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**The Transformative Power of Re-storying Childhood Trauma:
A Life Span Approach to Understanding Posttrauma
Leadership and Posttrauma Leadership Identity
Construction Processes**

A Dissertation by Carole-Ann Miller



Durham University Business School
Department of Management and Marketing

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for Doctor of Philosophy

Supervised by:
Professor Jacqueline Ford
Professor Olga Epitropaki

September 21, 2022

The Transformative Power of Re-storying Childhood Trauma: A Life Span Approach to Understanding Posttrauma Leadership and Posttrauma Leadership Identity Construction Processes

Abstract

We are living in a culture of trauma, with media depicting psychological trauma, crisis, destruction and mayhem almost daily. Yet, while much is known and communicated about the harmful effects of trauma, less is understood about positive growth post-trauma. Studies have demonstrated the possibility for individuals to experience posttraumatic growth. An equally substantive amount of management studies has explored leader identity and development. However, few studies have examined the effects of childhood trauma on the identity construction process, post-trauma leadership identity or leader development over the life span.

Using narrative inquiry to capture rich data and thematic analysis to identify themes related to the construction of their leadership identities, this study investigated the lived experiences of eight women who - despite histories of early childhood sexual abuse - ascended to top senior leadership levels. The aims of the study were to 1) explore how the participants were able to re-story their childhood trauma in positive ways, 2) investigate the influence of their childhood trauma on the construction of their personal and leader identities over their life span and 3) understand the formation of identity motives and competences related to their trauma, and their relevancy to the participants' corporate success.

The study reveals how the participants used narrative and re-storying to make sense of their early childhood experiences and how they influenced their leader identity development. It offers further insights into how these transformative narrative identity re-storying processes shaped their evolving life stories and influenced the construction of their personal and leader identities, life trajectories, and contribution to their corporate success. This work contributes to posttraumatic growth and narrative identity theories, with broader implications for leadership development, posttrauma leadership and leader identity construction over the life span while offering mitigating strategies for therapeutic practice.

Loneliness

*"Darkness is rising so that I cannot see
This terrible darkness is surrounding me
Outside that is where I have always been
Always outside, now want to come in
Come to me, show me some light
Tell me you love me, and everything is all right
Unlock the door. I can't; I lost the key
Come quickly, the darkness is killing me.*

*I knock on the door, but no one is there
The house seems so empty and bare
The darkness is filling me with fear
Tell me it's a bad dream, tell me you're here
Come to me show me some light
Tell me you love me, and everything is all right
Outside that's where I've always been
Mom and dad, please let me come in"*

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| List of Tables..... | 5 |
| List of Abbreviations | 5 |
| Statement of Copyright..... | 6 |
| Acknowledgements..... | 7 |
| Dedication | 8 |
| Chapter 1: Introduction..... | 9 |
| 1.1 Research Context Aims and Objectives | 9 |
| 1.2 Personal Interest in the Research Topic | 10 |
| 1.3 Synopsis of the Chapters | 11 |
| 1.4 Introduction to the Literature Review | 16 |
| Chapter 2: Survive or Thrive - Posttraumatic Growth Theory | 17 |
| 2.1 Chapter Overview..... | 17 |
| 2.2 A Brief History of Trauma..... | 17 |
| 2.3 Evolution of Trauma Research to Present Day | 18 |
| 2.4 Posttraumatic Growth Theories..... | 21 |
| 2.5 Background | 21 |
| 2.6 Growth Theories | 25 |
| 2.7 Common themes and differences amongst the growth theories..... | 28 |
| 2.8 Summary | 30 |
| Chapter 3: Identity and Leader Identity Theories..... | 34 |
| 3.1 Chapter Overview | 34 |
| 3.2 Background..... | 34 |
| 3.3 Contemporary Approaches to Identity | 36 |
| 3.4 Utilization of Emerging Identity Work Perspective | 39 |
| 3.5 Narrative Identity Theories..... | 40 |
| 3.6 Social Identity/Self-categorization Theories | 42 |
| 3.7 Leadership Identity Theories | 45 |
| 3.8 Leader Development Across the Lifespan | 48 |
| 3.9 Chapter Summary: Theoretical Framework..... | 50 |
| Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Design | 55 |
| 4.1 Chapter Overview | 55 |
| 4.2 Section One: Philosophical framework..... | 55 |
| 4.2.1 Background on framework | 55 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 4.2.2 Philosophical Overview | 57 |
| 4.3 Section Two: Research Approach to Narrative Inquiry..... | 60 |
| 4.3.1 Narrative Inquiry - A Definition in the Making..... | 60 |
| 4.3.2 Foundational Blocks: The Movement of Researchers to Narrative Inquiry..... | 61 |
| 4.3.3 Theoretical Differences and Associated Approaches within Narrative Inquiry | 62 |
| 4.3.4 Event-centred Approach to Narrative Inquiry. | 62 |
| 4.3.5 Experienced-centred Approach to Narrative Inquiry..... | 63 |
| 4.3.6 Variations within the Experience-centred Approach..... | 63 |
| 4.3.7 Narrative Inquiry: Strength and Weaknesses | 66 |
| 4.3.8 Existing Related Work in this Field..... | 67 |
| 4.4 Section Three: A Narrative Inquiry Constructionist Approach | 69 |
| 4.4.1 Conclusion..... | 71 |
| 4.5 Section Four: Data Generation: The Recruitment of Participants | 72 |
| 4.5.1 Profile of Research Participants | 73 |
| 4.5.2 The Interviewing Process | 74 |
| 4.6 Section Five: Ethical Considerations | 78 |
| 4.6.1 Sensitive Nature of the Research..... | 79 |
| 4.6.2 Confidentiality of Data | 82 |
| 4.7 Section Six: Data Analysis | 82 |
| 4.7.1 Four-Step Data Analysis Process..... | 85 |
| 4.8 Reflections on Adopted Methodology..... | 90 |
| 4.9 Chapter Summary | 91 |
| Chapter 5: An Overview of the Research Findings | 93 |
| Chapter 6: Identity Foundations, No One But Me | 97 |
| 6.1 Chapter Outline | 97 |
| 6.2 Sociohistorical Context: The Backdrop of the Trauma, Laying the Foundation | 98 |
| 6.2.1 Too Young to Understand | 101 |
| 6.2.2 Creating Victim / Survivor Identities..... | 102 |
| 6.2.3 Avoiding the Stigmatizing Victim Identity..... | 103 |
| 6.2.4 Summary: Significance of Research Context..... | 105 |
| 6.3 Identity Foundations, Defining Moments | 107 |
| 6.3.1 Ann’s Story | 108 |
| 6.3.2 Sub-theme # 1 - Premature Adult Identities: Role of Caregiver and Protector | 108 |
| 6.3.3 Sub-theme # 2 - Distrust of Others | 116 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 6.3.4 Sub-theme # 3 - Work ethic | 119 |
| 6.3.5 Sub-theme # 4 - Adaptations / Acquisition of New Skills | 121 |
| 6.3.6 Chapter Summary | 128 |
| Chapter 7: Identity Discovery: Emerging Life Stories and Leader Identities | 130 |
| 7.1 Chapter Outline | 130 |
| 7.2 Introduction: Laying the Foundation for the Emergence of the Participants' Life Story..... | 131 |
| 7.2.1 Debbie's Story | 131 |
| 7.2.2 Impact of Trauma on Identity Formation: Relationship to the Development of a Life Story | 133 |
| 7.2.3 Signs of the Life Story Emerging | 134 |
| 7.2.4 Summary: The Life Story, its Development and Relation to Trauma and Identity Development..... | 136 |
| 7.3 Introduction to Second Major Theme: The Emergence of their Life Story and Leader Identities | 138 |
| 7.3.1 Sub-theme # 1 - Identity Reframing: A Positive Social Identity | 138 |
| 7.3.2 Sub-theme # 2 – Extracurricular Activities..... | 146 |
| 7.3.3 Sub-theme # 3 - Early Leadership-rich Experiences..... | 152 |
| 7.3.4 Sub-theme # 4 - Early Work Identities: First Taste of Financial Independence | 157 |
| 7.3.5 Sub-theme # 5 - Power and Control | 162 |
| 7.3.6 Sub-theme # 6 - Education, A Pathway out, Future Work Selves | 165 |
| 7.3.7Chapter Summary..... | 175 |
| Chapter 8: Identity Enactments, Advancing their Leader Identities..... | 177 |
| 8.1 Chapter Outline..... | 177 |
| 8.1.1 Carol's Story | 178 |
| 8.1.2 Sub-theme # 1 - Early Identity Enactments | 181 |
| 8.1.3 Sub-theme # 2 - Identity Motives: Driven to Succeed | 190 |
| 8.1.4 Sub-theme # 3 - Social Validation: Impact on Drive to Succeed..... | 197 |
| 8.1.5 Sub-theme # 4 - Transference of Skills and Attributes to Work Identities | 200 |
| 8.1.6 Chapter Summary | 214 |
| Chapter 9: Identity Reflections: Taking Back My Power | 215 |
| 9.1 Introduction | 215 |
| 9.1.1 Alice's Story..... | 216 |
| 9.1.2 Sub-theme # 1 - Opening the door to the past..... | 219 |
| 9.1.3 Sub-theme # 2 - Identity Reflections, new ways of moving forward..... | 232 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 9.1.4 Sub-theme # 3 - Leadership Identity Transformation: The Final Journey | 239 |
| 9.1.5 Summary | 248 |
| Chapter 10: Towards a Conceptualisation of Posttraumatic Growth, Identity and Leader Identities: Overview of Research Findings and Discussion | 251 |
| 10.1 Chapter Outline | 251 |
| 10.2 Summary of Research Findings..... | 251 |
| 10.3 Model: Identity Phases of Posttraumatic Re-storying | 257 |
| 10.4 Model of Identity Construction Life Stages over the Life Span..... | 260 |
| 10.5 Summary | 262 |
| Chapter 11: Research Aims, Contributions, Study Limitations and Future Research Directions | 263 |
| 11.1 Chapter Outline..... | 263 |
| 11.2 Section 1: Addressing the Research Aims..... | 263 |
| 11.2.1 Research Aim # 1:..... | 264 |
| 11.2.2 10.2.3 Research Aim # 2:..... | 267 |
| 11.2.3 Research Aim #3: | 269 |
| 11.3 Section 2: Thesis Contributions..... | 271 |
| 11.3.1 Empirical contributions | 271 |
| 11.3.2 Theoretical contributions..... | 273 |
| 11.3.3 Contributions to Practice | 276 |
| 11.4 Section 3: Limitations | 276 |
| 11.5 Section 4: Suggestions for Future Research | 277 |
| 11.6 Section 5: Final Reflections..... | 279 |
| References..... | 282 |
| List of Appendices | 311 |
| Appendix 1 - Posting | 311 |
| Appendix 2 – Informed Consent Form..... | 312 |
| Appendix 2b – Study Information Sheet..... | 313 |
| Appendix 3 – Durham University Ethics Approval | 315 |
| Appendix 4 – Bradford University Ethics Approval..... | 316 |
| Appendix 5 – My Reflexive Journal | 317 |

List of Tables

| | |
|---|-----|
| Table 1: Summary findings for research on posttraumatic events..... | 23 |
| Table 2: Similarities/Differences between the four theoretical PTG frameworks..... | 30 |
| Table 3: Differences amongst the various approaches to identity..... | 39 |
| Table 4: Summary of participant demographics. Social classifications as per Savage et al. (2013). | 74 |
| Table 5: Initial 58 codes | 88 |
| Table 6: First order themes..... | 89 |
| Table 7: Timing/Age of sexual abuse | 102 |

List of Figures

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 1: How posttraumatic theories have developed over time..... | 24 |
| Figure 2: Theoretical framework | 51 |
| Figure 3: Problematic typology..... | 58 |
| Figure 4: Word cloud of initial themes | 87 |
| Figure 5: Data structure | 90 |
| Figure 6: Model of identity phases of posttraumatic re-storying..... | 257 |
| Figure 7: Model of identity construction life stages over the life span | 260 |

List of Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| CSA | Childhood Sexual Abuse |
| LICT | Leadership Identity Construction Theories |
| PTG | Posttraumatic Growth |
| PTSD | Posttraumatic Stress Disorder |
| PTSGI | Posttraumatic Growth Inventory |

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the women of this study and all victims of early childhood abuse. To the incredible women, who without your participation, this work would not have been possible, I thank you. You inspired me with your courage, candour, and strength of spirit. You entrusted me with your deepest, most painful memories while allowing me the honour of holding the truth of who you are. The world deserves to know your story, and I can only hope that I did justice to you and your life stories.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides the context for the study and sets out the research aims. In addition, it details my personal interest in this research topic and how the initial objectives for this inquiry evolved.

1.1 Research Context Aims and Objectives

Research has shown the wide-ranging adverse and debilitating effects of childhood sexual abuse. Many of these effects have resulted in a growing reliance upon social services and psychiatric treatment and care. In addition, the associated economic burden is estimated between 3% to 8% of global GDP or \$7 trillion (Perezniето et al., 2014), with an even greater societal impact. Tragically, this is an accelerating issue, with more recent studies revealing a significant escalation in child abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kuehn, 2020).

This narrative inquiry is an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of eight women who, despite having endured early childhood sexual abuse, achieved tremendous corporate success: rising to the most senior leadership positions in their respective industries. The study explored the phenomenon of posttraumatic growth over the life span and the forms of identity work the participants performed that allowed them to construct themselves in positive ways and culminated in their leader identities. The aims of the study were:

1. To investigate the influence of the participants' childhood trauma on the construction of their personal and leader identities over their life span.
2. To explore the bearing of the participants' adversity on the formation of their identity motives and skills sets and the relevancy of those competencies to their corporate success.
3. To understand how the participants were able to re-story their childhood trauma in positive ways.

1.2 Personal Interest in the Research Topic

My journey in relation to this work began fifteen years ago at a meeting attended exclusively by successful female CEOs of major corporations. Through anecdotal and informal conversations, it emerged that all the women in attendance had experienced early childhood sexual abuse. It was further revealed that these women did not identify with their childhood experiences or view themselves as victims. This led me to question if this was a phenomenon in women who held similar senior-level positions, why these women did not consider themselves victims and how they, at least on the surface, appeared to have succeeded in overcoming such adversity. Curious, I conducted an informal survey of fifty top female CEOs. Astonishingly, all but two of the respondents indicated that they had experienced some form of early childhood abuse. This further ignited my curiosity, and this inquisitiveness has culminated in this study.

My initial goal - to determine if this was a common occurrence in other women that held comparable positions - would have entailed a large-scale quantitative study with a substantial sample size. However, as my research evolved, I began to fully appreciate the rare and exclusive access I had to these women and the opportunity that had presented itself to gather exceptionally rich and intimate data from a group of women to whom others would have limited access. Consequently, my aims shifted towards undertaking a deep exploration, one that would allow for the capture of the intimate individual accounts of the research participants' inimitable abusive experiences with the full collage of their contextualised emotions over their life span.

I adopted a position of embodied reflexivity throughout the study (Finlay, 2005; Ellingson, 2012, 2017; Kelly et al., 2017; Hefferon and Kampman, 2020). Epistemologically, I believe that communication extends beyond that of mere verbal expression, that it is far more complex, and that human understanding is embodied (Finlay, 2005, Burkitt, 2018; Leigh and Brown, 2021). Moreover, I believe that an awareness of the stories that the bodies hold and communicate would allow for a richer and more in-depth account of the lived experiences of the participants in this study (Kelly et al., 2017). How this approach was incorporated into my

study is detailed in Chapter 4. Being both researcher and a member of the group under investigation adds a distinct set of challenges. I struggled with how to include my voice with that of the participants. My voice produces multiple identities, amongst others - that of a researcher, a woman, a CEO, a mother, and a victim of early childhood sexual abuse. All of which will inevitably influence my findings. Ultimately, I elected to introduce my personal narrative by weaving reflexivity and my own experiences into the four findings chapters, together with some final comments in the discussion chapter.

1.3 Synopsis of the Chapters

Chapters two and three introduce the major bodies of literature that contribute to the theoretical framework used in this study: posttraumatic growth, narrative identity, social identity, and leader identity theories over the life span. Chapter two begins with a general overview of trauma theory followed by an overview of posttraumatic growth theory. It demonstrates the contribution of posttraumatic growth theories (PTG) to the study of childhood trauma and the narrative process by which victims make meaning of their experiences. However, while useful, PTG theories do not explore how posttraumatic growth manifests itself in the lives of victims post-trauma, whether the growth sustains over time or how it contributes to their identity construction. Chapter three provides an overview of identity theories and explores how emerging identity theories in organisation and management studies build upon and interplay with those of contemporary posttraumatic growth theorists. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of these theories, how they fuse to create the conceptual framework through which the data in this study is examined, and how the framework serves to provide further insight into the role trauma plays in identity construction; together with the process by which the participants were able to re-story their childhood trauma in positive and, what Maitlis (2020) calls “growthful” ways.

Chapter four, consisting of six sections, introduces the research methodology and design. Section one sets out the constructionist approach for this study, how it aligns with my philosophical positioning, its links to existing work in the study of trauma and its influence on

the research design and methodology. Section two details the various applications of narrative inquiry and their relationship to existing work in the field. Section three explains why a narrative inquiry experience-centred approach was selected and positions the use of this approach in the study. Section Four discloses the recruitment process, the research design, and why thematic analysis was selected to analyse the data. Finally, the chapter concludes with the ethical considerations observed to ensure “no harm was done” and the sensitive approach taken to the difficult conversations and intimate stories of abuse endured by the women in my study.

Chapter five summarises the four key research findings - Identity Foundations, Identity Discoveries, Identity Enactments, and Identity Reflections - and outlines the approach to presenting the research findings using the study’s theoretical framework. Each research findings chapter includes select personal field notes. To distinguish my field notes from my analysis, I present them in shaded boxes. These personal reflections are included to demonstrate my awareness of the bias that my experiences bring to this study and to provide additional insights as to how my first-hand experiences influenced my interpretations.

Chapters six, seven, eight and nine engage with the four aggregated theoretical findings and related sub-themes. It reveals common themes and patterns that emerged, along with links to current literature related to posttraumatic growth, identity development and leader identity theories. It reveals the selected strands from within the vast body of leadership and identity theorising, woven throughout the research findings that provide further insight and respond to the aims of the study.

Chapter ten summarises the study’s research findings. The summary is followed by a presentation of two models that map the participants’ post-trauma growth process, identified through the five identity phases described in Chapters six to nine.

Chapter eleven consists of five sections and concludes the overall thesis. Section one details how the findings have achieved each of the three aims outlined in the introduction of this

thesis. Section two provides an overview of the theoretical and empirical contributions of the thesis together with the contributions to therapeutic practice. Section three discusses the implications for both research and therapeutic practice. Section four considers the study's strengths and limitations, and section five offers some concluding remarks and final reflections on the research project.

While posttraumatic growth studies have demonstrated the possibility for individuals to grow after having lived through significant trauma, the scholarship at the intersection of trauma and identity remains sparse (Berman, Montgomery and Ratner, 2020). This study provides rich insights into how the participants were able to re-story their childhood trauma in positive ways. It exposes the influence of the participants' childhood trauma on the construction of their personal and leader identities over their life span. The rich first-person accounts contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex, cyclical and emergent nature of the links between identity and post-traumatic growth theory. The study adds to the work of Maitlis (2020) and McAdams (2021) by providing additional support for current theorising that emphasises the importance of narrative identity and sensemaking as critical components of posttraumatic growth.

The study also reveals the formation of identity motives and competencies related to the participants' trauma and the relevancy of those skills to the participants' corporate success. While the literature on leadership development is considerable, few studies span leader development from birth through to early adulthood (Velsor, 2011; Liu et al., 2020). Against this wide-ranging backdrop, this study contributes by providing further understanding of how leadership identity develops. The study's examination of the participants' leadership development process from childhood to adolescence through to university and into adulthood, together with an increased understanding of the events and experiences that can lead individuals to seek out leadership roles, extends the work of Liu and colleagues (2020) that examines the very early origins of leadership. The study provides further insight into the influence of the participants' early formative experiences on their leader identity development

over time. The specific opportunities for leadership experiences presented in this study offer potential windows through which to theorise how leadership can be nurtured from a range of activities and events (Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021). It also adds to knowledge of how events, such as positive feedback can influence leadership developmental trajectories, an area that has been understudied by leadership theorists (Day and Thornton, 2018). Zheng and colleagues (2021) argue that, despite its importance, little research has focused on the early origins of leader identity. The richly narrated identity stories of origin provided in this study offer beneficial insight into individuals' sensemaking of their leader identities and the role that leader identity plays in leader development.

The role of trauma as it relates specifically to leadership development has been a missing phenomenon for examination, particularly in the leadership development of female leaders. Posttrauma leadership research has focused on the transition to trauma-inspired prosocial leadership development or work-related trauma, with little known about the processes through which the transition to trauma-inspired prosocial leadership actually develops (Wolf Williams and Allen, 2015). This study reveals the meaning making process the participants underwent as they confronted and came to terms with their trauma and how that translated into the development of their post-trauma prosocial leadership identities. By illuminating the role of sensemaking post-trauma and its impact on the participants' life trajectory, it addresses a significant gap in research (Maitlis, 2012, 2020) and contributes to the understanding of the effects of trauma over the life span. In addition, the study provides rich accounts that reveal the transformative power of narrative identity and its ability to enable the restorying of adversity into one of positive change and personal growth.

Finally, the thesis introduces a narrative re-storying model that depicts the discovery of a set of inter-linked identity phases, outcomes, and processes which makes a conceptual contribution that adds new insights into the manner in which trauma and leader identities can be narrated by exploring the means by which these women came to identify themselves as leaders. More specifically, this study introduces a conceptual framework that provides new ways to theorise

the inter-related ways in which posttraumatic growth, identities and leader identities emerge from the interpretative analysis of the narrative accounts of the women in the study. The thesis makes a theoretical contribution by using a theoretical framework that draws from disparate theories of identity and posttraumatic growth, resulting in a deeper and more dynamic understanding of the lived experience of the female leaders in this study.

1.4 Introduction to the Literature Review

This study aimed to explore how the participants were able to re-story their childhood trauma in positive ways, to investigate the influence of their childhood trauma on the construction of their personal and leader identities over their life span and to understand the formation of identity motives and competences related to their trauma and its relevancy to the participants' corporate success. The following review provides an overview of the literature that inspires the research and grounds the interpretation of the data. The bodies that form the theoretical framework for this study are posttraumatic growth, narrative identity, social identity, and leader identity theories over the life span.

The literature draws from a review of scholarly peer-reviewed journals, dissertations and books using library databases. The literature in the fields of trauma, identity and organisational management is formidable in its size, complexity, and diversity of approaches. As such, I have devoted two chapters to the review. Each chapter in the review provides an overview of the respective theory, its origins and how the theories have developed over time. The literature review concludes with an explanation of how these theories come together to create the conceptual framework through which the data in this study is examined.

Chapter 2: Survive or Thrive - Posttraumatic Growth Theory

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with an overview of trauma theory, beginning with a background of trauma theory and how the study of trauma has evolved to its current state. An overview of abuse follows with definitions of abuse and trauma-related terms used in this thesis. The chapter then offers an overview of posttraumatic growth theory, beginning with a background of the theory and how it has been further developed over the years. Next, a review of the common themes and differences among the major growth theories is provided. This section concludes with a summary and areas for potential development and their relevance to the aims of this study.

2.2 A Brief History of Trauma

While trauma has been part of the human experience since the beginning of time, trauma was only formally introduced in 1693 to describe externally caused wounds. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, trauma continued to be understood as a physical injury, and it was not until the nineteenth century - with the advent of the industrial era - that the notion of psychological trauma began to take root (Bond and Craps, 2020).

Since the 1900s, we have witnessed substantive increases in references to trauma. However, this increase is not a result of an increase in trauma. Rather, it reflects the new ways developed to categorize, represent and exploit distressing experiences (Bond and Craps, 2020). Today trauma is mainstream, infiltrating our daily lives through architecture (monuments that memorialise trauma), tourism (dark tourism to concentration camps, prisons, etc.), cinema, fashion, marketing and politics. Simply put, "*Trauma is big business*" (Bond and Craps, 2020, p. 3). Moreover, it has been argued that we are living in a trauma culture (Kaplan, 2005; Luckhurst, 2008), with the narrative of trauma taking a "*surprising ideological turn*" (Bond and Craps, 2020,

p. 4) as activists and politicians use their personal trauma as a political platform that serves to empower and facilitate communication of broader issues related to trauma to larger audiences.

2.3 Evolution of Trauma Research to Present Day

The roots of psychological trauma are based upon the three following “distinct lines of investigation”: the psychoanalytic studies of “*hysterical*” women, studies on the effects of war, and the attention brought about by the feminist movement to understand the effects of violence against women and children. (Herman, 1992, p. 9).

Research in the 19th century discovered a link between traumatic events and symptoms in women that could not be readily explained in medical terms. Further studies by individuals such as Janet (1859 – 1947) and Freud (1886 – 1893) asserted that these intense emotions, referred to as hysteria, led to sensory experiences and behaviours that caused the individuals to re-experience the trauma. This concept forms the foundation of the current understanding of trauma.

The second shift in trauma thinking occurred following the return of soldiers from World Wars I, II and the Vietnam War who exhibited new unexplained trauma-related symptoms such as battle fatigue and shell shock (Oltmanns, 2006). In the 1970s, many veterans raised public awareness of combat's lasting psychological and physical injuries. The “*political context of this investigation line was the collapse of a cult of war and the growth of an anti-war movement*” (Herman 1992, p. 9). This prompted the commissioning of comprehensive studies examining the impact of wartime experiences on the lives of these returning veterans (Hunt, 2001; Stacewicz, 2008). The culmination of these studies resulted in “*a five-volume study on the legacies of Vietnam delineated the syndrome of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and demonstrated its relationship to combat exposure*” (Herman, 1992, p. 27).

A third shift related to the feminist movement occurred in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. This movement exposed family violence and its devastating effects on women and children in North

America and Western Europe. (Warner, 2008). However, it was only after 1980, when the efforts of studies of returning veterans legitimized the symptoms of PTSD, that the voices from the feminist movement were heard. Only after this legitimization of PTSD was it acknowledged that the survivors of rape, the domestic battery of women and children, and incest shared the same syndromes as those experienced by survivors of war (Edkins, 2003).

A more recent influence on how trauma is understood occurred following the terrorist attack on the twin towers in New York City on September 11, 2001. More specifically, the event was revealed as a collective and a national experience (Edkins, 2003). As a result of this recent turn in thinking, trauma theorists in sociology and anthropology are exploring how violence influences individual people and how communities, nations, and entire regions cope with the long-term effects of violent events. In addition, these theorists draw attention to how trauma shapes our culture and how we use images to make sense of and navigate our world (Malesevic, 2010). Since the New York City terrorist attack, concepts of national, cultural trauma, national self-esteem, healing and closure have entered into popular vocabulary. According to Furedi (2003), this turn towards emotionalism represents one of the most significant developments in contemporary western culture.

Since 2011, the study of trauma has become more broadly defined. In the field of literature, trauma became the underlying theme for many stories in adult and children's literature. In particular, cultural, political and domestic violence was exposed, reshaping the words and images we use when describing those events and experiences. In addition, across all genres, there has been a proliferation of stories of children coping with parental death, neglect, abandonment, and abuse.

Today trauma is understood *"as exposure to an incident or a series of events that are deemed emotionally disturbing or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional and/or spiritual well-being"* (traumainformedcare.chcs.org). However, while the above-noted turns in thinking have served

to lift the veil on early childhood abuse and liberated discussion on childhood trauma and abuse, it has not resulted in a clear understanding of how to conceptualize, describe or categorize childhood trauma outcomes and risk processes (Howard, 2014). Nevertheless, there is a general acceptance that children may experience trauma in many ways and that early childhood trauma generally refers to traumatic experiences that occur to children aged 0 to six. (NCTSN, 2022).

This study draws upon The World Health Organization (WHO) definition of childhood trauma, defining child maltreatment as *“all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, development or dignity”*. There are four main types of abuse that the participants in this study experienced: neglect, physical abuse, psychological abuse, and sexual abuse. Abuse is defined as an act of commission, and neglect is defined as an act of omission in the care leading to potential or actual harm.

- Neglect may include inadequate health care, education, supervision, protection from hazards in the environment, and unmet basic needs such as clothing and food.
- Physical abuse may include beating, shaking, burning, and biting. The threshold for defining corporal punishment as abuse is unclear. Rib fractures are found to be the most common finding associated with physical abuse.
- Psychological abuse includes verbal abuse, humiliation, and acts that scare or terrorize a child, which may result in future psychological illness of the child (World Health Organization, www.who.itl).
- Sexual abuse is defined as *“the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities which they do not fully comprehend, to which they are unable to give consent, or that violate the social taboos of family roles”*. (World Health Organization as cited in Gonzalez et al., 2022).

2.4 Posttraumatic Growth Theories

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) introduced the term posttraumatic growth to describe a positive outcome triggered by an event which is sufficiently stressful that it calls into question an individual's basic assumption about the world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Posttraumatic theories are interested in understanding the processes that result in a positive psychological change as a result of adversity.

2.5 Background

The adverse effects of early childhood sexual abuse are wide-ranging in scope and often debilitating. There is a substantial body of literature that focuses on the deleterious consequences of early trauma (Salzinger et al., 2001; Afifi et al., 2006; Bethell et al., 2014; Marriott et al., 2014; Feinson and Meir, 2015). This study draws on literature related to the positive outcomes post-trauma and, by way of introducing posttraumatic growth theories (PTG), the chapter begins with an overview of how this notion has evolved over time.

The belief that positive outcomes can emerge from pain and suffering has been expressed through various religious teachings over the centuries (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). The concept of what doesn't kill us makes us stronger (Nietzsche, 1968) has been around for decades. Songwriters and poets have written of the transformative power of overcoming adversity, and we continue to witness similar expressions of this belief today in marketing campaigns that promote the idea of "no pain, no gain". However, it was not until the 1960s that the possibility that a life crisis could be the impetus for positive change was formally researched. Caplan (1964) was one of the first researchers to make the distinction between resilience and thriving. Through his research on community psychology, he introduced the concept that people faced with a material life crisis could be helped and could grow despite their negative experiences.

Murphy (1962) argued forcefully that the exclusive focus on the negative aspects of childhood trauma was limiting and proving detrimental to research. Masten and Reed (2002) believed that Murphy's position promoted the shift towards research exploring what, if any, positive outcomes occurred as a result of childhood trauma. Formative research in this field in the 1970s included studies (Rutter, 1979) which found that children who, due to their high-risk environments, were viewed as more likely to develop negative consequences were actually – and surprisingly – developing well. However, because research during this period was not explicitly focused on positive post-trauma outcomes, the few illustrations of positive posttraumatic growth were buried amongst a high volume of research that highlighted the various adverse outcomes of posttraumatic stress.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed further development of this theory as researchers began to look specifically for positive after-effects as a direct result of adverse events or ongoing negative life experiences. One such example of this shift lies in the work of Burt and Bonnie (1987). Their initial studies of rape focused exclusively on understanding the negative consequences that rape had on its victims. However, their preliminary research findings prompted Burt and Bonnie to alter their focus. As a result, they began to explore ways of capturing and conceptualising growth outcomes of 113 rape victims based on a series of dimensions of self-concept, coping, and self-reported change (Burt and Bonnie, 1987). Their research provided evidence that growth could occur post-rape, further supporting the potential of deriving a positive outcome from a particularly debilitating experience. Additional research on posttraumatic events, examined through wide-ranging psychological studies, also revealed the possibility of positive growth after trauma related to childhood combat (Aldwin, Levenson and Spiro, 1994); sexual abuse (Valentine and Feinauer, 1993); abuse and violence (Draucker, 2003); combat (Martz et al., 2018); cancer (Walsh et al., 2018); and childhood abuse (Defrain et al., 2003). More recent studies on posttraumatic growth have been extended to the field of organisation and management studies, where researchers have examined work-related trauma such as exposure to trauma by firefighters (Armstrong,

Shakespeare-Finch and Shochet, 2014); police officers (Chopko, Palmieri and Adams, 2018); aid workers (Veronese et al., 2017) and career interruptions (Maitlis, 2009, 2022).

Summary of Key Findings Related to Posttraumatic Growth Studies

| RESEARCH ON POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--|---|
| Author | Trauma Type | Research Methodology | Main Findings |
| Armstrong et al., (2014) | work-related exposure | quantitative study of 218 firefighters who reported a traumatic experience | The study found that the PTG occurred in the firefighters who had a strong sense of organisational belonging and well-developed self care strategies |
| Walsh et al., (2018) | cancer | on-line quantitative study of 241 participants 1 year post treatment | the study found that PPTG (physical growth) had an impact on overall growth in that the greater the physical improvement, the great the overall improvement |
| Drauckers, C. (2003) | sexual abuse | narrative analysis of data collected from 44 participants | Several common positive themes were identified but there were notable differences between the responses of men and women |
| Defrain et al., (2003) | childhood abuse | quantitative data from 90 adults | Determined that people are able to overcome horrific abuse and function well but the trauma remains part of their DNA |
| Chopko, Palmieri & Adams, (2018) | Work related trauma | survey of 193 active officers | Behaviours associated with maintaining control and remaining emotionally detached from the traumatic experience resulted in higher growth outcomes |
| Martz et al., (2018) | combat | internet-based survey of 418 veterans who indicated they experienced PTSD | PTG was found to be a protective factor that served to moderate the effects of PTSD |
| Veronese et al., (2017) | occupational trauma | 201 professional aid workers working in war torn countries | results show that personal resources, spirituality, and activism resulted in positive growth & demonstrate how helpers in dangerous roles can maintain good functioning |
| Maitlis, S. (2009,2022) | occupational trauma | narrative analysis and sensemaking career disruption of 4 musicians | Results revealed the meaning making process that led to the construction of new positive identities post trauma |

Table 1: Summary findings for research on posttraumatic events

This emphasis on the positive aspects of a person following a psychologically disturbing event can be seen as part of the broader positive psychology movement. Introduced by Seligman in 1998, this branch of psychology emphasises the positive aspects of psychology and has stimulated the emergence and development of a number of relevant post-trauma growth theories. Some of the more popular growth theories include those associated with Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), Joseph and Linley (2005), Maddi (2006), Joseph, Murphy and Regal (2012) and Tedeschi et al., (2018). An exploration of these emerging theories follows.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) established the first theoretical building block by introducing a conceptual framework that measured positive outcomes they termed posttraumatic growth via the use of a questionnaire (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1996). Joseph and Linley (2005) continued to build on this earlier framework by expanding it to include a mechanism that enabled them to understand the process by which the positive growth occurred. Maddi's (2006) contribution to the above-noted theories resided in his research on the social context

under which the growth occurred, together with an analysis of the personality traits associated with the resultant growth. Concurrent with the theory development of the above noted posttraumatic growth theories, theories specific to the study of posttraumatic stress disorder were also being further developed. Taking findings from both bodies of research, Joseph and colleagues (2012) presented an integrated conceptual framework of posttraumatic growth.

Development of Theory from Foundational Concepts

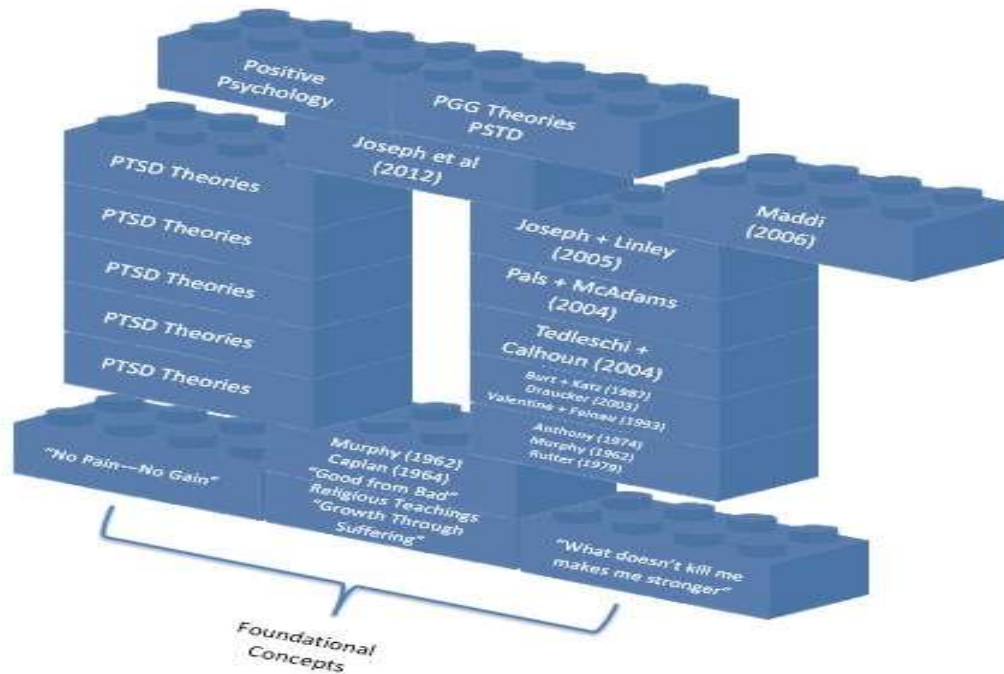


Figure 1: How posttraumatic theories have developed over time

2.6 Growth Theories

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) define posttraumatic growth as a transformational and fundamental positive change in a person following a psychologically disturbing event wherein the individual is significantly better after the event than before the distress. Such theorising defines an adverse event as sufficiently traumatic to call into question all of the person's prior assumptions about their life and their life's role. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) believe the adverse event in and of itself remains traumatic. They propose that it is the process by which the person tries to come to terms with the trauma that results in the growth and that the growth, and the remaining feelings of distress associated with the trauma, can exist concurrently (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). Specifically, the trauma shatters the person's perceptions of the world, how the world works and the role they play in it. As individuals strive to make sense of their new world, they create new narratives based on their new assumptions. It is the process of creating these new narratives that result in posttraumatic growth.

Measurement of growth is determined based on Tedeschi and Calhoun's Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1996). The inventory gauges twenty-one separate factors. The factors are based upon their review of existing literature of peoples' earlier responses to stress and an assessment of the victims' responses to the trauma as articulated in interviews. These twenty-one factors are grouped into five broad categories: changed priorities, warmer relationships, greater personal strength, new paths in life, and spiritual development. However, it should be noted that a limitation of this theory is that it relies on the participant's interpretation of the inventory and their assessment of the degree of growth they have experienced. As such, there is a risk of people reporting they have grown when in fact, they may not have grown (Ford, Harding and Learmonth, 2008). Furthermore, the five-factor inventory is restrictive in that it may exclude other factors that could also be deemed to be indicative of growth by others (Pals and McAdams, 2004).

In extending the work of earlier studies, Joseph and Linley's (2005) theory of posttraumatic growth recognised the importance of earlier research on growth but felt that these earlier theories fell short in providing a satisfactory explanation of how specifically the growth occurred (Joseph and Linley, 2005). Their theory was based on the belief that growth frameworks should include a more detailed understanding of the areas of growth and how they affect the individual's perception of themselves, their perception of others, and their basic view of life. Their research continued to build on earlier posttraumatic growth theories by addressing some of the limitations. The earlier theories examined growth as represented to them by people post-trauma. Joseph and Linley (2005) believed these earlier theories did not consider how the growth differed or existing research that aligned with them, such as the various posttraumatic stress disorder theories (PTSD). Looking at PTSD theories as well as other theoretical models, such as the concept of emotional processing (Rachman, 1980); psychodynamically informed information-processing approach (Horowitz, 1986); social cognitive theories (Janoff-Bulman, 1992); and cognitive processing models (Creamer, Burgess and Pattison, 1992), Joseph and Linley proposed a growth theory based on organismic theories.

Joseph and Linley's (2005) organismic theory is based on the concept that all people possess an innate understanding of what is best for them and are programmed to try to achieve it. They then applied this theory to the other theories, which they referred to as the valuing theory of growth through adversity (Joseph and Linley, 2005). This theory takes into consideration four salient theoretical themes. First, all individuals interpret their world based on their unique mental maps, and when they encounter a traumatic event, they are driven to rebuild their mental maps to integrate the new information. This is otherwise referred to as Horowitz's information processing theory (Horowitz, 1986). Secondly, as per Hollon and Garber's (1988) assimilation–accommodation theory, the individual must recognise that the event was out of their control and adjust their mental map accordingly. Third, this retrospective assessment leads to a state of understanding, followed by their search for meaning and how they can incorporate the outcomes of the trauma into how they lead their

lives (Joseph and Linley, 2005). Fourth, the characteristics are measured in terms of those aligned with personal well-being (Ryff and Singer, 1996). Finally, they explain the variability in individual responses to trauma by the variance between the trauma and the person's core beliefs. More specifically, they believed that the greater the delta, the greater the positive outcome. They also proposed that the degree to which the person's social background has hampered/encouraged their development of traits and experiences, the person's ability to ruminate and make meaning of the trauma together with the degree of social support received both during and after the trauma also correlate positively to the outcome post-trauma (Joseph and Linley, 2005).

In contrast, Maddi (2006) believes that posttraumatic growth occurs as a direct result of a trauma, following which the person then develops coping skills that allow them to become somewhat desensitised to future traumas as a result. Maddi's theoretical construct is based on the notion he termed hardiness. He expanded on the above-noted frameworks by examining, in more depth, the social context and personality characteristics of those reporting posttraumatic growth. Maddi's theory is that children whose early lives were subjected to significantly more stress than other children but who received strong support and encouragement from their parents developed skills and characteristics to deal more effectively with future stresses. Maddi (2006) believed that this set of circumstances allowed these children to develop three distinct traits he defined as commitment, control, and challenge. Commitment is described as the desire to remain engaged with their environment, regardless of the degree of stress encountered. Control refers to the desire to influence the outcome of matters surrounding them, and challenge is the ability to see stresses as potential opportunities to improve. These three traits, once developed, motivate the person to learn and grow from stress (Maddi, 2006).

While Maddi (2006) presented his theory as a growth strategy, it could be argued that such thinking is more closely aligned with that of adaptive growth. It is arguably part of our natural progression and development to learn from our experiences and incorporate those learnings

into our future experiences. Substantive growth needs to be transformative, whereby the person is fundamentally better because of the adverse experience encountered (Jayawickreme and Blackie, 2014). Furthermore, Maddi's research did not explore the process by which children develop these enhanced coping skills or whether children who are not exposed to early childhood stresses can also develop hardiness through learned experiences and supportive parents.

Joseph and colleagues (2012) also perceived limitations in earlier posttraumatic growth theories in that they believed that the use of only one measurement tool limited the breadth of growth experiences. They continued to build on earlier growth theories by "*developing a new understanding of psychologically disturbing events that integrates post-traumatic stress and posttraumatic growth within a single conceptual framework that can guide clinical practice*" (Joseph, Murphy and Regal, 2012, p. 320). Their growth model, which they refer to as an affective-cognitive processing model, is based on the premise that growth occurs as a result of the ruminative process post-trauma, wherein the individual attempts to recalibrate their perceptions of their world. What differentiates their model from the earlier PTG models is the integration of PTSD and PTG theories that draw on language from social and cognitive psychology (Joseph, Murphy and Regal, 2012). Specifically, they view stress and growth as curvilinear—the greater the stress, the more significant the growth. They propose that individuals undergo a cycle post-trauma that begins with "*event cognitions, appraisal, emotional states and coping, as a repetitive cyclic process*" (Joseph, Murphy and Regal, 2012, p. 322) that repeats itself until the individual's assumptive world is recalibrated in such a way that it makes sense to the person. Their theory also reports that the outcome is influenced by the individual characteristics of the person as well as their social and environmental surroundings (Joseph, Murphy and Regal, 2012).

2.7 Common themes and differences amongst the growth theories

A unifying notion of the theoretical developments within the field of posttraumatic growth is that a person can emerge stronger following a psychologically stressful event (Tedeschi and

Calhoun, 2004; Joseph and Linley, 2005; Maddi, 2006; Joseph, Murphy and Regel, 2012 and Tedeschi et al., 2018). Apart from Maddi's theory - another common theme emerging from the other four respective theories of posttraumatic growth - is that it is not the event in and of itself that causes the growth. Rather, it is the process following the trauma wherein the person tries to make sense of the event and then translates it back into their mental mapping that has the potential to result in growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Joseph and Linley, 2005; Joseph, Murphy and Regel, 2012 and Tedeschi et al., 2018). Maddi (2006) contrarily believes that the person already possesses the skills which allow them to grow from the trauma and that, with each stress they encounter, they continue to develop those skills. PTG theories all believe that the traumatic event must be severe enough to both destroy the individual's perceptions and cause the person to question their current frames of reference and that the relationship between the trauma and growth is curvilinear (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Joseph and Linley, 2005; Maddi, 2006; Joseph, Murphy and Regel, 2012 and Tedeschi et al., 2018).

Each PTG theorist believes that growth and distress can co-exist (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Joseph and Linley, 2005; Joseph, Murphy and Regel, 2012 and Tedeschi et al., 2018). Tedeschi (2004) and Maddi (2006) perceive that early success in coping is an antecedent to later posttraumatic growth. The remaining theorists believe that, if sufficiently intense, trauma will result in growth regardless of whether the person has developed coping mechanisms. Table 2 illustrates the common themes and differences between the four theoretical frameworks presented.

Posttraumatic Growth Theories: Similarities and Differences

| Similarities / Difference in Theoretical Frameworks | | | | |
|---|------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Themes | Tedeschi 2004 | Joseph 2005 | Maddi 2006 | Joseph et al 2012 |
| Event must be sufficiently traumatic to shatter the person's frame of reference | x | x | x | x |
| Growth is a result of the process of coming to terms with the event and not the event in and of itself | x | x | | x |
| Growth is defined as (*) psychological chg. as measured by (*) personality change, improved relations and enhanced outlook on life. | x | x | x | x |
| Social context/environment plays an important role in the development of outcomes | x | | x | x |
| Certain personality traits are required in order for growth to occur | x | x | x | x |
| Growth and distress can exist concurrently | x | x | x | x |
| Success is an antecedent to subsequent growth | x | | x | |
| * agreed with dimensions but felt more were required | | | | |

Table 2: Similarities/Differences between the four theoretical PTG frameworks

2.8 Summary

There is substantive research that details the varied responses people have to trauma. Some individuals never recover from these psychologically disturbing experiences; others overcome and return to their baseline; whilst others thrive. For those who do thrive post-trauma, there is no conclusive evidence as to why they thrive nor the specific processes they undergo post-trauma that leads to their growth. This study addresses this issue by investigating the processes the participants underwent and illuminates how these processes contributed to post-trauma growth. Furthermore, while useful, the theories do not explore how this post-trauma growth manifests itself in their lives, whether the growth sustains over time or how it may contribute to their identity formation. While posttraumatic growth frameworks have made significant inroads toward answering these questions, these are areas where growth theories can be developed further. This study addresses this limitation and extends the current theorising of posttraumatic growth by examining the participants' life experiences from childhood through adulthood and contributes to understanding how growth manifests over time, the sustainability of the growth, and its impact on identity formation.

