not for profit, various locations; see www.cridercenter.org)	
National Alliance on Mental Illness	1.800.811.4760
(not for profit, various locations; see www.nami.org)	

Central Missouri

Complimentary Therapies	(573) 499-3875
Counseling Associates	(573) 874-8818
Morningstar Counseling Center	(573) 499-4572
(not for profit)	

Western Missouri

Independence Counseling Center	(816) 373-1777
Associated Behavioral Consultants	(816) 358-0712
Ochester Psychological Service	(816) 224-6500
Comprehensive Mental Health	(816) 254-3652

(not for profit, various locations; see http://www.thecmhs.com/index.html)

Other Resources

National Hopeline Network 1-800-784-2433
National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
http://www.christian-counseling-online.com/index.html

BACKGROUND

There is a great deal of research investigating the ways childhood trauma may influence other adult behaviors such as relating to intimate partners, parenting, and managing one's health, but there has been no previous effort to understand how childhood trauma influences the way survivors lead. If you are interested in research on the impact of childhood trauma, some references are listed at the bottom of this form.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The study has been designed to protect your confidentiality. My transcriber for interviews will be a peer from outside the field of education and outside the geographic area where interview participants live or practice. My peer coder for data analysis has been trained in the conduct of research that maintains confidentiality. Your identity will be protected in reporting of my findings. I will use a code or pseudonym rather than your real name in all reporting of findings. I will maintain copies of all pertinent information related to the study, included but not limited to, video and audio tapes, instruments, copies of written informed consent agreements, and any other supportive documents for a period of three (3) years from the date of completion of the research.

FINAL REPORT

If you are interested in obtaining a copy of the final report of this study, contact the primary investigator, Wendy Mills, at wlmtx9@mail.missouri.edu or (816) 651-1784.

CONTACT

If you have *any* questions regarding this study, its purpose or procedures, please feel free to contact the primary investigator, Wendy Mills, at wlmtx9@mail.missouri.edu or 816-651-1784 or the Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Missouri-Columbia at 573-882-9585.

FOR FURTHER READING

Terr, L. (1990). *Too scared to cry: How trauma affects children...and ultimately us all.* New York: Basic Books.

Wollin, S.J. & Wollin, S. (1993). *The resilient self: How survivors of troubled families rise above adversity.* New York: Villard Books.

APPENDIX F

PROEM

I started thinking about wanting to die when I was nine years old. We lived on a farm with a barn that had a huge hayloft. I used to imagine standing in that hayloft with a rope around my neck and how free I would feel in the moment of jumping, how clean and cool the air would feel as I rushed through it to the moment of recoil when I reached the end of the slack in the rope. I longed for death but I was not suicidal; I had no plans to actually hang myself because I knew it would embarrass my mother terribly. I was just tired of living and death seemed like the only escape from my father's probing hands and excited breath. I knew, however, that I would not die. Whatever else my parents did or didn't do, they took me to church, and even at the age of nine, I had latched onto the notion things happen for a reason. I believed there was a reason I didn't get to jump out of the hayloft into freedom. I didn't want to be a cheerleader or get married or have babies or any of the other things girls my age talked about; at nine, I felt too old and too tired for that kind of frivolity. It was not a matter of looking forward to anything; it was simply a matter of believing there was a reason I had to keep going, so I did. I didn't know what the reason was, but I trusted there was a reason and God would show me what it was.

The consciously wishing for death began shortly after I started keeping a journal. I suppose the journal was how I learned to feel. I never wrote about the things my father did; no one in my family spoke of it. I wrote about everything else, though, and developed a voice in my journal I never used in real life. I became a writer, and a dreamer. I imagined there had been a mix up at the hospital when I was born and I had been sent home with the wrong family. I dreamed my real family was like the Ingalls

family and I read the *Little House on the Prairie* series so many times all the covers fell off; one summer, my mother drew a picture of me reading with cobwebs growing on my glasses. She thought it was funny and it probably was, but not to me. I wrote stories about girls who were smart and pretty and thin and had lots of friends. I was careful to hide the stories so no one would find them and laugh at me. The daydreams of jumping from the hayloft into oblivion were as appealing as the daydreams of being a different kind of girl; all that mattered to me was not having to continue to live as I was, but I did.

I seldom spoke at school and when I did, I was chided for speaking too softly. That was a sign of incest (Blume, 1990) but no one at school noticed, or they didn't know what it meant. My nearly inaudible voice, my shyness, my aversion to PE class, and my steadily-worsening obesity were all classic indicators of incest (Blume, 1990) while my love of horses, my habit of reading books at recess instead of playing, my frequent conversations with God and the poems I loved to write were all early indicators of a burgeoning resilience (Anderson & Danis, 2007; Wollin & Wollin, 1993) but no one knew. I didn't know myself, for years.

I knew I was not like other girls my age (Woititz, 2002) but I didn't know why. Very young children are not able to differentiate their own thoughts, feelings and actions from those of their parents (Lawson, 2002) so I did not know the shame and revulsion I felt all my life were about what my father did; I thought those feelings were about me, that they were me. Decades later, I was able to explain this to a friend whose wife is also an incest survivor. I said to him, "Suppose you had dinner at your parents' house this weekend and as you were saying goodbye, your father touched you inappropriately. You have several methods of defense. First, at 44, you are physically bigger and stronger than

your father, so you could push him away. Second, you could get in your car and drive away and, if you chose, you would not ever have to go back. Third, you have the credibility of your education and profession; you could contact the proper authorities to express concern over his mental state and they would believe you because you are an educated, rational adult. However, none of these factors are the most important. Far and away the greatest protection you would have in that moment when your father's hand reached between your legs for the first time is this: *you would know it was wrong.* You would have feelings of disgust and anger, but you would know those feelings were about what had happened; you would understand that you are not supposed to feel ashamed all the time."