These further developments would also serve to address issues that have been identified as problematic within the current posttraumatic growth frameworks. The most prominent of these is the fact that the most commonly used measurement tool of growth, Tedeschi's Personal Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), is based solely on individuals' subjective self-interpretations of growth (Ford et al., 2008). In this scenario of self-reporting, the individuals must rely on their own interpretation of how they have grown and their memory of what they were like before they experienced the trauma and subsequent growth. This inevitably begs the question: Has the person really changed? Or does the person believe and wish that they have changed? Research conducted by Frazier and colleagues. (2009) found that perceived but not actual growth was related to positively interpreted coping. Thus, the PTGI, and perhaps other retrospective measures, do not appear to measure actual pre-trauma to post-traumatic change (Frazier et al., 2009). This is further compounded by the fact that the measurement tool used only includes questions related to positive experiences with no allowance for negative experiences. This, in turn, runs the risk of creating a bias towards only positive growth reporting (Park and Lechner, 2006, cited in Jayawickreme and Blackie, 2014).

The study also further develops posttraumatic growth theory by exploring the context within which the growth occurred. It offers potential lines of theorising that demonstrate how the social environment can contribute to or deter growth. The emphasis on posttraumatic growth has centred on the premise that life was trauma-free; a trauma occurred, and then the person experienced growth as a result of the trauma. The current research does not fully explore those individuals who experience very early childhood trauma and whose early lives have never been trauma-free, such as the research participants in this study. An examination of this understudied group of trauma victims adds new insights to the study of posttraumatic growth. Finally, PTG theories focus more on the trauma itself and how the person comes to terms with and deals with it. They *"tend to be more descriptive rather than explanatory in that they fail to adequately examine the actual process by which the growth occurred"* (Joseph and Linley, 2005, p. 262). Nonetheless, the research on posttraumatic growth has effectively served to shift focus away from researching only the negative consequences of trauma. It has offered

theorists a valuable set of ideas and stimulated interest in understanding why, when exposed to similar traumas, some emerge better off as a result while others fail to recover, providing the foundation for further research.

This line of thinking led researchers such as Crossley, 2000; Pals and McAdams, 2004; Grant, Leigh-Phippard and Short, 2015; Charbonneau-Dahlen, Lowe and Morris, 2016; and Marin and Shkreli, 2019 to expand these theories further. What the preceding theorists all share in common is the belief that it was not the traumatic event that resulted in the growth of the individual but the sensemaking process following a traumatic event. They perceived that Tedeschi and Calhoun did not go far enough in explaining the theory. They (Crossley, 2000; Pals and McAdams, 2004; Grant, Leigh-Phippard and Short, 2015; Charbonneau-Dahlen, Lowe and Morris, 2016; and Marin and Shkreli, 2019) expanded on the transformative process: the role that life narratives play in the process and how this results in transformative growth. Their research findings highlight two distinct processes required for individuals to see themselves as having grown from the adverse experience. The first process involves the creation of a narrative that allows them to fully understand and work through the trauma (Pals and McAdams, 2004). They believed that self-reporting questionnaires and interviews were limiting and that the researcher should instead focus on the analyses of these “*narrative accounts of traumatic events themselves*” (Pals and McAdams, 2004, p. 65). This analysis would facilitate a deeper understanding of the ensuing growth and provide a more reliable mechanism for determining growth. It would also address situations where individuals experience similar traumas and resulting scores, as measured by the PTGI, yet their accounts of the events reveal greater growth in one person than in the other (Pals and McAdams, 2004). They also expressed concern that the positive dimensions that formed part of the PTGI were too broad and all-encompassing and that the dimensions did not consider the cultural implications on individuals’ narratives. To best understand individual narratives in context, they believed you needed to understand their socio-economic, political, and religious backgrounds (Crossley, 2000; Pals and McAdams, 2004; Cromer and Smith, 2010; Peters, 2010; Grant, Leigh-Phippard and Short, 2015; Charbonneau-Dahlen, Lowe and Morris, 2016; and

Marin and Shkreli, 2019). This study contributes to and extends this line of theorising by incorporating the socio-economic and historical context in the analysis as these factors play such a critical role in understanding the potential consequences of trauma (Maercker and Hecker, 2016).

This chapter demonstrates the contribution of posttraumatic growth theories to the study of childhood trauma and the corresponding theoretical processes by which victims of early childhood abuse are able to make sense of their experiences. These theories highlight the narrative role PTG theorists believe plays in positive growth transformation following adverse life events. Given the extent of the trauma experienced by the participants in this research, it was deemed essential to explore the literature and current theories that underpin the meaning making process that may have enabled the women in this study to overcome their childhood adversity. However, the application of these theories continues to reside predominantly in the field of psychology, where it is applied primarily as a means to understand the psychological and physical consequences of trauma. While these theories prove useful in understanding the various healing and meaning making processes associated with early childhood trauma, they fall short in explaining the influence of their childhood trauma on the construction of personal and leader identities over their life span. The limited studies that have examined identity change post-trauma have discovered that individuals engage in an array of differing types of identity work as they seek to negotiate “new selves” (Maitlis, 2009; 2020), uniquely modifying these new identities (Ibarra, 1999; Maitlis, 2022) as they navigate the meaning making process. To address the limitations of these theories, I now turn to the literature on identity, which expands on the role of narrative in the development of post-trauma growth that PTG theorists argue is critical for growth transformation.

Chapter 3: Identity and Leader Identity Theories

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with a brief background of some of the more widely acknowledged foundational concepts of identity theory. It describes how these theories contribute to today's contemporary thinking on identity and outlines the common themes and differences amongst the theories. It proceeds to describe specific strands from within this wide body of identity theory: social identity theory, narrative identity, and the life span approach to leader identity construction and development. A summary of the interplay between posttraumatic growth and the three interwoven theoretical approaches to personal identity and leader identity construction is provided, together with how they come together to form the conceptual framework used to analyse the data collected in this study. The chapter concludes with the rationale for why these particular identity theories were selected from the numerous identity theories available and how they support the study's research aims.

3.2 Background

There is a significant degree of variability in how the term identity is conceptually understood and how it is theoretically applied (Stryker and Burke, 2000). Identity theory consists of diverse views from within a diverse range of research traditions, which explore the relationship between mind, body, and society. In identity theory, the self is comprised of several identities, each of which is recognised by the self and others (Burke and Stets, 2009). The roots of identity theory can be traced back to the fields of psychology (Erikson, 1968), sociology (Mead and Morris, 1934) and social psychology (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), of which a general overview of each follow (Pratt et al., 2016).

Erikson, building on the earlier work of Freud, helped to popularise identity theorising with the development of his eight psychosocial stages of development (Erikson, 1968). He further develops Freud's psychosexual developmental stages by placing greater emphasis on the

societal context of identity development. Erikson was the first person to propose a lifespan theory of development that takes into consideration an individual's entire life cycle, from birth to death. Each of the eight developmental stages is characterised by some form of conflict which Erikson (1998) describes as turning points in the individuals' lives. The underlying premise of his theory is that if the conflict is not resolved adequately, it will manifest itself at a later stage, resulting in some degree of impairment or maladjustment. On the other hand, if the conflict is sufficiently resolved, it results in the growth of a positive self-concept and the ability to resolve crises more effectively in the future. He proposed that these conflicts are never 100% resolved, that they are more prominent at the age at which the conflict arises and that they occur in sequential order.

An equally significant early contribution to identity theorising was that of social psychologist and philosopher George Mead (1934), who developed the symbolic interactionist theoretical model to understand the relationship between individuals and society. He believed that society consists of symbols that individuals use to establish meaning, develop their views of the world and communicate with one another; that meaning occurs as a result of an interaction between individuals versus an intrinsic aspect of the object to which the meaning is ascribed (Aksan et al., 2009). These sociocultural approaches have significantly contributed to identity formation and understanding by exploring how the social environment and the interactions between others in society influence individual identities over time. The three core principles of symbolic interaction are meaning, language and symbols, with the underlying belief that individuals attribute meaning to symbols that are, in turn, communicated via language.

A third foundational contribution to identity theory was that of Tajfel and Turner (1979) with their social identity theory. Social identity theory is a means of understanding how and why individuals relate with one another and follow certain groups and not others; how they create and define their standing in society. Tajfel and Turner (1979, p. 40) define a group as "*a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category*". The three foundational processes of this theory are social categorisation, social comparison,

and social identification. Social identification is an individual's awareness that they belong to a particular social category or group that shares a common view of themselves as members of the same social category (Stets and Burke, 2000). Social categorisation is determined via a social comparison process wherein individuals deemed as similar to "self" are categorised and labelled as an in-group. Conversely, those who differ are categorised as part of the out-group. Social categorisation orders the social environment by providing individuals with a structured process that enables them to define themselves within their social environment (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). However, some critics assert that social identity replaces individualism with a collective social identity. Postmes and colleagues (2005) put forth that social identity concepts have proven useful in understanding the role of social influence on group processes in small groups. However, in larger groups, individuality has been found to play a key role in developing group identity and purpose (Postmes et al. 2005). Other critics, such as Huddy (2001), argue that social identity theory ignores the critical role of history and culture.

3.3 Contemporary Approaches to Identity

Many contemporary identity theories are rooted in one of the three above noted foundational theories. These theories are wide and varied. Nonetheless, it is useful to identify some of the general contemporary approaches to identity so that I may then position my research aims amongst them. I draw partially on Kroger's (2000) categorisation of selected commonly applied approaches to the study of identity. Below is an overview of each approach, followed by a summary of the common themes and differences between them.

Structural Stages

Theories that advocate a structural approach share the view that individuals make sense and construe their world through internal structures of ego development. These theories are based upon the early work of Piaget (1936, 1950). The underlying argument of these theories is the belief that individuals undergo a process whereby the various identities that people adopt to accommodate different social interactions are "*internalized, labelled, valued, and organised*" (Levine, 2003, p. 191). These form schemas that then change in predictable and organised ways

in response to new information they are unable to process, primarily as they mature from adolescence. A limitation to this approach is that it fails to consider aspects of an individual that are deeply ingrained and may not change over time, such as deeply held religious beliefs (Kroger, 2000).

Sociocultural theories

Contemporary sociocultural theories, which build upon the seminal work of Meads' (1934) early interactionist approach to identity (Kroger, 2000), are based on the foundational concept that an individual's identity is both shaped and created as a direct result of the societal and cultural context in which they live. These theories highlight the interaction between individuals within a society. Theorists using this approach, such as Stryker and Burke (2000), propose that identity is developed over time based on the social context and the interactions and responses imposed by and upon people and society. In turn, the process of self-verification confirms and upholds the various social structures. The belief is that people identify with groups with whom they share principles, values, and characteristics (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). These classifications provide individuals with a sense of order and provide the individual with the means by which they can situate themselves within their social environment (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Hogg, 2006).

Psychosocial theories

Psychosocial theories of identity are part of the wider theory of psychosocial development that, while not exclusively, draws in large part upon the work of Erikson (1968). While theorists who espouse this approach differ, they all focus on the psychology of the individual together with the influence that society and culture come to bear on identity development. They believe that as a person ages, they must navigate a series of predictable psychosocial stages from adolescence to adulthood. Current researchers following this tradition, such as Hollway and Jefferson (2000), have taken this step further by focusing on "*the unconscious intersubjective dynamics of the interview relationship*" (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 4). They accommodate

this focus through the use of a narrative interviewing technique that uses free association to unearth these unconscious subjectivities.

Common Themes and Differences Amongst the Three Theories

A unifying notion amongst the three theoretical developments is that individuals affect and are affected by society, that identity is a social phenomenon, and that multiple identities can exist in relationship with others who serve to confirm or deny those identities. However, they diverge in their view of the significance of structures and society's role in identity formation. Those adopting a structural stage theoretical lens place greater emphasis on how the social structures influence identity and behaviour, believing that structures are relatively stable. Those who follow a sociocultural approach, adopting a symbolic interactionist theory, view identity as both fluid and dynamic. However, even within a symbolic interactionist approach, there exist differing viewpoints. For example, some theorists place greater emphasis on the importance of the role that social structure has on identity. Researchers, such as Stryker and Burke (2000), who follow a traditional symbolic interactionist stance, emphasise how social structures influence identity and behaviour. Conversely, symbolic interactionists who adopt more of a situational stance, such as Burke and Stets (2009), focus more on the internal dynamics that operate for that particular identity (Stets, 2006). However, they both ascribe to the view that identities are continually and dynamically constructed through discourse as “storied” individuals share and connect with the broader society. The table that follows summarises the strengths and limitations of the three approaches.

Differences Amongst the Three Theoretical Approaches

| Differences of Varied Identity Approaches (Kroger, 2007, pp 26-27) | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| Approach | Researcher | Strengths | Limitations | Identity Change | Identity |
| Structural Stage | Piaget (1968) | Acknowledges developmental | Difficulty explaining | Predictable dev' mental | In some contents (values/beliefs) |
| | Kegan (1994) | structures in filtering life | individual differences in | sequence through adol- | |
| | Levine (2003) | events | identity principles beyond | escence; in some contents | |
| Sociocultural | Mead (1934) Stryker & Burke (2003) (Cote (1996) | Addresses how identities are formed, constrained, & defined by context | Difficulty explaining differences in identity | With contextual change | With contextual constancy |
| Psychosocial | Erikson (1968) | Addresses biological, | More attention needed to | In psychosocial tasks | In some biological or psychological elements |
| | Marcia (1993) | psychological and societal | intrapyschic developmental | required by society; in | |
| | Hollway & Jefferson (2013) | influences on identity | structures | some biological or psycholglcal elements | |

Table 3: Differences amongst the various approaches to identity

3.4 Utilization of Emerging Identity Work Perspective

More recently, leadership scholars have begun to incorporate two or more identity theories to theorise an array of phenomena related to the study of leadership development and the role of identity in the workplace (Ibarra et al., 2014). This emergent perspective (Brown, 2021) encourages researchers to consider more than one line of identity theorising in their studies. In particular, Brown (2021) advocates the use of *identity (role) theory, social identity/self-categorization theory (SIT/SCT), narrative theory, psychodynamic theory and dramaturgical/symbolic theory*" (Brown, 2021, p. 3). The focus on these particular streams of identity theorising has been influenced by the perceived role that sensemaking, discourse and critical studies play in the formation of leader identities (Brown, 2021).

This study has employed this emergent identity work perspective (Brown, 2020, 2021) by incorporating into the theoretical framework multiple, well-established interconnected approaches to identity theorising, identity construction and leader identity: narrative identity,

social identity theories and leadership theories. An overview of the three approaches selected, together with why this particular line of theorising was adopted for this study, is provided.

3.5 Narrative Identity Theories

Narrative identity theorists perceive that individuals form their identity by integrating their life experiences into an evolving story (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; McAdams, 2019). By assimilating the individual's past, present, and envisioned future, these stories serve to bring a sense of order and a purpose that take into consideration the sequential aspects of Erikson's conceptual stages of development (McAdams, 2018), with a particular emphasis on the adolescent stage. It is believed that during this adolescent stage, the individual's past experiences, envisioned future, and cultural and societal influences come together to form their identity (Ertorer, 2014). McAdams defines narrative identity as a "*story about how I came to be the person I am becoming*" (McAdams, 2018, p. 364).

While many posttraumatic growth theorists view posttraumatic growth as an outcome, narrative identity scholars perceive posttraumatic growth as a process (Maitlis, 2020). They have expanded upon the shared understanding of the role that discourse plays in shaping identity, a perspective that has grown considerably in popularity over the preceding decades (McLean et al., 2018; McAdams, 2019, Lilgendahl and McLean, 2020; Maitlis, 2022). Narrative identity researchers believe that events, such as early childhood trauma, call into question the individuals' basic assumptions and the sufficiency of their existing self-narratives (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Crossley, 2000; Singer, 2004; McAdams et al., 2006; Marin and Shkreli, 2019 and Berman, Montgomery and Ratner, 2020). This shattering of assumptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) results in a defining moment in the individual's life and necessitates a revision to accommodate this new experience.

Pals (2006) presented a two-step approach to dealing with adverse life experiences, which she refers to as a springboard effect. Initially, the individual ruminates on the experience and how the experience affected them. In the second step, the individual commits to focus on the

possibility of a positive outcome or resolution. When it comes to narrating trauma, the rumination process often results in positive life lessons and insights (Marin and Shkreli, 2019). There is a consensus amongst these researchers that the trauma results in a turning point for the person and that these turning points influence identity, either positively or negatively (McAdams et al., 2001; Thomas and Hall, 2008; Marin and Shkreli, 2019; Maitlis, 2022).

McAdams and Bowman (2001) categorized these outcomes as contamination and redemption sequences. As the words suggest, a contaminated sequence is when a positive experience is made negative by subsequent events. A redemptive sequence is when a negative experience is transformed into a positive outcome. The meaning making of these turning points involves an interpretive process wherein the person draws upon meaningful experiences from their past and infuses them with a self-defining meaning in the present by interpreting them as having a “causal” effect on their growth. (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 2001, 2019). These connections may be able to capture both the complexity of self-making that occurs within a person’s life story, as well as the also broader patterns of variation across people in terms of how cultural context shapes the narrative processes of self-making in the construction of their life story (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 2019). Pals’ (2006) conclusion aligns with McAdams’ (2003) theory that suggests we may have different and potentially contradictory self-defining narratives that can coexist in our lives. Studies suggest that narrative re-storying can be transformational such that individuals can take a negative experience and view it as a positive one in terms of outcome (Riessman, 1990, Maitlis, 2022). An individual’s ability to find redemptive meanings from their adverse experiences speaks to the wider adaptational issue of how individuals make narrative sense of their pain and suffering. (McAdams and McLean, 2013).

A common view of narrative identity theorists is that redemption and contamination sequences are effective narrative strategies for making sense of trauma. In addition, narrative identity theorists believe that sensemaking contributes to the construction of identity in adolescence and adulthood, as people attempt to integrate disparate elements of their lives into life stories. (McAdams, 2003, 2004, 2019; McAdams et al., 2006; Jirek, 2017; Maitlis, 2009, 2022).

According to narrative identity theory, trauma victims can effectively *“improve their psychosocial well-being and rebuild their identity through developing one’s life story”* (Carless, 2014, p. 440). The development of a narrative story that assimilates the trauma enables the individual to make sense of the adverse event and incorporate it into memory in its rewritten form (Jirek, 2017). The unifying premise of narrative identity theory is that the stories we tell ourselves and that others create for us reflect our reality (Grant, Leigh-Phippard and Short, 2015). Consequently, trauma affects identity, and our perception of the trauma is affected by our identity.

More recently, narrative identity theories have been used in studies to explore the influence of trauma on identity formation (Ertoer, 2014; Berman and Montgomery, 2014; Marin and Shkreli, 2019; Berman, Montgomery and Rather, 2020) and survivor identity (Morris et al., 2011). These more recent studies have demonstrated that trauma has the capacity to alter identity development and become incorporated into one’s identity as they become defining moments in their life (Berman, Montgomery and Ratner, 2020). Research in the field of leadership has shown how individuals revise and reconstruct identities when faced with role transitions (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; Maitlis, 2022), how narratives increase the probability of their identity claims being granted (Ashforth, 2000), and how individuals effectively manage stress through the use of narratives (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Many of these scholars view sensemaking as a critical component of the narrative process that results in identity work (Maitlis, 2012, 2020). These scholars use sensemaking as a useful lens through which they explore identity processes post-trauma.

3.6 Social Identity/Self-categorization Theories

The concept of social identity has been used across the social, behavioural, and political sciences to provide a conceptual link between the psychology of the individual and the nature and structure of social groups (Brewer, 2001). Social identity theory was introduced in the 1970s by Henri Tajfel and has become one of social psychology’s more mainstream theories. Social identity theory is the *“social psychological analysis of the role of self-conception in group*

membership, group processes and intergroup relations" (Hogg, 2006, p. 111). Personal identity is based upon attributes that are not necessarily shared with others. Whereas social identity is based on membership in a group of two or more people, where group members share the same social identity and definitions as to who they are, how they relate to those not in their social group and the attributes of those within their group. The theory is founded on the belief that part of an individual's identity is derived from the various groups to which that individual belongs (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Their sense of identity, in turn, varies depending on the nature of the group(s) to which they belong and the different social contexts that they encounter. Two primary motivations drive the desire to belong to a specific group or group: an individual's need for positive self-esteem derived from a group that holds some value or significance and uncertainty reduction (Hogg, 2006). The motivation for positive social identity is reflective of our basic human motive for self-enhancement and self-esteem (Turner, 1982). The motive for uncertainty reduction is predicated on our need to reduce subjective uncertainty about our role in life. It is directly associated with aligning ourselves with certain groups that provide us with a sense of how we should behave and interact with each other (Hogg, 2006). Social identities differ in their degree of importance, with some social identities deemed to be more salient, depending on the situation or context. The theory is underpinned by the principle that collective experiences cannot be understood by isolated individual processes alone.

While it is accepted that social identity theory distinguishes itself between social and personal identity, there exists a vast number of different interpretations amongst social identity theorists. One such variation addresses one view that the contrast between social and personal identities is too rigid (Hogg, 2006). Brewer (2001) posits that there are four different types of social identities. The first is *person-based* and focuses on how individual group members internalize group norms. The second type are *relational* social identities which focus on the identities in relation to others within the same group. The third type are *group-based* social identities which align with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) more traditionalist view. The fourth are *collective* identities, wherein group members conform to the self-defining attributes but do not

necessarily share those attributes. Other theorists, such as Thoits and Virshup (1997), distinguish “me” *identities that centre on individual role-based identities* and “we” *identities that are concerned with collective identities derived from the identification of the self within a group or category as a whole*”, (Thoits and Virshup, 1997, p. 106).

Tajfel and Turner extended social identity theory in 1985 with the introduction of the self-categorization theory, which emphasizes the process by which this social identity occurs. More explicitly, when an individual identifies with and is a member of a particular group, it is classified as an “in-group”. Conversely, when they are not part of a particular group, it would be considered an “out-group”. This line of thinking creates a sense of an “us” versus “them” mentality (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) while creating a sense of who they are that is based upon their group membership (Abrams and Hogg, 1988). The fundamental basis of this theory is that individuals are motivated to develop a positive self-concept. Tajfel and Turner (1979) outline the following three processes that result in this “us versus them” concept. The first is the process of self-categorization. During this phase, individuals categorize themselves according to existing broad social categories, such as race or profession. Once categorized, they appropriate the behaviour of that group. Secondly, individuals begin to identify with particular groups that they wish to belong to by modelling that group's behaviour. This process is referred to as the process of social identification. The third phase is that of social comparison. Once individuals have categorized themselves within a group and now identify themselves as members of that group, they compare their group to other groups. This phase of social comparison results in a tendency to favour the in-group over the out-group. The groups to which people belong have a profound impact on their life experiences and individual identity (Abrams and Hogg, 1988).

More current research has centred on social identity and self-categorization processes in organisational contexts. These conceptual developments place less emphasis on how identity is defined by group membership and focus more on how the various corresponding social cognitive processes associated with group membership influence behaviour within

organisational settings (Haslam et al., 2017; Hogg, Abrams and Brewer, 2017; Steffens et al., 2021). An example of one of these conceptual developments is the increased emphasis on the use of social identity theory to help understand how individuals align their behaviours to the norms and behaviours of the groups to which they belong. This concept of prototypicality is a key construct in the social identity theory of leadership (Hogg, Abrams and Brewer, 2017). Examples of social identity theory applications within organisational studies include social identity motivations, intergroup emotions, intergroup conflict central tenant (Hogg, Abrams and Brewer, 2017), and leader group prototypicality (Steffens et al., 2021).

3.7 Leadership Identity Theories

A Brief History of the Evolution of Leadership Theories

History reveals our fascination with the study of leadership, with writings - such as Sun Tzu's "Art of War" - dating back to the 6th Century B.C. The formal study of leadership is believed to have commenced in the 19th century with the introduction of the Great Man approach, a theory based on the notion that great leaders were born and not made (Allio, 2012). This was followed by the introduction of trait theories in the 1930s. Proponents of trait theory held that successful leaders possessed specific traits such as intelligence, self-confidence, trustworthiness, and vision (Northouse, 2016). Similar to Great Man theories, trait theories assumed that leaders were born with these specific traits and that these traits made them better suited to leadership roles. This prevailing way of thinking was replaced in the 1940s with behavioural theories. Behavioural theories were premised on the notion that certain behaviours lead to leadership success, causing a movement towards "*leadership training as a product*" (Hieker and Pringle, 2020, p. 12). This turn in thinking led to a shift towards consideration beyond the importance of the leader as a constant and the need for leaders to adapt their management style to their specific circumstances. Concurrent with the emergence of situational leadership theories, transactional leadership theories began to receive interest. Transactional leadership theories, also known as exchange theories, are founded on the premise that leadership is based upon mutually beneficial exchanges between leaders and followers and that individuals respond

rationally once they have weighed the benefits against the costs (Hieker and Pringle, 2020). Another major turn of thinking occurred in the 1980s with the shift from transactional leadership theories to transformational leadership theories. Transformation leadership theories are interested in the processes by which leaders engage with followers and the creation of environments that increase motivation and morality in both the leader and followers. As these theories gained traction, so did other theories, such as post-heroic leadership theories, wherein everyone employed within the organisation is considered a leader who contributes collectively to the overall efficiency and success of the organisation (Ford, Harding and Learmonth, 2008). This brief evolution of the various leadership theories was not meant to provide the complete history of all the leadership theories developed since the Great Man theory. Rather, it was to demonstrate how leadership theories have evolved considerably from what was initially viewed as a practice, in terms of how a leader fulfilled their role, to a defined research process that has resulted in numerous leader identity theories (Dionne et al., 2014). A review of some of these more contemporary leadership theories follows.

Contemporary Leadership Theories

One rich body of contemporary scholarship applies social identity theory to leadership identity development (Ibarra et al., 2014). The social identity perspective offers a social cognitive framework to leader identity that views leadership and leadership identity as a group process (van Knippenberg and Hogg, 2003; Haslam, Reicher and Platow, 2011). When applied to leader identity theory, this approach is interested in understanding the processes by which individuals come to be seen and view themselves as leaders, through social categories and group-level processes (Hogg, 2001). From this perspective, a leader's identity is viewed as the result of defining oneself and others based on the group to which the individual belongs (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Hogg, 2001). As norms are the basis of influence within groups, it makes sense that certain group members would represent the norms better than other group members. As a result, those individuals become more influential (Hogg, 2006). This line of theorising is the basis for the social identity theory of leadership (Hogg, 2001; Hogg, Knippenberg and Rast,

2012). Leadership theorists suggest that examining the individual through the lens of social identity theory will lead to a better understanding of the leader identity processes (Ibarra et al., 2014).

DeRue and Ashforth's (2010) leadership identity construction theory, another sub-set of identity theory located within leader identity scholarship, focuses specifically on understanding how individuals construct their leader identity (Brown, 2015) and is broadly defined as an individual's view of themselves as a leader. What differentiates leadership identity construction theories (LICT) from other leadership theories is the shift in focus away from leader identity based upon group prototypicality, with greater interest in the role that others and society have in the process of constructing a leader identity (Lanka, Topakas and Patterson, 2020). More specifically, DeRue and Ashforth's (2010) LICT ascribes to the view that leader and follower identities are reciprocally established over time through a relational process of identity claims made by the leader and identity grants by followers (Marchiondo et al., 2015). LICT focuses on the interpersonal dynamics of the leader-follower identity interplay. This line of theorising addresses the gap in leadership identity theory uncovered in the meta-analysis of the literature on leadership and followership identity processes undertaken by Epitropaki et al. (2017).

With the focus on the interpersonal aspect of leadership identity construction, identity claims are defined as either direct (verbal) or indirect (non-verbal) actions that assert a leader identity. Whereas identity grants are direct or indirect actions that bestow a leader identity on another individual. This reciprocal claiming and granting cycle generates, over time, models of behaviour that reinforce the individual's view of themselves and the view others hold of them as a leader. This process, in turn, leads to the construction of their identity as a leader. DeRue and Ashforth's (2010) LICT proposes several ways an individual is granted a leader identity. This includes prior successful claims for leader identity, which leads people to see them as leaders even before making such a claim (DeRue and Ashforth, 2010). LICT does not assume that those granted or claim a follower identity necessarily assume a subordinate position. On the contrary, it suggests that the process is open to all, independent of their organisational standing or

hierarchical positions. DeRue and Ashford (2010) believe that identities are internalized at the individual level, reinforced at the relational level, and endorsed at the collective level. This multi-level approach is absent in many of the other leader identity theories. Adopting this framework is useful in exploring the interpersonal components that may also contribute to the construction of a leader identity (Epitropaki et al., 2017; Lanka, Topakas and Patterson, 2020). While these approaches recognize that the development of one's identity as a leader is a complex phenomenon that operates across multiple levels of analysis (Nielson and Pate, 2008), they fail to take into consideration the lifespan of the individuals and the contribution of early developmental processes and early life experiences (Day et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2020). Notwithstanding the potential value in exploring early leader development, it is only recently that leadership scholars have begun to explore leader development activities in adolescents. This could be attributed to the fact that, until recently, there were few theoretical models of leader development that incorporated these early childhood years (Murphy and Johnson, 2011). This theoretical lens was helpful in exploring the developmental leadership experiences of the participants during adolescence and how their early life experiences may have influenced their leader identities.

3.8 Leader Development Across the Lifespan

Early interest in the lifespan approach to leader development tended to adopt a narrow focus on understanding the effect of early influences on leadership outcomes by studying the relationship between children's attributes and leadership at the same point in time (Recchia, 2011) or by exploring the relationship between the adult outcomes and characteristics developed in early childhood (Popper, 2011). Contemporary thinking by leadership scholars adopting this lifespan approach ascribes to the view that the construction of a leader identity is an ongoing process that occurs over an individual's entire lifespan, encompassing the early years of life and extending into retirement (Day et al., 2009; Day and Dragoni, 2015). This approach suggests that consideration be given to *“every form of growth or stage of development in the life-cycle that promotes, encourages and assists the expansion of knowledge and expertise required to optimize one's leadership potential and performance”* (Brungardt,

1996, p. 83) in providing for an examination of the earliest seeds of leader development (Murphy and Johnson, 2011)

Lifelong leadership theorists believe that a holistic model of leader identity that incorporates an integrated theory of leader development, including family, school and work, is required to accommodate these additional lifelong developmental experiences (Liu et al., 2020). This model explores the full lifespan from a psychological perspective, including early childhood, adolescence, emerging adulthood, adulthood, and later adulthood (Erikson and Erikson, 1998; Liu et al., 2020). Leadership scholars who adopt the lifespan approach to understanding leader identity construction believe that there are specific opportunities for leader development that individuals encounter throughout their life. These encounters progressively contribute to their leader identity (Liu et al., 2020), provided they qualify as a leader-rich developmental opportunity (Van Velsor and McCauley, 2004) in that the encounters are challenging and provide a mechanism for feedback and receive support (Van Velsor and McCauley, 2004). Leaders readily acknowledge the value of life experiences in developing their leadership abilities (DeRue and Wellman, 2009).

Consequently, several frameworks have developed more recently that provide for an exploration of early life experiences that shape a leader's development over time. One such framework was Murphy and Johnson (2011), which incorporated three early developmental factors: early influences such as genetics and temperament, parental styles, and early learning experiences such as education and sports. Their framework incorporates the impact of those developmental factors on leader identity and draws on the view that leader identity is essential for leader development (Lord and Hall, 2005; Day, Harrison and Halpin, 2009), as well as the importance of self-regulation in driving motivational behaviours (Murphy and Johnson, 2011). Lui and colleagues (2020) propose a framework that uses an interdisciplinary perspective that considers the critical developmental experiences occurring at each stage in an individual's lifespan (Lui et al., 2020). They propose that these developmental experiences *"influence one's expertise in leadership through the mediating role and dynamic interaction of the leader*

experience processing system and the leader self-view system” (Lui et al., 2020, p. 1). More specifically, this model considers the potential influences of leader developmental outcomes and leader identity that emerge during the following five developmental life stages: Nascent (0-6 years), Externally driven (6-12), Experimental (12-18), Emerging Adulthood (18-30), Middle Adulthood (30-60) and Late Adulthood (60+), across the course of life and within multiple contexts. This long-lens approach has been adopted in this study with respect to the development of the participants’ leader identities and leader development.

3.9 Chapter Summary: Theoretical Framework

“Identity weaves together all of the aspects of ourselves and our various locations of ourselves with others and with the larger society” (Josselson, 1998, p. 28).

As noted previously, an emergent theoretical model that pulls from several distinct research traditions was used to respond to the aims of this study. The analytical framework for this study engages with posttraumatic growth, narrative identity, social identity, and leader identity theories over the life span to explore how the participants storied their early life experiences within the context of their later leadership identities. Figure 2, which follows on page 51, illustrates how these theories come together to form the theoretical framework of this study.

Posttraumatic Growth Theories

Posttraumatic growth theories (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Joseph, Murphy and Regel, 2012; Charbonneau-Dahlen, Lowe and Morris, 2016; and Marin and Shkreli, 2019) supported the research aims of this study by reinforcing the significant impact a traumatic event can have on the individual’s sense of who they are and how trauma can alter the very core of their identity. These growth theories provide insight into the processes by which the participants in this study made sense of their childhood experiences and how the trauma may have created “turning points” in their identity development. This line of theorising proved very helpful in supporting the aims of this study. However, while useful, posttraumatic growth theories fall short in

explaining the contribution that society plays in identity formation and how, if at all, these experiences influenced the construction of the participants' personal and leader identities over their life span or the formation of identity motives and competences related to their trauma.

Theoretical Framework

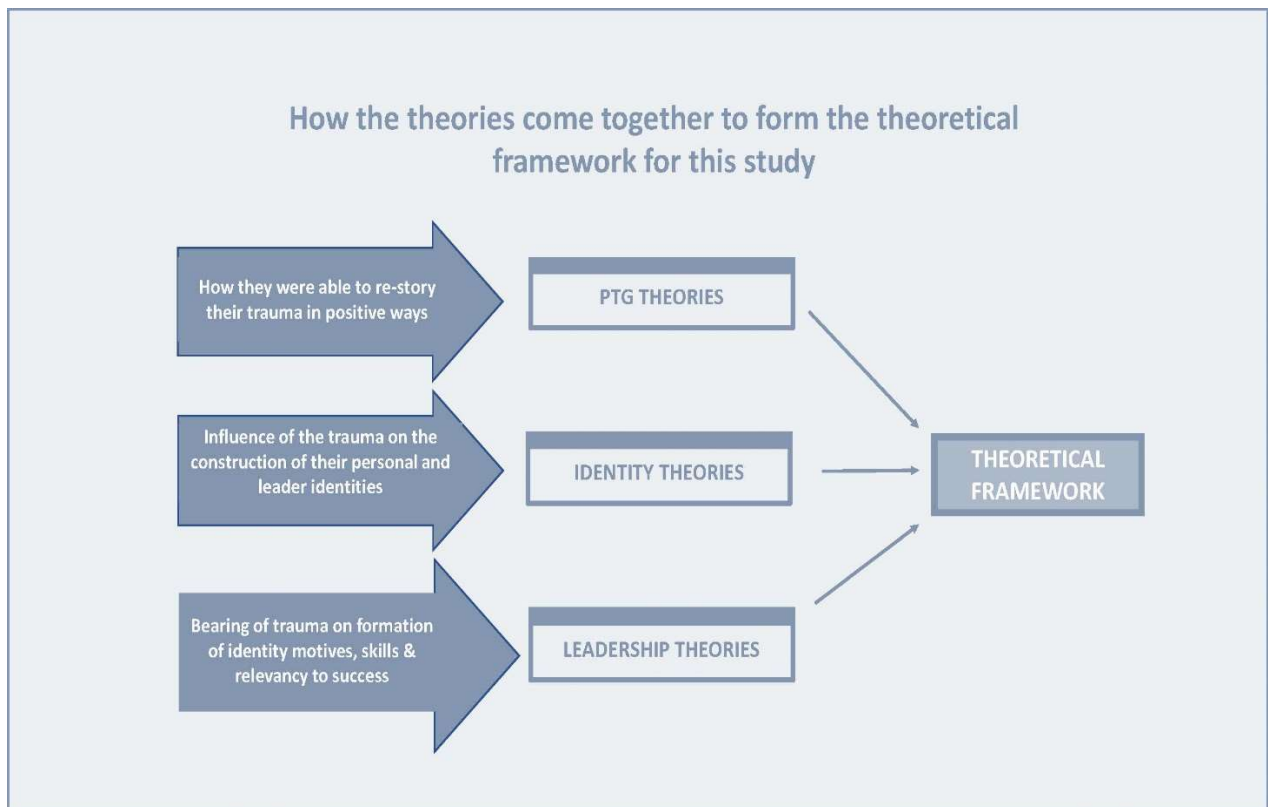


Figure 2: Theoretical framework

Identity Theories

Narrative identity theories (Lilgendahl and McAdams, 2011; Merrill, Waters and Fivush, 2016; Muldoon, Taylor and Norma, 2016; Marin and Shkreli, 2019; McAdams, 2021) are used to explore how the participants storied their early accounts within the context of their later identities. Narrative identity theories build upon and intersect with those of posttraumatic growth theorists and demonstrate the shared interest in the transformative capability of

narrative, particularly as it relates to childhood trauma (Marin and Shkreli, 2019; Penner, Gambin and Sharp, 2019; and Berman, Montgomery and Ratner, 2020). This line of theorising offered a useful set of ideas that facilitated the broader consideration of the transformative power of re-storying trauma. The study contributes to the field of narrative identity by drawing upon more recent theorising within organisational management studies that adopts a sensemaking approach to identity development (Vough, Caza and Maitlis, 2020; Maitlis, 2020, 2022). These theories focus on how sensemaking influences revisions and expansions of identity during and following trauma (Maitlis, 2009, 2020). These theorists believe that narrative and how individuals make sense of the trauma is *“not simply a way of describing reality, but a way of socially constructing reality”* (Maitlis, 2012, p. 492). This line of theorising aided the analysis of the sensemaking used by the participants to re-story their childhood trauma positively and adds to the work of Maitlis (2020) and McAdams (2021) by providing additional support for their claims that narrative identity and sensemaking are critical components of posttraumatic growth. Also, as noted previously, narrative theory has been used extensively in the study of trauma. These studies offered additional support for this research by shedding light on the participants' narrative re-storying processes that shaped their personal and leader identities.

Social identity and self-categorization categorization theories (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg and Abrams, 1988) make two key contributions to understanding the influence the participants' childhood experiences had on their individual and leader identity development. The study contributes to contemporary theorising that applies social identity theory to leader identity development (Ibarra et al., 2014), by exploring how the participants' sense of self was derived from their membership in assorted groups, the varied meanings associated with that group and how the differing forms of intergroup behaviour, defined norms and associated values shaped their personal and leader identities.

Leadership theories

Epistemologically, I believe that leadership is a complex and dynamic process that evolves over an individual's lifespan. As such, I chose to draw specifically on the more recent body of literature within the field of leader development that expands the social process of leadership identity development across an individual's entire life. (Riggio and Mumford, 2011; Murphy and Johnson, 2011 and Lui et al., 2020). This understanding was achieved by exploring how the early life experiences of the participants in this study influenced the construction of their leader identities over their life span. More specifically, it extends the work of Liu and colleagues (2020) that explores the early childhood origins of leadership by providing insight into how the participants' early formative experiences shaped the development of their leader identities and the development of their leadership skills from early childhood through to adulthood.

These leadership theories were also used to investigate the bearing of the participant's adversity on the formation of their identity motives and the relevancy of their competencies and motivations to their corporate success and leader identity constructions. The particular opportunities for leadership experiences presented in this study offer potential windows through which to theorise how leader identities can be developed from a range of activities and events (Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021). It also adds to knowledge of how socially related events, such as positive feedback, can influence leadership developmental trajectories, an area that has been understudied by leadership theorists (Day and Thornton, 2018). The descriptive stories of origin provided in this study offer further understandings of individuals' sensemaking of their leader identities and the role that leader identity plays in leader development.

Moreover, the rich accounts detailing the circumstances that led to the participants' trauma-inspired prosocial leadership add to an understanding of the role of trauma in leader identity development which has been a missing phenomenon for examination, particularly in the leadership development of female leaders.

Applying this conceptual framework allows for a richer understanding of the participants' leader identity construction that resulted in posttraumatic growth and how these processes developed a narrative identity that fused personal motivations, work identity and career choices. This approach makes a theoretical contribution and results in a deeper and more dynamic understanding of the research participants' lived experiences. These theories will be used to demonstrate the influence of the participants' early childhood trauma on the construction of their personal and leader identities within their sociohistorical context. To illuminate the processes that influenced the formation of the participants' identity motives and competencies, how they relate to their trauma, their relevancy to the participants' corporate success and how the participants were able to re-story their childhood trauma in positive ways.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Design

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter consists of six sections and sets out the research methodology and design applied to this study. I begin with an overview of my philosophical position and framework. It highlights why I chose to work from a subjectivist problematic, how it has influenced the research design and methodology and how it aligns with my overall philosophical positioning. Section Two details the approach and methodology adopted for this study and its relation to existing work in the field. Section Three introduces the research method, explaining why a narrative inquiry constructionist approach to the research was selected and positions the use of this approach in the study. Section Four details the data generation, recruitment and interviewing process used. In Section Five, I share the ethical considerations followed in this study to ensure “no harm was done” and the sensitive approach taken to the difficult conversations and intimate stories of sexual and physical abuse endured by the women in my study. The chapter concludes with an overview of the method used to analyse the data in the study. It details how it ties to the existing literature on interviewing difficult subject matter and specifies the process that was followed to code the data into themes and categories.

4.2 Section One: Philosophical framework

4.2.1 Background on framework

In 1979, Burrell and Morgan introduced the notion that research should align with researchers' individual views of reality (ontology) and how researchers deemed knowledge was acquired (epistemology) (Deetz, 1996). This position was predicated, in part, in response to the movement toward the increasing use of diverse qualitative research methodologies. Burrell and Morgan believed that the approach to research for someone who viewed reality as fluid and based on personal experiences was fundamentally different from that of a researcher whose view of reality was that knowledge was not personal and, therefore, could be objectively

researched (Cunliffe, 2011). Morgan and Smircich (1980) developed a typology depicting graphically these opposing views, which they labelled subjectivist and objectivist. They placed them on a continuum depicting their different philosophical perspectives and corresponding research methods. At one end of the spectrum was the objectivist stance that views the world as existing entirely outside of a person; that the *“social world is a hard, concrete, real thing out there”* (Morgan and Smircich, 1980, p. 495). At the opposite end of the spectrum are subjectivists who believe that the world is socially constructed and reflective of individual perceptions and experiences. Accordingly, they argued that the research methodologies of objectivists align with empirical research methods such as surveys and observations that focus on the study of structures and processes. Whereas for subjectivist researchers, whose view on reality is fluid and personal, methodologies are more congruent with understanding, for example, sensemaking through language and interactions.

Cunliffe (2011) recognized the further advancement of qualitative research in the intervening years and the use of more advanced qualitative methods that reflected broader underlying philosophical views on how knowledge is acquired. Building on Morgan and Smircich’s (1980) earlier work, Cunliffe (2011) introduced an updated typology, see Figure 3, p. 51. She updated Morgan and Smirich’s definitions of the objectivist and subjectivist problematics in consideration of these advances to theory and methodology through six additional dimensions, supported by existing literature. Cunliffe (2011) also expanded the typology to include the intersubjectivist problematic. The intersubjectivist stance of the world is that it is always viewed in relation to others and is focused on the *“we”* as opposed to the *“I”*. The following six additional dimensions formed the basis for Cunliffe’s expanded typology: *“relationality, durability, location of meanings, historicity mediation, and forms of knowledge”* (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 653). Consistent with Morgan and Smircich, Cunliffe maintains that researchers’ views on the world, the corresponding ways in which they formulate their research, and their related ways of hypothesizing remain fairly consistent within each problematic (Cunliffe, 2011). As noted earlier, I used this expanded typology to assist me in situating my philosophical beliefs and

ensuring that the methodology and approaches to my research were consistently aligned with these beliefs.

4.2.2 Philosophical Overview

In situating my philosophical beliefs within the three knowledge problematics: Objectivist, Subjectivist and Intersubjectivist (Cunliffe, 2011), I do not position myself within the objectivist problematic as I do not believe that reality exists outside of us. Nor do I believe that predictive theories can be generally applied to the greater population. While I believe that our interactions with others influence us, I do not believe that we are “always” in relation to others, always embedded in the “we-ness” of what occurs in the moment, or that meaning is always jointly constructed. Simply put, my perspective is that knowledge is personal, based on our personal experiences and situated within the broader context of our socially and historically constructed macro views on society.

Consistent with the seminal writings of Berger and Luckmann (1967), I believe we are an outcome of the various interactions we have with our environment and the people within that environment, and that each forever changes us and every interaction we have, but always within the broader societal and historical contexts in which we live. Some of those interactions result in immeasurable changes, while other interactions forever alter our way of seeing and making sense of the world. Whereas an intersubjectivist believes that we are “always” in relation to others and that meaning is made together, I believe that we are individuals whose meaning can change depending on the context and our own interpretations. This cycle repeats itself as we move through life such that we are always interpreting our world based on those interactions and the perceptions fed back to us by those with whom we interact. Additionally, my views align with that of Gergen and Gergen (2010) and Hollway and Jefferson (2013), who maintain that those ever-changing perceptions are anchored by socially constructed norms, values, and principles that, in turn, influence the outcomes of our unique individual, life-changing interactions.

Using a visual tool (Figure 3), my philosophical beliefs were plotted along the dimensions identified in the Problematic Typology (Cunliffe, 2011). The results on the continuum demonstrate a strong alignment with the subjectivist problematic expressed by Cunliffe and the views of reality and knowledge that I have conveyed above.

“The subjectivist problematic is one in which the ontology is generally accepted as based on historically, socially and/or linguistically situated experiences; as culturally situated understanding relative to particular contexts, times, places, individual, and/or group of people... where there are “truths” rather than one truth; and where meaning, sensemaking and knowledge are relative to the time, place, and manner in which they are constructed“. (Cunliffe, 2011, pp. 656)

Accordingly, the research design adopted for this study was fluid and evolving and based on an epistemology of discovery. While I do not believe it is possible to enter research without some early formative theories, however preliminary, I could not reliably predict what information would emerge from the interviews.

Cunliffe’s Typology

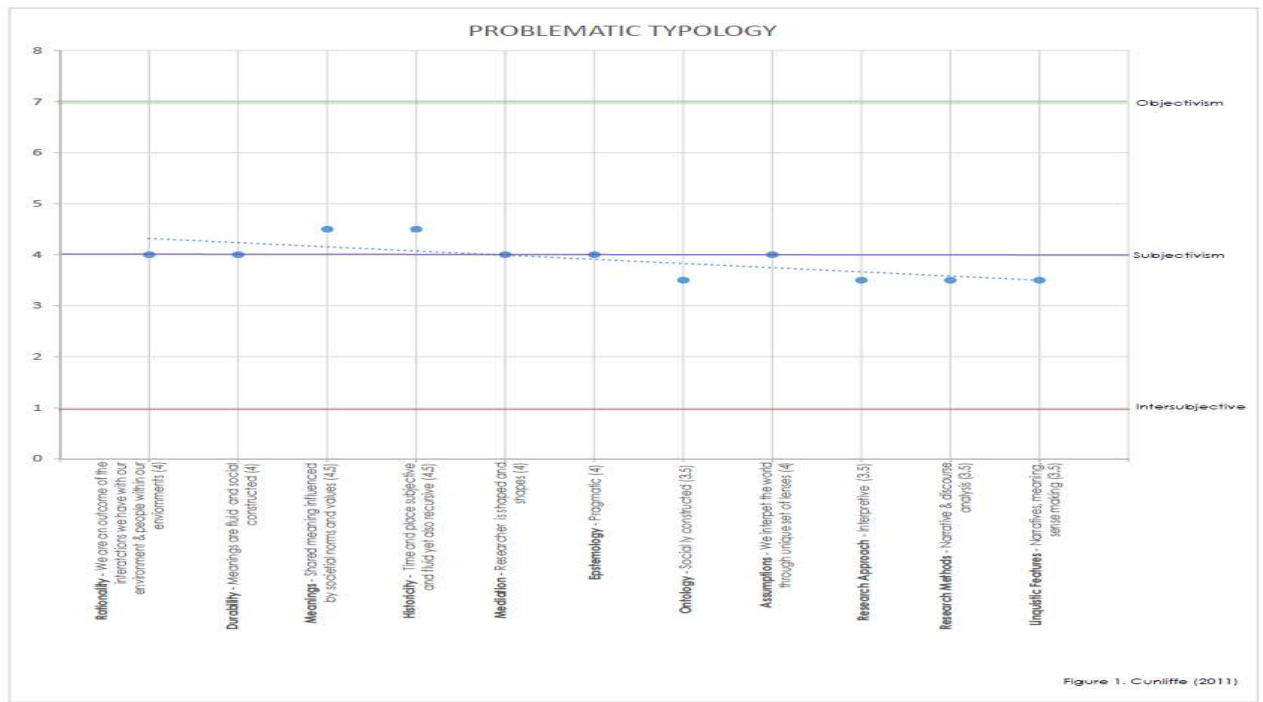


Figure 3: Problematic typology

This approach aligns well with Cunliffe's subjectivist problematic in that I am not looking for one truth but rather leaving myself open to fully explore whatever direction the research took. In addition, it aligns with the more inductive nature of the study. Finally, it reflects my view on reality that the interpretations of the circumstances, feelings and sensemaking of the experiences by the participants in my research, are unique to them and based on their own inimitable experiences, interactions, and environments.

This problematic provided the latitude to approach the research with an epistemology of discovery and to fully explore the distinctive experiences of the research participants within the broader context in which their abuse occurred. Specifically, it allowed for an in-depth exploration of how the participants were able to re-story their childhood trauma in positive ways and the influence of their childhood trauma on the construction of their personal and leader identities over their life span.

I adopted an interpretive approach to the stories shared with me by the women I interviewed. This approach affected my data collection and analysis choice as I wanted to explore the research participants' life stories within their broader social contexts.

“The stories we bring as researchers are also set within the institutions within which we work, the social narratives of which we are a part, the landscape on which we live”.
(Clandinin and Connolly, 2000, p. 64).

This line of thinking ties to this study in that I commenced the research with the belief that my personal experiences with childhood trauma would inform my research. It aligns with the constructionist view of narrative inquiry in that the meaning of stories told is neither stated nor are they created, but rather they are construed by the participants, the researcher and the reader. I further believed that the participants in my study would identify with the view that we shared a common history of abuse and that this could render them more comfortable sharing their stories.

4.3 Section Two: Research Approach to Narrative Inquiry

A phenomenological approach was initially considered for this study. However, this approach would have been more appropriate if the study were seeking to understand the lived experiences of the participants in specific relation to their childhood abuse. This research goes beyond simply understanding the abuse as an event, given that the abuse took place over time. The intent of this study is to gather the rich data that one gathers from the eliciting of stories to shed light on how the participants were able to re-story their childhood trauma in positive ways, the influence of their childhood trauma on the construction of their personal and leader identities over their life span and to gain an understanding of the formation of identity motives and competences related to their trauma and their relevancy to the participants' corporate success.

4.3.1 Narrative Inquiry - A Definition in the Making

Narrative inquiry is a growing interdisciplinary field, which gained initial interest in the field of social sciences and subsequently moved into the arts and humanities. More recently, management and organisational studies scholars have adopted it and applied it, for example, to the study of leadership (Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Narrative inquiry is focused on researching and analysing stories people create and share. The underlying concept of narrative inquiry is that it is through these shared stories that people make sense of their changing world (Viney and Bousfield, 1991; Jirek, 2017; Marin and Shkreli, 2019; McAdams, 2019) and that it allows the researcher – through the richness of the stories told – the ability to gain a deeper understanding of peoples' experiences.

The growing popularity of narrative inquiry is evidenced by the increasing number of studies across multiple disciplines which employ this research framework and the extensive and mounting number of writings on this topic (Czarniawska, 2004; Gergen and Gergen, 2010; Lilgendahl and McAdams, 2011; McAdams, 2021). While the literature on the topic is growing, there does not appear to be a consistent or concise definition of either narrative inquiry or narrative research (Riessman, 1993; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998). Today the

definition of narrative inquiry is far more complex and varied. The varying definitions of narrative inquiry stem from differing epistemological underpinnings outlined in a further section, see pages 62 to 65. However, despite these differing definitions, narrative researchers all agree that there is much to learn from the stories people share.

4.3.2 Foundational Blocks: The Movement of Researchers to Narrative Inquiry

The increase in local, contextual, and qualitatively informed research resulted in a turn to narrative inquiry. In *“What is Narrative Research”*, Andrews and colleagues (2008) contend that the shift towards narrative inquiry resulted from two concurrent academic post-war movements. The first movement was the rising interest in a more humanistic approach to research, centred on understanding the person as a whole while focusing on their life stories. The second movement expanded upon the work first introduced by Russian formalists Propp and Tomashevski (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2008). Propp and Tomashevski made the distinction between a story and a plot. They asserted that the story was the action, whereas the plot was how one learned of the action. This second movement - which expanded this notion into a more constructionist way of considering narrative - was introduced in the 1970s by post-structuralists: Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2008). These launched a more critical way of thinking that required understanding narratives and narrative structure.

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) put forth that this movement to narrative inquiry, from more traditional positivist approaches, was not simply the result of the shift to more local and contextually based forms of research. Rather, it was a measured and fundamental change in how certain researchers came to view their world, which then translated into how they approached their research. This shift in researchers’ epistemologies across multiple fields of study created this move towards narrative inquiry. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) argue that, while the approaches and methods of analysis vary amongst narrative researchers and the degree to which their thinking shifted, they all shared the same four basic moves in their thinking. This turn in thinking occurred in four areas: 1) the relationship of the researcher and

the research, 2) the turn from numbers to words as data, 3) a change in focus from the general to the specific, and 4) the shift from the belief that there was one accepted way of knowing to the belief that there are multiple ways of knowing (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007).

4.3.3 Theoretical Differences and Associated Approaches within Narrative Inquiry

The many definitions of narrative inquiry stem from differing epistemological underpinnings. This wide range of theoretical perspectives espoused by various narrative inquiry researchers is evidenced by the different methodological approaches they employ in terms of what they choose to emphasize in their research and how they conduct their research. Squire and colleagues (2014) broadly defined these differences as either Event-centred or experienced-centred (Squire et al., 2014).

4.3.4 Event-centred Approach to Narrative Inquiry.

Event-centred narrative researchers believe that stories must progress in a linear fashion and that any deviance from that natural order alters the story's meaning. This approach is based on the underlying theory that how the individual shares the story reflects their internal thought process (Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach and Lieblich, 2008) and that conscious and unconscious meaning exist. Event-centred narrative researchers adopt a structured or semi-structured approach to how they advance their research, focusing on the temporality and structure of the stories.

The Event-centred, organisational view is found predominantly in psychology and the social sciences. This structural approach is useful because it provides a clear mechanism to isolate narratives within the research content. However, this approach makes no allowance for stories that overlap, are disjointed, or are extremely long and cover longer timeframes. Given that this study was an exploration of identity construction over the life span of the participants, it was not deemed appropriate for this study.

Life stories provide the explanation of what the person is at present. In telling their life stories, people construct a longitudinal version of self which explains and justifies the present self (Shamir and Eilam, 2005, p. 17)

4.3.5 Experienced-centred Approach to Narrative Inquiry

An experience-centred narrative researcher focuses on the person as a whole, their experiences, how their identities are constructed over time and how their individual life experiences infuse the data shared through their stories. While the Event-centred approach is commonly used in psychology and social science, the experience-centred approach has been more widely adopted in management and organisational studies (Czarniawska and Pasquale, 2003; DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Ibarra et al., 2014). The approach is context-based and takes a holistic view with particular attention to life histories, biographies, and case studies. Unlike the Event-centred approach that assumes the stories shared by individuals remain constant over time, the experience-centred approach accepts that stories do change over time, to the extent that the same person may tell a particular story in many different ways. The primary theory underpinning experience-centred research is based on the phenomenological assumption that experiences, once expressed as stories, move into consciousness and shape the individual (Squire et al., 2014) and that these stories enable people to make sense of their world.

4.3.6 Variations within the Experience-centred Approach

The approach that experience-centred researchers choose depends on their interpretation and definition of narrative inquiry. Some researchers explore all aspects of subjectivity that fall both within and outside the narrative. This psychoanalytical approach can be found in the work of Strickland, 1994; Frosh, 2003 and Hollway and Jefferson, 2013. These researchers explore what the personal narratives reveal about individual thoughts and emotions, regardless of whether the narrative speaks to an event or experience (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997). They are particularly interested in understanding how individual meaning is made within the broader societal context. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Other researchers take an “applied” approach in that they believe that the stories influence the lives of the people that tell them. In particular, these researchers believe that, as people tell and re-tell their stories, they are unconsciously internalized and processed and therefore shape the person. Researchers with this view include Josselson and Lieblich (1999) and Cohler (2008).

Another approach is a co-constructed approach that views narrative as a form of social code. These researchers are particularly interested in the meaning of the narrative within the context of broader society, which also considers the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Researchers, such as McAdams (1995), argue that stories are psychosocially constructed based on the interactions of the storyteller and the broader context in which they live. He developed the life story model of narrative identity (McAdams, 1996), forming the platform from which many narrative inquiry researchers approach their interviews. These stories have a psychosocial orientation in that they are stories based on individual experiences but within the broader psycho-societal context. While no two life stories are the same, McAdams (2006) argues that they all contain the two common threads: agency versus communion and redemption versus contamination. Stories that emphasize communion stress conformity to the broader society. At the same time, stories with a focus on agency are underscored by individual accomplishments. McAdams (2006) describes a story that is contaminated as one that starts as good but ends poorly. Whereas a redemptive story is one in which the person overcomes adversity. McAdams (2006) believes that these life stories provide awareness into an individual’s subjective interpretation of their past experiences, how they made meaning of their past, and how they foresee their future unfolding. Scholars who adopt a sensemaking approach to narrative inquiry -- recently in organisational management – focus on the ways sensemaking influences revisions and expansions to identity during and after trauma (Maitlis, 2009, 2020).

In conclusion, and as noted above, while there are variances in how the researcher approaches their research, narrative inquiry researchers all agree that the stories people tell provide rich data about their lives and experiences from which to theorise.

My research is very personal and requires an in-depth understanding of the early childhood experiences of the participants. This can best be accomplished by gaining an appreciation of how the participants made sense of their experiences, how they were able to re-story their childhood trauma in positive ways and the influence of their childhood trauma on the construction of their personal and leader identities over their life span. These all lend themselves to the experience-centred narrative inquiry constructionist framework.

As noted in the introduction of the thesis, this narrative inquiry study incorporated an embodied reflexive lens. For this study, I adopted the definition of embodied reflexivity proposed by Leigh and Brown (2021). Their definition proposes that studies using embodied reflexivity include a conscious awareness by the researcher of their body, mind, thoughts, feelings, sensations and responses as well as those under study. As such, throughout the interviewing process, I took careful note of physical responses, changes in tone, what the participants wore, how they sat, and my own physical and emotional responses. Similarly, to other forms of qualitative research, narrative inquiry is motivated by the desire to understand the perspective of those under study (Bresler, 2006). This is particularly true for research on sensitive topics where the researcher strives to achieve an *“empathetic connection to allow a space for others to articulate experiences in the process of reflecting on meaning”* (Bresler, 2006, p. 25). Empathic understanding can be best achieved through the effective use of embodied reflexivity, which is proposed to lend itself to the narrative inquiry approach to research (Bresler, 2006; Hefferon and Kampman, 2020; Leigh and Brown, 2021).

The study included in-depth interviews conducted in person. I adopted an inductive approach to each interview and, in an attempt to capture as much rich data as possible, the interviews were unstructured and free flowing. I borrowed lightly from McAdam’s (2004) and Atkinson’s (1998) life story model, starting each interview with the question: *“Tell me your life story, in as much or as little information as you feel comfortable sharing”*. This form of questioning is conducive to the embodied reflexive lens as it is exploratory in nature (Leigh and Brown, 2021). In deviation from McAdams’ model, I chose not to adopt the more structured approach to

interviewing as I deemed the model too constraining for this study. One advantage of narrative inquiry is the flexibility it affords the researcher. Traditional methodological practices do not bind narrative inquiry researchers. Rather, they have the flexibility to use whatever tools they deem necessary to enable them to understand the stories they are told, how the people who tell them make meaning of their experiences and then “*theorise about it in insightful ways*” (Wertz et al., 2011, p 225). This is a well-accepted approach within narrative inquiry that considers the full context of the story (Tracy, 2013).

4.3.7 Narrative Inquiry: Strength and Weaknesses

There are several arguments for and against the use of narrative inquiry in qualitative research. A vocal opponent of narrative inquiry is Atkinson (1997), who takes the position that narrative researchers privilege the data they collect in that they believe that it provides greater validity and meaning than data gathered through more traditional sources (Thomas, 2010). Atkinson (1997) critiques illness narrative researchers (Mishler, 1986 and Frank, 1995), whom he states, by “*celebrating the voices*” (Atkinson, 1997, p. 339), are devoid of any analysis concerning formal structure. Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) also claim that the increasing complexities of today’s society can be best served with methods that also consider integrating culture and society. They argue that an exclusive focus on the story as it is told is both limiting and inadequate (Squire et al., 2014; Kerr et al., 2019; Maitlis, 2012, 2020).

Opponents of narrative research reject the subjectivity embraced by proponents of narrative inquiry and argue that it adversely affects the validity of the data gathered. Conversely, advocates of narrative research renounce the notion of neutrality, particularly concerning research on sensitive topics such as trauma, illness, or abuse. Instead, they argue that the researcher is ethically obliged to adopt a position of empathy when dealing with such matters, yet always within balance (Thomas, 2010). Furthermore, many narrative researchers (Mishler, 1990; Riessman, 1990; Bruner, 2004; Polkinghorne, 2007 and Thomas, 2010) take the position that a researcher can’t be completely neutral.

“I come to the analysis of the illness narratives with a standpoint that has been inextricably professionally and personally forged.... from these and other starting points, any claims made to neutrality or objectivity would be clearly spurious, indeed deceitful”. (Thomas, 2010, p. 656)

Narrative inquiry allows for a completely unstructured interview that permitted me to respond flexibly to comments made by the research participants. In addition, by creating distance from the trauma (Frank, 2000), narrative inquiry provided the means for the women in this study to share their experiences in a non-threatening way.

“Storytellers do not call for their narratives to be analysed; they call for other stories in which experiences are shared, commonalities discovered, and relationships built”. (Frank, 2000, p. 355).

Finally, narrative researchers view the theoretical complexity and multiplicity of methods available within the narrative framework as a major strength (Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004). In this study, it afforded me the flexibility to adopt methods I deemed would yield optimal results. It left me open to “discovery”; to explore each different “individual truth” as expressed by the research participants. Furthermore, it provided me with the latitude to let the participants choose the interview venues that provided them with the greatest degree of comfort.

4.3.8 Existing Related Work in this Field

Historically, trauma and childhood abuse have been researched and analysed using quantitative, positivist methodologies in clinical practice. These methods have focused principally on capturing data and are understood in terms of psychiatry by looking exclusively at the physiological and psychological impacts of these early childhood experiences on pre-determined psychological dimensions (Rutter, 1987; Anthony, 1974; Aldwin, Levenson and Spiro, 1994; Ryff and Singer, 1996; Joseph, Murphy and Regel, 2012). Earlier research focused on the individuals as objects, applicability to clinical treatment and generalizability to the broader population, despite the more current research (Maercker and Hecker, 2016) that

advocates the importance of social context and the positive relationship between family, peers, and society on recovery from trauma.

One of the overriding contributing factors to the continued reliance on quantitative methodologies is that research into childhood abuse is often related to various government policies, community stakeholders and associated government funding (Padgett and Henwood, 2009; Khankeh et al., 2015). Consequently, there has been a requirement to demonstrate the reliability, validity and generalisability of the data collected, which can be best demonstrated - in the eyes of government policymakers - through large-scale, survey-based and positivist methodologies.

The learnings and approaches from this early positivist research have proven useful in that they demonstrated the veracity of the objective data collected. However, the data was premised on the belief that the “self” existed solely as an object that could be determined. These views of trauma are such that trauma can be researched by analysing the “self” in the same fashion as one would examine an object and applied in general terms to all trauma victims (Crossley, 2000). Traditional quantitative research methodology is also limiting in that it is restricted to analyses of questions that can be measured and controlled. Quantitative survey-based and objectivist interviews answer the “what” and the “who” but fail to answer the more critical questions of “how” and “why” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). Contrarily, qualitative research methodology captures the full contextual experience: the thoughts, feelings, expectations, meaning and opinions (Malterud, 2001).

While there does not appear to be broad acceptance of research that is based solely on an interpretivist constructionist approach (Karnilowics and Phillimore, 2014), the growing use of narratives and storytelling is proving a useful technique in aiding victims of abuse to share their experiences (Pereira da Silva, 2017). More recent studies have examined the use of trauma narratives together with identity (Penner, Gambin and Sharp, 2019, Maitlis, 2020). These recent qualitative studies have taken a more comprehensive and holistic approach to understanding

the effects of trauma and adverse events and their influence on identity formation. While there are several more examples, below are just a few illustrations of how researchers have incorporated this approach into their respective studies.

Priya (2015) demonstrated the usefulness of the social constructionist paradigm in his study of the effects of violence inflicted by the government of India on poor farmers in response to the farmers' resistance to having their land appropriated. He believed a traditional intra-psychic approach to studying trauma would be ontologically irrelevant in the Indian culture, where there is little to no value placed on the individual self (Priya, 2015). Marin and Shkreli (2019) conducted a study that explored the ways in which narrative rumination and self-reflection related to identity. More recently, Maitlis (2022) applied sensemaking and self-narratives to her study of forced career transitions. Other studies have also incorporated psychosocial analyses to enhance understanding further. In addition to exploring discursive narrative approaches, Ford (2010) also adopted a psychosocial overlay to her research on organisational leadership. This critical approach provided a different lens that shed light on how leadership is shaped by the gender, cultural and social context, and individual experiences of leaders and how these unique individual experiences shape leadership.

4.4 Section Three: A Narrative Inquiry Constructionist Approach

In determining the best approach and methodology for this research, I established which methods were more likely to achieve the study's aims. Once identified, I selected the approach that I would be most comfortable using and the methods that aligned with my skills as an early researcher. I adopted a social constructionist subjectivist approach to my research (Cunliffe, 2011), using narrative inquiry and storytelling to capture rich data and an embodied reflexive lens. This approach aligns with my belief that our way of making sense of the world is influenced by our interactions with people but always within the context of perceived societal norms and values. While embodied reflexivity aligns with my belief that communication extends beyond the verbal form and that human understanding is embodied. The social constructionist framework allows for a broader understanding that encompasses the full emotional experience

within the socio-economical, cultural, and historical contexts (Sampson, 1993; Weber, 2002; Gergen, 2015). It also provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between individual experiences and discourses about physical and sexual abuse in the context of the individuals' cultural and socio-economic environment (Weber, 2002; Gibson and Rohleder, 2006).

“In the field of child abuse, for example, which traditionally has drawn on objectivist assumptions, there is an awareness that, as a phenomenon, child maltreatment is more like pornography than whooping cough. It is a socially constructed phenomenon which reflects values and opinions of a particular culture at a particular time” (Department of Health, 1995, p.848, as cited by Houston, 2001).

The social constructionist framework falls within the subjectivist problematic and aligns well with my philosophical beliefs. The research is very personal and required an in-depth understanding of the early childhood first-hand experiences of the participants. This was best accomplished by gaining an appreciation of how the participants made sense of their experiences, how they were able to re-story their childhood trauma in positive ways and the influence of their childhood trauma on the construction of their personal and leader identities over their life span. These all lent themselves to a social constructionist framework. In social constructionism, language, discourse, and storytelling are deemed to be how we construct our identity and our place in the world and have been used across multiple cultures to help people make sense of their lives.

My personal history is similar to that of the participants in that I, too, have a history of early childhood abuse and early career success. This afforded me a distinctive, ‘insider’ perspective as a researcher, enabling me to relate to the research participants. In addition, it allowed the participants to identify with me, which aligns well with the emic approach to the study. An emic perspective is the “insider’s” view of reality and is one of the guiding concepts of qualitative research (Olive, 2014). Moreover, given the sensitive nature of my research and my own experiences with trauma, I felt it was important to be conscious of the emotional and physical impact that hearing these stories would have on me personally.

While this afforded certain advantages, it also presented the risk of bias as I entered the research with my own associated meanings of early childhood abuse. This influenced how the interview data was interpreted and the interview dynamics. To account for this, the subjectivist problematic acknowledges the existence of a reflexive relationship between the researcher and the research participants and the subsequent biases that the researcher brings to the research (Cunliffe, 2011). Given my personal experiences with childhood abuse, I freely acknowledge a higher risk of bias in approaching my research from a subjectivist problematic than from that of the objectivistic problematic. However, I needed to move beyond the traditional objectivist textbook-based methods and ways of conceptualizing and generalizing abuse outcomes. Instead, I focused on understanding how these women made sense of their experiences within their unique past, present and future contexts. I believe that we all come into this world as unique beings and that we continue our journey through life forever and constantly changing in response to our individual experiences, influenced by our interactions with others, anchored by societal norms, influences, and structures. It is with this overriding philosophical belief that I approached my research with this group of women.

I mitigated this bias with a reflective journal, see appendix 5, wherein I introspectively explored and logged how I may have influenced the interviews and the research findings. I adopted the “reflexivity as an introspection approach”, as presented by Finlay (2002), which focused my attention on my own experiences, meanings, and ways of interpreting the interviews. This journal highlighted and sensitised me to my own subjectivities while concurrently informing others of the impact these biases will have on my research. Rather than having a deleterious effect on the research, I hope that my experiences have resulted in the emergence of more intimate understandings that will enrich the overall study.

4.4.1 Conclusion

A narrative inquiry, experience-centred approach - with an epistemological constructionist underpinning - that incorporates an embodied reflexive lens - aligns well with the philosophical positioning of my research. It endorses my belief that the research participants all have their

unique stories to tell and that communication is multimodal. It considers the external contextual social and cultural influences that occur across the lifespan. Maercker and Hecker (2016) take the position that the nature of trauma is such that it cannot be researched in isolation from the socio-environmental context in which the trauma occurred as these factors play such a critical role in understanding the potential consequences of trauma. This approach aligns well with my research philosophy as I believe the participants and I are reflexively embedded in our social and physical world and that the participants' experiences are subjective yet always contextualized (Cunliffe, 2011). Narrative construction and the use of storytelling, with an embodied reflexive approach, recognize the role of the researcher in the research while providing the potential to capture and represent the participants' lived experiences in a manner that encompasses the complexity of bodily encounters (McMahon and McGannon, 2016). My philosophical beliefs align well with the subjectivist problematic and have strongly influenced my choices concerning my research approach, design, methodology, methods, data capture, and analysis.

4.5 Section Four: Data Generation: The Recruitment of Participants

Recruitment of the research participants was via an organisation consisting of senior executives of major corporations, of which I have been a member since 1996. Acceptance into this organisation is by invitation only, and potential members must satisfy stringent minimum criteria concerning their position within the company, its size, the number of employees, and its annual revenue, all of which must be validated by a recognized audit firm. Approaching potential participants through this organisation ensured that the participants targeted met the study criteria. The criteria for this study were three-fold. Firstly, the women must hold or have held the position of CEO, President, Managing Director, or equivalent title. Secondly, their respective companies must have annual revenues greater than USD 13 Million or funds under management greater than \$USD 260 Million with 50 or more full-time employees. Thirdly, the women must have experienced sustained early childhood sexual abuse. For this study, sustained sexual abuse was defined as sexual abuse for a period of time greater than six months. Within this organisation, there are two sub-networks: A women's only network and a

second highly selective network comprised of owner-operators and CEOs for hire. The second CEO network is again by invitation only and is reserved for those members who have achieved a high level of life success within their particular industry. Through these two organisations' communication portals, I posted the initial request seeking participants for the research study. The posting invited those who had experienced early childhood sexual abuse to respond, see Appendix 1, "Posting".

Once an individual had expressed an interest in participating in the study, a brief teleconference was arranged to respond to any questions they had concerning the study and confirm that they met the study research criteria. The consent process commenced once the participants agreed to take part in the research and again after they had been screened over the phone. Immediately following each screening call, the research participants were provided with an information sheet that detailed the aims, consent, and confidential handling of the data, see Appendices 2a and 2b. The major points from each of these forms were highlighted. Confirmation concerning anonymity was provided, and the participants were advised that, while the study would include their words verbatim, any details that would suggest their identity would not be included. The participants were cautioned of the potential risk associated with their re-telling of painful memories, and they were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time; one participant withdrew from the study. A copy of the consent form was received before each interview, and the participants were advised that all interviews would be audio recorded.

4.5.1 Profile of Research Participants

All eight women in the study were CEOs of companies based in Canada or the United States. Seven of the eight women had post-secondary education, with all but one having earned an undergraduate degree. Two women have post-graduate degrees, with one having earned two PhDs, see Table 4. While several of the participants experienced verbal and physical abuse, all eight research participants have a history of early childhood sexual abuse, which commenced

around the ages of four to six and continued until they reached puberty, approximately ten to twelve years old.

The study sample consisted of one Black Hispanic, one South-East Asian, one Latin American and five Caucasians. In terms of the socio-economic background in which these women were raised, one of the participants came from a new affluent working class, one was raised in an established middle-class family, two came from traditional working-class families, and the remaining four participants were raised in a precariat class, see demographic data in Table 4 below.

Demographics of the Research Participants

| Research Participant | Age | Ethnicity | Education | Position | Socioeconomic |
|----------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| No. 1 | mid 40s | Black Hispanic | PhDs (2) | CEO/Founder | Established Middle Class |
| No. 2 | early 50s | Latin American | under graduate degree | CEO/Founder | Traditional Working Class |
| No. 3 | late 50s | SE Asian | under graduate degree | CEO | Traditional Working Class |
| No. 4 | late 40s | Caucasian | MBA/PhD | CEO/Founder | New Affluent Workers |
| No. 5 | late 40s | Caucasian | high school | CEO/Founder | Precariat |
| No. 6 | early 50s | Caucasian | under graduate degree | CEO | Precariat |
| No. 7 | 50s | Caucasian | under graduate degree | CEO | Precariat |
| No. 8 | early 50s | Caucasian | under graduate degree | CEO | Precariat |

Table 4: Summary of participant demographics. Social classifications as per Savage et al. (2013).

4.5.2 The Interviewing Process

There were sixteen in-depth face-to-face interviews completed over approximately three months; two separate interviews were held with each research participant. Two of the interviews were conducted in 2017, and the remaining fourteen interviews took place in August and September 2018, respectively. Each interview lasted, on average, 3.5 to 4.0 hours for an approximate total of 7 to 8 hours per research participant. Long interviews have been defined as interviews lasting more than 3 hours, either in a single session or successive sessions (Crawford, Chiles and Elias, 2021). Long interviews are deemed effective when exploring complex experiences and broad research questions (Bansal, 2018), such as how early childhood

abuse influenced the construction of the participants' personal and leader identities over their lifespan. Furthermore, as this study explored the life history of the participants, it required additional time (Atkinson, 1998) to cultivate rich insights and a holistic understanding of their life experiences. *“Long interviews are an important but little-used door to generate rich story-laden data, and that provides researchers with the flexibility to deviate from the rigid rules of rigorous scientific processes in order to engage in embodied and reflexive research processes”* (Crawford, Chiles and Elias, 2021, p. 341).

The interviews were scheduled over separate days to provide the participants with additional time to become familiar with the process and increase their comfort level with the researcher. Scheduling over multiple days also provided both the participant and the researcher with the opportunity to review and reflect on the first interview before conducting the second interview. Life stories interviews are typically held over two to three days, with each interview lasting one and a half hours or more. Ideally, life story interviews should be conducted over more than one day as it is believed that *“much can be learned in a two-part or three-part interview that extends over three hours”* (Atkinson, 1998, p. 24). Scheduling over two days also provided the opportunity to probe into areas of interest and seek clarification, where required. This is consistent with the view that people are naturally reluctant to be completely open and transparent with the researcher, such that more than one interview is recommended (Seidman, 1991, taken from Polkinghorne, “Validity in Narrative Research”, 2007). The value of a second interview is echoed by Hollway and Jefferson (2005), who believe that the second interview provides the means by which the researcher can further explore emergent theories while concurrently providing the research participant with an opportunity for reflection.

The interviews took place in either Canada or the United States, in the city where each research participant resided. Every research participant was provided with the option to choose the location where they wished to be interviewed. However, it was recommended that the venue selected lend itself to the nature of the interview and that it provide adequate privacy. The rationale for providing the participants with the choice of venue was threefold. Firstly, it allowed them to select an environment that afforded them the greatest degree of comfort.

Secondly, it gave the participant a sense of control over the interview process. Finally, I believed that the choice of location could provide further insight. Moreover, it is believed that providing research participants with some control over the interview process, either via unstructured/semi-structured interviews or the choice of location, empowers the participants and facilitates richer narratives (Mishler, 1986).

Before each interview, the confidentiality protocols were reviewed. Every participant was given the opportunity to ask questions concerning the research study and the interview format. At the start of each subsequent interview, the research participants were provided with the opportunity to ask questions and share any thoughts or comments resulting from the initial interview.

As noted earlier, the first interview did not have pre-established questions. Rather, the interviews were free-flowing and began with a simple: "Tell me your story". I suggested the participants begin their life story with whichever life chapter they chose, i.e., their early years, teenage years, etc. The reason for not having a set of pre-determined questions aligns with my epistemology of discovery and that of the narrative inquiry methodology. I did not want to guide the conversation in any particular direction or toward a particular theme. Just as I believe their stories are unique, I believe that the research participants' ways of communicating their stories are also unique. The second interview with each participant was semi-structured. Questions were raised on areas of interest that arose from the first interview, and clarification was sought on comments made that were not immediately clear. Research has shown that when interview participants are not interrupted, they tend to speak for long periods (Riessman, 2008). As such, I spoke only when required.

As revealed earlier, I had exclusive access to a significant group of women who were willing to share their stories hoping that this research would lead to case interventions that may significantly improve the lives of young girls and women who have suffered abuse. Just as I believe in the importance of considering the sociohistorical context during which the trauma occurred for the research participants in this study, I believe it is equally important to consider

the sociohistorical context during which these interviews occurred. More specifically, the Kavanaugh hearings were taking place at the time of the interviews. The Kavanaugh hearings concerned the appointment of a United States Supreme Court nominee, Brett Kavanaugh, whose confirmation was delayed due to allegations that he sexually assaulted another teenager whilst they both were in high school. The hearings were held concurrently with the rise of the “#Me Too” movement, and both were frequently discussed in the media. The #Me Too movement, introduced by a social activist, was introduced to promote “empowerment through empathy” for women who had experienced sexual abuse. The prominence of these two events served to further liberate discussions on sexual abuse and provided me with an additional window of opportunity to advance these discussions. This is illustrated by the one participant who had never spoken of her past prior to these two events - not even to her husband of over thirty years. A conversation with her father-in-law regarding the “#Me Too” movement and the Kavanaugh hearings prompted her to speak with me. By way of demonstration of the context within which my research took place, I report below a participant’s comments relating to the contemporary climate wherein the participant, galvanized by the following encounter with her father-in-law in which he uttered: “So, this Kavanaugh, this is ridiculous, this guy’s getting ruined”, stated:

“And like it just made me so mad, and it started all bubbling up. And [said], NO! I totally disagree with you, and here’s why I disagree, and then he started attacking the fact that like, she can’t even remember what happened to her and how could she never talk to anyone about that. And I was just, like holy fuck, I’m that person. I am that person [interviewer comment: participant began crying], I’m that person who had something like that happen to her at a really early age, and they don’t think, suppress it, they don’t talk about it, they’re ashamed about it” ...Susan

Except for one participant, the interviews were scheduled such that I was able to fully transcribe the first interview before conducting the second interview, usually allowing one or two days between the first and second interview. After each interview, I entered my thoughts and emotions, including any physical responses, in a reflexive journal that I maintained. I also incorporated reflexivity in the interviewing and analysis, see Appendix 4, while the data was

still fresh in my mind. This journal allowed me to maintain an introspective approach, as presented by Finlay (2002), that focused my attention on my own experiences, meanings and how they shaped my interpretation of the interviews. This journal highlighted and sensitized me to my subjectivities while providing transparency of the impact these biases will have on my research.

4.6 Section Five: Ethical Considerations

It is important to consider ethical matters at the outset of any research study. This is particularly true when researching sensitive issues, such as early childhood trauma. In compliance with the Durham University code of practice on research ethics, ethics approval was sought before the research was conducted¹. Approval for the research was granted on July 24th, 2018, by the Durham University Business School, see Appendix 3. As part of the review process, the Durham Ethics Committee requested further clarification on the following three areas: 1) the confidentiality of the subject matter of the research recruitment process for the research participants, 2) how consent would be secured, and 3) how I would address the emotionally sensitive issues they envisioned would arise during the interviews.

The inquiries made by the Durham Ethics Committee provided me with the opportunity to revisit existing literature on the topic of sensitive research, reflect deeply upon the issues raised by the committee, and seek additional information to address the concerns tabled. This exercise proved useful in strengthening the aims and purpose of the research while ensuring that the ethical governance arrangements were sufficiently robust such that “no harm was done”. Given the highly sensitive nature of this study, I feel it is important to detail the additional steps I followed in this study and to expand upon why this type of research is deemed vital, together with an overview of relevant studies that have examined the impact of this type of research on participants.

¹ Note that this study commenced while I was a PhD student at Bradford University. As such, two interviews were conducted in 2017, when I had approval from Bradford’s Ethics Committee (Appendix 4). The additional interviews were placed on hold pending approval from Durham’s Ethics Committee which took a further 10 months to secure.

4.6.1 Sensitive Nature of the Research

Other ethics committees have expressed concerns similar to those expressed by Durham's Ethics Committee due to the significant growth over the past three decades in research involving participants who have experienced moderate to severe trauma. This increase aligns with the growing recognition of the importance of developing a solid understanding of the short and long-term consequences of the trauma, both from a societal and individual perspective (Jaffe et al., 2015). In particular, given the significant societal costs² related to childhood sexual abuse, there has been a marked increase in research focused specifically on childhood sexual abuse victims. As a consequence, victims of childhood sexual abuse are more frequently being asked difficult and highly charged questions,

“Whereby the children are not only being asked whether they were victimized, but who the offender was, the nature of the acts that were perpetrated against them, and how many times each act occurred” (Jaffe, A. et al., 2015, p. 41).

The corresponding concerns raised with internal review boards (IRBs) and ethics committees have prompted studies and meta-analyses into the effects of trauma research on its participants. Several studies have explored the more general over-arching issues related to the ethics of researching sensitive topics (Newman and Kaloupek, 2004; Becker-Blease and Freyd, 2007; Ybarra et al., 2009; Decker et al., 2011; Wager, 2011). There has also been an increase in research that specifically explores the impact of asking research participants about trauma and, in particular, interview-based trauma research.

It is widely recognized that interviews provide the researcher with greater opportunities to gain an in-depth understanding of the effects of trauma. However, this methodology provides

² Research has shown that the adverse effect of childhood sexual abuse is wide ranging and include lower rates of school engagement together with higher rates of chronic disease (Bethell et al., 2014), depression and suicidal behaviour (Feinson and Meir, 2015) addiction and interpersonal /sexual difficulties (Marriott et al., 2014), adverse social behaviour and emotional well-being (Salzinger et al., 2001), and reduced quality of life and adult life expectancy (Afifi et al., 2006).

oversight committees with the greatest concern (Deprince and Chu, 2008). The desire to collect rich data gathered from interviews has prompted several studies focused on understanding the impact of interview-based trauma research on participants versus other methodologies. For example, Jaffe and colleagues (2015) examined the outcome of three different forms of gathering data related to trauma: computer-assisted interviews, questionnaires, and personal interviews. They found that the methodology did not affect the data provided but that the research participants reported greater stress from computer-assisted interviews.

Deprince and Chu (2008) studied the two most common methods of collecting trauma data – questionnaires only and questionnaires together with in-depth interviews – across a range of demographics and types of trauma, with 500 participants. Consistent with prior research, their study found that the cost-benefit ratio was both stable and positive across all samples. They also noted that the interview process was consistently associated with more favourable outcomes, even amongst those that reported mild stress. Brabin and Berah (1995) conducted a study of 257 mothers and 160 partners who had stillborn babies, the psychological impact of which was assessed as highly traumatic by the research participants. This study found that the in-depth interviews were perceived to be beneficial to most participants. Specifically, 75% of the parents indicated that the intensive interview was not distressing, with two-thirds finding the interview process helpful. Whereas two-thirds of the parents who reported experiencing distress found the interviews helpful nonetheless, with only 5% reporting that the interview was not helpful. One positive contributing factor to the favourable outcomes that the participants reported was that the interviewers themselves had a history of stillborn babies. In addition, my history of early childhood abuse proved useful in the study as it removed the fear the participants had that they would be “judged” by me and helped create an environment of trust.

Griffin and colleagues’ (2003) extensive psychological and psychophysiological study found that research participants, who had experienced sexual and physical abuse, reported no adverse effects. *“On the contrary, the experience was generally rated as a very positive and interesting*

one". (Griffin, 2003, p. 226). This was true even when the research participants were highly symptomatic of post-traumatic stress disorder (Griffin, 2003).

"These findings are in general agreement with other research suggesting that trauma survivors may directly benefit from disclosing trauma-related information despite the activation of intense emotions associated with the trauma (Pennebaker and Susman, 1988; Greenberg and Stone, 1992; Mackinnon, Korten, and Christensen, 1994; Dyrerov, Dyregrov and Raundalen, 2000; Parslow et al., 2000 and Ruzek and Zatzick, 2000)", Griffin, 2003, p. 226.

Jaffe and colleagues (2015) conducted a more recent meta-analysis of research participants' reactions to trauma research. Specifically, they analysed results from 73,959 research participants across seventy samples. Their findings were that, although distress is higher for participants with PTSD or trauma history, the distress is not worrisome and that the research participants generally find the experience to be positive and experienced no regret from their participation, irrespective of their trauma history or PTSD. They put forth that the present findings provide evidence that trauma-related research can take place without fear of harming the research participants (Griffin, Germain and Wilkerson, 2014). Notwithstanding the potential benefits of such research, I was always mindful that studies such as this run the risk that the interview could result in therapeutic intervention. This study did not create interventions other than one exception whereby one of the participants – who had never shared her experiences with anyone else before our interview – felt compelled to share her past with her husband following her participation in this study. My use of narrative inquiry mitigated the risk of a potential therapeutic intervention, particularly the life story method, which has been identified as an effective method to deal with research on sensitive topics.

"In providing the participant with the opportunity to articulate their story which in other settings may have been ignored can often be beneficial to the narrator" (Mishler, 1985 in Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection 2018, p. 269)

Nonetheless, an inexorable challenge of this study resided in the fact that the very nature of the research is concerned with the lived experiences of women who have experienced early

childhood sexual and physical abuse. I was exposed to emotionally charged accounts that shook me to my core and brought back many of my own painful memories. The very nature of this type of research, therefore, required a very considered and sensitive approach to the incredibly difficult and painful stories and conversations that were shared with me. Despite being a member of the group under investigation, I was always mindful that I was also a researcher with a research agenda (Hesse-Biber, 2014). To respect and honour the women's voices in this study, the subsequent chapters consist of a significant amount of often lengthy quotations from the research participants. This is consistent with wider feminist endeavours to ensure that participants' voices remain present in the written delivery of the research findings (Holloway and Freshwater, 2007). Finally, several steps were taken to remove any power imbalance between myself, the researcher, and the participants (Hesse-Biber, 2014). These included providing the participants with the choice of venue for the interviews and disclosure of my background of early childhood trauma.

4.6.2 Confidentiality of Data

The Ethics Committee raised valid concerns regarding the need to ensure confidentiality. Given the sensitivity of the data, all confidential data, interview data and consent forms were stored on a USB device, securely stored in a locked fireproof safe. As an additional step, the interview audio recordings were transcribed only by me immediately after each interview, while the conversation remained fresh. During the transcription process, all references to names, places or dates that could potentially reveal the identity of my research participants were deleted and their names replaced with pseudonyms.

4.7 Section Six: Data Analysis

This section provides an overview of the data analysis. It begins with a review of the specific method chosen and why this method was selected. It concludes with the details of the coding process used to develop the aggregated theoretical dimensions from the first and second-order themes.

Thematic analysis, a commonly accepted form of analysis within qualitative research (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012; Braun and Clark, 2022;) was applied to this study. It is a method for identifying and analysing themes within research data that are not necessarily related to pre-existing theories (Braun and Clark, 2006, 2022).

There are multiple ways in which thematic analysis may be applied to a research study (Brooks et al., 2015). I opted to use template analysis which *“is a method of thematically organising and analysing qualitative data”* (King and Brooks, 2017, p. 3). Several unique features of template analysis were deemed beneficial, including the ability to adapt the format of the template to align with the needs of the study. Two further benefits are that it does not require that the researcher incorporate a preliminary set of codes, nor does it mandate the researcher to distinguish between descriptive and interpretive themes. (Brooks et al., 2015). This provided the flexibility to fully capture the rich data in the study, irrespective of the classification of the identified theme. Another distinctive feature of template analysis, used extensively in organisational and management research (Brooks et al., 2015), is its emphasis on hierarchical coding, which provides the researcher with a degree of structure to the analytical process.

Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) recommend using coding as a practical and efficient means of analysing and interpreting qualitative data. Saldana (2016) defines a code as *“most often a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data”* (Saldana, 2016, p. 4). Data from the study that the researcher deems relevant to the research question and found to be present in multiple accounts form the basis of the themes. Once identified and labelled, the themes are coded and entered into the researcher’s template. Themes may be inductive or theoretically based (Braun and Clark, 2022). This study adopts an inductive approach, looking for themes that are directly linked to the data collected and that link back to the aims of this research study. As such, the codes were developed inductively from the data, as opposed to attempting to align the data to pre-existing codes.

This approach was chosen as several recurring themes emerged from the data that were deemed to be relevant to the study. The analysis was less concerned about the actual choice of words used by the research participants and more focused on the substance of what was shared in the study. This aligns well with template analysis. As a new researcher, the flexibility of the approach was appealing as I was able to adapt the template throughout the process. Also, the approach aligned with my epistemology. It supports my belief that there are multiple and varied interpretations of the interviews and that my history of childhood trauma will influence my interpretation. Finally, this approach does not advocate that the stories shared by the research participants are accurate depictions of their lives. Rather, the stories told represent their unique perceptions and interpretations which, in turn, inform their subsequent actions and view of the world.

In qualitative research studies, a sample size less than twenty is deemed appropriate (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006). The very nature of qualitative research is exploratory such that qualitative researchers do not know at the onset of their studies how much data they need to gather (Baker and Edwards, 2012). As a result, qualitative studies are frequently guided by the principle of saturation, as introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Mason, 2010). Their definition is that saturation is reached once the researcher discovers that new data collection does not yield new information or provide further insights into the area of study (Dworkin, 2012). The dominant themes that emerged from the interviews in this study were present in the stories of all eight participants. Furthermore, the sub-themes that presented themselves were found in the majority of the participants' stories. Finally, the data gathered was deemed rich enough to generate meaningful insights and theorising. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to conclude that saturation had been achieved.

4.7.1 Four-Step Data Analysis Process

Template Analysis, while offering flexibility in terms of the format and style, has a moderately high level of structure concerning the process by which the data is analysed (Braun and Clark, 2022). Therefore, I adopted the following four-step data analytical process for this study, as outlined by Brooks and King (2014), to organize the data into themes.

The first step in this data analysis process is to become familiar with the data. This commenced at the outset of each interview as I endeavoured to capture a holistic view of each research participant. Immediately following each interview, I listened to the taped audio recording and noted any strong emotional or physical display that occurred during the interview, together with any emotions I may have experienced whilst listening to the stories. The interview notes were further augmented by details of the participant's appearance and references to the venue or the context within which the interview took place. This initial process of data capture and analysis ensured that I was fully immersed with the data and introduced me to major recurring themes that had surfaced. This in-depth knowledge and insight into each participant's account served as a solid foundation from which to proceed to the preliminary coding.