I was involved in sexual activity before I knew what it was. I didn't know it was wrong the first time it happened to me, or any of the times after that, until the last time, when I was 12. When it was happening, I did not disassociate as I usually did, floating out of my body until it was over. I stayed present and instead of looking away, trying to be invisible (Blume, 1990), I looked at my father and for the first time, consciously thought, "Other fathers don't do this to their daughters." I didn't say a word, as usual, but I knew, and he knew that I knew. It took another 25 years or so to realize the dirty feeling was not an inherent part of me; rather it was something separate I carried around, and I could stop carrying it, and I did.

I became a teacher because of Mrs. Ruby Martin, my sixth grade teacher at Carver School in Fulton, Missouri. Our class was precocious and by the end of the school year, students took turns explaining the algebra problems in the very back of the math textbook because Mrs. Martin said she got confused by them. Sometimes she mispronounced the

more challenging vocabulary words in language arts class and the best readers would respectfully help her. Looking back, I wonder if she just pretended not to know so we could all have the pleasure of assisting her. Her content knowledge limitations, whether affected or actual, mattered not at all, however. She was the greatest teacher in the world because she adored our class and was excited about coming to school to see us every day. She got sentimental before Christmas break because she was going to miss all of us. Mrs. Martin would bring in a stack of graded papers and go on and on about how smart we all were, about how hard we had worked and how we wrote so well, we should be in high school already. This made us work even harder.

I got a feather cut at Fantastic Sam's and the hair was out of my face for the first time in years. Mrs. Martin noticed right away and told me I looked "just like a movie star." Looking back at my class picture now, I clearly did not, but she made me feel like one, for a while. I had one pair of jeans and wore them to school every day of my sixth grade year, but no one picked on me in sixth grade because it would have let her down. I am sure she was my guardian angel because the torment of fifth grade resumed when we moved on to seventh grade. But Mrs. Martin's class was a safe haven. I thought very little about wanting to die that year. I was happy there, the happiest I had been at that point in my life. I wanted sixth grade to go on forever. All of us did. We all cried on the last day of school, even the boys. It was while I was basking in the glow of Mrs. Martin's love that I realized what my father had been doing was wrong.

I don't believe in coincidences; all those years of journal writing taught me to see connections among events and people. All those years when I could not talk to anyone, I talked to God, and He talked to me. I learned there is a bigger picture than what I see and

God guides me for reasons I don't always understand, but I trust. I wanted to be someone's Mrs. Martin. I became a teacher, and then an administrator. I always chose to work with "at risk" students in non-traditional public school settings: a vocational school, an early childhood center, and two alternative schools. In seventeen years in public education, I have never worked in a school important enough to have a cafeteria, a gymnasium, or a football team. No matter. I love the forthrightness of at risk students; when I say "good morning" to students as they arrive, they might answer in kind or they might tell me to go to hell. Either way, I know where I stand and after growing up in a family where we never talked about anything, I welcome the clarity.

Apparently, I am not the only one. Over the years, I have had many staff members come in to work when they are ill and when I offer to get a substitute so they can go home, they say, "No, I'd rather be here. This is my safe place." Schools can heal adults as well as children; many of us who were traumatized as children felt protected at school and chose careers that let us remain in school forever. My increasing understanding of myself as a trauma survivor allowed me to see how events from decades earlier influenced the way I live my adult life. Being an abuse survivor influenced the way I dress (Blume, 1990), the way I talk (Terr, 1990), the way I spend my free time (Wollin & Wollin, 1993), the way I think and talk about spirituality (Kirschman, 2004), as well as the way I love (Woititz, 2002). It made sense, to me, that it would also influence the way I lead and I began asking other principals about their own childhoods and their own leadership. This study is about those conversations.

In my years as a principal, I have heard the words "I've never told anyone this before" many times. When someone trusts me with a painful secret, I can listen without

flinching because I've been there. There is always a moment when the crying slows down so they are able to smile a little and say "Thank you for listening." In that moment, I always thank God all over again I did not jump out of the hayloft. I know now the reason I had to keep going—it was for those moments with each of those kids. I tell them life gets much easier when you are an adult because when you grow up like that, it does. I tell them they are going to have some great music come out of them, some powerful prayers, some hilarious jokes, and they will have a mighty heart for helping people. Then I add, "Maybe you'll be a principal, too."

VITA

Wendy Mills was born in Columbia, Missouri, April 1, 1968, and graduated from Fulton High School in 1986. She received her Bachelor of Science in English Education in 1990 from the University of Missouri-Columbia, Master of Education in Secondary Administration in 2000 from William Woods University, and Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (to be conferred in May 2010) from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Her professional career has included four years as an English teacher and Basic Skills tutor at Hart-Mexico Area Vocational Technical School, Mexico Public Schools, Mexico, Missouri; a year as a STARR teacher at the Heart of Missouri Regional Professional Development Center; three years as Professional Development Coordinator for Mexico, Missouri Public Schools; and four years as Federal Programs Director for Mexico, Missouri Public Schools. She then became principal of Fulton Academy, the alternative school for Fulton, Missouri Public Schools. During that time, she assisted in the design and opening of a new building that expanded the program from an alternative high school and GED program to include early childhood programs Parents as Teachers, Early Childhood Special Education, and Title I Early Intervention. She then became principal of Lewis and Clark Learning Center, a K-12 behavior management school and alternative high school, at Fort Osage R-1 Public Schools in Independence, Missouri. She lives in Blue Springs, Missouri.