The second step, the preliminary coding, frequently begins with themes that were identified before the commencement of the coding process. These *a priori* themes may render the process more efficient as they provide the researcher with a clearly defined starting point (Brooks and King, 2014). However, I did not approach the research with preconceived ideas or theories per se. Rather, this study aimed to gather as much rich data as possible and see what percolated to the surface. As such, this study did not use *a priori* themes, despite the existence of well-documented theories on childhood trauma.

The first phase in this second step began with a meticulous reading of all eight transcripts, highlighting areas of interest as each transcript was reviewed. The objective of this initial step was to refamiliarize and re-immense me with the data. I then focused on three of the eight transcripts, noting particular attention to narrative accounts that were specifically related to

the trauma, the process by which the research participants made sense of their experiences and further insights that contributed to the study's overall research aims. Having reviewed in detail the three transcripts, I returned to them again, highlighting any commonalities amongst the three transcripts. I took note of specific quotes that supported the aims of the research. I incorporated my initial thoughts and personal notes throughout this process. I then repeated this step with the remaining five transcripts. My notes proved useful when I revisited the data, allowing me to critically engage with the coding, notes, and my preliminary thoughts.

Using NVivo 12, research software designed to assist qualitative researchers in analysing their data, the interview transcripts were then entered as text files into NVivo. The narrative accounts that shed light on how the abuse may have manifested into their adult personal and work lives, references that suggested a trauma-related consequence and any reference that had relevance to their identity construction were coded. I created folders specific to the themes that had emerged and populated these folders with related quotes from the participants. I took particular care to code any identity labels the participants applied to themselves or that others applied to them. Common threads and themes that ran across the participants' accounts, which provided further insight into their life stories or themes related to the development of their personal and leader identities, were recorded. The themes did not all passively emerge from the data. Rather, the themes were actively produced through a systematic engagement with the data set. This entailed reading the transcript multiple times, listening to the tapes, and reading my personal field notes and preliminary comments. In addition, I found it useful to distance myself from the data for a week such that I could return with a fresh perspective. Taking time away from the data and then returning to it after an extended period is an approach that Braun and Clarke (2022) recommended that I found especially useful.

- How has the data generation process and coding influenced my thinking?
- Have any of my earlier assumptions changed?
- How has this study affected me?

Initial 58 Codes

| Initial Codes | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Career | 21. Forgiveness | 40. Independent |
| 2. Defining events | 22. Rebellion | 41. Self-reliant |
| 3. Role Models | 23. Taking-Control | 42. Validation |
| 4. Could only rely on self | 24. School | 43. competitive |
| 5. Empowerment | 25. Education | 44. Not-a-victim |
| 6. Power | 26. Multiple jobs | 45. Persistent |
| 7. Control | 27. Multiple activities | 46. Perseverant |
| 8. Financial independence | 28. Leadership | 47. Philanthropic |
| 9. A-path-out | 29. Confident | 48. Resilience |
| 10. Need-love | 30. Corporate success | 49. Resourceful |
| 11. Need-attention | 31. Corporate identity | 50. Approval-seeking |
| 12. Need-stability | 32. Adaptable | 51. Coping |
| 13. Skills | 33. Drive | 52. Tough |
| 14. Coping | 34. Work-ethic | 53. Problem-solver |
| 15. Denial | 35. Fearlessness | 54. Achievement |
| 16. Acceptance | 36. Big dreams | 55. Status conscious |
| 17. Guilt | 37. Self-awareness | 56. Self-Control |
| 18. Anger | 38. Image | 57. Safety |
| 19. Early-career-success | 39. Refused to feel sorry | 58. Risk |
| 20. Healing | for self | |

Table 5: Initial 58 codes

Overlapping codes were consolidated, new codes were added, and the codes were sorted into NVivo nodes based on broader, meaningful categories. Template analysis encourages hierarchical coding wherein wide-ranging predominant themes are given prominence (Braun and Clark, 2006, 2022; Brooks and King, 2014; Brooks et al., 2015). This process resulted in the following preliminary template consisting of the 18 themes noted below.

Eighteen First Order Themes

| First Order Themes | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Role of caregiver/protector | 10 | Power and control |
| 2 | Distrust of others | 11 | Education |
| 3 | Work ethic | 12 | Extracurricular activities |
| 4 | Adaptions | 13 | Driven to succeed |
| 5 | Acquisition of new skills | 14 | Fearlessness |
| 6 | Positive self-identity | 15 | Contribution of earlier skills |
| 7 | Choosing a different narrative | 16 | Opening the door to the past |
| 8 | Early leadership-rich experiences | 17 | New ways of moving forward |
| 9 | Financial indepenence | 18 | leadership transformation |

Table 6: First order themes

The fourth and final step of the four-step process is creating the final template. The preliminary template was applied to all eight transcript files, using NVivo to aid the data retrieval process with further refinements made. The structure involved in developing the templates allowed me to organize a large amount of data into a useful form for analysis. However, given the sensitive nature of the study, it was important to respect the participants' voices and remain loyal to the trust they had placed in me. As such, I returned again to my field notes and the audio recordings to arm myself with an intimate analysis of the data (Saldana, 2016). Equipped with this understanding, I began to group the preliminary themes into a smaller group of more meaningful and parsimonious units that would lend themselves more readily to further analysis (Saldana, 2016). With the data fully coded and sorted into meaningful categories, I was able to reflect on the key messaging and how it related and responded to the aims of the study. Employing a range of different methods to help me organize and further refine the themes, including drawing pictures and “doodling”, I was able to map out a rough outline for how the data would be presented. This resulted in the following four aggregated theoretical dimensions that underpin the findings: identity foundations, identity discovery, identity enactments and identity reflections. These themes form the headings of the four discussion chapters that follow.

Themes Arising from the Data

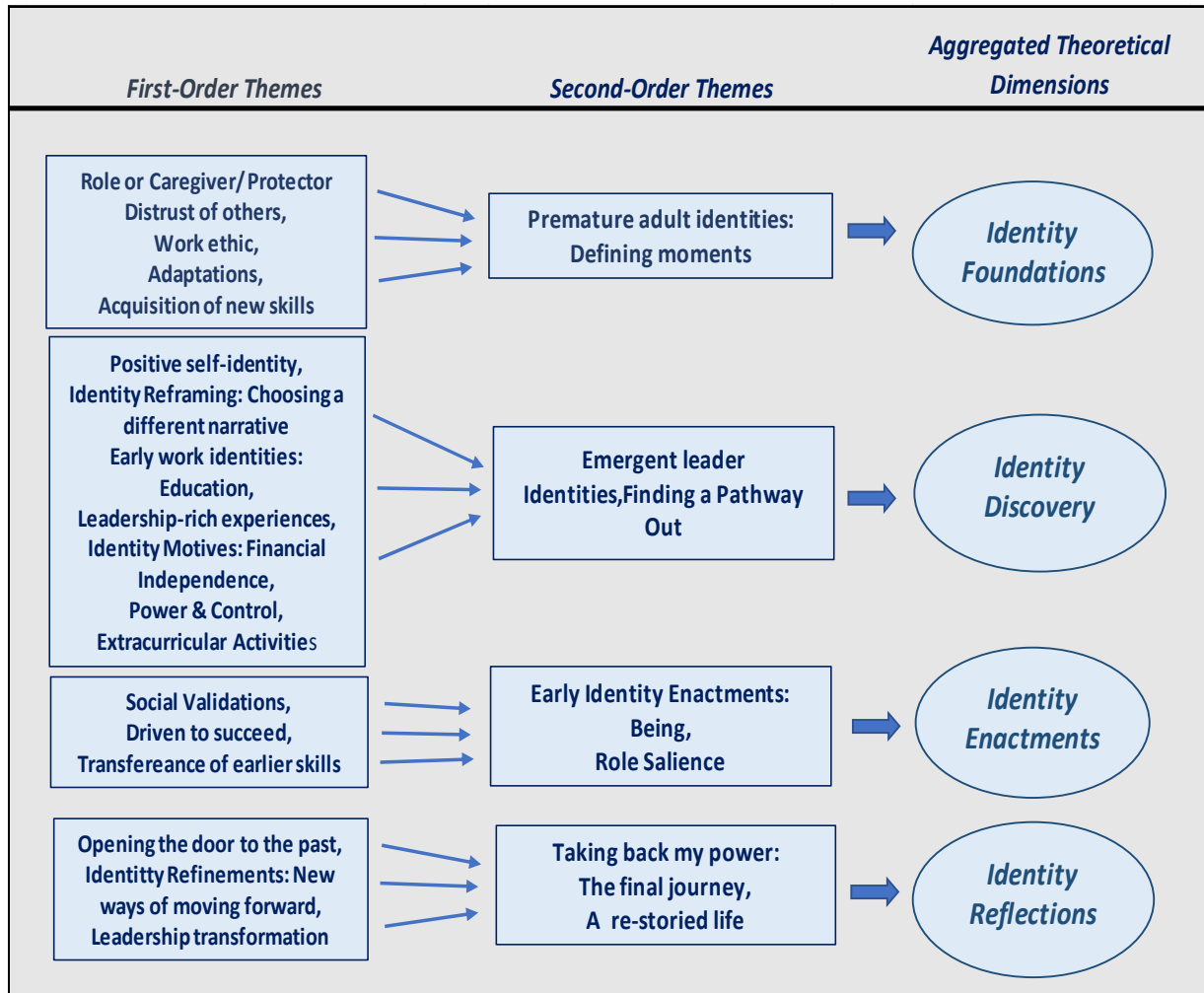


Figure 5: Data structure

4.8 Reflections on Adopted Methodology

It is incumbent on researchers to reflect on the appropriateness of the methodology chosen for their research study and to be aware of the inherent weaknesses and limitations in the approach they selected.

This study explored the lived experiences of female leaders in North America who have endured early childhood sexual abuse. It is limited in that it is not generalizable to the wider population.

Also, as an interpretive inquiry, other researchers conducting research of a similar nature would inevitably arrive at different themes. Given the investigative and exploratory nature of the study, it does not provide definitive conclusions about the phenomenon under study. However, I was not seeking one or more truths but leaving myself open to discovery. Qualitative research, by its very nature, is accompanied by researcher bias. An inexorable challenge of this study resided in the fact that the essence of the research is concerned with the lived experiences of women who have experienced early childhood sexual and physical abuse. To that end, I have incorporated my field notes and personal thoughts into the thesis. To distinguish my field notes from my analysis, I present them in shaded boxes. My reason for doing so was to provide complete transparency. I have also supplemented my findings with generous participant quotations to provide further transparency and respect and honour the voices of the women in this study. As such, the subsequent chapters consist of a significant amount of often lengthy, quotations from the research participants. This is consistent with wider feminist endeavours to ensure that the voices of research participants remain present in the written delivery of the research findings (Hollway, 1989).

Considering all of these factors, I believe the method I selected for this study, coupled with the reflexivity and steps to ensure transparency, aligned with my philosophy and research aims. As I have commented on earlier in this chapter, narrative inquiry – using the life story approach - to collect data has been identified as an advantageous approach to researching sensitive topics (Griffin et al., 2003) and has resulted in an abundance of rich data in this study. Thoughtful care was given to the location, length, and scheduling of interviews over multiple days. These further considerations provided additional validity to the approach and served to respect the objectives of the study, which was to gather as much rich detail as possible to facilitate theorising and to capitalize on the unique access to these women.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the research methodology and design for this study. It set out the approach selected and how it aligned with my philosophical positioning. It highlighted why I

chose narrative inquiry and how this approach links to existing work. Details of the recruitment process, data generation methodologies, and coding process were provided. Given the sensitive nature of the topic being researched, I shared the ethical considerations followed to ensure “no harm was done” and the sensitive approach taken to the difficult conversations and intimate stories of sexual and physical abuse endured by the women in my study. I concluded the section with the research methodological limitations and how I have addressed these through rigorous reflexivity and transparency. The chapter presents a sound methodology that enabled the collection of rich and compelling data that is the foundation for the analysis and presentation of the research findings and discussion that follow.

Chapter 5: An Overview of the Research Findings

An overview of the findings and major themes that emerged that provide meaning to the participants' early childhood experiences and that continued to surface within their constructed accounts of their personal and leader identities is offered in this chapter. To a greater or lesser extent, the described themes are present in all the participants' narratives. However, I elected to present each of the four themes by leading with an in-depth analysis that is based upon the story of one of the women in the study, whose narrative is both representative of the others in the study and whose story captures the spirit of the participants for the particular theme. Each research finding is complemented with supporting narratives from the other women in the study. Sharing the results through the voice of a lead protagonist for each theme shows how the themes emerged across the women's narrative accounts while providing a more holistic account of the lived experiences that intersected the varying themes. It is also my desire to give a voice to the women who make up this study and provide a more intimate understanding of their lived experiences, with all its rich contextual detail.

Each of the four themes and related sub-themes represents the building blocks that formed the basis for the progressive identity changes that unfolded over time. They served as the catalysts for the development of the motivations and skills that facilitated the participants' development as leaders and contributed to their personal and leader identities. To assist in building a more vivid portrait of these women's lives over their life span, I align the presentation of the findings and the participants' diverse childhood experiences in a chronological narrative form. However, the linear pathway that this entails inevitably disguises the numerous detours, disruptions, and learnings along the way. I believe that were I to interview the women today, their stories would not be told in the same fashion. Rather, they would be reconstructed to reflect the additional passage of time and the result of new experiences as well as the different accounts inevitable in such constructions. I have aimed to knit together the women's voices and the childhood experiences that they chose to share in such a way that respects both their personal stories and highlights the common themes that surfaced across their accounts. The participants' rich

descriptive accounts provide a picture that exposes how, by integrating their life experiences into an evolving story (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010), the participants' identities were shaped and re-shaped in response to their life experiences, culminating in their leader identities.

To that end, the words I have chosen to convey their stories - in support of my theorising - are those of the research participants. I have deliberately presented the narratives with minimal participant-specific information to protect their identity. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the decision of what to include and exclude in this analysis is mine. This was a difficult task as I had a wealth of rich data upon which to draw yet was limited in the amount of information I could share within the confines of this thesis. I have taken considerable care to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and honour the trust they placed in me, electing to provide each participant with a pseudonym rather than a code or number, given the personal nature of the interviews. I did not want to lose sight of them as human beings and women who have suffered and overcome great adversity. The following four chapters explore the circumstances that gradually led the research participants to acquire new ways of seeing themselves and demonstrate how these emergent constructed identities progressively influenced the development of their personal and leader identities.

Chapter 6, *Identity Foundations*, leads with an overview of the sociohistorical context for the participants in this study. The findings suggest that the context in which the trauma occurred played a critical role in how the participants made sense of their trauma. This preliminary finding contributes to the current theorising that stresses that trauma research must consider the socio-historical context in which the trauma occurred (Maercker and Hecker, 2016). More specifically, it reveals how their abuse influenced their early identity formation and set the stage for posttraumatic growth and the development of a positive self-identity. With the stage then set, I proceed to the first finding and provide an account of the early formative years of the participants by illustrating specific triggering events that transpired, which I theorise shaped their narrative identities.

Chapter 7, *Identity Discovery*, describes the school years of the participants. It illuminates how, when exposed to new experiences and people, the participants discovered new ways of being and seeing themselves, sowing the early seeds of their leader identity. This chapter contributes to several leadership development theories. In particular, it extends the recent work of Lui and colleagues (2020), who assert that early childhood experiences can lead individuals to purposely seek leadership roles. It supports current theorising that leadership skills may be developed from a diverse array of activities (Zhen, Meister and Caza, 2021) and demonstrates the influence of the social environment on the development of leadership identity trajectories (Day and Thornton, 2018).

Chapter 8, *Identity Enactments*, sheds light on how the participants enacted these new identities and how these enactments resulted in a dynamic process (Day et al., 2009) that reinforced their emerging identities. I demonstrate how this dynamic process strengthened the salience of their identity and how it links to various leadership development theories that posit that the trajectory of a leader is influenced by their early personal experiences (Day et al., 2009; Day and Hock-Peng, 2011; Liu et al., 2020). I conclude by extending the analysis by theorising how these events reinforced the formation of their leader identity.

Chapter 9, *Identity Reflections*, completes the research findings with an overview of the additional triggers and processes that compelled the women in this study to confront and make peace with their past. It reveals how the participants, upon reflection, recognized that their childhood experiences had unknowingly manifested in their early management style and practices. It exposes how, after making peace with their past, these women underwent a process of identity self-reflection that led to a transformation in their understanding of themselves as individuals and leaders. This chapter provides rich first-person narrative accounts that extend current theorising as to the role of trauma in the development of prosocial leadership behaviours (Frazier et al., 2013; Wolf Williams and Allen (2015).

Each of the four findings chapters that follow contains researcher field notes. To assist the reader in distinguishing these field notes from my analysis, they are entered in shaded text boxes. These personal reflections have been included to demonstrate my cognizance of the role my personal experiences bring to the research and provide insights into how these personal experiences influence my interpretations.

Chapter 6: Identity Foundations, No One But Me

6.1 Chapter Outline

This chapter focuses on the early formative years of the participants, a time when the foundation of a child's identity is formed (Josselson, 1998). First, I introduce the events that transpired during these developmental years that shaped the participants' early identity formation. Then, in each sub-theme, I link the presentation of the findings to the theoretical framework adopted for this study, explaining why and how the various theories were used to interpret the findings.

The events described were critical moments that took the participants' lives in new directions (Singer and Salovey, 1993) and privileged how they came to define themselves (McAdams and Bowman, 2001). I describe the intervening period between when the participants were children and did not see themselves as victims to the time they realized that they were victims of sexual abuse. I reveal circumstances that contributed to the development of a positive self-identity that facilitated their ability to make meaning of their trauma. The chapter leads with the sociohistorical backdrop in which the trauma occurred and then proceeds to the following four sub-themes: *Role of caregiver/protector, Distrust of others, Work ethic and Adaptation/acquisition of new skills.*

Relevance of the Sociohistorical Context to the Study

I begin the presentation of the research findings of the early formative years of the participants by providing an overview of the sociohistorical context within which their childhood abuse occurred. Identity is shaped and created as a direct result of the societal and cultural context in which the individual lives (Stryker and Burke, 2000). This is particularly true for victims of abuse. Maercker and Hecker (2016) assert that the nature of trauma is such that it cannot be researched independently from the sociohistorical context in which the trauma took place as these factors play such a vital role in understanding the impact of trauma on the identity of the

victim. As such, understanding the relationships between the research participants' experiences and the discourses about physical and sexual abuse in the context of their cultural and socio-economic environment is critical (Weber, 2002; Gibson and Rohleder, 2006). As will be demonstrated, the sociohistorical context played a crucial and foundational role in the early identity formation of the participants. In the following section, I reveal how the views and practices surrounding sexual abuse during this timeframe prevented the research participants from attaching the victim identity to themselves and how this underpinned the participants' positive growth post-trauma and early development of positive self-identities.

6.2 Sociohistorical Context: The Backdrop of the Trauma, Laying the Foundation

The dominant cultural narrative as to what constitutes a victim has evolved considerably over the last two decades and is historically, culturally and socially grounded. The majority of the women in this study are in their fifties. As such, their sexual abuse occurred primarily in the late 1960s and 1970s. This was a time when there were significant barriers to disclosure about childhood sexual abuse. The general taboo surrounding sexual issues resulted in a lack of language to describe sexual abuse, such that the participants did not understand that what was happening to them was indeed sexual abuse (Hunter, 2010). This was exacerbated by the shrouding of sexual abuse by society and the silencing and denial of the experiences of children (Orbach, 1998). Additional factors from this time included what Hunter (2010, p. 176) referred to as *“respect for authority, rigid gender roles and a lack of supportive adults”*. These impediments were compounded by the limited forms of communication. There was no internet or alternative means for the participants, as children, to learn about sexual abuse. Nor were there formal sex education programs offered through the education system. In terms of the rigid gender roles that predominated this period (Hunter, 2010), men were generally the primary breadwinners and heads of the household. Women were frequently placed in subservient roles where obedience was expected, which was reflective of the patriarchal and androcentric culture that existed during these two decades (Lerner, 1986).

This was evident in Alice's story, where she describes how there was this "family lore" about the "misbehaviours of men".

And I have seen the women in my family grin and bear it, bear a lot of stuff. They would present a face to their husbands, or to brothers or to the men of the family. And then go to the kitchen and like blah, blah, bah. So, to me, it was this is what happens. Men are stupid, and you can't depend on their emotional stability or, you know, for them to rein in their physical temptations or whatever. That's what they do, and you just have to kind of grin and bear it...Alice

Alice's narrative illustrates the general acceptance of such behaviour by the women in her family and supports the patriarchal and sexist culture that existed at the time. Furthermore, her narrative discloses her expectation of men's inability to "rein in their physical temptations". This instilled in Alice a belief that when it came to the "misbehaviours" of men, she had no choice other than to "grin and bear it", as the women in her family had modelled for her from a very young age.

Carol tells of her mother being married off by her grandparents when her mother was just fourteen years old and was "sort of given to him". She grew up watching her father beat her mother regularly and her mother being helpless to defend herself or her children.

Um, again, it's another way to, there in (name of country), you know, if you can give your daughters away to someone who is gonna look after them, right. And my mom was a good mom but there was no way she was able to control what was happening with this man...Carol

This vulnerability and sense of being powerless to defend themselves against men were prevalent in the participants' narrative accounts. As shown in Chapter 7, seeing their mothers' fear and inability to defend themselves profoundly impacted the participants and instilled a strong need for power and control in each.

This was also a time when women were generally seen as vulnerable and in need of protection by men, as was also the case for the women in this study. The participants described their mothers as being timid, kind and very subservient and referred to their fathers as controlling and aggressive, as illustrated by the participant quotes below.

Um, my mother was a (pause) delightful and simple woman. And I like to think of her as Winnie the Pooh. She was, um, so golden at heart and loved everyone. I can think of only two people in my life, maybe three, that she talked badly about. That just wasn't her. And, she was just so, so sweet. Very manipulated by my dad. Very scared of my dad. Um, and would just do anything for a quiet life to keep him from getting too wound up. And my dad has a personality, now I realize, an awful lot like an ugly drunk all the time, but he never drank alcohol...Debbie

My mom and my dad couldn't be more polar opposites. My dad was very aggressive. Again, my mom was very passive. So usually, my mom in tears, my mom quiet, my mom pleading...Olive

As supported by the participants' narrative accounts, it was also common for an acquiescence of silence and a perspective that embraced the mantra of "what happened in the family, remained in the family". It was common for teachers, neighbours, and parents to choose to ignore signs of childhood physical abuse as there was no requirement for mandatory reporting at the time. Difficult events, particularly of a sexual nature, were simply not discussed outside of the home (Hunter, 2010).

Again, I left the house actually and went to the neighbour's house. Um, who was a policeman at the time, and you know he didn't even want to get involved...Carol

The participants' accounts thus far have introduced several key foundational perceptions based on their childhood experiences that had a significant impact on their early identity formation. These included their general acceptance of the misbehaviours of men, the recognition of the absolute authority their fathers wielded over their mothers and their mothers' corresponding sense of helplessness. The participants' early home life experiences mirrored that of the misogynistic and patriarchal culture that existed at the time. This was compounded by the

societal shrouding of sexual abuse and the suppression of children's experiences of abuse. All of these encounters and observations contributed to a lack of trust in others and served as the catalyst for the participants' need for power and control, which will be engaged further in detail in Chapter 7.

6.2.1 Too Young to Understand

The sexual taboo that existed during the 1960s and 1970s was exacerbated by the fact that language related to child sexual abuse was not yet conceived (Hunter, 2010). This rendered it difficult for the children to articulate, let alone fully understand, their sexual abuse. This was further compounded by the fact that the sexual abuse of the participants in this study occurred at very young ages, with the abuse commonly commencing at the age of four years old, see Table 8. Every participant in this study spoke of not fully understanding what was happening to them at the time. The following transcript excerpts of Betty, Susan and Debbie illustrate this point.

It didn't always happen together, but um, there were times that we would talk about that something weird had happened. And there was a time when I made mention that something had happened the night before with my cousin's husband. And XX, my sister was like ya he did the same thing to me....Betty

I remember that they taught me to say, "mother fucker", and I walked up to my neighbour, and I went " , hi mother fucker", and the neighbour ran over and was like, do you know what your 3.5-year-old daughter just said to me. Um, I had no idea, obviously, but they thought it was all funny. So, one of the things that they started doing with me was to get the neighbourhood boys together and have the little sister perform oral sex on all of the boys (starts crying forcefully) and um, I thought it was something that was cool. I thought it was. I remember being like, oh, this makes the boys want to hang out with me. I didn't know. I didn't know....Susan

You don't really know or understand, and it wasn't talked about. And it wasn't anything, they didn't talk about this at school. Sex education didn't really start at that age. I remember

thinking it was kind of gross, it was gross, and I didn't like it, and I wasn't allowed to talk about it. To anyone...Debbie

The early age of the participants when the abuse occurred, together with their failure to comprehend the severity of the crimes that were being perpetrated against them by members of their own family, is important to the study as it enabled the creation of a foundation upon which they were able to develop positive identities. For example, a child malnourished from birth never truly understands hunger. Whereas a child who knows what it is like to be well-nourished feels the pain of hunger when deprived of food. The participants in this study never understood they were being abused and therefore did not, at least initially, feel the anguish and suffering that generally accompanies such atrocities. Furthermore, as will be shown in the following section, their failure to understand that they had been abused prevented them from assuming a victim identity and its associated socially constructed behaviours and beliefs.

Age of First Occurrences of Sexual Abuse

| Participant | Age of Sexual Abuse |
|-------------|----------------------------------|
| Alice | 8 until approx. 12 |
| Debbie | from age 4 to approx. 7 - 8 |
| Susan | from age 4 to 8 |
| Carol | earliest memories to teenager |
| Betty | from age 4 to 10 |
| Sandy | from age 4 to 10 |
| Ann | from age 8 to 12 |
| Olive | first memories - approx. 3 years |

Table 7: Timing/Age of sexual abuse

6.2.2 Creating Victim / Survivor Identities

“A person harmed, injured, or killed as a result of a crime, accident or other event or action. A person who has come to feel helpless and passive in the face of misfortune or ill-treatment.”

Oxford Dictionary, the definition of a victim

In North America in the late 1970s and 1980s, feminist activists and wider social campaigners, with the objective of creating social change, crafted a legal framework and corresponding narrative intended to highlight the rights of children who had experienced sexual abuse (Hunter, 2010). Unfortunately, while serving to provide a voice for these children, it also led to an overarching cultural narrative that portrayed these children as victims who were both powerless and passive. The victim narrative of ongoing suffering is seen as a socially coherent narrative (Courtois, 2010), with individuals accepting the identity of a victim and carrying with it the associated adverse consequences and suffering (Gergen and Gergen, 1986). This ultimately resulted in discourse that was stigmatizing to the child (Jenkins, 1998).

However, by the latter part of the 1980s, this denigrating victim narrative was replaced with a “*powerful survivor discourse*” (Hunter, 2010, p. 177). The survivor language employed included strength, resilience, and posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Pals and McAdams, 2004; Joseph and Linley, 2005; Maddi, 2006; and Joseph, Murphy and Regel, 2012). The social and self-characterization of a victim and a survivor is created by a complex set of social processes (Bumiller, 1988) that evolves over time. This evolving discourse, at one extreme end of the spectrum, depicted the “victim” of childhood abuse as a weak and vulnerable person whose life had been shattered by their experiences and who played on their experiences to justify their behaviour or to gain sympathy. On the opposite end of this spectrum were those individuals – survivors - who were able to overcome such extreme trauma and were seen as resilient and powerful: conquerors of their life stories.

6.2.3 Avoiding the Stigmatizing Victim Identity

The research participants’ narrative accounts demonstrate that they did not, and do not, see themselves as helpless or passive. Nor do they see themselves, or wish to be seen, as “victims”, despite their history of abuse. In telling their stories, each participant readily acknowledged the pain and suffering they continue to associate with their childhood. Nevertheless, they each

asserted that they were able to make sense of their experiences and “*move on with their lives*, choosing not to wear the victim identity as supported by the narrative accounts that follow.

I am not a victim

Researcher: *So, you don't feel like a victim?*

No, not at all. I used to; you know. Um, and nobody can do a victim better than me, a Latino woman. (LAUGHING) I mean, have you seen our soap operas? (LAUGHING) Us and Jewish people we got this online if we are going to go with stereotypes. I think it is so much more powerful to be able to say I lived through that, but that experience is not living through me, you know....Alice

I didn't choose to be in that situation, that childhood situation. Um, so as an adult, I get to make different choices. Well, just, I don't like the handout kind of mentality. I think that, um, that perpetuates. I would not want to (be) the person on the receiving end of that handout. It is not because of I don't see any good in holding a grudge; it doesn't benefit me to hold a grudge....Ann

And I said (to her sister, who was also abused), well, you know I don't know about you, but it stopped at a pretty early age, and I'm not one that is gonna let anything keep me down. It is just who I am. And maybe it's because of that. It's part of my defence mechanism. It's like no, that's done. I can't do anything about what happened then. So, I'm gonna move on. I'm just gonna make the best of whatever...Debbie

While the participants in the study all refused to accept the victim identity, their narrative reveals that they applied different concepts and terms to the notion of victimization and how they made meaning of their histories of abuse. For example, Alice's narrative reveals that she chose to avoid the cultural narrative of a victim. In addition, Ann applied the concept of agency in how she opted to make meaning of her past. Whereas Debbie attributes her ability to deal with her past to her coping mechanisms.

The women in this study experienced their abuse during a period in history when matters such as these were not discussed and when there was no discourse, no form of words, to attribute meaning to their experiences. Simply put, they did not know what a victim of sexual abuse

meant and therefore, they were unable to attach the stigmatizing victim identity to themselves, as evidenced by their narrative accounts. The introduction of the “survivor” narrative is critically important to this study. It provided the participants with an alternative identity to the stigmatizing victim narrative once they matured and understood that a family member had sexually abused them.

6.2.4 Summary: Significance of Research Context

I chose to lead the research findings section with the historical context for four key reasons. First, I believe that identity is shaped in response to the societal and cultural context in which the individual lives (Stryker and Burke, 2000) and that narrative, to be legitimate, must be negotiated within its particular social context (Riessman, 1993). Secondly, I believe that the described historical context in which the childhood trauma occurred for the participants in this study tempered the impact of their trauma. More specifically, as children, the participants failed to understand the significance of what was happening to them or recognize that what was happening to them was abusive, as further illustrated by the quote below for Betty. As a result, they did not come to see themselves as victims of abuse.

We didn't know it was molestation at the time. We didn't know. There weren't all these resources or like public conversations. you know, There's no internet, there's no. You know you don't really know even, um, you just know that something weird has happened that just doesn't seem quite right...Betty

Thirdly, and more critically, the sociohistorical context in which trauma occurs is believed to play a crucial role in understanding the extent to which the trauma contributes to the identity formation of the victim (Maercker and Hecker, 2016). The fact that the women in the study did not see themselves as victims counteracted their accepting the socially constructed identity of a victim (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Burr, 2003), its associated negative consequences³, and

³ lower rates of school engagement, higher rates of chronic disease, depression, suicidal behaviour, addiction, interpersonal and sexual difficulties, adverse social behaviour and emotional well-being, reduced quality of life and adult life expectancy (Salzinger et al., 2001; Afifi et al., 2006; Bethell et al., 2014; Marriott, 2014; Feinson and Meir, 2015).

its ongoing suffering (Gergen and Gergen, 1986). Fourthly, and more significantly, the subsequent introduction in the 1980s of the powerful survivor discourse of the 1980s provided the participants with an alternate identity to that of a victim. Whether subsequent growth is positive or not depends upon how the trauma affects the individual's self-perception and view of others (Joseph and Linley, 2005). The survivor identity provided the participants with a positive way of seeing themselves that was aligned with their self-identity, the foundation of which enabled the development of positive growth identities.

While not necessarily presupposing that all victims of abuse would inevitably come to see themselves as a victim, the participants' lack of awareness of self begs the question as to why, when they grew older and understood what had happened to them, they did not come to see themselves as victims. It is hoped that the following section provides an answer to that question. More particularly, in this section, I look across the participants' narratives to explore how certain early events may have influenced the early revision, reconstruction and redevelopment of their identities. McAdams (1988) posits that there are events in a person's life, referred to as nuclear episodes, "*that define who individuals are and what they stand for*" (McAdams, 1988, p. 169). These turning points, or "nuclear episodes", are triggering events that represent a critical juncture that takes one's life in a new direction (McAdams and Bowman, 2001).

Finally, the women in the study experienced their trauma during a time when the prevailing culture was patriarchal and sexist. They observed their fathers' absolute authority over their mothers, their siblings, and themselves. They saw their mothers as "*helpless, pleading*". As previously noted, these early experiences instilled in each a strong desire for power and control with a corresponding refusal to be placed in any position of vulnerability. These core drivers, which will be explored and expanded upon in Chapter 7, profoundly influenced their identity development and life choices.

6.3 Identity Foundations, Defining Moments

The presentation of the first research finding begins with an exploration of the characteristics and individual identities of the participants as a result of the trauma and the various turning points they encountered in their early years. Drawing on posttraumatic growth and identity theories, I describe the immediate and progressive impact of those events on the participants as they gradually learned new ways of being and understanding themselves. I then explore the nature of the emergent constructed identities and how they contributed to the growth of the participants and set them on a path that eventually led to their current roles as CEOs. The events that I describe are important to this study. They were self-described as sufficiently traumatic to cause the participants to re-evaluate their role in life and subsequently set the stage for the participants to see themselves in a different light. (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Josselson and Lieblich, 1999; McAdams and Bowman, 2001; Singer, 2001).

This section begins with the first of the four dominant themes - *Identity foundations, defining moments* - which describes early defining moments in the participants' lives when they realized that they were completely alone, with no adult or significant others responsible to care for them or to ensure their safety. This circumstance, which was present in varying degrees in the narratives of all eight participants, forced the participants into the role of primary caregiver and protector, where they had no choice other than to look after themselves and, in some cases, others as well.

This main theme is expanded further through the four sub-themes - *Premature adult identities: role of caregiver & protector, Distrust of others, Work ethic, Adaptations & acquisition of new skills* - which describes the nascent impact these early experiences had on the identity formation of the eight participants. I begin with the presentation of the dominant theme - *Defining moments* - with the life story of Ann, the first of four protagonists.

6.3.1 Ann's Story

Ann is a Latin American woman in her early fifties who was born in the Southern United States. She is currently the CEO of two large regional companies she founded, both of which are in the service sector. The venue Ann chose for the two interviews was a quiet corner of the hotel's restaurant where I was staying. Ann was the second participant who shared with me that she had not completely come to terms with her childhood abuse, having decided to lock her memories away "*in little boxes high up in a cupboard*" and choosing only to open them when she feels ready because "*Um, I think my boxes aren't well labelled, and I might get the wrong box, (laugh) right*"? Nonetheless, Ann was very open to sharing her account with me with the hope that her story may help others in similar situations. In addition, she was an effective communicator and presented her story logically and concisely.

Ann comes from a traditional working-class background and has one sister who is two years older than her. Other than a niece, Ann's mother is estranged from her family and was married four times. Ann and her sister were sexually and physically abused by one of her four stepfathers over four years. As will be portrayed below, Ann's mother was an "*absentee mom*" who showed little interest in raising her children, choosing to abandon them both when they were seven and nine years old, respectively, for one year and then abandoning them for a second time when they were fifteen and seventeen years old. These were defining moments for Ann and represented the first of several key turning points in her life.

6.3.2 Sub-theme # 1 - Premature Adult Identities: Role of Caregiver and Protector

Ann's mother divorced her father when she was one and a half years old and remarried shortly after that to a man who worked at a travel agency. Ann did not share with me what transpired in those early years, other than to say that her parents would frequently take family vacations where they would set sail on the same cruise ship. It was on that particular cruise ship that Ann's mother met the man who would later become Ann's second stepfather, the third father. However, before they married, Ann's mother disappeared with him, abandoning Ann at age

seven and leaving Ann and her nine-year-old sister alone for over a year. This was a pivotal turning point in Ann's life, setting the stage for Ann and taking her life in a new direction (McAdams and Bowman, 2001) where, as will be shown in this chapter, she began to progressively acquire new skills and new ways of seeing herself.

She went off to one of the ports of calls of the mad Italian, which was in the XXX, for a year. And I was 7 years old, and my sister was 9, and for an entire year, we lived completely by ourselves. (Speaking very slowly, clearly enunciating) ...Ann

Ann communicated the above narrative in a manner that suggested that now as an adult, she still struggles with her mother's decision to abandon them. Her body language and tone revealed that her mother's actions are still very painful for her.

It was difficult for me to hear the pain and emotion in Ann's voice, causing knots in my stomach and tension in my body. I believe I understood Ann's current struggle in sharing this with me and interpreted her reaction to reflect that she still found it hard to believe that a mother would be capable of doing such a thing to their child. I based that interpretation on my own experience. As an adult, I could comfortably rationalize my mother's decision to turn a blind eye to my abuse. I believed that I understood my mother's reasons, and I did not hold her accountable for her actions. However, once I became a mother that changed. As a mother, knowing the unconditional love I have for my daughters and that I would do anything to protect my children, I could no longer rationalize my mother's behaviour. As such, I still struggle to this day to understand why she did not do anything to try and protect me...Researcher Field Notes and Reflexivity

Ann maintained that she and her sister knew intuitively that they could not let anyone know they lived alone. Furthermore, based on Ann's account of the neighbourhood where they lived and attended school, Ann would have seen that the parents of other children were present in their everyday lives, which could explain how they knew that they must keep their mother's abandonment secret.

We knew that it was important to LOOK like someone was home. We knew that no one was supposed to know that we were completely by ourselves at 7 and 9 years old. Um, we didn't really know what would happen if someone knew. But we knew that we were supposed to keep it VERY quiet. So, we would walk to school and make our own food. And then we cut the grass; we would walk, we would make our breakfast, go to school, make our lunch, go to school, walk back home, go home, put on our play clothes, go outside and play, come in. You know, make dinner...Ann

Ann's account reveals the burden placed upon her to keep the fact they were abandoned a secret. However, it also suggests that she understood at some level that what her mother did was wrong and that there existed the potential for negative consequences should the abandonment be discovered.

Early childhood is traditionally considered a time of innocence where the child's needs are met by parents who love them within the context of a safe and stable environment. This enables the child to develop a clear sense of who they are and their place in society (Erikson, 1968). During these early formative years, the foundation of the child's identity is formed (Josselson, 1998). However, in Ann and her sister's case, their needs were not being met by any parental figure. Instead, they were compelled to take on the duties and responsibilities that adults normally undertake. As a result of her new circumstances, Ann was beginning to develop a sense of herself as someone capable of looking after her own needs.

The only other significant or insulating person in Ann's life throughout this period was her aunt. Her aunt, who was in high school at the time, would stop by their home every Friday. She would take Ann and her sister grocery shopping, check the mail, and depart the next morning after spending one night, leaving the girls to fend for themselves. While Ann was confident that her mother would return one day, Ann's older sister had difficulty coping with their mother's abandonment.

Like I always felt like my mom would come home at some point. My sister didn't. My sister had the same nightmare every single night. Sleeping in her bed and my mom walking up

the steps, she is saying, please don't go, please don't go, and my mom continues up the steps and disappears every night. She is 52. She may still have the same dream every night now. For as long as I can remember, she always had that dream...Ann.

Ann's ability to cope better emotionally with their abandonment by their mother began to create a shift in the dynamic of the relationship between Ann and her sister. Despite Ann being two years younger than her sister, she was emerging as the stronger of the two. With no other family member and no significant others available, Ann was the only person left to assume the role of primary caregiver, with full responsibility for herself and her sister.

We live in a world where we are in relation with others, and our individual repertoire of selves is derived from the significant others in our lives (Andersen, Chen and Miranda, 2002). Significant others play a crucial role and are *"important for the ongoing confirmation of that crucial element of reality we call identity"* (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 170). Having no significant other from which Ann could model her behaviour or benefit from their ability to nourish and support her development placed Ann in a position where she could only rely on herself. Moreover, the departure of Ann's mother represented the loss of a significant other. Studies have shown that the loss of a significant other - particularly a parent - is not dissimilar to what one would experience with the death of a parent. This loss has the potential to trigger a *"grief-like response"* because the experience of a loss is always related to identity (Lofland, 1985, as cited by Jakoby, 2015, p. 111). More specifically, the loss necessitates changes in habits and thought patterns to accommodate the changes in the individual's life (Jakoby, 2015). Being left alone created a form of crisis for Ann such that she could no longer continue to live in the manner to which she was accustomed. This required her to modify her behaviours and, in so doing, how she saw herself. Being in charge of themselves and others was a common theme with all the participants and is further illustrated by the following narrative accounts of Sandy and Betty.

Sandy's mother was a prostitute and drug addict. Nevertheless, Sandy's early childhood memories were not unpleasant, and Sandy recalled enjoying the freedom she was afforded as a young child.

And my first memories of it were probably when I was around the age of five. We had lots of people in and out of the house, back and forth. They were always smoking, drinking, and doing drugs. It was fine. I had fun; I got to play. I spent a lot of my time on my own, wandering around doing, I guess, whatever I wanted. Check out during the day and come back at night. So, there were lots of guys there all the time. I honestly probably remember seeing her more vividly having sex a lot (more) than anything else...Sandy

While Sandy's narrative does not reveal trauma, it does demonstrate the lack of parental care and appropriate role models, which will be explored further in Chapter 7. However, Sandy's home situation changed markedly when her mother became pregnant. Her mother was incapable of looking after the children, and as was the case with the other participants, there was no significant other available to fill the void. Consequently, the burden of the primary caregiver shifted to Sandy.

So, my brother and my sister were born. My mom again really struggled, um, and I remember that part of my life. I spent a lot of time looking after my brother and sister. I remember (if I) wanted to go to a sleepover at my friend's house, I could only go if I brought my little brother with me, right. He's an infant, right. So, I would take him with me to the sleepover. Um, there were a handful of times when I would get up to go to school, and my mom would think it was nighttime when it was day, um, just because she was so high (on drugs), and she wouldn't let me go to school. So, I would stay home and take care of the kids all through elementary school. I would walk home from school every single day at lunch and feed my brother and sister, make sure they were fed and go back to school. And that continued. She was just really strung out, and that was kind of how I lived then....Sandy

Sandy's account reveals the premature adult identity she assumed due to her mother's inability to look after her children and the nature of the responsibilities imposed on Sandy. Betty's story further illustrates the assignment of the role of caregiver. Betty's father was an alcoholic who had a position in an industry sector that required him to work offshore for extended periods.

Accordingly, he would leave Betty and her twin sister with one of his many wives: he was married six times throughout his life.

So, he would go, and he would be gone for weeks at a time. So, we were very much left in the care of whoever was our stepmother at the time. And so, we were malnourished, very much so, and locked in closets. We had to find ways to protect and feed ourselves and would sneak food from our neighbours or the trash cans....Betty

Betty's narrative exposes that she lacked the basic essentials typically provided to children, food and a safe environment. It is common for older siblings to have responsibility for taking care of a younger sibling. Nevertheless, one can only imagine that being left completely alone or left with adults largely incapable or unwilling to look after them at such a young age would have been a traumatic experience for Ann and the other participants. However, the participants' accounts do not disclose evidence of trauma or any indication that they felt panicked or helpless; their narratives reveal that they simply responded and adapted to the new situation. I believe that this could be because they were thrust into their respective situations and that the urgency of their circumstances did not afford them the time to fully consider or appreciate what had happened to them. Furthermore, they were all under the age of ten, and one can speculate that they did not fully grasp the gravity of their situation. Nonetheless, studies have shown that when the children are abandoned or forced to look after themselves or others, it creates an identity crisis; a turning point whereby one is propelled to seek answers and "to question the meaning of life and one's purpose in it" (Erikson, 1968, p. 16). This represents a key turning point in the identity formation process (Erikson, 1968). To function, individuals need a situated identity that provides them with a solid understanding of who they are within that particular situation or context (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016). The early trauma of being on their own necessitated a revision to the life story of the participants to accommodate their new circumstances (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004) and reduce their subjective uncertainty about who they were and how would they go about accommodating this new role that was imposed on them (Hogg, 2006).

In the case of the participants in this study, their role as caregivers became their salient role out of necessity and a need for survival. Role salience is defined as a commitment to a person's identity and the prominence and value they place on the identity (Burke and Stets, 2009). While the events did not cause the distress typically associated with trauma - as will be further demonstrated through the narrative accounts of the women in this study - becoming the primary caregiver with all the associated pressure and responsibilities had a profound effect on how the women came to define themselves. Role identities provide meaning for self because they provide concrete role expectations and corresponding behaviours (Hogg and White, 1995). The picture that emerges is that while daunting for children so young, assuming the role of caregiver provided the participants with some sense of order and stability amidst the chaos. And as will be shown, the assumption of this new role gave them a sense of control and purpose and provided the foundation for how they would steadily come to see themselves, notably, as independent, reliable, and resourceful. Studies on the impact of trauma have determined that individuals employ a wide variety of identity work as they seek to negotiate "new selves" (Maitlis, 2009).

Aside from the role of the caregiver, the need to protect a sibling was another early childhood common theme among the participants who had siblings. The urge to protect their sibling existed regardless of whether the sibling was older or younger and shifted the role of the participants from that of caregiver to that of caregiver/protector. An illustration of this transition is shown through the following narrative of Ann, the lead protagonist for this theme, and offers an opportunity to understand how, while still very young, these children started to see themselves no longer as children but as protectors and caregivers. It exposes how those early identity revisions may have influenced their identity in later life. The perception of our social reality has a strong influence on the social identities we form (Turner and Reynolds, 2010). For the women in this study, their social reality was one of survival. These personal and social identities serve to answer the age-old questions: Who am I, how do others see me, and how do I want to be seen? (DeRue and Ashforth, 2010). In the case of Ann, the initial departure of her mother left a vacant role to fill. Given the inability of Ann's older sister to cope with the

abandonment, the burden and role of caregiver fell to her. When Ann's mother returned home a year later, she returned with her third husband, who was verbally, physically, and sexually abusive.

When he would start beating my sister, I was always quick to jump in and go. If you have to hit somebody, then hit me, but you are not hitting my sister, right. I needed to be here to protect my mom and my sister. Like that was my job. I was their protector; I mean to me, was it her (mom's) job to protect us? I mean, she was living in her own hell. She certainly wasn't in any condition to protect us. So, um, my sister and I always joke when my mom does something silly. I know; I thought we raised her better than that. (Laugh) ...Ann

Over the year that they were left alone, Ann became accustomed to looking after her sister and being the primary decision-maker. As such, it would seem to have been a natural progression for Ann to shift unhesitatingly from a caregiver to a protector. As the research participants adjusted to and made sense of their new reality, they created new narratives. It is the process of creating these narratives that result in posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). Studies have shown that traumatic events such as those experienced by the participants in this study often become defining moments. They become integrated into one's identity and lead to expectations about who they are and whom they are becoming (Berman, Montgomery and Ratner, 2020).

This transition to protector was present, although in differing degrees, in all the narratives of the participants who had sisters, as further illustrated by Alice's narrative. As Alice approached puberty, she noticed that her abuser was beginning to redirect his attention and interest toward her younger sister. Fearing for her sister's safety, Alice took steps to protect her sister, shifting her role to that of a protector.

*The first time it happened, I was just shocked. I felt gutted; I felt disembowelled. And then he is (going to) harm my sister, and my sister is even smaller than me. My sister is like a willow in the wind. I am like, if this hurts me, and I am a bigger girl. This is going to break my sister. I can't have that. So, I learned to keep quiet, and I learned to manipulate him. Like when I wanted, like I am setting this up, so you can do something. I mean, so I started to be a little Lolita about this whole thing. You know what I mean. (Researcher: **Why do you***

think you did that?) Because I did not want him to be close to my sister. I was like, if you are going to do this, then do this to me because we have already crossed that bridge and like, I already hate you. There is nothing worse than you can do...Alice

On page 99, I introduced a narrative showing how the women in Alice's family accepted the inappropriate behaviours of the men in their family. Alice's account demonstrates how this role modelling by the women was passed along to her such that, she, too, learned to "*grin and bear it*". Moreover, it reveals the emergence of agency – which will be explored further in Chapter 7 – when Alice learns to exert some semblance of control over her abuser.

The first sub-theme, *Premature adult identities: role of caregiver/protector*, describes several early defining moments in the participants' lives. It describes the circumstances that placed them in situations where they had no adult or significant other to ensure their safety or provide them with the loving care traditionally afforded to a child. While still young children, the participants were forced to assume the roles of protector and caregiver. The introduction of these roles in the early formative stage of their identity development created a foundation for how the participants would see themselves over time. Step by step, they were developing a sense of themselves as independent, resourceful, and possessing the strength and abilities to protect others while developing coping skills that would desensitize them to future traumas (Maddi, 2006).

6.3.3 Sub-theme # 2 - Distrust of Others

The participants' trauma of being forced into the role of caregiver and protector was compounded by their distrust of others, leaving them with the belief that they were truly alone. Events such as these shatter our basic fundamental assumptions about life (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; McAdams et al., 2006; Marin and Shkreli, 2019) and place us in a world where "*we are no longer able to provide a trustworthy road map for negotiating life*" (Janoff-Bulman and McPherson-Frantz, 1997, p. 94). This sub-theme, *Distrust of Others*, describes further events in the participants' lives that reinforced their distrust of others. It illuminates how this lack of trust influenced the choices they made and how it contributed to their identity formation.

None of the women felt they had an adult or significant other that they could trust or to whom they could go for help; the burden was solely theirs to bear. Ann still expressed disbelief that no one intervened during the initial one-year timeframe she and her sister lived alone.

And of course, like you, there's no way the neighbours didn't know. There are no cars; you see no human beings, adults, other than the kids. It doesn't make any sense that no one called the authorities. You see a 7-year-old cutting the grass every week religiously; it doesn't make sense. Right. I grew up believing that you can't count on other people to PAUSE because clearly, you couldn't...Ann

Ann's account reveals that the lack of trust she had as a result of her mother's abandonment was compounded by the acquiescence of others. Ann's narrative signals that she knew, intuitively or otherwise, that neighbours and other adults would have noticed the absence of an adult. The fact that they could have intervened and chose to turn a blind eye resulted in a distrust of others that still exists today based on her narrative accounts. This knowledge that "you can't count on other people" reinforced her independence and self-reliance, which contributed to her identity formation.

The distrust surfaced in the case of Alice when she finally worked up the courage to tell her mother that her uncle was sexually abusing her. Alice's relief in confiding to her mother was followed by her devastation when her mother responded by slapping her across the face and said: "Don't ever lie like that on your family again".

Speaking up meant a break from my mother. Because my relationship since that moment it was like - DUM, DUM, DUM - there was before that moment and after that moment. It was a break with her, you know. I realized that I can't rely on the woman for anything. She is not going to be there to protect you, she is not going to be there to defend you...Alice

From that point forward, Alice's account reveals her belief that if she could not trust her own mother, there was no one else she could trust. This set Alice on a path where she knew that she was solely responsible for looking after herself.

The origin story is what happened with my mother's brother, you know. Umm, it was pivotal. It coloured the way that I saw men; it coloured the way I saw women; it coloured the way I saw my own sexuality, you know, my power, my own agency. It was like you can't depend on anybody; you have to take yourself through this. I have created a world where you can't trust anybody, where you have to go at it by yourself. Like with an underlying fuck you, you know...Alice

Both Ann and Alice's narrative accounts show the impact these early experiences had on their view of the world and how they formed part of the foundation for their early identity, reinforcing their independence and self-reliance. This lack of trust was prevalent in all eight narratives in varying forms. In some cases, such as Olive, the lack of trust was created by both the family member abusing her and the "seemingly loving" parent who turned a blind eye to the abuse. In the case of others, the neighbours, teachers and other adults that were in a position to intervene but for reasons unknown to the participants chose to ignore the situation.

My mom was never, it wasn't that she wasn't around, but she never intervened in any of those situations. Um, I don't know why. I don't know if she was scared....Olive

I have to be able to deal with these things and persevere and move on my own and not use it as an excuse to go backwards or look for help or find somebody else to help me through something. I am just going to have to manage it myself. So, it was also like one of those sorts of like fundamental things for me. That was like you can't count on other people, so you have to do it yourself....Carol

I believed that I understood how the events that were shared with me by the participants influenced their view of others and their corresponding inability to trust. Hearing their stories caused me to remember an incident at school when I refused to shower following gym class. Afraid of the consequences of disobeying further, I undressed. I can still remember the unsettling silence as my classmates and teacher bore witness to the bruises and marks on my body. After what seemed like an eternity, I was told to get dressed and never had to shower from that day forward. I still sometimes wonder why the gym teacher chose to do nothing...Researcher Field Notes & Reflexivity

Identity theory proposes that the salience of any one identity is strengthened by their commitment to the role (Hogg, Terry and White, 1995). This sub-theme demonstrated how the inability to trust others reinforced the salience of their role as the primary caregiver, and as the women in the study undertook these various roles of primary caregiver and protector, they began to assume the socially constructed practices and identities commonly associated with that role.

6.3.4 Sub-theme # 3 - Work ethic

The third sub-theme, *Work ethic*, describes the early emergence of a strong work ethic amongst all the participants in the study and highlights the specific circumstances that contributed to its development. It is important to the study as these learned behaviours continued throughout their lives and supported the advancement of their identities as leaders. The reader will see the resurfacing of the work ethic the participants established in their formative years throughout their life span.

The role of caretaker and protector brought with it responsibility for undertaking basic household and farm chores for all eight participants. When Ann's mother returned with her third stepfather, the amount of work Ann and her sister needed to perform daily increased substantially.

So, then they set very strict rules for every day – the children – we are to vacuum the house twice a day; he saw us more as servants. We are to vacuum the house twice a day; we were to cook the meals. We dusted every day. How dusty could the furniture be, but these were the things? Mop the floor twice a day, so all of these things. And the kids were not to speak until spoken to.....Ann

While it is not unusual for parents to assign responsibility for household chores to their children, as elucidated by the additional narrative accounts that follow, the participants in this study were responsible for far more than would be typically assigned to a child. Debbie recalled playing with her siblings “quite a bit” and working around the farm. The requirement to work

at such a young age established a very strong work ethic in Debbie and the other research participants.

We all worked on the farm before and after school. We all took care of the animals. We all worked, umm, in the garden. We did not have any, umm, farming machinery for harvesting. It was always the neighbours who did the planting and the harvesting for the crops. But the animals we tended to. And it was a very controlled environment...Debbie

Leadership identity scholars believe that leadership development is a lifelong, complicated process and that it is constructed over time with the benefit of new experiences and corresponding learnings (Day, 2000; Avolio, 2005; Day and Harrison, 2007; Day et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2020). For example, research has demonstrated that childhood participation in household chores has been linked to a number of key childhood antecedents to leader development (Liu et al., 2020), including but not limited to the development of responsibility. In addition, evidence suggests that our capacity to learn diminishes with age and that how we define ourselves begins with our early life experiences (Avolio and Vogelgesang, 2011). Moreover, the development of personal traits, such as work ethic, which are deemed to contribute to the success of specific goals, is more difficult to develop as adults (Avolio and Vogelgesang, 2011).

This sub-theme demonstrated that the research participants' requirement to work before and after school established within each of them a solid work ethic that I suggest supported their leader development. Working extremely hard was more than a mindset for the participants; it became a personal identity label that was descriptive of their self-view (DeRue and Wellman, 2009). The participants in this study encountered significant obstacles while finding their way out of poverty, with many working extremely hard and juggling multiple jobs while attending school. Their well-established work ethic enabled this juggling of multiple activities. These learned behaviours continued through their working lives, becoming part of their personal and emerging leader identities.

More specifically, the participants in this study were accustomed to hard work. They had worked hard for their entire lives. Once they entered the corporate world, they brought that work ethic

with them. Their willingness to work longer and harder than their colleagues was a key element to which they attribute their early promotions to senior leadership positions. The participants' work ethic is important to this study as it played a significant role in facilitating the ability of the participants to pursue the path that led them out of their difficult personal situations and into their leadership positions.

6.3.5 Sub-theme # 4 - Adaptations / Acquisition of New Skills

This sub-theme demonstrates how, as the participants carried out their role of caregiver and protector, it set off new ways of thinking of themselves, reinforcing their new roles as they gradually acquired new ways of being. I employ the metaphor of becoming a mother to further illustrate this point. Similarly to becoming a primary caregiver, becoming a mother is a social role accompanied by societal norms and behavioural expectations. It carries a socially shared image that invokes notions of collective values (Stryker and Serpe, 1994). These socially accepted values include responsibility, dependability, and trustworthiness. Whereas a person-based social identity assumes specific characteristics and beliefs that arise from membership with a specific group, role identities are conceptualized as “*structured sets of interrelated behaviours, obligations and orientations toward others that are specific to that social role and hence differentiated from other role identities that the same individual may have*” (Brewer, 2001, p. 121). As the participants were forced to assume responsibilities typically undertaken by adults, the participants took on the socially accepted behaviours of a primary caregiver and, in the process, acquired the requisite survival skills. They became resourceful, creative, decisive, and progressively more confident in their abilities to manage the situation. They also became more confident about being placed in the role of “being in charge”. In speaking about having to maintain the house and her sister, Ann’s narrative demonstrates that she grew progressively more and more comfortable in the role and, like the other participants, began developing a different set of skills related to their being alone and their collective need to survive.

And I remember one day it was particularly difficult because we had to have a permission slip signed, and there was no one to sign a permission slip. Well, I had never not done the

thing that I am supposed to do, so my teacher made a big deal about the fact that I did not bring in the permission slip. Who is going to sign the permission slip? It is not Friday; no one is going to be there 'til Friday. So, my sister and I spent hours that night practising forging my mom's signature so that she could sign the permission slip. And from that point forward I had, we didn't know about that gap in our plan, right? And I decided no more gaps. We never invited anybody to spend the night. We always said no when someone asked if you could spend the night cas we know someone would call and ask for permission. And I kind of felt like; we've got this, you know. I don't need help...Ann

This event was another turning point for Ann in two ways. First, it demonstrated Ann's capacity to overcome a challenge. In this scenario, solving the problem of providing her teacher with a signed permission slip. Secondly, and more critically, Ann shifted from being reactive to being proactive. Up until this point, Ann and her sister dealt with the events as the situations presented themselves. This particular incident caused Ann to realize that she needed to take a proactive, strategic view so that there would be "no more gaps". When confronted with role transitions, individuals can revise and reconstruct their identities to align with that of the new role (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). When coupled with her ability to deal with situations, Ann's newfound awareness provided her with a sense of control and self-confidence that gradually began to alter how she saw herself.

Ann, as previously noted, was very protective of her sibling and became very skilled at effectively diffusing their father's anger through humour or "intellectual banter", which allowed her to "buy enough time to remove them from the situation". She became very practised at assessing the mood of her stepfather and determining the best strategy to manage the situation. Out of necessity, she learned how to assess and respond very quickly to difficult situations, adapting her response as required by the circumstance, resulting in further skill adaptations.

And, I would make him laugh, I would, I could intellectually banter with him. I could do things that they couldn't even get. If I could get to a happy place intellectually, it would kind of give them at least enough time to at least get out of the way. Right?...Ann

Another thing I learned from my upbringing was to be adaptive. My style was figure it out on the quick to what does the environment need. Does it need like, oh ok? If I say something really funny, he will go from being really pissed off potentially, or he could go from hitting someone to laughing if I am quick-witted enough. So, this situation requires this. Being very adaptive was a survival mechanism. Being funny was a survival mechanism as well. Being quick-witted and quick to read a situation and adapt...Ann

All eight participants acknowledged acquiring skills that they directly attribute to their early childhood abuse, which was developed due to this need for self-protection, self-preservation and survival. Further participant narratives support the notion that how we come to see ourselves is guided by our past experiences. This is consistent with studies that have shown that an individual's ability to display resilience in the face of adversity has the capacity to alter the individual's self-view in positive ways. As a result, they come to view their capacity to persist as a core component of their reflected self-portrait. (Roberts et al., 2005).

In the case of Alice⁴, despite feeling both resigned to the situation and obligated to protect her sister, she also gained some control over the situation with her abuser. She learned how to “manipulate him”, which, in turn, gave her some “agency” over the situation. The need for control and power was a strong motivational driver in all eight participants (which I explore further in Chapter 7). Initially, Alice was devastated by the abuse. As was shown earlier in this section, this feeling of “helplessness” was compounded by her mother's refusal to acknowledge the abuse once Alice told her mother what had been happening to her. As a result, Alice initially felt vulnerable and “helpless” to do anything to stop the sexual abuse. Learning how to manipulate her abuser provided her with a sense of control and power which represented an early turning point in how Alice started to see herself, no longer completely helpless but capable of having some control over an adult.

And it got to the point where I just kind of like resigned myself. Like this is what happens when you go to grandma's house. It is just going to happen, and you know, I kind of grin and bear it. I learned to keep quiet, and I learned to manipulate him ...Alice

⁴ Reference to Alice's narrative account, page 115/116

It was also interesting to note that Alice used the same term to describe her response to her situation – *grin and bear it* – that she used to describe how the women in her family had learned to accept and live with the misbehaviours of the men in the family. It reveals how Alice was shaped by her earlier role models. Her account also shows the development of early skills related to her experiences. Namely, the ability to know when to remain quiet and how to manipulate situations. The development of early skills was seen in all of the participants, as further illustrated by Carol’s account.

Carol was the second eldest in a family of five children. The role of caregiver was shared equally between Carol and her older sister. Despite this shared role, Carol’s older sister was considered the leader, the one that the other siblings looked up to and to whom they listened. This dominant position amongst the siblings changed when Carol, at approximately ten years old, was confronted with the prospect that her father was going to kill her mother and potentially all the children. Galvanized into action out of sheer terror, and while her older sister remained paralyzed by fear, Carol took the initiative to contact social services. The family dynamic shifted from that point forward, and Carol “*became a different person*”, as shown in the rich descriptive account that follows.

I still believe today that we would all be dead if I didn't do what I did this one day which was: we were in the bedroom, he called us all in, he made us all stand there. He had a revolver, the one that you put the bullets in. He put a bullet in, and he was spinning, and he was holding the gun at my mom's head and clicking, and he kept spinning and clicking, and he did this like 3 or 4 times. And I was sure that he was gonna blow my mom's brains out. And so, then it didn't happen. He passed out for a couple of hours, and then he got up, and he wanted to go somewhere. She drove. He didn't drive. He was always too drunk to drive. So, she took him out, and I locked myself in their bedroom, and I called social services. I didn't even know what number I was looking for and was trying to figure out, and, um, my older sister was freaking out. She was like; he is going to come home and kill us. You know I can't believe you are doing this, and I called social services. You know things changed after that. Right after that. I became a completely different person after that, just my mindset, my attitude, you know. I had done what all of us felt was impossible

to do, which was to get us out of that situation and at that point, I just felt that if I could do that, there was nothing else that was going to get in my way with regards to you know who I was, what I was going to become. So, I think that was really a defining moment in my life. Um, that changed me forever...Carol

Carol had never experienced a safe world, having been abused “for as long as I can remember”. However, the gravity of this event represented a turning point early in Carol’s life and one that forever changed how she came to see herself. It revealed her ability to identify a solution to an immediate crisis as well as her resourcefulness in calling social services. Her narrative provides insight into how this event influenced her early identity and how shifting her self-view from being helpless to becoming the heroine of the story instilled in her self-confidence and set her on a new path.

Like, it was such a weird, surreal feeling. It was almost like I stepped away from who I was right there and went, “you are going to make this decision”, and one way or another, it is going to change what is going on with it. Or we are either going to end it all here because we are going to die anyway as we can’t continue to go through life like this. Or we’re going to move on, but this is it. Even though my sister was pleading with me not to make the phone call as she just thought that would be the end of all of us. Um, I almost went; that doesn’t matter anymore, you guys, it doesn’t matter anymore. I’m just going to do this. I won’t call it power. It’s just that empowerment; feeling empowered and knowing what it feels like to feel empowered after all those years of just having no power, no control over what was happening to us constantly...Carol

Carol realized the gravity of the situation and knew that the status quo was no longer an option. She refused to listen to her sister, the purported leader of the family, who was immobilised in the terror of the present. Acting on her own, she took control of the situation with a view to a more permanent resolution and a new future. Such traumatic events often lead to a re-evaluation of one’s life (Janoff-Bulman and McPherson-Fantz, 1977). They “challenge the assumptions that guide action” (Maitlis, 2009, p. 49) and interrupt our ways of thinking, setting off an emotional reaction that causes us to question what is happening and what it means (Maitlis, 2009; Roberts et al., 2005). How individuals come to define themselves is determined

by their specific situation and context in which they use their internal sensemaking to construct their situational identity while considering their past, present, and future (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016). Carol's account demonstrates this internal sensemaking. In the context of the present moment, she decided that she was no longer willing to accept the abuse she had experienced in the past with actions that were motivated to achieve a future solution. From that traumatic day, when Carol assumed control of the situation with her father, Carol is still considered the matriarch of the family and the one to whom the others seek guidance and advice.

Definitely, I, uh, still today, I am the leader in the family with regards to what we are doing, if we are planning anything, if we are doing a surprise party, or whatever. Everybody says XXX, what do you think we should do here? You know we can do this; it will work out fairly well, so now everyone looks to me...Ann

This sub-theme reveals how the circumstances of the participants placed them in situations where out of necessity and a need for survival, they acquired select skills. They learned to assess the severity of situations together with the ability to determine the most appropriate action to respond to the circumstance. They learned how to diffuse anger through re-direction or humour. While still very young, they proved to themselves that they could overcome challenges, becoming resilient, reliable, and resourceful in the process. Their need for self-preservation resulted in the development of unique skills not typically developed at such young ages. Skills that proved useful later in life.

A Postscript on Ann, the lead protagonist of this theme

While more of Ann's story will be revealed in subsequent chapters, I thought the reader would appreciate an overview of areas that will not be covered to provide a more complete picture of Ann's life. Ann's mother returned home with the man she ran away with, as her third husband, approximately a year after she had abandoned her two children. During that intervening period, Ann and her sister attended school every day. Unlike the other participants, they could not participate in many extracurricular activities and only played with friends at school. This was with a view to maintaining the knowledge that they lived alone a secret. Life became much more difficult for Ann and her sister with the return of their mother and the arrival of their third stepfather. He was physically, sexually and verbally abusive with both girls and extremely controlling, applying strict rules that he harshly enforced.

And anyway, a year later mom comes home with the mad Italian as our new dad. We thought living by ourselves was tough, (LAUGH) but it was MUCH better than living with the mad Italian. He never wanted kids, probably never really wanted to settle down but he comes in as our Dad.? Definitely did not want kids, especially girls. He cut off all my hair. He decides if I am going to have a kid at least she needs to be a boy. He bought me; I only wore boy's clothes. He made me look like a boy. I played soccer because he played soccer. So, then they set very strict rules for every day – the children – we are to vacuum the house twice a day, he saw us more as servants. We are to vacuum the house twice a day, we were to cook the meals. We dusted every day. How dusty could the furniture be but these were the things. Mop the floor twice a day so all of these things. And the kids were not to speak until spoken to so...Ann

Ann's memories of the timeframe between when her mother returned home with her stepfather to when her mother abandoned them again are "spotty" and, as noted earlier she is choosing to "unpack her memories" of this timeframe to when she feels equipped and strong enough to confront the memories buried within the boxes. When Ann's mother left again, Ann (15) and her sister (17) felt equipped to live on their own, preferring that to the alternative. They continued attending school while working and supporting themselves, with Ann as the sole breadwinner and caregiver. Ann earned an income modelling children's clothes well into her freshman year, as she looked substantially younger than her age. As will be explored in the next theme, Ann like the others, recognized education as a path out and applied herself to getting an education. She graduated from university and started her own highly successful company. Her sister did not fare as well "and allowed that experience to beat her down instead of build her up". So, she ended up with an abusive husband, "She follows the pattern, right". Ann, who is in her 50s never married as she continues to believe that others, in particular men, can't be trusted.

"Well, I am a single mom in my 50s. (Laugh) I think there may be an obvious one there (laugh) um, so ya, I believe I can depend on only me" ...Ann

Ann has a daughter with whom she enjoys a strong bond. She has since started a second company. The role of caregiver still resides within Ann personally. Ann continues to provide emotional and financial support to her sister. Her mother, who she has long forgiven, lives with Ann and her daughter and is 100% financially dependant on Ann. While still dealing with her past, Ann is content with her life, has many friends and is looking forward to her next life chapter.

6.3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on events that occurred in the early foundational years of the research participants and the corresponding impact on their identity development. The chapter led with the sociohistorical context in which the trauma occurred for the women in this study which was offered as an explanation for why the participants did not, as children, see themselves as victims and were therefore unable to attach the stigmatizing victim narrative to themselves. During the intervening period between when these women were children and did not see themselves as victims to when they understood what had been done to them, the foundation of their identities had already shifted in positive directions such that they simply could not identify with the socially constructed notions of a victim (Bumiller, 1998). I believe that this offers a plausible explanation as to why, when the participants understood the significance of their early childhood abuse later in life, they did not attribute the word victim to themselves. They did not, and do not, identify themselves as having the traits that are typically associated with victims of abuse, such as poor self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, passiveness, and anti-social behaviours (Dargis et al., 2016).

Following the historical context, descriptions of the participants' early life experiences were provided that offered insight into how the performance of specific roles they were forced to assume established some sense of stability and structure for them. Posttraumatic theories assisted the interpretive process as they provided a useful lens with which to explore the impact the trauma may have had on the early identity formation of the research participants. I then applied narrative identity theories to interpret how the enactment of those roles introduced the participants to new ways of seeing themselves that served as a foundation for positive self-identity and how their distrust of others reinforced the salience of these roles. As they performed these roles, the participants began to take on the socially constructed practices and identities commonly associated with them. The study also demonstrated how adopting new roles post-trauma could lead to an expanded identity that encompasses the recognition of the individual's strength and resourcefulness in overcoming adversity and sowing the seed for their ability to do so again (Maitlis, 2009). As will be seen in subsequent chapters, the participants

drew strength from their ability to have endured their early childhood trauma and that part of their narrative identity is that of a person who is capable of surviving anything (Morris et al., 2011; Berman, Montgomery and Ratner, 2020). The chapter concluded with the early development of unique skills and the establishment of a strong work ethic developed out of a need for self-preservation and how these new skills informed their identity. Adopting the life-span approach to leader development, this chapter showed how the early individual roles the participants assumed began to fuse with their identity and that they increasingly began to define themselves by their role (Turner, 1978) of being “*in charge*”, sowing the early seeds of what appears to become, in later life, a leader identity.

Chapter 7: Identity Discovery: Emerging Life Stories and Leader Identities

7.1 Chapter Outline

The life story is a selective autobiographical narrative which articulates how the important events of our lives are shaped by and have shaped, our sense of self
(McAdams, 1993; McAdams, 1996)

This chapter introduces the early adolescent years of the research participants and the second of four dominant themes, *Identity discovery: emerging life stories and leader identities*. It describes this period of identity discovery when the participants started attending school and how that exposed them to first-hand experiences of how others lived. Their awareness of the opportunities available to others and, more critically, the possibilities they discovered that existed for them instilled in each participant a desire for a better life. I explore how these discoveries formed the basis of the script for their emerging life stories, one that motivated them to find a pathway out of their familial circumstances. The chapter leads with an overview of the overarching theme for this chapter - identity and meaning making through the development of a life story. This theme is illustrated through the narrative account of Debbie - the second of the four protagonists - that signals the emergence of her life story and reveals her nascent narrative identity. Following the main theme, I then proceed to the chapter's six sub-themes.

The six sub-themes draw primarily upon the life-span approach to leader development and identity and illuminate how the events of the participants' early childhood prompted them to purposely seek out leadership-rich experiences and how their participation in these activities contributed to their emergent leader identities and their evolving life story. The first sub-theme, *Choosing a positive social identity*, describes the events that created the impetus for the participants' desire for a different identity. The following two sub-themes, *Extracurricular activities* and *Early leadership-rich experiences*, shed light on why the participants chose to participate in so many activities and why they specifically sought out

leadership roles. Next, the sub-themes - *Financial independence* and *Power and control* - highlight the motivational drivers that set the research participants on a trajectory where they were spurred towards finding a pathway out of their respective situations. The final sub-theme, *Education*, describes the skills they acquired along the way to enable them to do so successfully.

7.2 Introduction: Laying the Foundation for the Emergence of the Participants' Life Story

The introductory section aims to lay the foundation for the principal theme of this chapter, *The Life Story*. Just as I believed it was important to lead the first research findings in Chapter 6 with an overview of the sociohistorical context in which the trauma occurred, I believe it is equally important to demonstrate – through the narrative accounts of Debbie - when, how and why the participants begin to create their life story and the corresponding impact the emerging life story had on their identity development.

7.2.1 Debbie's Story

Debbie was a difficult participant to interview. While she was willing to participate in the study, Debbie admitted during the initial interview that, like Anne, she had not completely come to terms with her adverse childhood experiences. Debbie had not yet made peace with her childhood trauma, and her past experiences continue to haunt her in ways that were less evident in the accounts of the other research participants. Her account suggests that she accepts what happened to her and does not feel as though she is a victim. However, what surfaces from her narrative is that she still feels the hurt and emotions that accompany her childhood memories. These emotions were manifested in the sentiments Debbie expressed and exhibited during the interview. Nonetheless, Debbie spoke freely and candidly about her childhood. She carried herself with confidence and had a very pragmatic approach to life and to presenting her story. Debbie requested that she be interviewed in the living room of my hotel suite, as she deemed it afforded her maximum privacy. The fact that Debbie wanted maximum privacy, coupled with the emotions she exhibited in the interview, intimated that

Debbie still harbours some shame about her past and that it revealed her ongoing concern that she would be judged unfavourably by others. This worry of being judged poorly by others was expressed by several of the participants and as will be shown in this chapter, yielded a strong influence on the development of the participants' identities.

*This resonated with my own experiences of early childhood abuse and in my
Field notes from this time, I had recorded the following:*

I understood and shared their concern. My biggest fear about others learning of my past is that they will see me as somehow broken, or worse, feel sorry for me. I believe that the participants spoke so freely with me because they understood and took comfort in knowing that we shared similar histories and fears...Researcher Field Notes

Debbie is a Caucasian woman in her early fifties raised in extreme poverty in the rural Southern United States and whose socioeconomic classification would be precariat. Debbie was the CEO of a large international company she founded and subsequently sold. Following the sale of her company, she was appointed to the role of Vice-Chair of the publicly traded company that purchased her firm and has since retired. She is the youngest of five children, with two brothers and two sisters. Debbie's mother was a stay-at-home mother while her father worked "*on and off*". He had a difficult personality with what Debbie described as an "*explosive temper, always right and never liked anyone telling him what to do*". As such, he had a difficult time keeping a job which required the family to move frequently, to "*wherever he was able to find a new job*". Most of the food they ate, they grew themselves and "*a shared soda was a big treat on the 4th of July and New Year's Day, McDonald's was one hamburger and a French fry you shared with your sibling, and that was really rare. It was a big deal to go to McDonald's once a year*".

7.2.2 Impact of Trauma on Identity Formation: Relationship to the Development of a Life Story

Debbie was verbally, physically, and sexually abused by her father from a very early age, as far back as she can remember. Based on which home they lived in at the time, she believes the sexual abuse started when she was four years of age and ended when she was approximately aged ten, as she neared puberty. After that, however, the mental and physical abuse continued.

When I was younger, when we were all at home, it was, umm, [long pause], you kept to yourself as much as you could. Or you kept out of dad's realm as much as you could. If he was working, he did not like noise, and it wasn't like every single day he was going to blow up. You just never just knew when it was gonna be, and you never quite knew exactly what it was that was going to piss him off. I hated my dad, but I didn't; I didn't connect my feelings about my dad to what happened when I was really little. Umm, not the sexual assault, it was the beatings and the verbal abuse was why I hated him...Debbie

Debbie's account speaks to the fact that she still has not made peace with her past and that she still harbours strong emotions about her father. Her account also provides insight into Debbie's lack of control over her environment. Debbie never knew what trigger would "set off her father". This caused her and her siblings to live in constant fear of him. Later in life, this lack of control over her environment would translate into a need for control, which I explore further in this chapter.

Hearing Debbie describe her familial circumstances surfaced memories of my own. Similarly, I never learned what caused my father's temper to surface and consequently I became very skilled at assessing my environment. Over time, I could tell by the sound of the car entering the driveway and the opening of the front door whether it was going to be a good day or a bad day. The participants' narrative accounts in the study, such as Ann's,⁵ revealed they had developed similar skills to mine. As Debbie described her similar situation, I wondered if Debbie had also developed those skills...Researcher Field Notes

⁵ References narrative account of Ann on page 122 and 123

7.2.3 Signs of the Life Story Emerging

Narrative identity theorists believe that the life story is a culmination of the various events in an individual's life that they bring with them from situation to situation that continuously shape, evaluate, and reconstruct the sense of self (Polkinghorne, 1996; McAdams, 2003). Other researchers believe that the life story is a representation of an internal "schema" that enables the individual to integrate into their life story the events that occur in their life that are deemed significant, recurring, or that take place during important life periods (Habermas and Bluck, 2000). Adverse experiences, especially traumatic ones such as those experienced by the participants in this study, have been shown to challenge identity development and disrupt the normative identity process (Janoff-Bulman and McPherson-Frantz, 1997; Marin and Shkreli, 2019). Trauma adds complexity to the identity formation process by forcing the individual to confront and make sense of their trauma while calling into question previously held beliefs and assumptions about the self and the world (Janoff-Bulman and McPherson-Frantz, 1997; Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004).

Paradoxically, traumatic events also provide individuals with the opportunity to revise their life narratives into a more positive story (McAdams, 1993) which, as will be shown in this chapter, is exactly what Debbie and the other participants chose to do with their life stories. Moreover, the stories we tell ourselves can bring meaning into our lives (East et al., 2010), and Debbie's quote below highlights her basic philosophy of "making the best of what life sends her way".

I can't do anything about what happened then. So, I'm gonna move on. I'm just gonna make the best of whatever. Yes, it has shaped me, but I have not let it define me, I guess. Umm, I have not let it bring me down. I would say my sisters did. I would say my sisters are victims because it's really messed them up. I would blame that on my dad, but I don't let him hold a grip on me. I'm gonna move on...Debbie

Debbie's narrative account indicates that she possessed the cognitive ability to understand what happened to her and that she acknowledges the trauma of her past. Identity theorists believe that during adolescence, individuals begin to create their life stories (Erikson and

Erikson, 1998; Habermas and Bluck, 2000; and Pasupathi, Mansour and Brubaker, 2007). It is believed that this is when individuals possess the cognitive skills and abilities to link life events with personal characteristics and themes that are required to create a life story (Habermas and Bluck, 2000). These cognitive abilities, which are referred to as autobiographical reasoning, represent the ability of an individual to cause certain events to occur that, in turn, change or shape the individual. (Habermas and Bluck, 2000). Debbie's narrative reveals that she recognized the impact the sexual abuse had on her siblings. However, unlike her sisters, Debbie made an overt decision that the events of her past would not define her; she was going to be the author of her own story. Narrative identity theories are premised on the belief that individuals form their identity by integrating their life experiences, including early childhood experiences, into an evolving story (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Posttraumatic growth theorists expand upon narrative identity theories and the role and transformation process that life narratives play in the sensemaking process that results in transformative growth (Crossley, 2000; Grant, Leigh-Phippard and Short, 2015; Charbonneau-Dahlen, Lowe and Morris, 2016; Marin and Shkreli, 2019). They put forth that the first step towards this transformative growth requires that the individual creates a story *"to explain how he or she came to be the person he or she is becoming, a story that is both retrospective and prospective. Once the story is invented, the author – who is also the main character of the story and its most assiduous reader – is forever changed"* (McAdams, 2019, p. 8).

Studies have shown this to be the case with other victims of childhood sexual abuse. More specifically, Thomas and Hall (2008) conducted a study of twenty-seven female child abuse survivors that were seen to be thriving in adulthood. A central finding from this study was that the participants' narratives were ones of positive growth, which Thomas and Hall (2008, p. 154) referred to as *"being resolute"*. This resoluteness was evidenced in the study by the participants' determination and pride in having survived their abusive experiences (Thomas and Hall, 2008). For growth to occur, posttraumatic growth theorists believe that individuals must acknowledge the trauma and restructure their life narrative to incorporate the trauma into it (Jirek, 2017). These stories, by integrating the individual's past, present, and envisioned future,

can help the victims of trauma by creating some semblance of order and a purpose that takes into consideration the sequential aspects of Erikson's theoretical stages of development (McAdams, 2019). As will be discussed, once Debbie and the participants began to re-story their lives, they began to understand themselves in those narrative terms, making life choices and decisions that aligned and supported their evolving life stories (McAdams, 2019).

7.2.4 Summary: The Life Story, its Development and Relation to Trauma and Identity Development

That identity is a fundamental developmental milestone of adolescence has been well acknowledged since Erikson first introduced the concept in 1959. More recently, research has found that trauma promotes identity development beyond that which normally occurs during adolescence (Ertorer, 2014; Merrill, Waters, and Fivush, 2016). Traumatic events cause individuals to question basic goals, values and beliefs about the world that serve to provide them with a sense of purpose (Janoff-Bulman, and McPherson-Frantz, 1997; Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Tedeschi et al., 2018). Post-trauma identity development is triggered by the need to recalibrate those basic goals and values within the context of the trauma (Berman, Montgomery and Ratner, 2020). As such, traumatic experiences have been shown to “*force individuals to confront and engage in meaning making efforts*” (Janoff-Bulman and McPherson-Frantz, 1997, as cited by Marin and Shkreli, 2019, p. 139). When confronted with trauma, narratives and stories become an important means by which individuals rebuild their sense of order because the primary way that individuals attach meaning to experiences is through storytelling (Crossley, 2000) and the construction of a life story (McAdams, 1993; Dunlop and Walker, 2013). The life story becomes the mechanism through which individuals can understand and describe the developmental change (Pasupathi, Mansour and Brubaker, 2007) such that a sense of identity can be achieved through the construction of a life story (Dunlop and Walker, 2013).

In Chapter 6, *Identity Foundations*, I introduced the early formative years of the research participants. Adopting the lens of posttraumatic growth and identity theorists, I explored the

events and circumstances as they were reported to me by the participants, which occurred in their lives. These events influenced the participants' early identity formation as they gradually acquired new ways of being and understanding themselves as independent, resourceful, and resilient. As they entered their adolescent years and acquired the requisite cognitive capabilities to create a life story, they began to incorporate these early life experiences and their interpretation of the roles those events played in shaping their present selves (Lilgendahl and McAdams, 2011) into their newly developing life story. The life story theory of identity is founded on the principle that the life story allows individuals to make sense of their past, their present and their anticipated future (McAdams, 2019) and explains how a past event informed or influenced them (Habermas and Buck, 2000). This form of autobiographical reasoning has been found to result in the two major types of self-event connections: self-stability and self-change (Pasupathi et al., 2007). Self-stability occurs when events serve to *"construct a stable sense of self as well as a sense of how the self has changed over time"* (Pasupathi, Mansour and Brubaker, 2007. p. 85). Whereas self-change connections serve to describe how individuals deem themselves to have changed as a result of a past event.

Debbie's account provided a glimpse of her emerging life story and narrative identity development – *"the process of identity development by forming meaningful connections between past experiences and the self"* (Lilgendahl, Pals, and McLean, 2020, p. 960) as she makes meaning of her early trauma. It demonstrates her ability to connect her early childhood trauma to her understanding of herself as someone who *"won't be brought down"*. Posttraumatic growth and narrative identity theorists believe that traumatic events, such as those experienced by the research participants, provide individuals with the opportunity to revise their life narratives. (McAdams, 2003). The sub-themes and subsequent chapters that follow animate the additional circumstances that occur in the lives of the participants that merge with, and form part of, their evolving life stories; a life story that selectively incorporates their past while shaping them for their imagined future (Fivush and Hayden, 2003, McAdams, 2003) and contributing ultimately to their leader identity.

7.3 Introduction to Second Major Theme: The Emergence of their Life Story and Leader Identities

7.3.1 Sub-theme # 1 - Identity Reframing: A Positive Social Identity

The first sub-theme builds upon the research findings of the preceding chapter. It begins with a presentation of the self-described ways in which the participants grew into adolescence, armed with newfound self-confidence and a positive self-identity they acquired from successfully executing responsibility for taking care of themselves while still young children. It reveals, upon commencing school, how they were confronted with negative identities imposed on them by others that did not align with this positive self-view. Using self-enhancement, self-verification and social identity theories, I explore the corresponding impact this perception held by others had on them and how that discovery informed their actions and behaviours. I then demonstrate how the participants begin to re-story their lives and further revise, construct and develop their identities. Drawing upon identity motive theory, I then animate how their desire for a positive social identity connects to their desire for, and discovery of, a pathway forward. A path forward that aligned with the positive self-identity that was created as a result of their early life experiences.

Debbie did not speak about her early school years in any detail other than sharing that she was required to work on the farm before and after attending school, that she loved school and that she was very social. However, she did speak at some length about a specific event that occurred at school that she divulged as one of her most vivid memories from her early childhood school years. The event occurred in the school lunchroom, where Debbie was made aware by one of her classmates that she qualified for a subsidized lunch because of her family's financial situation.

You know when your friends have milk, and you don't. Or when, [long pause], we didn't get free lunches, but we are on some kind of discounted lunch card. And in the infinite wisdom of school ignorance, discounted lunch cards were a different colour. Nobody needs to know that. But I remember that and being embarrassing. I remember thinking even in

elementary school that it was embarrassing. Because somebody told me why my punch card was a different colour. You know, another kid said that I had a poor kid's punch card. And I didn't like that...Debbie

The fact that this was such a prominent memory for Debbie and the anger and emotional pain she exhibited while sharing this story conveys the dramatic impact this event had on her and reveals that the encounter was a triggering event in her life. How individuals attach meaning to noteworthy events that occur in their life and what is learned from those events becomes incorporated into the individual's developmental potential. More specifically, individuals' development potential is derived from the accumulation of these triggering events that determine *"what you choose to try, learn from, or walk away from which shapes how we develop as leaders"* (Avolio, 2005, p. 16). Debbie knew that she was poor. However, she reported that knowing that her classmates also understood that she was poor caused her to feel tremendous shame. She clearly did not like the socially constructed stigma and the *"negative, deviant identities"* (Nichols, 2020, p. 584) that are typically associated with being poor being attributed to her. Life course theorists argue that an individual's life trajectory, once determined, guides and limits their opportunities. This, in turn, ensures the maintenance of their trajectory. Significant triggering events have the capacity to alter the probability of life trajectories and open up new opportunities, resulting in significant shifts in the individual's identity, cognitive schemes, narratives, and life trajectory, all of which promote posttraumatic growth. (Jirek, 2017, p 167). Debbie's narrative exposes her desire for a positive social identity that aligned with her self-view, which, in turn, determined the subsequent actions she undertook.

Debbie reported shame in having a poor person's identity attributed to her is consistent with studies that have shown that part of every individual's basic need is to have a positive social identity. This desire is reflective of our fundamental need for self-enhancement and self-esteem (Turner, 1982) and being *"dirt poor"* did not align with Debbie's view of what constituted a positive social identity or how she wanted to be seen by others. According to social identity theory, people classify themselves and others into various social categories. The classifications

come with associated norms, stereotypes, and behaviours that the person assigned to that category is assumed to possess (Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Ashforth, 1998). Social identities are defined as socially constructed and socially meaningful classifications that describe the group. When referring to socio-demographic groups, these social categories form the foundation for individual and collective identities (Thoits and Virshup, 1997). Her classmates learning that she was poor was the first of several events that occurred in Debbie's life that motivated her to "find a pathway out" of her circumstances. McLean, Pasupathi and Pal (2007) argue that events, such as Debbie's lunch card experience, which are part of one's life story, become part of the self. Debbie's resentment of being labelled as a poor person, with all the associations that accompany being poor, was strongly expressed in the interview. Her narrative account clearly shows that Debbie resented the "poor person" classification label and the corresponding social identity ascribed to her by others. Consistent with self-verification theory (Swann, 2012) that asserts that individuals desire to be seen by others as they see themselves, Debbie wanted to be seen as she saw herself: independent, resourceful, and resilient. Possessing a self-view that is aligned with the view others hold helps to maintain a coherent sense of self while providing stability to the lives of individuals (Swann, 2012, Talaifar and Swann, 2017). This, in turn, provides individuals with a clear sense of who they are and how they fit into their environment. As a consequence, individuals seek out experiences that confirm or reinforce their self-views. This could explain why, both in elementary and later in high school, Debbie refused to belong to or be identified with any one particular group unless it was a professional or popular group that had a positive social identity.

I did not want to live the life my parents lived. I was motivated in the sense that I was going to not live in poverty. That, um, disgusted me. The things that we didn't have or couldn't do. The stresses it put on my mom. Umm, I was like no, I'm not going to do that...Debbie

Debbie's narrative above shows that this was a defining moment for her in that she made a conscious and deliberate decision that her future trajectory did not include living in poverty. Her rejection of the poor person's identity and pursuit of a positive social identity exposes how this particular personal experience contributed to the development of her identity. As will be

shown, it determined her decisions and actions from that moment onward, contributing to her evolving life story and corresponding emerging leader identity.

The research participants shared Debbie's unwillingness to be categorized in unfavourable or stigmatized social identity positions or groups. In addition, they shared her desire to create a different narrative that aligned with their emerging self-view, as further demonstrated by the narrative accounts of Carol and Sandy that follow.

I also grew up in the 1970s and 80s out in redneck XXX where you know people of my background and colour and minority were not looked at, um, favourably, right. So, we were immigrants coming in; you know, my parents were taking away jobs from good XXX citizens, that sort of thing. So, I was picked on a lot, and I was bullied a lot throughout my childhood as well...Carol

Sandy lived in a small rural town, and her mother was well known in the local community as a drug addict, alcoholic and prostitute.

Like you've gone too far, and that moment I figured out that I was following the same path (as her mother) and I, it scared the shit out of me, and I just never, I've never. (Researcher: So, why do you think it scared you?) Because I don't want to be like my mother. I just and I'll tell you about that in a second. But I've spent my life having to prove that I'm something other than what other people assumed that I'd would be....Sandy

In similar ways to Debbie, both Sandy and Carol resented the social identity classifications that were ascribed to them. They disliked the negative attributes and stereotyping that came with their familial, ethnic, and socioeconomic circumstances. They were ashamed of the associated norms and behaviours that others assigned to them by association. This feeling of shame was shown to impact how the participants revealed their stories. Debbie's telling of the story was expressed with anger. She resented the school for having a policy that visibly distinguished subsidized lunch cards from the others and verbalized her anger that her father had placed her in the circumstance that necessitated aid. Some participants acknowledged their desire to distance themselves from their past, which suggested a sense of isolation and shame that

extended well into adulthood. The desire to avoid the stigma associated with their past implanted the importance of a positive social identity within each participant. This, in turn, influenced their life choices and contributed to their ongoing identity formation, which will be explored further in Chapter 8. Events such as those experienced by Sandy, Debbie, and Carol, become a crucial component of the process by which individuals integrate these memories into a narrative identity and life stories. How they integrate them provides insight into how their identity emerges from these first-hand experiences. (McLean and Fournier, 2008). Sandy's narrative below provides an exemplar of the impact these experiences had on the participants. It elucidates how these experiences began to shape their identities while showing how their past histories continued to haunt them throughout their lifetime.

I was with a group of physicians, and I probably had one or two glasses of wine, and somebody asked me about my parents. I said something about my mother being a drug addict, and afterwards, one of the physicians pulled me aside and said, "you probably shouldn't say that to people". I think it just made people perceive you in a way that was less than professional. It was a surgeon, so (laugh) it was a little bit of an eye-opener for me. I've never really talked about it before, right. People close to me, like family, knew the story, but people in the work setting had no idea. And the first time somebody asked, I was kind of redirected or made to feel ashamed about it. For a minute I was, oh, I didn't know I shouldn't say it. And then, over time, I got a little bit, I got a little angry about it because I thought it wasn't my problem, and it's the truth. It is what it is. But anyways. When you say you hate to be judged for something other than what you do or how you present yourself today, it was one of the first times. Well, I take that back because when I was younger, I realized that people would judge me. But it was the first time, as a professional adult, that I realized that people still would think some way about something that happened in your past. I've spent a whole lifetime having to prove to everyone that I'm something other than what other people assumed that I'd would be...Sandy

Sandy's account reveals the range of emotions she experienced related to this event. Her account suggests that she was initially hurt and surprised by the response she received. Sandy was a successful professional, and, as such, she did not initially believe that she would be judged harshly for actions for which she had no control and that occurred when she was a child.

However, her account reveals that these feelings quickly shift to shame and embarrassment. Over time, and with the benefit of further reflection, she became angry that others would judge her unfairly. Sandy still carries that anger with her today and, as noted in her account, has spent a lifetime trying to distance herself from her past. This perceived need to prove herself to others became part of Sandy's self-identity and influenced the development of her life story, who she chose to become and why.

All the participants shared this life-long fear of having people apply unfavourable traits and associated behaviours to them based upon socially constructed classifications such as being "poor", an "immigrant", or "white trash". Much of the shame in the narrative accounts appeared to stem from the participants' belief that being "poor or trashy" was visibly obvious to others. Consequently, like Betty, many of the participants went to great lengths to hide circumstances that they thought would support those negative identities.

I was too embarrassed to tell anybody what was going on because of the (sigh) the shame of being pregnant outside of marriage. And so that shame. I was just humiliated. So, I wouldn't tell people the abuses I was suffering or all of the things going on because I didn't want them to think of me as (pause) trashy or uneducated or any of the things of the family I had come from. There was just so much shame and embarrassment. I was pregnant and living in my car for about a month. Then, it was kinda like couch surfing. So, I would stay the night with friends, and they would have no idea. Nobody knew I had nowhere to go. And I was so (pause) embarrassed...Betty

Interestingly, in some cases, it was the parents of the participants who were concerned with how others within their community perceived them.

My mom's consternation about keeping things looking a particular way regardless of whether you are dying inside or not. As long as you looked good everything was fine...Alice

We were also taught that there was this other big theme in our childhood about appearances, about the importance of appearances. So, when she was married to the mad Italian, he wasn't bringing home hardly any money. We literally qualified for food stamps.

But I am wearing cashmere and silk blouses while I was in elementary school, right. So, it was all about appearances, right....Ann

While still young, this embedded within the participants a concern for how others perceived them, the importance of social classifications, as well as the requirement to conform to certain societal standards. The participants expressed the determination this fostered in them to avoid being classified in a social category that was associated with a negative social identity. Narrative identity scholars believe that our identity is derived from storytelling and that we revise our narrative constructions to align with how we wish to see ourselves, how we wish others to see us and to accommodate changes in our lives (McAdams, 2019). This desire to possess a positive social identity was advanced when the participants commenced high school. As their world expanded, their awareness was heightened of the opportunities available to others that were denied to them as a result of their familial circumstance. *“In constructing narrative identity, human beings plagiarize shamelessly from their respective cultures, borrowing and appropriating master narratives, common images and metaphors, and prevailing plotlines from a set of canonical cultural forms, each culture showcasing its own favorites”* (McAdams, 2019, p. 14). Knowing there were options and other possibilities provided the participants with the beginnings of a life script from which they could begin to re-story their lives, together with the additional motivation to do so. This is illuminated by Sandy’s descriptive narrative account that follows.

So, I got in the car, and she (her mother) was super friendly. She told me she didn’t think my dad should take me and have me, and so she wasn’t going to take me back. So, I went with her. I didn’t, I mean, I didn’t have a cell phone, so I couldn’t call anyone on a cell phone. I ended up staying with her for two days until the police came and took me back, but in that short time, I knew that I didn’t want. At that point, I kinda knew that this (her home life) was dysfunctional. Other people knew that she (her mother) was a prostitute. Other people knew that she sold drugs. Other people knew that she (Sandy’s mother) was in and out of jail. Just nobody talked to me about it. It was normal when I was there. But when I was removed from that situation, I think people felt safer to actually say, wow. Like you know what I mean. So, for me, it started to take on a different kind of stigma than I realized it had. And when I started to wear (nicer clothes) and started to make friends and

I started to be accepted in different social circles. I figured out that I didn't want to be part of that. Like my life was so much calmer...Sandy

Sandy's narrative account illustrates the process through which the participants came to understand that there were other pathways and opportunities available to them. Sandy learned that she could be part of a different group by simply wearing different clothes and befriending others. More importantly, she realized that they would accept her into their group.

...because of that being more accepted. Right. I wasn't the poor kid in school. I was, I started to make friends. So, I started to make friends. Um, I became a cheerleader in high school. So, you know, super popular, and had lots of people to hang out with. Like, I loved high school. It was one of my very favourite, um favourite times of my life...Sandy

The picture emerging from the participant's narrative accounts exposes their desire for a different life than the one they had been living. They discovered that there were other avenues and options available, and they wanted to pursue those options. They wanted to find a path that distanced them from the negative stereotyping and stigmatized social identities that had been assigned to them as a result of their familial and socioeconomic backgrounds. As Josselson (1990, p. 27) has argued, "Identity is the link between who we believe ourselves to be and how others view us, and our ability to decide what we make of ourselves is our "ultimate act of creativity". The participants believed themselves to be independent and resourceful. Through their creative identity acts, they were able to influence whom they perceived themselves to be and, through this, how others would also see them. Once they learned that others viewed them differently, they chose to make something else of themselves, becoming the authors of their own life stories in the process. The meaning that Sandy and the others attached to those events and what they learned as a result of those first-hand experiences provides a depiction of their emerging identities (McLean and Fournier, 2008) and, in particular, the development of their emerging narrative identities. This desire for a positive social identity is another core finding that emerged from the study, which furthered the participants' strong aspirational goals. These goals, which translated later in life into a fervent need for public acknowledgement and recognition, drove

their corporate ambitions and contributed to their leader identities and early ascension to the C-suite.⁶

7.3.2 Sub-theme # 2 – Extracurricular Activities

The previous theme – *Choosing a positive social identity* – explained why the participants chose to pursue a positive social identity and why it was so important for them to be seen by others in a favourable light. This sub-theme: *extracurricular activities*, builds upon this desire for the creation of a new narrative identity. It describes the participants' involvement in extracurricular activities and how their participation in these events provided them with a more specific script for their evolving life stories. This emergent life story was more closely aligned with their developing self-identity, who they now wanted to become, and how they wanted others to see them. The development of the participants' life stories is linked to their emergent selves in that their individual self-concepts were formed as a result of their early life experiences, the meaning they attributed to those experiences and the outcomes they desired as a consequence. (McAdams, 2003; Thorne, 2004; Merrill et al., 2016). In this case, the pursuit of new experiences through undertaking extracurricular activities provided the means through which to add to their socially sculpted identities. This theme is important to the study as these activities exposed the participants to positive role models within a safe and nurturing environment. Moreover, it was through their participation in these activities that their leadership identities began to emerge.

The research participants all had positive school experiences, and each reported that they enjoyed attending both grade school and high school. Extracurricular activities were an important component of the participants' school experience and contributed to the development of the unfolding sense of whom they wished to become, as well as a means through which they could continue to take control of their destinies. For most of the participants, school also represented an escape from their family lives. It provided them with a

⁶ a widely used term used to refer collectively to a corporation's most important senior executives (EOWA, 2010).

safe identity space where they received positive feedback and recognition for the first time in their lives, as demonstrated by the following narrative,

But, um, you know, the other thing is I dove into school because of this, right. So, it wasn't even about trying to get good grades to please my parents. My mom couldn't pay attention to that stuff; she was trying to keep herself alive. And he didn't care about our grades, right. If you got good grades, you got beat for showing off and trying to prove that you were smarter than anybody else, and then if you didn't get good grades, you'd get beat for not having good grades. So, I just got good grades because I got a feeling of accomplishment and a pat on the back. I got some kudos, some love from another human beings which were my teachers. So, it enabled me; I was always like a straight A+ student. You know, uh, in math, science, it didn't matter all the way through high school. And so, I think the catalyst, you know, for me, a sort of turning point where for me, I felt like I had some control, I could do something about my life...Carol

Carol's account exposes how she benefitted from the positive praise she received and how the praise, in turn, served to motivate her to perform well. Carol's recognition that school was a turning point for her was similar to comments made by the other participants. As disclosed in Chapter 6, the participants' mothers were depicted as largely passive, submissive women whose roles within the family were purely domestic. Carol's account speaks to the fact that the participants' mothers were so busy just trying to survive that it left little time for them to provide the participants with emotional support. School provided the participants – many for the first time - with exposure to strong female role models. These role models provided Carol and the others with the emotional support they lacked in their home life which, in turn, motivated them to seek praise for performing well. This is important to the study as it sowed kernels of a strong need to achieve. This need to achieve will be discussed further in Chapter 8, as it was one of many motivations that the participants attribute to their corporate success. Carol's response to having a positive role model aligns with studies that have noted that many successful female leaders have acknowledged the importance of strong female teacher models earlier in their life and the positive impact these role models had on their careers (Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014).

Aside from the opportunity for positive role models, support, and encouragement, the research participants quickly learned that extracurricular activities effectively minimised the time they spent in their abusive situations. The participants' recognition that extracurricular activities were a mitigant for abuse aligns with other studies conducted on victims of childhood abuse. These studies have found that it is common for victims of abuse to perceive school as a welcome refuge, a place where they are provided with the opportunity to interface with teachers who offer encouragement and where they can grow socially (Thomas and Hall, 2008). School served as a coping mechanism for the participants and provided them with athletic and academic achievement opportunities. Consequently, many of the participants described how they became involved in as many extracurricular activities as possible.

Debbie, in particular, absolutely loved high school and became very animated when describing her high school years. While she earned good grades, academic studies did not come naturally for Debbie, and she had to work diligently at maintaining her grades. The strong work ethic explored in Chapter 6 surfaces once more within the participants' accounts of their school life. Debbie's learned ability to work hard enabled her to participate in multiple extracurricular activities and fulfil her obligations to work on the farm concomitantly with the extra work required to maintain her studies.

I loved school. I liked being at school. High school was a lot of fun for me. I liked being away from home, but I was also very much. I was a go-getter through school. I always wanted to be a leader, run for office or library helper or, Um. I was driven in that sense. I had to work. I remember in elementary school, school seemed really easy. Umm, but then high school work, it wasn't. I got good grades, but I had to, um, I have a really strong work ethic, but I had to read and highlight and then rewrite etc., to make things stick....Debbie

Debbie's account alludes to the fact that she was very popular and was friendly with everyone, refusing to belong to a particular clique. She was involved in as many extracurricular activities as she could "squeeze" into her schedule. Her participation in so many activities was driven both by Debbie's desire to associate with the more popular, socially accepted groups as well as providing her with a reason to stay away from home and her abuser. Debbie's account also

reveals her active pursuit of leadership roles which will be explored further in the following sub-theme.

The use of extracurricular activities to avoid their respective abusive situations was a dominant theme with all eight participants and aligns well with wider research evidence. Studies of women who have exhibited positive growth following early childhood sexual abuse have found that separation from an abusive family that is provided by attending school was a necessary component of the healing process and a source of self-esteem (Grossman et al., 1999). While the prime motivator for becoming involved in so many activities was to avoid their abusive environments, it set the research participants on a path of overachieving, a word used by several of the participants when narrating the perceived impact of their “*busyness*”. This is consistent with earlier studies of victims of childhood sexual abuse. In 1993, a study of twenty-two female victims of childhood sexual abuse was conducted by Valentine and Feinauer. They found that involvement in school activities was a critical source of self-esteem for the participants. Further, their findings indicated that involvement in school activities often resulted in a “*critical turning point*” for how the participants came to view themselves (Valentine and Feinauer, 1993, p. 222) that resulted in the development of a positive social identity, as elucidated by Sandy’s narrative account that follows.

Early on, I probably could have gotten into trouble. I could have gotten in with the crowd that drink and did all those things. But one thing my grandparents did was fund dance lessons for me. So, I was active that way in grade school and even the first part of junior high. Um, I didn't have a ton of friends and was living now with my grandparents. I don't know exactly but getting more involved kind of changed things for me. At least at that point of school, if you were an athlete or cheerleader, you just hung out with kids (that) knew everybody. So, you were invited to stuff. I don't think I skipped a school dance. I was invited out on dates, all of those things and um, that started to change for me. And so, I think that also gave me optimism. Like, ok school. Um, I had, people actually like me, right, and you had examples of kids and people who are, for all intents and purposes, normal. Like you are hanging out with people who are normal. Before that, the kids that I was with or the family I was with or the people I was playing with their families were as messed up as mine.

'Cas, it was my mom's friends or the guys who came around and their kids, you know what I mean. So, you are in you a circle of kids. You don't know what it is like 'cas you're having fun and whatever. But then you get into a group of people who are just adjusted well, and they don't have all those things going on, and it just changes things for you, and it changes who you want to be.....Sandy

Sandy's rich account provides insight into how the participants, through their involvement in extracurricular activities, began to associate themselves with the various groups outside of their immediate family. Moreover, her account reveals her discovery of diverse ways of being and how knowing how others lived created her motivation for a different life, providing her with an additional script for her evolving life story. Whether it was the debating club or the cheerleading group, the participants began to model the group's behaviour, a process referred to as social identification (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Hogg, 2014). The belief is that people identify with groups with whom they share, both current and desired, beliefs, values, and characteristics (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). These classifications give individuals a sense of direction and structure and enable individuals to situate themselves within their social environment (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Hogg, 2006).

This sub-theme demonstrated the relevance of extracurricular activities to the participants in this study. It revealed how their involvement in these events informed their emerging identity and life choices. More precisely, the participants discovered that their involvement in extracurricular activities provided them with a means by which they could reduce the amount of time they spent at home, limiting their exposure to their abusers. It introduced them to a safe identity space where they benefitted from the support and encouragement of other adults, many for the first time, which contributed to their development of a positive self-esteem. The participants' exposure to adult women had been limited primarily to their mothers, who were passive, stay-at-home mothers. Their extracurricular activities offered them positive female role models who furnished them with the emotional support and encouragement they lacked at home. Their discovery and appreciation of the benefits available to them by their participation in extracurricular activities prompted the participants to become involved in as

many activities as possible. The various wide-ranging activities exposed the participants to new groups of people. Their involvement in these diverse pursuits allowed them to become members of those varied groups, i.e., the cheerleaders and the athletes. Their membership in these groups afforded them more positive associations than their social or economic backgrounds had previously provided. It is believed that an individual's identity is derived from the different groups to which that individual belongs (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). The exposure to these new groups of people introduced the participants to the new possibilities and opportunities that were available to them. This newfound awareness provided them with the desire for more in life, a different pathway into the future. Theorists have maintained that life trajectories, once established, "*alter one's life destination and open up new possibilities*" (Jirek, 2017, p. 167). This was particularly true for the participants as these new relationships provided them with a sense of hope and, more critically, the roadmap for their way forward (McAdams, 2019), informing and shaping their identities in the process.

While I shared much in common with the women in this study, my school experiences were notably different. I attended a small elite boarding school consisting of 54 girls. The week was fully structured with a small 3-hour window of free time on Sunday afternoon and only one dance a year. As a ward of the court, I was unable to return home on school break. Consequently, I lived on the streets at Christmas, Easter and summer break, a fact I had to hide. I wondered what differences these almost diametrically opposed experiences had on our respective identities or life trajectories. Upon reflection, I realized that our adolescent experiences were not so different after all. I, too, discovered different groups: the privileged and the homeless. I learned to model my behaviour after both groups, one to fit in and the other to survive. I became very adaptable to my environment as a result and wondered if the participants' exposure to such a diverse group of activities and people made them adaptable too? If so, did that prove useful once they entered the corporate world...Researcher Field Notes and Personal Reflections

7.3.3 Sub-theme # 3 - Early Leadership-rich Experiences

This sub-theme expands on the significance of these extracurricular activities and how the participants' active participation in these pursuits contributed to their emerging leader identities. More specifically, this sub-theme provides insight into why their early childhood experiences encouraged the participants to seek out activities that placed them in leadership-rich roles and how their involvement in these activities contributed to the development of their leader identities. Engaging with the life-span approach to leader development, I explore how - while not in and of themselves producing their leader identities - these early influences provided the participants with the stepping-stones that helped them develop as a leader (Day and Sin, 2011; Gottfried et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2020).

Accustomed to being in charge, the participants naturally gravitated toward familiar roles in school. This provided them with leadership-rich opportunities that served to further their leader identities. As the participants enacted the roles, they progressively began to identify with them (Turner, 1978), and their identities concurrently became increasingly aligned with their behaviours (Tice, 1992). Alice's account provides additional narrative illustrating the impact of these activities on the research participants.

I was in Catechism class. I was in volleyball, and I was in this and that because I wanted (to be) as away from my family as possible. Because when they wanted to send me to my grandma's house, I couldn't cas I had volleyball camp. And when they wanted to spend the weekend to go into the country, I was like; I can't cas I have this debate competition. I made it so I could avoid it as much as possible. So, then we moved to this country (and away from the abuser), but the thing continued, the overachieving thing and the getting involved in extracurriculars. Umm, so high school for me was an escape. ---- It was like, this shit is happening, and I can't tell anyone about it. So, let me just excel over here. And I got really good at extracurricular activities. I was like the President of this, and Chief of the paper and I was just everywhere....Alice

Alice's ability to excel informed how she was beginning to see herself: as someone "really good at extracurricular activities". It paints a picture of how she begins to create a more positive self-identity through social categories and group-level processes (Hogg, 2001, 2006), leading to the surfacing of her leader identity. Polkinghorne (1988) describes how - as part of everyday life - individuals are constantly exposed to new situations that have the potential to shape their identity and add to their existing narrative. The fact that Alice sought out leadership roles and excelled in them helped define her view of herself as a leader. A study conducted on cadets by Kwok and colleagues (2018) showed that the cadets who possessed a more defined leader role identity were more likely to emerge as leaders. The participants in this study had adopted the role of a leader as children due to circumstances imposed on them that led them to "being in charge", as supported by Olive's narrative that follows.

So, um, I need to take control of these things to move forward. So, ya, and just the nature and even after that being in charge of my mom and my sister's wellbeing, right. It puts you in a position of being in control. Not for the sake of the power but needed to make sure you see things through. And you have control over those situations. So, it's like it gets to be a routine, I guess. You just get in this routine. You don't have control, and then you are in control. Then all of a sudden, you are in this routine and sometimes I would rather not be in control because it would be a lot less pressure. But you are in this routine of being in control...Olive

Olive's account further illustrates how the participants came to see themselves as leaders. They were so accustomed to assuming a leadership position in terms of making decisions that it became part of their self-identity. This line of theorising aligns with that of DeRue and Ashforth's (2010) leadership identity construction theory in that it focuses on the interpersonal aspect of leadership identity construction through identity claims that assert a leader identity. Studies have shown that leaders relate the origins of their leader identity to personal attributes they developed over time, such as "being in charge", which, in turn, prompted them to gravitate toward leadership positions later in life (Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021). The emergence of a leader identity through extracurricular activities was present in the narrative accounts of all eight participants, as further supported by Susan's narrative.

So, I had been kicked out of every honours class into my sophomore year. Sophomore year⁷ I worked my ass off in Junior year⁸. I was back in my advanced class AP classes. I also ran for Class President, and I became Class President. I joined all these clubs because I knew that was important for college. And like, I became the leader in my grade in terms of academics and doing all the student council stuff, and in the meanwhile, I still hung out with the very, very naughty kids...Susan

Susan's account reveals that her motivation for purposely seeking out leadership roles in high school was related to her desire for a scholarship to attend college. She recognized education as a pathway out of her familial circumstances and how her involvement in leadership-rich extracurricular activities would support her goals. While the participants' motivation for assuming leadership roles in high school varied, they all served to support the emergence of their leader identities.

Leadership scholars suggest that the formative experiences individuals accumulate throughout their life influences their ability and desire to assume leadership roles (Avolio and Hannah, 2008). It is perceived that what is learned in adolescence becomes integrated with the development of one's self-concept as a leader (Lord and Hall, 2005). The participants' narrative accounts revealed that many of their formative experiences included leadership roles in team sports or extracurricular activities. These experiences provided them with the opportunity to acquire the skills and attributes to succeed that have been linked to self-confidence and self efficacy (Hoffman, 1972), competence and leadership skills (Day and Sin, 2011). The more favourable these adolescent experiences, the greater the likelihood that the individuals will be motivated to pursue leadership roles. This self-perpetuating process has been referred to as leader identity-development spirals (Day et al., 2009). This perspective believes that the salience and centrality of a leader identity increase with each new leader experience. When the experiences are deemed positive, it provides further motivation to pursue leadership roles. Conversely, when the experiences are assessed negatively, it diminishes the individual's

⁷ Equivalent to Grade 11 in the UK education system

⁸ Equivalent to Grade 12 in the UK education system

interest in seeking out leadership roles, weakening their leader identity. (Day et al., 2009; Day and Sin, 2011). For the research participants, these extracurricular activities had several positive outcomes. Firstly, they were an effective means of reducing the time spent in their abusive situations. Secondly, and more critically, through these experiences, they were able to create a more positive self-identity which led to the surfacing of their leader identity. Finally, their success in executing these roles reinforced their emerging leader identities.

There is a multiplicity of leadership-rich experiences available to individuals throughout their life, and the frequency with which a person encounters them can influence their leadership development (Avolio, 2005). Murphy and Johnson (2011) argue that these early leader-rich experiences form the foundation for future leadership development. These leadership-rich opportunities came in various forms for the participants, including clubs, athletics, and leadership roles such as Class President. These opportunities also presented themselves in the various social groups to which the participants belonged. As children, out of necessity and a need for survival, the participants had each learned a unique set of skills, such as resourcefulness and creative decision-making. We see these unique skills explored in Chapter 6 continue to surface in the narrative accounts. As the participants aged and entered high school, they began to apply this resourcefulness to their social lives, as illustrated by Susan's narrative account.

When I was 14, my friends would always joke that I was the one that always kept everyone alive and that I could figure everything out. (Researcher: can you explain what you mean by that)? If we wanted pot, how are we going to do that? I'd be guys, here's what we're going to do. And so, I'd figure things out, and it always worked out. And it enabled us to do a lot of things, and so everyone looked to me to figure everything out. Like I was in charge....Susan

Susan's account shows how her friend group valued her resourcefulness to the extent that the group placed her in the exalted position of being the person in charge of "figuring things out". This iterative social process of asserting a leader identity and then having others affirm the leader identity (DeRue and Ashforth, 2010) is supported in Susan's narrative account above.

Day and Sin (2011) suggest that when individuals are placed in the role of a leader, they begin to see themselves as a leader and that the more individuals perceive themselves as leaders, the greater the likelihood they will seek out leadership-rich opportunities. The research participants' early life experiences had taught them to be resourceful. They were accustomed to assuming a leadership role, and as a result, they frequently and "automatically took charge" of situations.

Um, I think I have always been kind of a problem solver, and when I think back, it's funny now. I would get on a plane every month and fly by myself across the country. My parents never checked me in as a minor flying alone, starting at age of about 10, and you know, I had to change planes, and I would do my own thing. I was very, very self-sufficient...Susan

Susan's account illuminates how the behaviours that the participants adopted in response to the roles they were placed in became part of their developing identity, and over time, one can see that it resulted in behavioural consistency. For example, for Susan, the situations she was placed in required that she resolve problems and look after herself. As a result, she came to identify herself as being both self-sufficient and "a problem solver", identities that remain with her today.

This sub-theme provided illustrations of the extent to which the participants, as adolescents, became involved in academic, athletic, and social extracurricular activities. It sheds light on why they chose to become involved in so many different activities and, more specifically, why they sought out activities that placed them in roles that enabled them to shape their leadership identities. It suggests that the participants' earlier experiences instilled in them behaviours that were aligned with these leadership roles. Consequently, they looked for roles that provided them with a sense of coherence (Kwok et al., 2018) and that placed them in situations where they could enact their most salient identities (Stryker 1968; Stryker and Serpe, 1994). The participants' earlier years, when they were forced to look after themselves and others, taught them to make decisions for themselves and others. For this reason, it was a natural transition for them to seek out leadership roles as adolescents, further sowing the seeds of a leader identity. How an individual responds to and attaches meaning to these leadership experiences

can expand or reinforce their motivation and ability to lead (Avolio and Luthans, 2006). Assuming a leadership role started to become more central to how the participants saw themselves and now also how others saw them. Additionally, it is believed that extracurricular activities such as these form a critical means through which adolescents gain leadership skills (Hancock, Dyk and Jones, 2012). These leadership-rich activities provided the participants with endless opportunities to practice leadership skills (Murphy and Johnson, 2011) and, through these activities, develop their leadership identities. While more explicitly, these activities allowed for social learning about leadership by providing specific scenarios in which they could deploy leadership-related skills, further developing their leadership potential (Murphy and Johnson, 2011). Correspondingly, these activities exposed the research participants to a greater number of positive social groups, and they began to identify with those groups. The positive reinforcement they received from teachers, coaches, and group members as a result of their success in those extracurricular activities reinforced their developing positive self-identity. Their acceptance by the members of the various social groups to which they belong provided them with social validation, which fortified their emergent leader identities (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016) and further fuelled their desire for a better life and a path forward.

7.3.4 Sub-theme # 4 - Early Work Identities: First Taste of Financial Independence

Concurrent with their extracurricular endeavours, many of the participants also began working outside the home. Leadership scholars, who perceive that leadership is a developmental journey that occurs over the entire lifespan (Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014), identify that adolescence and early work experiences play a critical role in the early development of a leader identity (Day, 2000; Day, Harrison, and Halpin, 2009; Riad, 2011). This sub-theme explores the motivations that drove the participant to begin working and the corresponding impact these early work experiences had on their emerging leader identities. The presentation of this sub-theme continues with our protagonist Debbie, who, not content with all the extracurricular activities and is motivated to find additional reasons to avoid going home, decided to enter the workforce.

Debbie was fourteen years old when she started her first job stuffing envelopes and other odd jobs. She loved working, the income that her job provided her and the financial independence that accompanied the income. By the age of sixteen, Debbie had saved up enough money to purchase her own car. The combination of having money and striving toward financial independence emboldened Debbie, and she shortly began to equate money with power. Debbie's narrative below reveals that this newfound sense of agency translated into an ability to stand up to her father.

One time I thought he was getting ready to hit me, and I threatened to kill him. I said you ever hit me again, ever lay a hand on me again, I will slit your throat. It might be in your sleep, but you will not get to do it again, I said. And he was a big man, but I made it very clear to him that I was not going to put up with any more violence from him. Umm, that was high school. So, around 16 or older. I remember I got especially bold once I had my own car, I was a lot bolder. Umm, I think because I did have a way to make money...Debbie.

Debbie's account demonstrates that she connected her newfound agency with her ability to earn an income. It suggests that she recognized that her ability to earn an income provided her with options that were previously unavailable to her. While the reasons behind the participants' motivation for financial independence varied, they all shared an ambitious determination to accumulate wealth. Several, like Debbie, equated money with power and a positive social identity. Debbie had been forever changed by the incident in the lunchroom when it was made known to the other students that she had "a poor person's lunch card"; a critical turning point in Debbie's life when she decided she was not going to be impoverished.

Other participants, such as Ann, were spurred on by the knowledge that money provided them with independence and the potential for additional life choices. This is supported by Ann's narrative when she and her sister determined they earned sufficient income to support themselves, enabling them to remove themselves from their abusive situation while still adolescents.

I started working when I was 14, and you know, obviously being paid under the table,

working part-time. At this point, I am 15. I am getting some decent modelling gigs. My sister is working. I said you know, we can do this. We had to endure this (the abuse at home) as a child. We don't have to have to deal with this as an adult, right? Not like 15 is an adult, but in my mind, you know. And it is like as long as we stay together, you know, it is not like we can live in the lap of luxury, but we can do this...Ann

Chapter 6 described the ways in which the research participants recognized the importance of being able to look after themselves. This theme develops these insights further by underscoring, as demonstrated by Ann's narrative account above, how they came to realize the significance of earning money whilst still very young and being able to secure some financial independence. Such personal responsibility provided opportunities for them to boost their self-reliance and provide them with the freedom to choose their destiny and seize opportunities to move on.

And from a very early age realizing that I needed to be financially responsible for myself. And, um, that I had to persevere and do what I wanted to do and put myself in the place to have the opportunities that I wanted to have...Susan

Susan's narrative shows that her self-identity was becoming that of a primary breadwinner. It reveals her belief that she was solely responsible for herself and that her ability to pursue the opportunities available to her could only be achieved by her ability to finance them. Studies have shown that part-time employment whilst in high school plays a significant role in fostering independence and contributing to leader development (Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014). From adolescence onwards, six of the eight participants were required to work and contribute an income to the family household, and all eight were required to self-finance their post-secondary educations. Correspondingly, the participants' identities grew increasingly aligned with their capability to look after themselves and their ability to become financially independent.

Um, we worked since we were 12. I mean, we helped pay for things and support things financially...Olive

Olive's account, and that of the other participants, supports the notion that what we do and the activities that consume our time help define how we see ourselves. Based on their earlier childhood experiences, the participants had become confident that they possessed the ability to look after themselves. However, it was only as they aged that they began to appreciate that it is important to have money to be independent and that money also brings with it the prerequisite power and freedom they sought. Moreover, this drive for financial independence was reinforced and advanced by the personal indignities the participants suffered simply because of their family's lower-income status.

I don't know how it parallels to Canada, but in the States, at least back then, you had to go back every 3 months (to the welfare office) for a re-evaluation to determine whether or not for your eligibility. Well, it was humiliating. They just, you bring all of your income, and you are assessed, and then they um. I was getting medical care. So, they assess and ask very invasive questions. Like, are you still sleeping with the father of your children, would he deny he is the father of your children. Like, I don't know. It was just so humiliating...Betty

And my mom would give me food stamps, and she would send me into the convenience store and make me buy penny candy so we could get 99 cents back in cash, right. 'Cas with food stamps, you can only buy food, right, and they would give the rest back in change. So, you would get the 99 cents back in US currency. So, she would send me and say get two pieces of candy with this dollar, and I would do this all day. I would go around town and cashing in food stamps, and it was so embarrassing...Sandy

I could hear the pain in their voices as they shared this part of their story with me. Their tone, the cadence of their speech, and their body language. It was so intense that I could almost feel their shame. I can't imagine what it must feel like to be thought less of by people simply because you are poor. It made me sad to hear that they suffered much more than sexual and physical abuse. But it also allowed me to understand their motivation for financial independence and their desire to never be placed in that position, "never, ever again"
...Researcher Field Notes

The accounts of Betty and Sandy speak to the lack of agency and shame they felt knowing that others were aware of their familial and economic circumstances. This sense of being judged by others and the humiliation of being poor was a common theme amongst the participants. Through the narrative accounts presented in this sub-theme, one can appreciate why the participants did not wish to be identified as “poor” and how that fuelled their drive for financial independence, which continued into adulthood. The participants’ storied accounts of the shame they endured illuminate the impact these experiences had on them and help to explain the participants’ construction of desired future selves (Strauss, Griffin and Parker, 2012) that included financial independence.

This sub-theme brought to light the newfound agency that accompanied the participants’ ability to earn money and how being able to provide economically for themselves and others became part of their early identity. The ability to earn an income supported their positive self-identity and validated their self-view as someone independent, resourceful, and capable of looking after themselves. Identity theory is an overarching term that captures a wide range of theories that all seek to answer, “who one is and what one does” (Mathias and Williams, 2017). The narrative accounts reveal the participants’ aversion to the poor person identity and how, as a result, the participants began to link their need for a positive social identity with becoming financially independent, steering them towards a career trajectory that would enable the achievement of their financial goals. Studies have shown that such early childhood experiences significantly impact individuals’ pursuit of agency and financial independence (Maitlis, 2022). More critically, this sub-theme demonstrated how the ability to earn an income had provided the participants with their first taste of power and control over their destiny, something that is developed further in the next sub-theme. Having been deprived of any sense of control as children, one can understand how this furthered their motivation for wealth. Furthermore, they discovered that money also provided them with additional life options, which only added further fuel to their motivation for financial independence.

Part-time work during adolescence has been found to play a significant role in the success of CEOs as it fosters self-confidence and self-efficacy (Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014). The self-confidence obtained from working energized the participants and propelled them towards finding a path forward. A path that included financial independence and power. The participants' determination to avoid ever being made to feel less than others became an important part of their identity that remains with them today.

7.3.5 Sub-theme # 5 - Power and Control

This sub-theme continues to introduce specific events and experiences the participants encountered as adolescents. It reveals how these circumstances presented the participants with diverse ways of seeing and being that, in turn, instilled within each of them strong motivations. It describes how these individual identity motives then influenced the construction of their identities (Vignoles et al., 2006; Vignoles, 2011). It builds upon the preceding sub-theme and the participants' first taste of power that was derived from their demonstrated ability to earn an income. It introduces how, once the participants began to date and established their first relationships, they discovered there are other ways to obtain power. In particular, they discovered that sex was a means by which they could wield both power and control over men. Equally important was their discovery that sexual relationships could be a positive experience. This knowledge resulted in a turning point in the participants' lives that led to further revisions to their self-view, their view of others and the early formation of a positive sexual self-image. This drive for power and control also served as strong motivators that guided their identity construction processes.

For Debbie, this discovery was in the form of her first romantic relationship at fourteen years old. Debbie spoke of the time in her life when she first began to date and build more positive relationships than what she had experienced as a child. It was clear from her tone and the emotions she expressed while sharing her story that she continues to hold fond memories of her first consensual sexual experience.

I started dating when I was 14, a family friend. And, at 16 started having sex with him. And, umm, the, (long pause) the power of being able to have sex. I was very, very fortunate in that it was a very caring, loving relationship, thank God. Umm, I just wanted to be loved so damn bad...Debbie

Debbie's account reveals that she associated sex with power. Moreover, it exposes how her ability to have a positive consensual sexual experience helped to fill an emotional void in her life. This was a pivotal moment for Debbie. It taught her that she could have a positive intimate experience with a man. This was important as it is not unusual for childhood sexual abuse to result in an avoidance of intimacy. Or alternatively, the powerlessness experienced as a child translates later in life to diminished self-protection strategies such that the victims continue to believe that they have little control and remain powerless to thwart efforts by others later in life (Banyard, Arnold and Smith, 2000). As a consequence, it is difficult for victims of childhood sexual abuse to achieve what is deemed to be a healthy romantic intimacy (Newsom and Myers-Bowman, 2017). This is supported by research that has shown that victims of childhood sexual abuse develop unhealthy schemas of adult intimate relationships that are predicated on their own experiences (Newsom and Myers-Bowman, 2017). Debbie's experience showed her that not all men would hurt her and, more relevantly, that she was worthy of someone loving her. While Debbie knew that her mother loved her, her father's abuse overshadowed that love. Debbie recalled her intimate experiences as having been both favourable and mutually beneficial. Her reference below, that sex "was good for me" suggests that these experiences contributed to her self-esteem and positive self-identity.

*But I was very, very fortunate in that sense that I gave because I also got. **(Researcher: What do you mean by you gave but you got?)** Well, I gave sex, and I gave my body because I was treated well when I did, and that was good for me. So, I didn't have issues with any, you know, I was not attracted to bad boys. I was not attracted to mouthy men. The guys that I dated or even the guys that I had a few one-nighters with, but in general, it was somebody I date for a little bit but not long. But I was never treated badly by those people...Debbie*

Debbie's first consensual experience provided her with a healthy perception of sexuality which led to the formation of a positive sexual self-image. A positive first consensual intimate relationship was a common theme amongst the participants. It is important to this study for several reasons. Firstly, this new perspective of sexuality, which resulted in a more positive sexual self-image, provided the participants with a new narrative from which they could reframe their early childhood experiences. Therefore, allowing them to escape the "childhood sexual abuse identity" commonly associated with abuse victims (Newsom and Myers-Bowman, 2017). Secondly, it allowed them to reclaim their personal power, enabling them to experience growth post-trauma (Valentine, 2007).

Through this first intimate relationship, Debbie also discovered that sex was an effective means of gaining control and power over men. Childhood sexual abuse robs the victim of any sense of personal power. However, as noted from the transcript excerpts that follow, sex provided the participants with power over men and offered them their first semblance of agency and a degree of control in their lives which they found empowering.

After breaking up with [name], I became (long pause) promiscuous. Very. Umm, and it was I just wanted; I like the control...Debbie

I became very promiscuous, and when I was in college, I WAS out of control (LAUGHING). But to me, it was the thought pattern continued of, um, guys can't control themselves. All you have to do is dangle a little cleavage action, a little hip action, and they are putty in your hands. And so, it was almost the objectified person started objectifying the predator, if you will...Alice.

Alice's account acknowledges the abuse and objectification the participants experienced as young children by male family members. Consequently, their early understanding of sex was founded on unhealthy schemas of what constituted an intimate relationship. Their first consensual intimate relationships presented the participants with alternative positive narrative scripts in that they discovered that sex could be both pleasurable and empowering. This led to self-described promiscuous behaviours in seven of the eight participants. While studies have shown that it is common for victims of childhood abuse to adopt maladaptive behaviours such

as promiscuity (Conley and Garza, 2011), the participants' narrative accounts describe being primarily driven by other factors. Specifically, as noted by the accounts of Debbie and Alice, the participants enjoyed the feeling of power and being in control. This is consistent with wider studies of female victims of childhood sexual abuse. These studies have found that the ability of the victims to control their circumstances provided them with a sense of power that manifested itself through self-confidence in their ability to overcome any challenge (Valentine and Feinauer, 1993).

This sub-theme shows how Debbie's story, and that of the other participants, begins to paint a picture of the thought process the participants underwent as teenagers and how these early adolescent intimate experiences established foundational motivators for them. Chapter 6 revealed that the participants were raised in family situations with no control over their environments or bodies. Their awareness of the power sex yielded over men instilled agency in many of the participants for the first time. Its significance for this study is that it provides insights into the reasons behind the participants' motivation for power and control and how their intimate adolescent experiences contributed to their identity development.

7.3.6 Sub-theme # 6 - Education, A Pathway out, Future Work Selves

The two prior sub-themes revealed the circumstances that created powerful identity motives for financial independence, power, and control within each of the participants. This sub-theme draws upon the life span approach to narrative and leader identities while engaging with the theoretical concept of future work selves. The concept of future work selves is predicated on the belief that individuals possess a sense of whom they wish to become in the future in relation to work. These aspirations, in turn, drive behaviours to achieve the desired work self. The more salient the envisioned future work self, the stronger the motives and corresponding behaviours (Strauss, Griffin and Parker, 2012). This sub-theme reveals how the participants' strong identity motives created a commitment to their envisioned future work selves and the role that education played in closing the perceived gap between their self-view and desired future.

As noted earlier in this chapter, high school for Debbie and the other participants was a positive experience that enhanced their self-esteem while revealing opportunities available to them. Studies of childhood sexual abuse victims have shown that positive school experiences lead to positive outcomes that extend well into the victim's adulthood (Grossman et al., 1999). The participants' involvement in extracurricular activities, including working outside the home, served as the driving force behind the participants' desire for a new life story and corresponding positive social identity. This sub-theme describes the means through which - *Education* – the participants set about revising their life stories. It brings to light how pursuing an education set them on a trajectory that enabled them to find a pathway out of their early familial circumstances, describing the skills they acquired along the way to do so successfully and exploring how their actions promoted their emerging leader identities. I lead this sub-theme with a continuation of the life story of this chapter's protagonist, Debbie.

Debbie attended a small rural high school where only a third of the children graduated. Her friends never spoke about going to college or continuing their education. Debbie does not remember the specific circumstances that brought her to a college campus but recalled that she went to a college campus at some point during high school and thought it was “*really cool*”.

I wanted to do things. I wanted different types of jobs. I wanted to; you know I want to travel. I wanted to be an entrepreneur, and that required college, but it was also I want to live somewhere else. I wanted to live in the city. I wanted to live near high-rises. That was all part of the fantasy. It's always what you don't have, right. But I wanted to be away...Debbie

Debbie's choice of the words “*part of the fantasy*” was quite revealing in that it unveiled that she had created a life story for herself that was radically different from her life story at that time. Her account also reveals the emergence of her desired work self, an entrepreneur. Debbie had lived all her life in a very small rural community. Her earlier narrative revealed that Debbie's family did not eat out at restaurants or travel on vacations due to their economic circumstances. It is not surprising that Debbie wanted to “*be away*” from an abusive environment. Nor was it surprising that her fantasy would include living in a place that was

diametrically opposed to that where the abuse occurred. It was apparent from her narrative that Debbie did not just desire to distance herself from her home; she wanted to be as far away as possible. All the participants shared this sentiment, as Olive's narrative account further supports.

Um, it also, again in high school, I knew I wanted out of my house and not to come back...Olive

Thus far, several key themes run across the participants' stories of their adolescent years that contributed to their emerging identities and culminated in their ardent pursuit of an education. Firstly, their exposure to other groups and activities had made them aware that there were other opportunities available to them. Secondly, they had established their capacity to succeed, in many cases, both academically and athletically. Thirdly, through their work outside the home, they came to understand the benefits of financial independence and the freedom that money could provide. Fourthly, their first romantic relationships gave them their first taste of power. These adolescent experiences created a fervent desire for power, financial independence, and the opportunity to pursue a new path forward, one as far away as possible and as dramatically different from their current situation. Debbie's narrative vividly portrays the process by which the participants chose to incorporate these four motivations themes into their life stories, which reveals her envisioned and desired future work self.

I started subscribing to Inc. magazine⁹ when I was just a teenager. Umm, I set a goal to be on the Inc. 500 before I knew what kind of business I would start. [chuckles] I was going to be there. I devoured that magazine, every word of it, every month and learned a lot. And I think a big part of my control and my desire to be an entrepreneur was driven by I want control. And I want my voice to be heard and play it out and to understand and be able to plan something and know that it's going to happen. Or at least has a good chance of happening the way that I want it to. And I think that that was a big part of it was not having that control. Also, I did not want to live the life my parents lived. I was motivated in the sense that I was going to not live in poverty...Debbie

⁹ Inc. Magazine is a business and finance magazine providing insight into the world of business that is read primarily by small/growing business owners

That Debbie avidly read this magazine while only fifteen years old is somewhat unusual and reflected her strong motivation for financial independence, power and control, elements that were missing from her early childhood years. She envisioned herself as a leader of one of the country's top 500 companies and, as will be seen in Chapter 8 that follows, this was a goal she handily achieved. Her imagined *"future work self"* provides a striking illustration of *her hopes and aspirations in relation to work*" (Strauss, Griffin and Parker, 2012, p. 580) that guided her behaviours. These future work selves are based on the concept that individuals hold future dreams and aspirations in terms of whom they wish to become (Markus and Nurius, 1986). The fact that Debbie's envisioned future work self was so clear is reflective of her future work self-salience. An individual's commitment to their future work self evolves in response to self-reflections, observations, and new experiences (Ibarra, 1999) and underpins the motivation of proactive career choices (Strauss, Griffin and Parker, 2012). In turn, they drive self-directed behaviours aimed at facilitating change and self-development. The greater the salience to the future work self, the stronger the commitment to undertaking the actions to achieve the desired work self. Moreover, Debbie's envisioned role as a leader exposes a strong leader identity which has been shown to contribute to leader development. Leadership theorists believe that the more an individual is committed to the role, the greater the role salience (Davis and Love, 2017).

The participants' commanding motivation for success bound them to their roles, compelling them to succeed. *"When individuals select leadership as a strategy to help them strive toward their life's passions, they set in motion a complex interaction of behaviors, cognitions, and emotions that can result in successful leader development"* (Rosch and Villanueva, 2016, p. 48). Simply put, as the participants in this study enacted the behaviours associated with a leader, they began to expand their identity as a leader, which furthered their motivation to lead. Their drive, in turn, led to greater opportunities to assume more progressively challenging roles and therefore more developmental opportunities. When coupled with the broader skills acquired over the lifespan, this cycle enhances the quality of leadership performance and aligns with the

view that motivation is the driving force behind developmental pursuit. (Rosch and Villanueva, 2016).

However, wanting to be a leader and becoming a leader are two different things. Strauss and colleagues (2012) argue that the individual's recognition of the gap that exists between their desired future work self and their present-day self elicits self-directed behaviour to close the gap. The participants' narrative accounts that follow reveal the salience of their future work selves and expose how that drove their actions and behaviours. Their narrative accounts demonstrate they recognized the actions required to achieve their future selves and their belief that a quality post-secondary education was their optimal path to achieving their envisioned future work selves.

I knew that the only way that I could get out of this situation was if I could afford to get out, and by the time I was 15, I figured that I could afford to get out but to make money, you need to get an education; you know that is the path, right. I am going to be working three jobs to put myself through school. I need college classes in high school. What do I have to do to make that happen? And I did...Ann

I was just on a real mission to try to utilize my education and do something with that, with my life, and I basically had three jobs. I was raising my kids, waitressing, working as an agent in a call centre, trying to finish my undergraduate and working part-time at a hockey arena on weekends...Carol

The narrative accounts of Ann and Carol provide further strong illustrations of the participants' work ethic and support the themes and sub-themes presented thus far in Chapters 6 and 7. More specifically, it reveals the participants' resolve to find a pathway out of their familial circumstances and their belief that the only way out was to attain a work role that afforded them financial independence. The participants recognized those roles could be best achieved with a post-secondary education. This commitment to the pursuit of an education is supported by the fact that seven of the eight participants attended college. Financing their post-secondary education was not an easy undertaking for any of the participants. They all worked multiple jobs, saved money, and took other extraordinary actions to enable them to finance their

education. A supporting narrative that demonstrates the participants' commitment to education and the sacrifices they made to attend college is seen in the following accounts.

I went to school on a volleyball scholarship and left for college, about 7 hours away on the other end of the state. My mom lost her job and tried to commit suicide. I, uh, went home, started school late, navigated my mom through a divorce with my dad, helped navigate my mom just getting through, moved out of the house, and my sisters moved out of the house. I went back to school. I came home almost every weekend I could, even though it was a horribly long drive. And, um, things had started to get verbally abusive with my little sister, who had never experienced that just because my dad was on his own. He started drinking not very long after that. So, paying for gas, you know, any other costs were really up to me at that point. I think that there was benefit to that. I think it was really hard at the time because ya I didn't know most of the time how I was going to pay for things that weren't included in the room and board package of school. I had to work and study; I had a couple of other jobs in the small community I was in. I was lucky I had done some lifeguarding and swam so I could teach private swim lessons and could do things like that so that every ounce of my time that wasn't in class or spent studying, I could fill with work to make money. So, I think that amount of work and that amount of attention to the fact that I was lucky financially to be at school allowed me to stay focused and do very well... Olive

Olive's rich account provides another powerful illustration of the participants' commitment to education. In addition, it provides insight into the difficulties and the associated stress the participants experienced while attending school. The need to juggle multiple tasks while maintaining primary responsibility for others was another dominant theme in the participants' stories.

Attending college also presented the research participants with their first opportunity to make important self-decisions. Those decisions included their choice of college, where to live, whom to live with, etc., all of which reinforced their identity narratives as self-confident, self-sufficient individuals with high self-esteem. Studies that have examined self-views, such as self-confidence, have found that they are developed further over time as they are practised

(Avolio and Vogelgesang, 2011). Additional motives for seeking an education also emerged from the accounts.

As Olive shared her story, which was similar to the stories the others shared, I could not help but notice that it was not presented as a complaint. There was no sense of “wow, look what I did” or self-pity for the circumstances that caused their struggle. It was all presented so matter-of-factly, almost devoid of emotion. It was the same with the other participants, and it made me realize that not once did any of the women in the study complain, feel sorry for themselves, or place the blame on others. I reflected on my own circumstances that were not dissimilar. I completed my university degree full time in the evening, attending classes five days a week while working full time. I never really stopped to think about it. I was accustomed to working long and hard, and I just did what I did because it seemed like the only option. I could not help but wonder if the same was true for the participants...Researcher Field Notes

I was the first person to ever go to college in my family. It wasn't something that you and my parents, or my grandparents even, um. I mean, we knew it was there, but we never mentioned or even just going to any post-high school education was all my doing. And they were supportive of it, but they couldn't pay for it...Sandy

For some of the participants, like Sandy, being the first in their family to attend college was shared with a sense of pride. Sandy's quote that she “*spent my life having to prove that I'm something other than what other people assumed that I would be*”, Chapter 7, page 142, also provides further insight into her motivation for an education. Her achieving a university degree proved to her, and offered a form of validation to others, that she was different from her family and was “*not what others assumed she would be*”. This aided Sandy in distancing herself from her past and furthered the creation of her positive self-identity.

The participants' requirement to work and support their families precluded most of them from partaking in the typical collegial experiences that college offers its students. However, Debbie's

first couple of college years were more traditional than her later ones. She was a full-time student that worked nights and weekends. She was also a commuter student, which meant that she did not live on campus. However, Debbie had several girlfriends who lived in a house adjacent to the campus, where she would stay on occasion. As such, her freshman and sophomore years came as close as possible to a classic collegial experience.

In Debbie's third year of college, she completed a company internship. Her fellow workers belonged to a professional association which she quickly joined, even though the association consisted of people several years her senior. Her membership in this group was instrumental in her securing another internship in a large city in another state.

I knew intuitively; I don't know how or why, maybe somebody told me, but the networking was how I was going to get anywhere. So, I joined the club at 18, as a student, and that's how I made connections to move to this city; it was through that...Debbie

While Debbie's initial motivation to join this group was driven by her recognition of the need to network, I believe that it was also motivated by her desire to be seen as a "professional" by others. It demonstrates her need to belong to a social group that had some emotional and value significance to her (Tajfel, 1982) and that allowed her to define herself in terms of the group (Turner, 1982).

Debbie returned to her college but "knew in her heart" that she wanted to return to the city. So, she packed up and moved and transferred to the college in that state to finish her studies. Unable to afford an increase in tuition for out-of-state students, Debbie relocated to the new state for a year before returning to college. This move allowed her to overcome the obstacle by becoming an in-state student. She continued to work full time while attending school, frequently taking off a semester to earn enough money to pay for her tuition the following semester.

This sub-theme highlights the role of education in the participants' lives and its impact on their emerging narrative and leader identities. It demonstrated how the participants' identity motives led to the development of a desired future work self and how they determined that

their ability to attain their desired work self was predicated on their capacity to secure a quality post-secondary education. It exposed how college presented the participants with opportunities to make important self-decisions and how those self-decisions furthered their identity narratives by instilling in them self-confidence. It reveals the resurfacing and application of the skills they acquired as children to successfully pursue an education and how, by having to juggle financial and familial burdens, they were precluded from fully experiencing the rich social life that so frequently accompanies attending college. Their need to work and support themselves throughout university served to reinforce their identity as someone who has always worked diligently, and that is captured by Carol's quote that: "*I have been an adult my entire life*". Their inability to enjoy the more social aspects of life because they were so busy working, studying, and trying to survive became part of their self-identity – that of someone with all work and no play - along with their envisioned future work selves.

A Postscript on Debbie, the lead protagonist of this theme

Debbie knew that she wanted to start her own company but recognized that she needed both an idea and more practical experience. After graduating from college, Debbie worked at a number of jobs, everything from a secretary to a legal secretary to a secretary at a large corporation, always along with “side jobs” typing papers or doing general administrative work. She “didn’t have so much pride into thinking she couldn’t do a job” and also knew she could figure any job out. Her goal was to work in as many industries and as many roles as she could find.

I think I’m always trying to look ahead. What’s the next thing. Where is the opportunity and I don’t, um, I don’t take no” very. [Long pause]. as definitive in business. if I get a “no”, it’s a why and then or when will it be a yes. Umm, and I think, as I said earlier, I am very much an optimist...Debbie

In her early 20s, she was offered a position in a small start-up that required her organisational skills. She quickly became the owner’s “right hand man” and it was while working at this company that she came up with an idea for a new business. It was during this period of time that Debbie met and married her first husband. He was much older than Debbie and offered her the stability that had been missing in her life. 3 months into the marriage, he hit her. The next morning, she left, and her divorce was finalized 3 months after her departure. She has had no contact with him since. Shortly thereafter, she met and began dating the man that was to become her second husband. Three years later, armed with some practical experience and an idea for a new company Debbie, along with her husband of 3-4 years, started their first technology-based business. Debbie as the CEO was responsible for strategy and sales while her husband managed the day-to-day operations.

I left my job, built a marketing plan and the manual and etc. etc. And then was nights and weekends building the product. And then we launched the product in 1995 and, umm, and immediately it started selling. It was a big hit...Debbie.

Despite the company’s early success, Debbie and her husband lived well below their means. They chose to invest as much as possible back into the business, opting to bootstrap their company to avoid the need for outside investors. Three years after the launch of their initial product, their company made “Inc.” magazine’s list of the country’s fastest growing companies. Their success culminated with the industry award for product excellence. Attracting the attention of a large private equity firm, they were offered more than their “magic number” resulting in the sale of the company. A condition of the sale was that Debbie remain on as CEO. She accepted, her husband remained on in a middle management role and, within a year, Debbie was promoted to Vice Chairman of the parent company. Unhappy with the direction that new management was taking, they both recently retired, in their mid-50s. She credits her corporate success to the lessons she learned from her early childhood experiences.

Debbie and her husband remain happily married and have one son. Their son is away at college and she, with her husband of 26 years are enjoying retirement and a quieter life with their dogs. Not content to just relax and enjoy the potentially slower pace that early retirement might allow, Debbie is in the throes of writing a novel.

7.3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the storied accounts of the participants' adolescent years and the transitioning to their early adult years. It includes an in-depth exploration and analysis of the participants' various identity transitions once they commenced school and were confronted with the negative identities imposed on them by others that did not align with their positive self-views. The participants' earlier roles as caregivers and protectors had provided them with the opportunity to see themselves as resourceful, capable, self-reliant, and resilient, and they rejected the negative attributes that came with their familial and socioeconomic circumstances. This particular theme is critical to this study as this was the stage in the life of the participants when they started to think about their identity, whom they wanted to be and how they wanted to be seen by others.

The first three sub-themes in this chapter demonstrated the reasons why the participants chose to re-story their lives, how it informed their identity and how it connects to their desire for, and discovery of, a pathway forward. It provides further insight into the participants' ability to re-story their lives in positive ways and how they developed a trajectory that aligned with the positive self-identity created from their early life experiences. The final sub-theme shows how the participants chose to re-story their lives. It reveals why they deemed education to be the most effective means of enabling them to find a pathway out of their familial circumstances and how that connected to the development of their envisioned future work selves and exposed how their future work selves influenced their behaviour.

In describing the motivation, triggering events, and corresponding processes, this chapter has set the scene to explore how the participants were becoming authors of their own life stories. The chapter proposes why, how, and when the script of the participants' stories begins to take shape, based on the participants' earlier life experiences, and how it progresses once their understanding of the world is expanded through their attending school, working and intimate relationships. With their developing positive self-identities, one can conceive why the participants refused to be placed in a less favourable social group based solely on their familial

circumstances and their motivation for a better life when they learned of the opportunities and possibilities available to them. These desires were reinforced by their participation in extracurricular activities as they carried out their leadership-rich roles as Class President, School Paper Editor or Head of the cheerleading squad, which, in turn, planted the seeds of a leader identity. Narrative identity theorists purport that an individual's life story comprises selective autobiographical accounts of the experiences that provide purpose to them (McAdams, 1993, 1996) and that the stories that develop from these triggering events become part of the self (McLean, Pasupathi and Pal, 2007). The following chapter explores how the participants' emerging leader identities are enacted as they enter the workforce and how those enactments further contribute to their life story and their emerging leader identities.

“despite the many changes that attend the passage of time, the self of the past led up to or set the stage for the self of the present, which in turn will lead up to or set the stage for the self of the future.”
(McAdams, 1995, p. 382)

Chapter 8: Identity Enactments, Advancing their Leader Identities

8.1 Chapter Outline

This chapter continues the life story of the research participants, as young adults, with the presentation of the third dominant theme, *Identity enactments, advancing their leader identities*. It explores how the participants' burgeoning leader identities and envisioned future work selves - developed as adolescents - are enacted as young adults and the ways in which those enactments added to their life stories and fortified their leader identities. Following an introduction to Carol, the lead protagonist for this theme, the four sub-themes: *Early identity enactments, Identity motives: driven to succeed, Social validation and Transference of skills and attributes to work identities* are presented.

Early identity enactments, the first sub-theme, draws upon the life story approach to narrative and leader identities. It describes how behaviours that shaped the participants' early identities became integrated into their early adult life stories. It portrays how these behaviours, which were learned from meaningful events that occurred in the participants' early childhood years, were triggered as young adults (McAdams and Bowman, 2001) and how they served to expand their leader development readiness (Avolio and Luthans, 2006) and how they contributed to their leader identities. The second sub-theme, *Identity motives: driven to succeed*, employs motive identity theory to illustrate how the participants' motivation for power, control, and financial independence - which links to their early childhood experiences - coalesces in the form of a fervent drive to succeed. It demonstrates how the participants' determination to succeed translated into their role salience as a leader and their corresponding commitment to their careers. The third sub-theme, *Social validation*, describes how public validation of their business acumen fortified the participants' leader identities. The final sub-theme, *Transference of skills and attributes to work identities*, focuses on the skills and corresponding attributes the participants acquired as children and adolescents and how their early life experiences and corresponding skills contributed to their corporate success. The chapter concludes with theorising how those acquired skills and motivations, when coupled with their attributes,

facilitated their career advancement, solidified their leader identities, and culminated in their rise to the most senior leadership position in their respective industries.

8.1.1 Carol's Story

Carol was a charismatic individual with high energy. She spoke candidly about her childhood experiences, including her long personal journey that allowed her to come to terms "*and be at peace*" with her abuse. Carol indicated that she still finds it difficult to speak about her past. She stated that very few people in her life are aware of her history and that she has never discussed the extent of the abuse she has suffered with anyone other than a few close friends. Carol elected to hold both interviews in her private corporate office, a place where she maintained that she felt the safest and relaxed. Her choice of venue suggested to me that her identity is very much tied to her corporate role and that her salient role is that of a leader and CEO. Carol was bright, articulate and, despite her preference to keep her past private, she was very open and indicated that she was comfortable sharing her story with me. However, unlike the other participants, Carol did not present her life story sequentially. Rather, the presentation of her life story was event-specific in that she shared events with me that she described as having had a significant impact on her life and self-view. The account she presented through her identity narratives brought to life someone with a strong but nurturing personality with a passion for life.

Carol is a South-East Asian woman in her early fifties who emigrated with her family to Canada when she was a small infant. Carol is currently the President and CEO of a large public company. She is the second eldest of five children, raised in a traditional working-class family with no other family members in Canada.

Carol did not do or say anything that suggested to me that she felt uncomfortable sharing her story. I suspected it was because she was aware that I, too, had a history of abuse and that, as a consequence, I would not judge her. Interestingly at the end of the interview, Carol thanked me and said, while laughing, “*thank you for not making it painful*”. This intimated that she held some trepidation over the process and feared that sharing her story would have indeed been painful for her. I wondered if her comfort with me was because she understood at some level that I could identify with what she went through, as her story was eerily similar to mine. It also occurred to me that if we did not hold a similar story, there existed a strong possibility that she would not have been willing to share her story...Researcher Field Notes

Carol comes from a verbally, sexually, and physically abusive background. Memories of Carol’s abuse date back to her first early childhood memories and extend into her late teenage years. Carol indicated that her home life was very stressful and that the family lived in constant fear of their father. Her father had a military background and exerted extreme and excessive control over their mother, Carol, and her siblings.

He treated us like little soldiers, right. We’d have to march around and stand at attention. If we didn’t have everything perfectly right, he would punch you in the face or punch you in the stomach or whatever. What I think was really strange about this kind of abuse was the ongoing, um, it was almost like torture, you know. Something would go wrong, and we would have to go and do things like kneeling for 3 hours with our arms extended, and then he would put books on our arms. If you dropped the books, you have to do it for another 15 minutes, or somebody else gets beat up or punished because you dropped the book. So, kinda using the love that we have for each other against each other in this sort of psychological, you know, sort of torture. Um, and this is just, I don’t know what else to say. This was just a daily occurrence...Carol

Carol’s description of her father’s treatment as “torture” and subsequent comment that she still today she doesn’t know how else to describe her homelife provides insight into her meaning making process post-trauma. It suggests that, despite her ability to move forward with

her life, she continues to struggle to understand or rationalize her father's abusive treatment of them.

The abuse the participants endured extended beyond their family environments but in diverse ways. For some, like Carol, the abuse came in the form of racial taunts and bullying. Racial discrimination in the 1970s and 1980s was common in the part of the country where Carol resided and as a non-Caucasian, she was subjected to racial taunts throughout most of grade school. While I imagined that this form of mistreatment would have been difficult for Carol, she did not expand on the racial abuse or bullying other than to share that it occurred.

This chapter's dominant theme and sub-themes run across the storied narrative accounts of all eight participants. However, I chose Carol as the protagonist as I felt she was a strong exemplar of how these women begin to enact their emerging leader identities as young adults. More specifically, Carol's narrative accounts provide a strong illustration of how her identity and behaviours were shaped by the impact of her earlier life experiences and how, in turn, they contributed to her leader identity as a young adult.

As was described in Chapter 6, following Carol's decision to contact social services¹⁰, her father was arrested, and the family was relocated to the safety of a motel. Not long after social services had removed Carol and her family from their home, Carol's mother met and re-married Carol's current stepfather. Carol was approximately twelve years old when the family moved to a home where Carol's mother and stepfather both still currently reside. The second marriage of her mother was a healthy marriage. However, Carol had a challenging time adjusting to this new life.

I went from being abused, locked up, you know, forced to do terrible things to, um, total freedom. Um, I totally rebelled. Right, I went, because now I can do whatever I want and all those years of being oppressed, and you know abused and everything else. Now, I think that I just lost my mind, basically...Carol

¹⁰ References Carol's narrative account on pages 1124 and 125

Once again, we see the resurfacing of the need for control in the participants' storied accounts. Carol stated that her rebellion was not because her mother and stepfather were not strict. Rather, it was that Carol's parents did not dispense any negative consequences for her poor behaviour. After being tyrannized, with no control over her environment, it is not surprising that Carol tested the boundaries of her parents and embraced her newfound freedom. Several studies have supported this quest for agency. For example, a study by Buchbinder and Sinay (2020) found that when narrating the accounts of their childhood sexual abuse, the women actively sought to create a life narrative that demonstrated their ability to grow from the experience. This was expressed as a desire for "*personal control versus chaos; wholeness versus disintegration and agency versus helplessness*" (Buchbinder and Sinay, 2020, p. 819) that is reflective of the loss of power and sense of helplessness they experienced as children (Neimeyer, 2006).

8.1.2 Sub-theme # 1 - Early Identity Enactments

Early identity enactments present the circumstances in the participants' earlier lives that had compelled them to respond and behave in certain ways. It reveals how those learned behaviours, which informed their early identity formation, then manifested themselves in the participants' actions as young adults. It exposes how the enactment of those early identities reinforced their emerging leader identities and began to integrate into their evolving life stories. This line of theorising draws upon the life stories approach to leadership (Shamir and Eilam, 2005) that is developed across the individual's life span. Leadership life-story theorists (Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Avoli and Vogelgesang, 2011; Hancock, Dyk and Jones, 2012) believe leaders' life stories are self-narratives. These self-narratives answer the age-old question of 'who am I?' by incorporating the meaning that the individual attaches to those earlier events – which are then organized into a coherent life story. The more meaningful the event, the greater the likelihood of incorporating it into the individual's life story. (McAdams, 2019, 2021).

This sub-theme explores how the participants' responses to these earlier specific defining moments resurfaced in their early adult years, how they became incorporated into their

evolving life stories and how they contributed to the construction of their emerging leader identities.

Despite her self-described misbehaviours, Carol still managed to finish high school as a straight “A” student. While in high school, she befriended what she referred to as a bad crowd. She started smoking, drinking excessive alcohol and, in Carol’s words, began “*going down a bad path*”. Carole, married at sixteen and a mother by eighteen, lived on and off the streets until she was in her early twenties. Throughout this period, Carol continued to be subjected to physical violence and sexual assaults by a husband that was “*into drugs and alcohol and didn’t have a job*”.

I basically lived on the streets with this guy. Sleeping at bus stops, sleeping at friends’ houses, things like that. ‘Cas, after I left my girlfriend and went to live with my boyfriend, which I ended up marrying in between there for about a year and a half – to 2 years, we didn’t have a place to live. So, we just lived wherever people would let us live, and so we went through that...Carol

Carol did not elaborate on her relationship with her first husband other than speak of her challenges living on the streets while caring for her first child. She left her first husband when she was approximately eighteen. After struggling to make a life for herself, Carol met and married her second husband. She had a second child with her second husband when she was twenty years old. As neither of her partners worked, the burden of being the sole income provider fell to Carol as she juggled her three jobs: waitressing, working as an agent in a call centre and working part-time at a hockey arena on the weekends. Carol’s financial burden and the hardship of living on and off the streets were compounded by the responsibility she carried for her two children. She laboured with how to provide for herself and her children. As illustrated by her narrative account that follows, the gravity of her situation was brought to the forefront when she was placed in a situation with the possibility that harm could befall both her and her daughter.

When my daughter was one and a half years old, um, you know (Carol's partner) was selling cocaine out of our house. And he wouldn't sell to this one person down at the XXX that he was selling to all evening. He said no, that's enough whatever, and they came with a gang of 5 guys with baseball bats into my house to beat the crap out of all of us, and I had a one-and-a-half-year-old kid. And the first thing I thought of was, what are my options? How do I get out of this situation safe, what is the best alternative for my daughter?... Carol

As Carol began to share the events of that pivotal day with me, I detected anger in her voice. Her narrative account revealed the anger she still harboured related to that particular event and her early childhood experiences, two separate events where innocent children were placed in danger by their father. That interpretation is based on the intensity of the emotions Carol displayed as she shared her story. They are also based upon my own experiences in that I also sometimes feel anger at those who placed me in harm's way when I was too small and too young to protect myself. As the story progressed, Carol's anger was replaced with what I would describe as pride, pride in possessing the resolve to confront the men and in her ability to protect her child. I, too, sometimes feel proud of myself for having survived my experiences now but wonder at what cost...Researcher Field Notes

Carol's account provides insight into her problem-solving capabilities and role as primary caregiver and protector. The intensity of the emotions that Carol displayed while sharing the specifics of this particular incident - the five men entering her home with baseball bats - denoted that this was a triggering event that she had integrated into her life story and, by association, her identity. Studies have shown that emotionally significant life events and experiences are important components of individuals' life stories (George, Park and Chaudoir, 2016). Carol's following quote shows how she enacted the same behaviour as a child. More specifically, in recounting her story, Carol referred back to the time in her earlier childhood when she intervened and called social services to report her father, which resulted in their removal from their abusive familial situation¹¹. Carol offered her prior experience as a ten-year-old child to explain why she believed she was able to respond calmly to this situation and

¹¹ Refer to pages 124 and 125 for details of Carol's narrative account

how she was able to successfully diffuse the emotions of the group of men with the baseball bats. Interestingly, Carol referenced her childhood incident with the gun five times during our interview, which indicated to me that this earlier event was also a pivotal moment in her life that defined her self-identity. When Carol - as a child - called social services, her actions resulted in a positive outcome for Carol and her family. My interpretation of Carol's quote below is that her earlier childhood event had shown her that she should not let fear stand in her way of taking action when deemed necessary and that she was capable of looking after herself and others. This particular story was shared in the context of explaining to me the reasons why she felt she was successful corporately and how she was able to become a CEO while still relatively young. Namely, her ability to take risks is connected directly to these two experiences and will be explored further in this chapter.

I wasn't afraid to because I have taken that risk before, right...Carol

Individuals create identity narratives that link their past to their present and their desired future (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016). Carol's narrative accounts demonstrate how the events of her past informed her behaviours in the present and how her ability to take control of the situation with her father by making certain decisions and actions transferred to her identity. Narrative identity scholars suggest that individuals make sense of their various life experiences through the creation of a life story that incorporates those specific events and that it is the process of creating the story that becomes the foundation of their "identity-making process" (Polkinghorne, 1988; McAdams, 1993; Jirek, 2017). This line of theorising has been extended to leadership development and construction theories by several leadership scholars, including Lord and Hall, 2005; Avolio, 2005; Avolio and Vogelgesang, 2011; Murphy and Johnson, 2011 and Kwok et al., 2018. More specifically, Avolio (2005) described the leader developmental process as lifelong. A lifelong process whereby an individual's view of themselves as a leader is derived from how they interpret and make meaning of the specific experiences they encounter throughout their life and that this self-view, in turn, impacts future leader development (Avolio and Hannah, 2008). In other words, an individual's self-construct is based upon their experiences which may lead them to conclude that they possess skills that are associated with

leaders. (Avolio and Hannah, 2008); the more leadership-rich opportunities a person is afforded, the greater their leadership readiness. When the identity enactments have a positive outcome, it reinforces the behaviour, strengthening the emergent identity (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016). That Carol's enactment of a behaviour she learned as a child led to a positive outcome validated her self-view as someone capable of taking control of a difficult situation, contributing to her emerging leader identity. Avolio and Hannah (2008) propose that the greater the degree of developmental readiness, the more likely the individual will seek out opportunities as both adolescents and adults that can "*stimulate and accelerate leader development*" (Avolio and Hannah, 2008, p. 332).

The ability to connect specific triggering events is a crucial factor in how individuals integrate single memories into their narrative identity (McLean, Pasupathi and Pal, 2007; Merrill, Walters and Fivush, 2016) and support how identity is developed from these first-hand experiences (McLean and Fournier, 2008). An event that occurs that is deemed inconsequential is dismissed. However, when the event is deemed material, it becomes part of the life story that will either reinforce or change how a person perceives themselves (McLean, Pasupathi and Pal, 2007; Merrill, Walters and Fivush, 2016). Shamir and Eilam (2005) have applied this line of theorising to their studies of the relationship between narrative and leader identity development (Avolio, 2005; Avolio and Luthans, 2006). Their primary argument is that how an individual attaches meaning to these triggering events determines the learning outcome and its developmental potential, the timing and accumulation of which can contribute to one's self-view as a leader and influence the course of leadership development (Avolio, 2005; Avolio and Hannah, 2008). In other words, the outcomes of the formation of an individual's identity from these triggering events are cumulative. Carol took a risk as a ten-year-old by calling social services. The materiality of that particular event resulted in a favourable outcome and became part of Carol's emerging early leader identity, that of a person capable of taking action when confronted with a challenge.

(Referring to her earlier childhood memory), It is just my mindset, my attitude of, you know. I had done what all of us felt was impossible to do, which was to get us out of that situation

and at that point. I just felt that if I could do that, there was nothing else that was going to get in my way with regards to, you know, who I was, what I was going to become...Carol

In the above quote, Carol displays her determination to learn from her early life experience/trigger point, and this continued to serve her well through further trigger points, such as when she was once again placed in a potentially vulnerable and abusive position. Carol's ability to connect those specific events - that of the five guys with baseball bats to the earlier childhood event when her father played Russian roulette with her mother - is illustrative of the ways in which the research participants began to connect events from their past into their life story (McLean, Pasupathi and Pals 2007; Merrill, Walters and Fivush, 2016) and also demonstrates the capacity of these specific triggering events to shape an individual's sense of self (McAdams, 1993, 1996). For Carol, her early childhood trigger event and the brave actions she took became part of her early identity, an individual capable of successfully negotiating and resolving a crisis, attributes that served her well later in her career.

Such practices strike a chord with other research, including a study by Jirek (2017) of forty-six individuals who had experienced trauma. The study found that the individuals who exhibited the greatest amount of posttraumatic growth had a well-defined understanding of who they were before the trauma and how the trauma had changed them. More specifically, the individuals understood what they had lost and had moved forward with their lives. They also accommodated the trauma into their identity, life story, and world views (Janoff-Bulman 1992; Janoff-Bulman and McPherson-Frantz, 1997). For example, Carol's narrative demonstrates her belief that she became a different person as a consequence of the action she took as a ten-year-old. The incident had shaped not only her present self-view but also her future potential in that she had proven to herself her abilities to deal successfully with difficult situations.

Liu and colleagues (2020) believe that a significant portion of leader development commences during the early childhood years, prior to the commencement of formal education. This lifespan approach to leader identity development and leader identity construction suggests that each

critical life stage (Erikson and Erikson, 1998, Murphy and Johnson, 2011) can influence leader identity through the development of “*learning, practicing and applying feedback from experience*” (Liu et al., 2020, p. 3). The outcomes from these reflections, in turn, influence leader self-awareness, self-identity and self-efficacy (Day and Dragoni, 2015; Liu et al., 2020). The study by Merrill, Waters and Fivush (2016) found that when there is a positive outcome from an event, it leads to identity exploration. Whereas when there is a positive outcome from a traumatic event, it leads to identity commitment. The finding is supported by an empirical study of five hundred college students on the contributions of event centrality in predicting PTSD and posttraumatic growth that was conducted by Barton, Boals and Knowles (2013). Event centrality is defined as “*the extent an individual construes a traumatic experience as a central part of their identity which becomes a reference point to interpret new and future events*” (Barton, Boals and Knowles, 2013, p. 718). This study found that the ability to draw a positive self-identity from a traumatic situation demonstrates the individual’s ability to deal with trauma constructively and results in posttraumatic growth and a greater commitment to their positive self-identity (Boals, Steward and Schuettler, 2010). The reinforcement of a positive self-identity as a result of successfully navigating traumatic situations was prevalent in each women’s accounts in my research. At some point in their early childhood or adolescent years, they found the courage to take action, making difficult decisions that led to a positive outcome from a traumatic event. Olive’s account serves to illustrate this.

Things got very physically violent after that. My dad stayed sober for like the next eight years, but even though he was sober, he had become a lot more physically aggressive. Slapping, punching, black eyes. On two occasions, I don’t remember what he got mad about, but he ended up choking me until I passed out. My mom was still working a couple of jobs at that time to make ends meet, but then my mom lost her job and tried to commit suicide. I stepped in and navigated my mom through a divorce, helped her move out and, um, then things had started to get verbally abusive with my little sister (Olive’s father had been awarded custody of Olive’s younger sister), who had never experienced that just because my dad was on his own. He started drinking not very long after that, which I guess triggered the violence. So, I arranged to have her move out of my dad’s house and full time

with my mom. And um, um, and went ya through, while going to college, all that and it was really tough but, in the end, it all worked out...Olive

Olive's ability to step in and deal with an emotionally charged situation while navigating the judicial system was not an easy undertaking. However, her actions, that of a person capable of taking charge, contributed to her emerging leader development and self-identity. She attributed her ability to resolve this issue while juggling a part-time position and attending college to her early childhood experiences. While this was offered as a more general statement, I believe that her ability to manage these competing priorities was due to her multitasking ability. A skill developed due to her obligations as an adolescent to look after most of the household chores while attending school and participating extensively in sport-related activities.

Olive's narrative above and Carol's self-identification as a leader that follows both reveal how the events of the participants' past informed their identity as early adults. More specifically, Carol's account reveals that she translated the decision she made and her corresponding actions as a ten-year-old child and integrated them into her life story. Her courageous earlier decision ultimately became part of her life story. It seemed to provide a foundation for her leader narrative, shaping the development of her self-view as a leader and thereby changing her view of the world (Pasupathi, Mansour and Brubaker, 2007).

Definitely, I'm still today. I am the leader of the family with regards to what we are doing if we are planning anything...Carol

Carol's narrative demonstrates how her actions resulted in her self-identity as a leader. McLean, Pasupathi and Pal (2007, p. 265) argue that "*narrative construction is an engine for self-development*". They suggest that situated life stories developed in childhood can affect self-development throughout an individual's entire life span once they reach adolescence and possess the cognitive abilities to integrate them into the life story itself. Furthermore, an individual's self-identity is attained and reinforced by connecting their life story to these meaningful life events (Pasupathi, Mansour and Brubaker, 2007), and this self-development

and connections are evident in the accounts provided by the participants in my study. The narratives from the other research participants support the findings of Carol, our lead protagonist. This line of theorising can be applied to the participants in the study, as further illustrated by Olive's narrative below.

You know, I think the transition, not so much during the height of the abuse, but I think when we made the separation and the role I played in taking care of my mom and my sister. So, I think the aftermath of that has really cemented a path for me. And I think, again, when my mom was out of the house working all the time, my dad, even if he wasn't working, wasn't helping. We were in charge of taking care of the house and cooking and doing that. And my youngest sister was little at that time, so we took care of her too. And so, I think I have just always been in that role; not that it was directly related to the abuse necessarily, but just how the dynamics of the household functioned because of that. I have continued to support my mom along the way, although she is in a very good spot. She lives with my aunt. She is solid financially. It has been almost a full year since I have given her any money other than for birthdays or Christmas or things like that. And, um, my little sister – I still give her money and support her sometimes. She is overall in a stable spot. Um. I think I need my work; it is such an important part of my identity. Um, I think because of my experiences...Olive.

Olive's current role is that of a CEO of a large national company that provides health and caregiving services. Her narrative account demonstrates the impact of her early life experiences on her self-development and identity. The roles of caregiver and financial provider she enacted as a child continues to the present day. Her account unveils how, once she possessed the cognitive capabilities, she made sense of her early childhood experience and integrated them into her life story and her identity as a service provider.

The additional insights provided by the descriptive accounts of Ann that follow offer further compelling support of the impact the early childhood experiences had on the participants in terms of shaping their personal and career identities. Ann's narrative accounts illuminate the means through which the research participants incorporated the events of their past into their narrative identity and provide a representation of their emergent identity from those first-hand

experiences (McLean and Fournier, 2008). Moreover, it illustrates how experience leads to changes in the way people view and describe themselves over time (Pasupathi, Mansour and Brubaker, 2007).

So, growing up, I was very much the caregiver, the caregiver. So that is exactly what I do in my professional life; I take care of people. I considered social work, I mean, social work is god's work, but you will be a pauper, right? And that flew in the face that I needed to be financially self-sufficient. But taking care of people was what my childhood taught me to do. What I was good at taking care of people. Right? And, you know, my mom and my sister are alive in whatever condition they are in, and I think I probably played a role in that. So, I built a company around taking care of people, right. I have another company in the senior space, which is essentially about taking care of people again, right? So, I think my upbringing very much guided my career choices, but the industrious, the "figure it out, the staunchly independent" all comes from my childhood...Ann

From the time that Ann was seven years old, she was placed in the role of primary caregiver. As a consequence, her behaviours and actions became integrated into her life story and defined who she was, her perceived role in life and her identity as a caregiver. The narrative accounts presented in this sub-theme revealed how the behaviours the participants learned as children are enacted later in life and how, through their enactment, they became integrated into their life stories, their life choices, and their evolving identities. By incorporating the meaning they attached to their earlier childhood experiences into the development of their life story, the participants begin to understand who they are and why? The participants' narrative accounts show how their childhood roles of being the caretaker and protector and effectively dealing with their childhood adversity were positively interpreted, the manner in which it influenced their life choices and how it sowed the seeds of a leader identity.

8.1.3 Sub-theme # 2 - Identity Motives: Driven to Succeed

In Chapter 7, I revealed the particular circumstances the participants encountered that created powerful motivations within each for financial independence, power and control. This sub-

theme, *Identity motives: driven to succeed*, continues the life story of the research participants. It begins by engaging with their earlier life experiences and exploring how these three identity motives linked to their past coalesced into a powerful drive to succeed once they entered the workforce as young adults. Next, it reveals the manner in which their drive to succeed impacted their career and how the enactment of this identity motive fortified their emerging leader identities, corporate aspirations and envisioned future work selves.

Identity motive theorists generally agree that individuals are motivated by a need for a positive social identity and self-esteem. However, they also argue that other psychological motives shape individuals' self-views and are heavily linked to the identity process and resultant behaviours (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Vignoles, 2011). Identity motives are defined as pressures *"toward certain identity states and away from others, which guide the processes of identity construction"* (Vignoles et al., 2006, p. 309). Carol's confrontation with the five men, described on page 183, moreover served to heighten her awareness that the responsibility for her child resided solely with her. It also, as further illustrated by the narrative account below, advanced her desire to construct a better life for herself and her daughter, fuelling her determination to succeed.

So, behind the scenes, I was constantly trying to figure out a way to support my daughter, you know, be able to raise her. I was on a mission to try to utilize my education and do something with that with my life and basically had three jobs. I was raising my kids, waitressing, working as an agent in a call centre, trying to finish off my undergraduate, and, um working part-time at a hockey arena on the um, weekends. My first husband and then after that my second boyfriend, who sort of watched both of them while I was doing all this work. Neither one of them could hold a job, so it was up to me, and then when I left my boyfriend, my second boyfriend, I had them (her children) stay with my sister while I went in and worked...Carol

Carol's account demonstrates her resolve in wanting to *"do something with her life"* and the corresponding effort she was prepared to expend to achieve her goals. This desire for a better life, which was an outcome of their earlier experiences and motivations, was present in the

accounts of all study participants. Olive and Alice's narratives below provide further insight into how these early motivations later translated into the participants' collective drive to succeed.

I am very driven, very accomplished. I think one of the biggest driving factors from those experiences is at the end of my high school years thinking that I am going to find a way to get out of here and not come back. I think just the drive, the work ethic, the need to succeed and not fail at things. I think that has been the biggest way that it (her early experiences) impacted me. I think even though my career choices were driven by getting out of there and not being able to go back. That obviously propelled into something that I do actually desire. And not just driving myself for things that I hate doing. Achieving more of what I like to do and not just running away from the things I didn't want to have. So, um, so ya, I guess in that way, just by the nature of how he treated us, we were responsible for taking care of the entire household in that way. That instilled a work ethic that it doesn't bother me much to work hard and to do any level of things. But without those negative experiences, I am not sure I would have had the drive...Olive

And that was the set up. It was like, you know, this thing over here that hasn't been achieved. And I was then like, ok, that is where I am going, that's my next horizon. And it was always running from this. I always say that your past doesn't define you; it is simply a starting point; it doesn't define where you are going, it defines where you came from, and everyone should know where they came from, but they should work like hell to go where they are intended to go, right...Alice.

These accounts demonstrate their strong motivations to succeed, which they both attributed to their early life experiences. Interestingly, the participants all used terms such as “*running away or running towards*” that Olive and Alice used to describe the impact they perceived their past had on them. I found this revealing and interpreted it to suggest that their past continues to haunt them, that they will be forever running from their childhood memories or running towards new memories to help erase their memories of the past.

Carol was “*on a mission*” to construct a better life for herself and her children. However, near the end of her studies, the stress of living on the streets and the corresponding trauma of her

life “*caught up with her*”. Carol had lost a significant amount of weight living on the streets and, with a compromised immune system, became quite ill. More than ever committed to moving forward with her life, Carol sought out government financial assistance for the first time in her life. The financial support and assisted living aid she received allowed Carol to remain at home, where she continued her studies through correspondence until she was well enough to return physically to school. Once her health resumed, Carol returned to working multiple jobs and was able to save sufficient funds to purchase her first house while still attending University.

Just getting a job, just going out and job hunting and jobs and saving money to the point that I was able to actually put a down payment, believe it or not, on my first house. So, it was always just being able to. It was always this whole independent thing and struggling though to be able to do things and get things done on my own. Um, rather than depend, like I know that through our entire growing up, we could never depend on my dad, my father to do anything. All he did was sleep and drink and eat and take everything that we had from us. So, for me, it was imperative that I make my own money, have my own bank accounts... Carol

Carol’s narrative above was not dissimilar to the other participants and, once again, ties back to their childhood when they were vulnerable, with little perceived control over their lives. They witnessed their mothers’ dependence on their fathers and their fathers’ inability and unwillingness to provide for them and their families. The participants came to believe as a result that the only person they could depend upon was themselves. This independence and, in particular, their identity motive for financial independence and power that coalesced into a powerful drive to succeed has been identified in other women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. A study of twenty-six female incest survivors identified three common themes amongst the participants. “*These themes included resistance to (a) being powerless, (b) being silenced, and (c) being isolated*” (Anderson, 2006, p. 414). Consequently, like the participants in this study, acquiring personal power and the ability to make choices became dominant themes for the women in Anderson’s study. They all worked towards the achievement of those goals (Anderson, 2006), as supported by Carol’s narrative that follows.

So, I learned proactively and asked questions and sat down with people and just. I really wanted to feel like I was in control which I never was before in my life. I needed to feel like I was the one making the choices, a difference and moving myself forward. You know, in the world and getting to the next level and the next level...Carol.

Carol reveals her understanding that the responsibility for “moving forward” resided with her exclusively. It prompted her to accept responsibility for her learning and drove her corresponding actions to assume control over her life. The inability to trust others and the assumption of responsibility for their careers was a dominant theme for all eight participants, as will be further illustrated in this chapter.

As I wrote up this sub-theme, I reflected on how the participants’ inability to trust had manifested into their life choices and self-identities, the most notable of which was that the participants took complete control of their own lives and careers. It also occurred to me that of the eight participants, only Ann had never learned to trust later in life. It caused me to realize that I also have not learned to trust. I found this noteworthy and reflected deeply on why that may be the case. I believe it may be because Ann and I had very different experiences with authority. Many of the participants had positive experiences later in life with either mentors, organisations, or others in positions of authority, such as Carol’s positive experience with social services. It is hard to go through life not trusting. I wonder if Ann and I will ever be able to trust again and how that will be gained. Even more so, I wondered if the participants’ ability to move forward and make peace with their past was, in part, a result of learning how to trust again...Researcher Field Notes and Personal Reflections

The participants’ narrative accounts intimated that they all intuitively understood the positive relationship between career advancement and the achievement of their desired life goals. Their shared drive to succeed strongly influenced the participants' careers in this study, and it did not go unnoticed within their respective roles. For example, one of the corporations where Carol worked while attending university, impressed with her work as a part-time employee, offered

her a full-time position after graduating. Once in the role, Carol worked diligently and fearlessly, and her hard work was rewarded with new and progressively more demanding roles.

So, it was like when I first started working here one of my first supervisors said, “boy, you know, you are really amazing at this. Do you think you can take on this role of this?” And I would take it on, and I would learn it, and I didn’t have the background, or you know the education yet or the skills that to understand (the industry) or all that stuff. ...Carol

Carol’s account exposes her willingness to take risks by accepting roles where she did not yet possess either the skills or the experience. It also reveals her willingness to work hard to acquire the skills and confidence in her ability to do so successfully. One of the most notable ways in which the participants’ drive to succeed was expressed was their willingness to work hard, and once again, we see - through Betty - the resurfacing of the participants’ work ethic, which supported their drive to succeed.

I was working at this little furniture store. I make 9,000 USD a year before I got this job. Um, I needed to do something else. I was on food stamps and welfare. My boss helped me find a job. I had no idea what they did. They were paying 24,000 USD a year, which, when you have been making 9,000 USD, makes you feel like you hit the lottery. I knew it afforded me the ability to get off government assistance, which was just like, you know, a dream. I didn’t know what they did. Even when I went in the interview I still had no idea. I didn’t care what they did. I just needed the cheque, and I knew I could learn anything. I never, from the time I was a little girl, I’ve worked hours a day in the fields. I have never not worked very, very hard. Physically, mentally. So, I never approached anything – even today probably – that I felt like I couldn’t figure it out (chuckle). I have always had this strong sense of like, doing, working hard. Like I said, I think it comes from my dad, but it was not an option to fail. So, this new job, this 24,000 a year, was a commission job. So, 24,000 was the base salary. Once I put 2+2 together that all I had to do was sell something and I could earn more money, I was relentless. I would work 80 hours a week. I just worked really hard, really long hours, which is kinda the reason I didn’t go back to college ‘cas I couldn’t do night school and this...Betty

Betty’s narrative reveals a strong identity motive to succeed that was bolstered, in large part, by her desire to get off government assistance. Her determination to succeed was aided by her

strong work ethic, willingness to take risks and problem-solving skills. The participants' drive to succeed was supported by these competencies and traits that resided in all eight participants and that will be engaged with further in this chapter.

Up until this point in their early adult lives, their commitment to succeed was based on their identity motives for power, control, and financial independence. Once in the workplace, they quickly recognized that a leadership role provided greater financial rewards, independence, and power. This stoked their drive to succeed “*at all costs*” and reinforced their commitment to their envisioned future work selves and careers, resulting in greater role salience. Leadership theorists believe that the more an individual is committed to the role, the greater the role salience (Davis and Love, 2017). Athanasoulou et al. (2018) studied twelve highly successful female CEOs of large global companies. Their findings indicate that active ownership is a crucial component of a successful career in women acceding to the CEO role. More specifically, the CEOs in their study were willing to defy the socially constructed norms and behaviours that existed for women at that time by prioritizing their careers over their families. This self-acceptance is borne out of leadership-rich experiences and personal ambition, which facilitates each woman's willingness to assume responsibility for their own self-development and execution of their new roles (Athanasoulou et al., 2018). This prioritizing career over family was a shared theme for the participants in this study, as depicted by Betty's narrative,

I can remember coming in on Saturdays and Sundays, which I am sure was against company policy (laughing), but I would come in. I would put my children on a blanket with toys and snacks, and I would outbound phone calls for 12 hours. So that compels me to work really hard. I will also never forget what it was like to be a young single mom living in the projects. I know what it is like to be sitting alone and having no money and like you don't have enough food to feed yourself and your kids. And making that choice. And, um, being treated pathetically by the government. And be treated like you're pathetic by the church. And so, I just, I guess that compels me...Betty

Betty provides an exemplar of the commitment the participants had to their respective work identities. We see their devotion to their work and roles surfacing in all of their accounts. Betty

reveals her determination to never return to a position where she had to rely on assistance from others to provide for her children. She was equally driven by never wanting to be placed again in a position where she was made to feel less than others purely as a result of her financial situation.

This sub-theme demonstrated the importance of the identity motives developed as adolescents to the participants in this study. It reveals how their desire to make something of themselves connected to their past and the process by which their identity motives are forged together to form an unwavering drive to succeed. More specifically, the participants quickly discovered that their ability to achieve their goals increased as they advanced within their respective industries. Correspondingly, this led to the participants' willingness to work exceptionally hard and, once again, we see the recurring role of their strong work ethic in their lives and its impact on their work identities. More explicitly, the willingness of the participants to defy the socially constructed norms and behaviours that existed for women at the time by prioritizing their work above all else. This resulted in the participants acquiring active ownership of their work identities, which has been found to lead to corporate success and that served to reinforce their role salience and work identities. This sub-theme is important to the study as it illuminates how the participants' drive to succeed became an important part of their leader identities that were contributory to their corporate success.

8.1.4 Sub-theme # 3 - Social Validation: Impact on Drive to Succeed

As their careers progressed, another shared sub-theme of the research participants was to actively seek out opportunities for public acknowledgement. This need for social validation was evidenced by the participants' accumulation of numerous prestigious awards. This sub-theme reveals the various reasons why the participants pursued public validation and, moreover, the impact of the validation on the participants' drive to succeed and leader identities. For some participants, such as Carol, the motivation for social validation was driven by a need to fill the void in their lives created by the lack of praise and support they received as children.

I mean, I was very driven to achieve, right. So, everything I did to be rewarded, I had to get a reward for. I had to feel accomplished. Somebody had to give me the best of this and the best of this. I won 3 XXX best in the best, the international global XXX award, right, laughing, and it was always to get that like pat on the back that I never got as a child, I think. You know I never got recognized for anything, and you know everything was always about, you know, not achieving as opposed to achieving...Carol

Two of the participants chose to be interviewed in their corporate office, and I could not help but note the numerous awards that lined their bookshelves. Curious, I conducted a cursory online search of the remaining participants. I was intrigued to uncover that most of the participants had multiple awards, some of which were very prestigious. I, too, have my share of awards displayed in my office. It never really occurred to me that I needed affirmation of my business acumen. However, I couldn't help but wonder, did I need to prove my self-worth? And if so, to others or myself? ...Researcher Field Notes and Reflexivity

In similar ways to the three identity motives that merged to form the participants' determination to succeed, the shared participant's need for validation and public recognition promoted their drive to succeed.

Because when he got home, I was so desperate for him to love me and think I was a good girl, which is probably why I was a straight-A student and all this. And so, I just wanted, to like to sit on Daddy's lap and you know to be loved. Always trying to get people's approval, you know. Always, that's always certainly been part of the younger year's story.... Betty

I loved the recognition I was receiving at work. It was just the positive attention side of things that I had gotten from my track coach and my teachers. In high school, it was important that my track coach was happy with my performance. It was important that my teacher was happy with how I performed. It was important that, um, you know, people that I respected and looked up to. It was important that my (boss) was happy with my performance even though I was difficult to work with. And so, I just really thrived. I think as part of my – when I look back over the years – and the way that my dad interacted with us. That he just never approved of us. Um, which never left us feeling good enough, and I think that, um, even

during those rebellious times, it wasn't just a power struggle. It just was about finding somewhere where I could be approved of. So, I think a number of things I have done along the way. I have been just really driven by that. And so, um, the need to be approved of and the need to be accepted. I think it is a human need – knowing that you belong somewhere. A tribe. You know your group of people and where you are accepted...Olive

Olive and Debbie's accounts illuminate the ways in which their earlier life experiences influenced their behaviours as adults. More specifically, it shows how the lack of praise they received as children translated into a need for recognition and public validation later in life. However, the reasons for seeking public validation varied amongst the participants. Several of the participants in this study, like Debbie and Betty, sought self-validation to prove to others that they were worthy and to affirm their leader self-identity. For other participants, it provided tangible proof that they did not become the person that others expected them to become based on their familial circumstances. And finally, for other participants – like Carol and Olive - the need for recognition arose primarily from a requirement to fill the vacuum caused by being raised in a home devoid of love and filled with constant criticism.

Being selected from amongst their peers for awards provided the participants with social validation that instilled confidence in their abilities as a leader, which in turn, fortified their emergent leader identities (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016). This shared need to achieve, fuelled by the varying personal motivations, was reinforced through this accumulation of awards which served to strengthen their leader identity (Yeager and Callahan, 2016) and provided the participants with further motivation to pursue additional success in different venues associated with leadership (Day and Lance, 2004). Life stories tell us who we are and why we are here (Shamir and Eilam, 2005). However, for the participants in this study, it was equally important for them to know how others saw them. The plaques and trophies provided a visible confirmation to the research participants that others saw them as successful leaders.

This sub-theme illuminated how the participants' earlier experiences, identity motives and need for public validation created the foundation for a strong drive to succeed. It exposed how

their fervour was aided by the work ethic that had been implanted in them as children. It revealed the positive consequences their actions had on their careers and why those public rewards and recognition strengthened their leader identities and added to their career aspirations.

8.1.5 Sub-theme # 4 - Transference of Skills and Attributes to Work Identities

In Chapter 6, pages 97 to 129, I introduced the notion of key competencies the participants acquired as children that allowed them to successfully navigate and survive their abusive familial situations. While not limited to the following, these skills included: resourcefulness, complex problem-solving capabilities, artful negotiation aptitudes and a strong work ethic. Leadership theorists believe that these early experiences influence proactive learning and subsequent leadership development skills in that individuals actively seek out opportunities to deploy skills they have successfully executed in the past (Chan and Drasgow, 2001). Those skills, once performed successfully, inform the individual's self-view (Lord and Hall, 2005). This form of developmental experience is perceived as "*a powerful trigger for leader development*" (DeRue and Wellman, 2009; Liu et al., 2020, p. 5). Moreover, studies of individuals who have experienced trauma have shown that incorporating an awareness of their resourcefulness and ability to persevere despite their adversity results in the formation of positive identity construction (Maitlis, 2009), which contributes to leader development and identity. Accordingly, the participants' experiences became the lens through which they viewed the world and themselves. This sub-theme describes the transference of these skills and attributes to the participants' corporate roles and work identities. It exposes how these competencies and attributes were enacted and the manner in which they contributed to their leader development. It illuminates the impact the participants' view of the world had on their leader identity and how, in turn, it aided their early career advancement that culminated in their ascending to the most senior leadership roles in their respective companies.

One early acquired skill was the resourcefulness the participants had developed when forced to look after themselves as children. As children and adolescents, the participants were

accustomed to being placed in roles beyond their capabilities and having to learn “on the fly”. Their ability to find creative approaches to resolving issues set off new ways of thinking of themselves. Correspondingly, they came to see themselves early on as someone resourceful and capable of resolving any issue that came their way, as illustrated below.

So, I think those skills you develop living on the street, how do I get my next meal, you know. Those kinds of things, you become – pause, what do you call it, not um, it is not like these things don't matter, or they don't phase you. They do, but you become very alive to the fact that you need to find other ways to deal with issues and problems beyond just sulking in a corner and waiting for something bad to happen, you know. Everything was done the best way that I could possibly get it done. I was proactive, innovative. If there was something that couldn't get done a certain way, I would look for options and other roads to get it done. Um, so you know those things got noticed as I worked... Carol

Carol's narrative provides insight into how the participants transferred the resourcefulness they acquired as children to their corporate lives and how the performance of those skills aided their career advancement. More importantly, it reveals that Carol directly connected the skills she executed while living on the streets to her ability to be proactive and innovative in her corporate role. Skills that Carol's employers favourably received. Identities are developed from specific past experiences that are stored in memory. How individuals organize and respond to situations in the present is guided by these identities (Markus, 1977). Lord and Hall (2005) argue that leadership skills develop from basic skills acquired through problem-solving experiences or observations that inform behaviour, knowledge, and subsequent experiences over time. In turn, as these skills develop, the individual's personal identity becomes more aligned with their self-view, which results in the construction of their leader identity (Lord and Hall, 2005). Carol's account demonstrates that her requirement and ability to solve problems as a child had become incorporated with her personal identity, which later transferred to her evolving leader identity. This resourcefulness, ability to problem solve and negotiation aptitudes were shared themes amongst all eight participants, as further supported by the narratives of Sandy and Debbie that follows.

Ya, ya. Well, I think the drive part is I am going to problem solve. I think I am an incredible problem solver. I think, by the nature of needing, to being really motivated to survive out of that household. Um, I want to not have to rely on going back or being part of that. I wanted to be self-reliant, so I think it has driven me to be a problem solver...Sandy

My ability to negotiate is definitely from that too. Negotiating when people don't even know you're negotiating with them. That was honed at a very early age...Debbie

The accounts of Debbie and Sandy above reveal that they directly attribute their work-related success to the skills they acquired in response to their childhood adversity. They were both able to accredit the specific skills they developed, how they believe they learned those skills and how they began to apply them in their corporate roles. It exposes in what manner their early childhood trauma came to play in the corporate roles and how their self-view transferred to the leader identities. Performance-based skills are inextricably linked to performance, and strong performance is a prerequisite for career advancement. The importance of complex problem-solving skills has been supported by research and is becoming increasingly important to career success. A study conducted by Mainert et al. (2015) found that the ability to solve problems and general mental ability facilitates and leads to career advancement. Furthermore, work ethic, critical thinking and negotiation skills were found to be closely linked to career advancement potential (Heimler, Rosenberg and Morote, 2012). Moreover, well-established cognitive skills are strong predictors of career advancement potential and are increasingly viewed as a crucial requirement of career success, particularly as leadership roles become more complex. The aforementioned skills align with the competencies that the participants believe they acquired as a result of their experiences.

Another core competency that the participants applied to their corporate roles - that promoted their career advancement - was their strong work ethic and ability to multi-task. Many women that succeed attribute their success to working harder than their male counterparts (Glass and Cook, 2016). A study of successful male and female CEOs found that the majority of the male CEOs had stay-at-home wives, which enabled them to focus on their careers. In contrast, the

study found that female CEOs had primary responsibility for childcare, which was similar to the women in this study. The study's findings found that female CEOs needed to develop strategies to ensure that the accretion of their career capital was not put at risk by the additional demands associated with their responsibility for maintaining their home lives (Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014). Studies that have also demonstrated the relationship between leadership work ethic and organisational performance (Vimba, Coetzee and Ukpere, 2013) have been found to support advancement to senior leadership roles (Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014). An illustration of how the participants executed their work ethic in their corporate roles follows.

My life taught me discipline and powering through pain and failure. So, there was always this striving. You can be better; you can be better. I think that just created an ingrained sense in me that you have to work, you have to work hard, you have to keep going. You can always be better. Um, from a really early age. I think I was even that way in school where it was like, work harder, keep doing more, you can always be better if you put in the effort...Susan

Susan's narrative shows that her willingness to work hard was not impeded by failure. On the contrary, failure served as a further incentive to work harder and reflected the participants' need to excel. I believe that was an outcome of the constant criticism they endured from their fathers. As children, the participants were constantly told that they were "never good enough", with many of the participants describing themselves as perfectionists as a consequence.

I just work hard. I learn pretty quickly, but I also work hard. Ok, so I do think my personal style or the decisions I make is influenced by my past in a handful of different ways. So, you know. Sometimes taking the hard road is me trying to prove that I can do hard things. Um, even prove that I am smarter than people think I am. Um, pause. I do think that has something to do with it. And I am a hard worker. I am. I don't give up until the job is done. I think those things are just part of my personality...Sandy

The accounts of Debbie and Sandy are strong examples of how the participants' work ethic extended beyond simply working longer hours. Susan's narrative reveals how she deliberately

sought out challenges, often taking the “hard road”. I believe that this ties back to her need to prove to herself and others that she was not the person others expected she would become.

A strong work ethic surfaced throughout the participants' life stories, beginning with their early childhood and extending to the present day. Susan and Sandy – indeed all study participants - had worked hard their entire lives. They were accustomed to working hard, having juggled multiple jobs while raising children and going to school. As a result, they never questioned hard work; it became hardcoded into their self-identities. Once they entered the corporate world, they brought that work ethic with them, labouring harder than the men, toiling for longer hours and “*doing whatever it took to succeed*”. Several studies have demonstrated that the ability to work long hours contributes positively to the accumulation of a person’s perceived value to a corporation. Those who are unable to put in the additional time and effort have fewer opportunities to create the social capital required for corporate success and advancement (Eagly and Carli, 2007). The willingness of the participants to expend the effort and time was a major contributing factor to their career advancement and success, becoming part of their leader identity.

A substantive body of leadership literature explores the relationship between corporate success and personality traits (Judge et al., 1999; Badura et al., 2020; Bergner, 2020). While there does not appear to be agreement as to exactly which personality traits lead to corporate success, it is widely accepted that personality traits yield significant influence on an individual’s corporate advancement and success (Boudreau, Boswell, and Judge, 2001). The narrative accounts that follow provide insights into specific traits – adaptability, tenacity, ability to quickly assess situations accurately and fearlessness - that the participants developed in response to their early childhood experiences. It illuminates how these traits evolved and were then expressed in their behaviour and actions as they progressed with their respective corporate roles.

Other than just being able to achieve, um, I think I have a lot of clarity around issues that, you know, maybe other people don't. I get in a room, and I can see things. I have extremely good intuition, um. I find myself an intuitive leader. Um, because my gut is almost 100% correct. It had to be to survive on the streets...Carol

I have the ability to read a room and the ability to read someone's personality. I know when to shut up, and I know when to speak up. And now, I talk, but I know when to shut up when it is a contentious situation, and that worked really, really well with my dad. When you stopped confronting him or agitating him, he'd slow down. Once I got older, I had enough of my own personal power to confront him, and he wasn't going to retaliate. So, the ability to deal with things; that ability to know what to say to someone to defuse the situation. Umm, I was good at that. I was really, really good at that, really, really young. And I know that came from that household environment...Debbie

I am the most adaptable person; I can adapt to any environment. So, you can put me in luxury with snotty people. Or you can put me on the streets, and I'm equally happy with both. Um, I, I can adapt to any environment, whether it's fast-paced or a slow pace, hectic, political, non-political. I just, I'm very, very adaptable. So, I would say that's one skill that's a hangover from my childhood...Betty

The participants' childhood survival depended largely on their ability to assess their immediate danger. Carol's intuition was honed while living on the streets, and Debbie's ability to quickly assess people would have proven useful in the politically charged corporate world. When coupled with their adaptability, it allowed the participants to quickly assess situations and adjust themselves accordingly. Thus, enabling them to deal effectively with others. This skill of sensing what others are feeling and handling relationships effectively contributes to a leader's emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence refers to *"the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions"* (Salovey, 1990, p. 189). A study conducted by Dulewicz (2000) found that Chairmen and CEOs benefit from possessing high emotional intelligence and that it is a key factor in determining successful corporate leadership in today's increasingly complex world.

The stories caused me to reflect on my own circumstances and their impact on my career. I could relate to the stories I heard - particularly Carol's account - and I believe that my early career advancement was largely due to my childhood experiences. As a young teenage girl living on the streets, I very quickly learned several skills to survive and stay safe. In time, I learned to read people exceptionally well, such that I could tell within minutes who was good and who intended to harm me. I also learned how to negotiate my way out of some difficult situations. To this day, I am an excellent judge of people; I can "smell bs" a mile away and believe that I can negotiate my way out of anything. These skills, and others I learned directly from my adverse experiences, have served me very well in my corporate roles and – I believe - are the reason I became a CEO when just 29 years old...Researcher
Field Notes

Whether it was their complex critical thinking skills, their adaptability, or their ability to assess a situation accurately and correctly, the skills that the participants acquired as children translated into a strong set of competencies that enabled them to navigate the corporate world and the associated politics successfully. Confident in their ability to learn anything, the participants in this study accepted positions despite not possessing the skills required for the role. They didn't take no for an answer, and they weren't afraid to make bold or unpopular decisions, all of which the participants attribute to their accelerated career advancement and corporate success.

I was put very quickly into a leadership role, and I didn't know anything about leadership. I had no training. I had no education on it. I mean, on the basketball court, I had leadership opportunities. But I didn't really associate that at the time, and I have enough fear of not doing the right thing to see us through some of the challenges we're having now. Um, I don't see it as an unhealthy fear though. I think it drives me to be willing to take risks and to problem solve and, um, and to ya find a way to not be complacent...Olive

Olive's narrative account provides insight into how the participants' ability to successfully survive their childhood abuse translated into a belief in their ability to "resolve any issue" and how that belief then transferred to their corporate roles. Her account also introduces her

willingness to take risks. This sense of fearlessness and the participants' disposition to take risks are important to the study as the readiness to take risks has been found to lead to corporate success. More specifically, studies exploring gender differences amongst CEOs have found that most female CEOs entered the workforce without the benefit of the leadership capital found in male CEOs. A study by Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen (2014) that investigated the life trajectories and the developmental roots of the leadership of male and female CEOs found that the female CEOs had significantly fewer career-relevant experiences than their male counterparts. They noted that within Western society, girls are discouraged from participating in play that promotes risks, yet these risks have been found to promote self-confidence and self-esteem (Pallier, 2003; Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014). Childhood events that are "related to the ability to take risks and to be successful promote self-confidence in males around risk later in life" (Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014, p. 246). Moreover, it has been argued that the scarcity of women in the C-Suite is a function of women's unwillingness to take risks (Sandberg, 2013; Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014). The participants in this study were not afraid to take bold risks, as noted by Susan's narrative below.

When I became an entrepreneur, I didn't really know what an entrepreneur was. My thought was more: ok, you have an idea, you think it's good, you go out, and you figure out how to do it. And, um, I think that that tenacity and that also just, you can, no matter what's put in front of you, you can figure (it) out, that comes from my experiences growing up. I was put in a lot of circumstances where I had to be completely self-reliant, and I worked it out. And so, a lot of people said, weren't you worried you were going to fail, or you know, why did you have so much faith that what you were doing was going to work. I was always such a risk-taker, and my thought is always like ya, but in the risk calculated, if you think you can overcome it and um, you think you can pretty much work through anything, then what do you have to lose. And if you fail, having learned something along the way that will make you better in the next thing you do. So, you are not really failing. So, I don't really see a downside to this. (Chuckle) Except for losing my money, that sucks. So, I think that very much comes from my early experiences, and so I just decided that we were going to grow a high kick-ass company. And I was gonna lead it...Susan

Susan's account paints a strong picture of her ability to take risks. It exposes how her past experiences contributed to her identity as someone capable of resolving complex issues, which created a willingness to undertake risks. Studies have shown that self-confidence and resilience are essential attributes of a successful CEO (Bennis, 2009). Susan's sense of fearlessness was coupled with tenacity, borne out of her earlier childhood experiences, which all eight research participants shared as further supported by Debbie's narrative account.

And I think that, umm, but I think that I'm very driven. If I say I'm going to do something, then I will do it. And, umm, that's important to me, keeping my word. That's very, very important to me. And when I don't. When I fall down on that, it usually crushes me far more than whoever I didn't get a deliverable for. I think I'm always trying to look ahead. What's the next thing. Where is the opportunity and I don't, um, I don't take no?" [Long pause]. As definitive in business. If I get a "no", it's a why and then or when will it be a yes...Debbie

Debbie's reference to being "crushed" when she is unable to deliver what she promises suggested to me that she is still, to this day, concerned with how others perceive her. I believe that this resoluteness and strength of will were partly driven by the participants' need to prove to themselves and others that they were much more than what others predicted they would become. It was also based on the drive to succeed that extended to everything they undertook. This resoluteness, tenacity, and strength of will have been found in previous studies of posttraumatic growth and are reflective of the ardent need for power and control amongst resilient survivors (Valentine and Feinauer, 1993). The participants voiced this shared underlying belief that life could not present them with anything that could be worse than what they had already endured. Consequently, they were confident in their ability to overcome any challenge or obstacle they encountered. Carol's narrative account below illustrates this sense of fearlessness and tenacity that developed from their early childhood experiences.

I'm going to make this happen. You know, if you tell me no, it was my reason for even pushing even harder to make sure that it was a yes or I could do it, you know what I mean? I don't know how anyone's past cannot influence who they become in the future. So, yea, I would not be who I am today, for sure!... Carol

Carol had struggled her entire life. First, as a child abused by her father, followed by her being bullied by her classmates because of her ethnicity and then again while living on the streets. The requirement to “*get up and fight another day*” was a part of her accepted identity. This shared sense of their ability to overcome adversity - unburdened by a fear of failure - created this incredible sense of “fearlessness” in the participants, enabling them to make bold decisions and take risks.

I was like - shit - he doesn't know what I am made of! ...Alice

Alice's choice of words, “*what I am made of*”, suggested to me that she took pride in the knowledge that fearlessness was part of her identity and the adversity she had survived. This fearlessness is consistent with other studies that have found that individuals who have overcome adversity “*draw strength from hardship and see their struggle against it as one of the keys to their later success*” (Jay, 2017, p. 1).

What is important to note is the fact that the eight participants in this study achieved their corporate success during a time when there were significant barriers for women. I believe that this is noteworthy because it highlights the magnitude of the obstacles the participants overcame. There is a wide body of scholarship that highlights the significant barriers that limit women from securing top leadership positions (Glass and Cook, 2016; Athanasopoulou et al., 2018). For example, a study of 1,100 organisations worldwide conducted by Mercer, a global consulting leader, revealed that women's percentage of executive positions as of August 2020 was 23%. The percentage of female CEOs of Fortune Global 500 companies was a mere 2.6%, and of that 2.6%, 100% were Caucasian (Catalyst, 2021). When the participants in this study entered the workforce, the percentage of women in executive positions was 22% (Scarborough, 2018). Despite this dismal representation of female CEOs in the workforce, all eight women in this study, three of whom are visible minorities, overcame significant adversity and considerable roadblocks to women, rising to the top of their respective organisations. Equally noteworthy is that the women in this study have achieved incredible corporate success in industries that were, and many continue to be, traditionally male-dominated. As noted by

Betty's narrative that follows, this added a further challenge to the participants in this study and illuminated the efforts required from the participants to overcome these obstacles.

I remember countless meetings. As a high performer, I would be flown to headquarters, and I would do a presentation in front of the top executives for the whole firm, and I would be the only woman in the room. Many, many times. So, I always felt that I had to work harder to be seen. I also have this deep southern accent which can be perceived as ignorant. Certainly, in the US anyway. I had to work really diligently to be perceived as that much smarter because of that and very conscious of what I was wearing. Um, to be attractive but not too attractive. All of those things that I feel are not the same for men. So, I am going to work harder. I am going to produce more numbers because you can't argue with numbers. I am going to um, you know. If they asked me to be here, I was going to be here so I could beat every man. All of that. So, I just never remember not working very, very hard...Betty

Betty's account describes the hurdles she faced and her awareness of gender-related issues and, once again, we see the resurfacing of their work ethic. It was not simply that Betty perceived that she had to work harder than her male counterparts. Her account also reveals an awareness of the need to present herself in a manner reflective of the misogynistic and patriarchal culture that existed at the time (Hunter, 2010), where men were seen as the primary breadwinners and heads of household (Lerner, 1986).

Despite the barriers that existed for women in that period – and that I would argue still exist, albeit to a lesser degree, today - five of the participants achieved their CEO status in major organisations before the age of 40. The remaining three participants are CEOs of extraordinarily successful companies they founded. The eight research participants articulated the inverse relationship between their trauma and their appreciation for the resilience it created which they attributed to their corporate success. They also credited the skills they acquired, as they successfully overcame the various obstacles and challenges they encountered as their careers progressed. This ability to revise negative experiences into a positive narrative has been supported by several studies (McAdams, 1993; Maitlis, 2009). These studies have shown how

it has enabled the victims of abuse the means to develop a more “shatterproof: view of their world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), resulting in posttraumatic growth (Calhoun and Tedeschi, 2006).

I just have that fighting survival instinct with everything I do. It is like, I can, I survived this, so I can do this. Like this is not challenging for me. I don't know if you ever get that sense, but sometimes things happen to me, and people go, oh, I can't believe that you accomplished that, and I am thinking to myself, it wasn't really that hard, right. Why would you think that doing something like this is difficult when it really isn't? And I think it is just growing up with that, um, survival instinct. You know I got through all of this. Why would I think that this is difficult to do, right? I have taken several risks in this organisation where other people wouldn't have, but I wasn't afraid to because I have taken that risk before, right. My life, with my kids' life. You know, my first partner, living on the streets, all that stuff...Carol

*And ya, if you can dream big and make it happen, um. I think I hold myself in a high regard. I think I know that I can be successful. I know I can work hard at things, and I can make them happen. **Researcher: And how do you know that?** Because I have done it in the past. Ya, certainly, I mean, I think that most people, the first thing that they do in their life is not start a company, right; that's pretty brazen to do that. And you know to kind of have the balls to say like I can do that, why not? For a lot of people failing at business could be the worst thing that ever happened to them. Failing at business is not going to be the worst thing that ever happens to me...Debbie*

The accounts of Debbie and Carol are strong depictions of how the events of the participants' past defined whom they became as adults. Further, it reveals how they incorporated their early childhood trauma into their life story, re-storying their life into one of strength and resilience that concluded with each participant not only rising to the most senior leadership positions in their respective companies but achieving tremendous corporate success along the way.

This sub-theme returned to a discussion of the early skills that the participants acquired in response to the participants' childhood trauma. It revealed how their well-developed skills then transferred to their work lives and leader identities and how these competencies facilitated their career advancement. More precisely, it demonstrated how the successful execution of these skills, when deployed as children and adolescents, became integrated with the

participants' identities. It showed how over time, as the participants sought out opportunities to enact these skills with which they had become familiar, these skills evolved, and the participants' personal identity became more aligned with their self-view, fortifying their leader identity (Lord and Hall, 2005). The sub-theme exposed the impact of the participants' childhood trauma on the development of personality traits and how those traits manifested in and contributed to their leader identities and corporate advancement. Advancement for women during this period was very challenging and no less so for the participants in this study. While other factors may have come into play, the participants attribute their significant corporate success to the combination of the skills acquired, personality traits developed, and lessons learned in direct response to their early childhood trauma.

A Postscript on Carol, the lead protagonist of this theme

Carol is a highly successful CEO of a publicly traded corporation, author, and recipient of numerous awards in recognition of her business acumen. She is the matriarch of her close-knit family who all reside in the same city. At the time of the interview, her mother and stepfather remained happily married and fully engaged in Carol's life.

Carol is married to a man several years her senior and enjoys a strong and positive relationship with her two children and husband. Her children work in companies that she founded and owns. She is very committed to philanthropy and giving back to the community, with a particular emphasis and empathy for young women. Her children are very supportive of her decision to leave the significant wealth she has accumulated to charity via a trust she has in place to ensure that her philanthropic endeavours will continue into the future.

I wanted to be able to mentor young women, write books, help them with their career choices and how they navigate this male dominated corporate world to get into leadership roles and really prove their worth as women. Now with #metoo and everything that is going on with women's empowerment and gender equality, um, that's come to fruition quite nicely. I think you sort of push all this pain you have; you push it in to other areas of your self that you gain something from. Maybe that is how you get so successful or become so successful. You are taking all of that anxiety, all of that pain and that hurt that you have experienced, and you are pushing it into some other area of yourself that becomes so much better because of it. It is not like it is a positive thing to go through this trauma or this abuse but if you could somehow channel that into some other part of yourself to get to, to gain um, you know, more capacity in those other areas. I think there is something significant there and that is what I did.

8.1.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored how the participants' emerging leader identities were enacted as young adults commencing their careers and then as their careers progressed. It revealed how certain learned behaviours, which had been triggered in response to earlier traumatic events in their lives, resurfaced in response to subsequent events and describes the process by which the enactment of those learned behaviours was expressed successfully in their corporate roles. It illuminates how they then became integrated into their early adult emerging life stories and leader identities. Finally, it demonstrated how the identity motives that were developed during the participants' early childhood and adolescent years coalesced into a powerful drive to succeed once they became young adults and entered the workforce and how the combination of early childhood experiences, the discovery of identity motives and early leader-rich experiences fused together and contributed to the participant's early adult leader identities.

The participants' determination to succeed was expressed in the form of commitment to their work roles and a willingness to work exceptionally hard. In return, their commitment and work ethic resulted in early career success that was rewarded with new opportunities and public recognition. It further reveals how, devoid of praise and support as children, this public recognition added fuel to their ambition and validated their leader identities. The chapter concluded with a presentation of the attributes and competencies that arose from their childhood adverse experiences. It exposes how the combination of these behaviours and the self-described skills they acquired enabled them to successfully navigate their traumatic past that led to their ascension to the most senior leadership positions in their respective industries.

Chapter 9: Identity Reflections: Taking Back My Power

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the next phase in the lives of the research participants. It details how, once the participants had risen to the top of their respective professions, they continued to construct and revise their leader identities. It describes specific transformational events that occurred in the lives of the participants and exposes the manner in which those events resulted in new ways of seeing. The chapter's overarching theme, *Identity reflections: taking back my power*, describes the meaning making process the participants underwent as they confronted and came to terms with their early childhood traumatic experiences. It shows how this retrospective view provided them with a new understanding of their trauma, which changed how they perceived themselves as leaders, their post-trauma symptoms, and their evolving life stories. This final research findings chapter presents the healing process that the research participants underwent as they confronted and made meaning of their past and the corresponding impact on their leadership identities, management practices and vocational choices. The three sub-themes for this chapter include: *Opening the door to the past*, *Identity reflections and new ways of moving forward* and, *Leadership transformation: the final chapter*.

The first of the three sub-themes, *Opening the door to the past*, describes the triggering events that compelled the participants to confront their past and provides a brief overview of the process the participants undertook as they made peace with their history of childhood trauma. With the door to their past unlocked, the second theme describes how the participants underwent a period of deep *Identity reflection* as they each discovered and reflected upon the unhealthy ways that their earlier trauma had unknowingly manifested itself in their corporate and personal lives. *New ways of moving forward* describe the further revisions to their leader identities as the participants employed new ways of coming to terms with their early childhood experiences, together with the corresponding changes to their management practices. The chapters conclude with the fourth and final theme, *Leadership transformation: the final chapter*, which reveals the impact these identity reflections had on the participants and how

their newfound knowledge transformed their leader identity, career trajectories, and life choices.

The recovery from childhood trauma is a long and arduous journey, one that is not well documented or well understood in terms of how survivors integrate their experiences into their life narratives (Buchbinder and Sinay, 2020). There is an equally significant void in understanding what specifically causes the resurfacing of past events and, more precisely, how events of the past are triggered by events of the present (Palmer et al., 2020). Furthermore, whether one is deemed to have recovered from trauma is highly subjective. For purposes of this study, I draw on the US Department of Health, SAMHSA's definition that defines recovery as *"a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life and strive to reach their full potential"* (SAMHSA, 2011). In this context, I view recovery as the research participants' perceived quality of life as opposed to recovery that is linked to a specific outcome. However, it is important to note that not all the participants in this study are completely at peace with their past. Ann and Debbie, two of the eight participants, readily acknowledged that their past and early life experiences continue to trouble them in ways not obvious in the others' accounts. They readily admitted that they are still very much an ongoing *"work in progress"*.

9.1.1 Alice's Story

This final research finding is presented primarily through the life story of Alice, the last of our four lead protagonists. However, I have elected to supplement the themes presented in this chapter with rich, detailed narrative accounts from the other research participants. My reason for presenting this final research findings chapter through multiple voices is to provide a more intimate understanding of the onerous and painful journey the participants endured as they confronted and made meaning of their early childhood trauma. I believe this is best communicated directly through the participants' voices. Therefore, I begin with an expanded overview of Alice's life story such that, similarly to the previous protagonists, the reader may gain a more holistic view of Alice.

*I think that the biggest secret for human consciousness is that you
are the author of your own experience... Alice*

Alice is a self-described 45-year-old Black woman from the Caribbean who emigrated to the United States in her early teens. Alice holds two PhDs, one in comparative religion and the second in psychology. She is currently the CEO of an acclaimed consulting company that she founded. Alice is the eldest of three children and part of a large extended family. She described her childhood as “*idyllic*”, spending time in the countryside every summer and weekends with her cousins and other immediate family members. Alice was very self-aware and open to discussing her story. She was quick to laugh and quick to cry. She was gregarious, with a strong, assertive personality and an infectious laugh, and presented herself as being very bright. She was exceptionally articulate, using visuals, metaphors, and analogies to aid the communication of her story, and I found myself being drawn into her storytelling. For the first interview, Alice elected to be interviewed in a very busy restaurant where she appeared to be well known to the restaurant personnel. The second interview was conducted in a quiet hotel restaurant.

A close family member sexually assaulted Alice at the age of eight. When she disclosed the abuse to her mother, her mother’s reaction was to punish Alice and deny the occurrence of the abuse. As a result, the abuse continued until Alice was thirteen years of age, stopping only when Alice and her family moved to the United States. Alice did remarkably well academically, such that her grade level was advanced twice.

The way that the school system works in the (name of country), every half of the year you take exams to see how well you are doing in a particular subject. If you get a 95 or above in all of your subjects, then you have the option of going into the next grade. We did that twice for me, so when I got to this country (the US), I was in Grade 8 when I was supposed to be in Grade 6, and when I got to high school, people were like, what is going on, why do we have an 11-year-old in high school...Alice

Once relocated to the United States, Alice threw herself into her studies. Her drive to excel in her extracurricular activities and her need to outperform academically continued well into her

college years. Alice's strong academic performance extended into college, and she enjoyed the freedom that college provided her. Alice met and fell in love with a fellow student in her third year of college. This relationship resulted in the birth of a son that she subsequently gave up for adoption but with whom she was later reunited. During her final college year, Alice married the father of her first child. They divorced shortly after the birth of their second child. Alice was nineteen at the time of the divorce.

Alice did not reveal much about her college years or her first marriage. I noted that this was consistent with the other participants and wondered why the participants glossed over this chapter in their lives. I would have thought – in the case of Alice – that having a child and getting married would have been significant events in her life. I considered that similarly to the other participants, Alice self-financed her education and therefore had little time for traditional collegial activities. Based on their narrative accounts, I surmised that the participants' time was fully allocated to their studies and work and that, as a consequence, perhaps not much else transpired during this period. Moreover, I sensed that the others did not identify their current self with this chapter of their lives and that they did not deem events that transpired during this period noteworthy, comparatively speaking to the materiality of the trauma and other events in their lives. Consequently, it did not appear to have had as strong an impact on their identity as did their other life chapters...Researcher Field Notes

Fresh out of college, Alice was offered an entry-level managerial position in a large corporation in the financial sector. Alice, driven to achieve, was highly successful and rose quickly to the company's top ranks, where she was acclaimed as one of the company's top performers. In the same way as the other participants, Alice loved a challenge and was never afraid of failure. She would not hesitate to try something new, often "*learning as she went along*", which she attributed to her corporate success. When presented with a challenge, her typical response was, "hold my beer"¹². Her laughter and the manner in which Alice used this expression

¹² This was an expression Alice used multiple times – while laughing – in the interview. In North America, this expression is an idiom that suggests the speaker is about to engage in a challenging undertaking, the outcome of which they are confident will be highly successful.

suggested to me that she was not afraid to take a bold risk and was confident in her ability to succeed.

9.1.2 Sub-theme # 1 - Opening the door to the past

The chapter's first sub-theme, *Opening the door to the past*, discloses the circumstances that occurred in the participants' lives that caused the memories of their early childhood trauma to resurface. It describes the emotional impact this resurrection of memories had on the participants and exposes the manner in which their emotions then manifested physically. I share the process the participants underwent as they struggled to find meaning in their trauma and how they incorporated their recovered memories and emotions into their evolving life stories.

This period of time, when the adverse events of the past caught up with the participants, was an exceedingly difficult phase in their lives. The participants indicated that for a variety of reasons, they had not previously sought therapeutic counselling. As a result, their strategies to make peace with their past were internally oriented and emotionally draining. As Chapters 6 7 and 8 revealed, the research participants had previously drawn upon several established survival mechanisms and coping strategies to allow them to deal as best they could with their past histories of abuse. Survival strategies that victims of abuse have been found to deploy include avoiding or escaping feelings, not knowing or failing to remember, and diffusing the intensity of feelings. Coping strategies include resistance strategies, reframing the abuse to give the illusion of control, controlling other areas of life and physical avoidance. Such strategies have been highlighted in the literature, from which we also know that whilst they may be effective in dealing with immediate trauma, these very strategies may prove costly to the individuals in the future (Morrow and Smith, 1995).

The earlier narrative accounts of the participants in this study suggested that, once they were old enough to understand what had happened to them, they grasped the significance and severity of the trauma they endured as children. Additionally, as noted in Chapter 7, the

participants quickly learned that their participation in activities outside of the home was an effective means of limiting the amount of time they spent in their abusive households. Consequently, the participants' early childhood and adolescent years during which the trauma occurred were consumed with school, household chores and extracurricular activities. Their college attendance offered no respite from their "*busyness*" as the participants continued to look after their respective families and work outside the home while completing their academic studies. Once they graduated from college, their drive to advance up the corporate hierarchy offered them little to no time for self-reflection or self-care. My overall sense from listening to their accounts was that the participants were evading or denying the impact that the trauma was having on their lives in the hope that they could almost erase the abuse from their past by keeping as busy as possible. Studies have shown that this type of avoidance has been found to lead to related increases in PTSD symptoms that are expressed in later years (Soo and Sherman, 2015). Theoretically, it is not surprising that the trauma of the participants' past would one day "*catch up to them*". Nonetheless, this was one aspect of this study that surprised me. The participants' acknowledgement of their trauma and positive self-identity led me to believe that they had made peace with their past long ago. This assumption proved to be incorrect as this "*catching up of one's past*" was a dominant theme and present in all eight participant narratives, albeit at varying times in their lives.

For Alice, our lead protagonist, the triggering event arrived in the form of a cancer diagnosis when she was in her mid-twenties. At the time of her diagnosis, Alice was flourishing in her career and was excited by the momentum and prospect of her career trajectory. Interestingly, she interpreted the fact that it was cervical cancer as a sign that she had unresolved issues concerning her past. My line of thought was aligned with Alice's in that I also interpreted her explanation to suggest that she had not completely come to terms with her childhood trauma. Moreover, the fact that she readily acknowledged that she had unresolved issues intimated to me that she had, up until this point in time, employed successful avoidance strategies to deal with her history of childhood sexual abuse. Alice's cancer diagnosis was a defining moment for Alice, and she found it extremely emotional to share this portion of her life story with me, as

exhibited both by her choice of words and the intensity of the emotions she displayed while sharing her story.

But of all of the things, I would get cervical (cancer). And cervical is the seat of your womanhood, of motherhood, and you know all of that. So, to me, it was an immediate hint that I had motherhood issues to solve, womanhood issues to solve, sexuality around my femininity to solve....Alice

It was incredibly difficult for me to listen to Alice share this part of her life story. At times, her sobs wracked her body with such intensity that she found speaking difficult and would have to stop and catch her breath before continuing her narrative. Her grief and suffering were palpable, so much so that I had also had to take deep breaths to avoid her emotions from consuming me. I sensed that Alice still carries the visceral emotions associated with her abuse today, notwithstanding her success in making peace with her past. I am still haunted by the force of the emotions she displayed and had to take a deep breath and brace myself every time I circled back to her transcript. I couldn't help but wonder if it would have been harder or easier for a researcher without personal related experience to listen to the stories that were shared with me by the participants...Researcher Field Notes.

At that point in Alice's life, she realized that her "busyness" was a strategy she had unconsciously deployed to avoid dealing with some of her past trauma and that her drive and need to achieve were rooted in her childhood experiences. This new understanding was a catalyst for Alice and activated the onset of her long and painful healing process. Alice's rich and detailed account that follows reveals the impact this newfound awareness had on her. It also exposes her recognition that to heal and make peace with her trauma, she finally was required to acknowledge and confront her past.

I knew that when I got the diagnosis, and it wasn't until I started just walking myself out of this web that I created, this jail that I created for myself, that I started to understand what I did. Just to medicate myself, like I had done in high school. It was like, here is how you avoid him; you get busy and achieve. And I thought to myself, all the shit that I swallowed (begins crying, has difficulty continuing to speak), all the avoidance, all the grandstanding, you

know. It's caught up to me. This the way that you survive with an 8-year-old mindset. You avoid, and you get busy.... Umm, at the time, I thought that my cancer was the worst thing that happened to me, but it was the best thing that happened to me because all of the stuff that I have been carrying for - like at that point 16 or so years - you know came to a head and I had to confront it...Alice

Alice's account and the demonstrative manner in which it was shared provided insight into the intensely emotional impact the re-opening of her past had on her. She readily acknowledged that she had successfully avoided dealing with her trauma through her active participation in extracurricular activities. Studies have found that it is common for victims of childhood trauma to numb their feelings with, for example, food or alcohol (Perry, 2013). Alice had elected to numb her feelings through her "busyness", which had proved an effective coping mechanism at the time. However, her narrative reveals that she realized its negative impact and her need to confront her past. Moreover, her metaphor of this "web I created" suggested to me that her coping mechanism extended beyond an avoidance strategy. Rather, I interpreted her creation of a web to suggest that she had created for herself a life story – her web - that did not include her childhood trauma. The re-surfacing of Alice's memories resulted in a critical turning moment in her life wherein she began to question her basic assumptions and the sufficiency of her current self-narrative (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; McAdams et al., 2006; Marin and Shkreli, 2019 and Berman, Montgomery and Ratner, 2020). This shattering of assumptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Tedeschi et al., 2018) resulted in another defining moment for Alice that necessitated a further revision of her identity to accommodate the resurfacing of her memories and the acknowledgement of her past trauma. This re-emergence of the participants' past trauma is further illustrated by Carol's rich narrative that follows.

Between the ages of 25 and 30, I started to see my health start to deteriorate. It was almost like I had been on this roller coaster of emotions, like up and down; my childhood, living on the streets, to finally getting pregnant at a young age, having two kids, and trying to raise them and then finally, the point where I was about to get married, and I was in the job, and all the stresses of my life just came down on me, and I just got sick. We were away on a holiday, and I thought I got something in my arm, pulled my shoulder or something like that,

and it moved to the other side. We flew home, and within two days, I couldn't move. I couldn't get out of bed. It was unbelievable. I ended up in a wheelchair. I couldn't walk and was eventually diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder caused by stress and trauma. Something that could just switch on, basically. So eventually, I had to change (my) lifestyle, de-stress, let go of things that I had been holding onto for too long...Carol

Carol had revealed to me that her first major promotion to Vice-President occurred when she was twenty-five years old. The fact that her career advancement coincided with the deterioration of her health suggested to me that her vocational achievement and pending marriage had caused her stress to reach a boiling point. Up until this point, Carol's coping strategy was similar to that of Alice in that she deliberately filled her days with activities as a means to avoid dealing with her trauma. This overextending of oneself was present in the accounts of all eight participants. However, it was particularly evident in Carol's account, where she indicated that she deliberately sought out unnecessary activities to prevent her from spending time with her children. Carol indicated that "*part*" of her reason for choosing to work beyond what was required was her desire to avoid the risk of the cycle of abuse continuing.

I had heard and read so much about the cycle of abuse. I felt like I had to be the one to break that cycle, and it is probably the reason why...Carol

I found Carol's choice of words "*part*" and "*probably*" interesting, and they intimated to me that, at some level, Carol was aware that she was avoiding dealing productively with her childhood trauma. My sense was that, up until this point, Carol's life had been hectic wherein she was constantly contending with one major life issue or another, which, when coupled with her family and corporate demands, afforded her little time to ruminate. However, her account exposes that her life was becoming more settled. While on vacation and once removed from her busy environment, her past re-surfaced. Carol's narrative was similar to that of Alice in two ways. First, a major health issue triggered the return of their memories and the emotions associated with their early childhood trauma. Secondly, their narrative reveals that they each recognized that they needed to deal with their past trauma to return to a healthier life.

A vast amount of literature with increasing evidence establishes the long-term deleterious effects on adult health and well-being arising from early childhood trauma (Spataro et al., 2004; Krammer et al., 2016; Villalta et al., 2020). Further studies have found that it is not uncommon for trauma victims to report trauma-related health issues several decades after the trauma occurred (Stige et al., 2013). Moreover, it is believed that the younger the person is at the time of the abuse (Miller-Graff, Scrafford and Rice, 2016), and the longer they are exposed to the trauma (Ogle, Rubin, and Siegler, 2013), the more severe the symptoms of PTSD and the greater the likelihood of complex delayed PTSD. Therefore, it is not surprising that a world health organisation survey concluded that “early childhood trauma has strong links to a multitude of disorders that may affect a person at any stage in their life” (Kessler et al., 2017, p. 594). Alice and Carol’s somatic response is consistent with studies showing that delayed responses to early childhood trauma typically resurface later in life when a new traumatic experience occurs (Maschi et al., 2013).

However, as Olive's narrative account illustrates, the resurfacing of the participants’ childhood memories was not all brought about by health-related issues or subsequent traumatic events.

I remember lying in bed one night – I don’t know what had happened that made me feel so angry at my dad. But everything I failed at tied back to being his fault. I remember being so angry about it and then just having this epiphany of like I feel so horrible feeling this angry. I don’t want to feel this angry, and there is never any point that as he is going to acknowledge or apologize or anything like. So, that isn’t even an option to head down that path for some sense of satisfaction that would get rid of this anger. So, I made a decision that whatever he did to me before, it can’t ruin the rest of my life, and I just have to make a choice to just let it go. Not forget about it, not forgive but to just like, it is what it is. And even that process was still very much like it was just closing a door on it. I am thinking of it. I am moving ahead in a way that I can be me and figure out who I am and not let that anger drive me. But it is still not complete until I can say, no, I can process it and understand it in a way that I am not just closing a door to it. Not obsessing about it or making excuses, but I can at least acknowledge it and own it in a way. It wasn’t zero from an emotional standpoint, but it was an active choice to say, it’s done, it’s over, and I’m not letting that past negative experience affect the rest of my life...Olive

Olive's account exposes the meaning making process she underwent once her emotions had percolated to the surface. It reveals that she understood her anger was rooted in the memories of abuse she suffered and that her anger was directed towards her abusive father. It further exposes that she harboured some hope that her father would acknowledge and exhibit remorse over the harm he had caused Olive and that, in turn, his apology would provide Olive with the means to heal and the ability to move forward. However, realising the futility of that hope and recognizing the anger's impact on her allowed Olive to understand that she alone had the power to move forward. This was a pivotal moment for Olive in that she decided to acknowledge the past, process it and incorporate the memories into her evolving life story.

Olive could not attribute her feelings of anger to any particular activating situation. Rather she merely ascribed it to an unconscious event which Susan - when narrating her account - described as "*a crack in the door to the past that just opened spontaneously and unexpectedly*". Studies have shown that the circumstances that evoke the resurfacing of earlier trauma may be so benign that individuals are unaware of what caused the trauma to resurface (Palmer, Yorker and Harrington, 2020). I surmised this to have occurred with Olive. More explicitly, that something transpired or was said to Olive that unconsciously triggered her memories of abuse. This, in turn, resulted in the "*re-opening of her door*" that gave rise to the anger. I believe that Olive's anger was repressed and reflected the anger she felt as a vulnerable child. Her narrative accounts of her childhood had suggested that Olive had limited avenues to display any anger towards her father without fear of repercussions. I, therefore, inferred that she chose instead to model her behaviour after her passive mother¹³. Correspondingly, Olive's account demonstrates the full range of emotions she experienced. It illuminates the thought process the participants underwent wherein they recognized that their ability to move forward with their lives resided in their ability to make meaning and deal with their past trauma.

¹³ Page 100, quote from Olive "My dad was very aggressive. Again, my mom was very passive. So usually my mom in tears, my mom quiet, my mom pleading"

Research has shown that to explain how a traumatic experience has positively transformed one, the individual must first recognize the trauma's emotional impact and analyse its effect and meaning on them (Pals and McAdams, 2004; Pals, 2006; Maitlis, 2009). Olive's account illuminates her acknowledgement of the trauma's emotional impact and effect on her, which enabled her to envision a path forward.

It should be noted that there were two contrasting ways in which the research participants, at the time of the interviews, have dealt with their trauma. Six participants confronted and are now at peace with their childhood adversity. Debbie and Ann's narrative accounts reveal that they have not made peace with their past and that, while they acknowledge they have a history of childhood abuse, they also readily admit that they that their past continues to trouble them in ways not evident in the accounts of the other participants...Researcher Field Notes

Additionally, I found the words that the participants chose to communicate these experiences again quite illuminating. Olive's reference to a *"door not closing"*, Alice's *"web"*, Susan's *"crack in the door to the past"*, and Ann's earlier reference to *"keeping her memories in little boxes"*¹⁴ begin to paint a picture of the participants' ability to compartmentalize their trauma-related memories as part of their coping mechanism, only to have them resurface unexpectedly. As noted, the triggers that prompted the re-emergence of the participants' past varied. For Carol and Alice, the catalyst was the new trauma caused by a significant medical issue. Neither Susan, Sandy, nor Olive could recall or speculate what may have caused their memories to return, while Betty's re-awakening was brought about by the birth of her second child.

Once the events of their past had caught up with them, the participants could no longer deny or avoid the impact the abuse had on their subsequent lives, compelling them to acknowledge and make sense of their trauma. This was a long and distressing journey for the participants, as

¹⁴ Page 108, Ann's quote re locking her memories in boxes

illuminated by Alice's vivid narrative account that follows. In sharing her healing journey, Alice claimed that she never afforded herself the time to reflect on her past, choosing instead to focus on her future. Alice's narrative demonstrates her awareness that this coping avoidance mechanism was the manner in which she chose to deal with her sexual abuse. Alice's journey took several years and a substantial amount of deep introspection. Alice briefly sought guidance from her pastor. However, as she had throughout her life, Alice ultimately determined that the only person she could trust to help her on this journey was herself. I interpreted her decision to deal with her past without the aid of others as a lack of trust. The choice to deal with their past trauma unaided was another common theme amongst the participants. For Alice, the decision was predicated on a lack of trust in others. For the others, it was a self-described fear of being judged unfavourably and a desire to avoid the socially constructed stigmatization of being a victim.

I just created the space and gave myself the permission to just be heartbroken (cried intensely). To just be the 8-year-old girl who was so disappointed in her mother. Who was so disappointed in this world of adults that are supposed to love you and protect you. I was running from this other thing. Cancer allowed me to stop running and face it. My entire life was running. If I could have a visual of what my life was like, it's like what they do in cross-fit, you create this resistance 'cas you have this band (around you), and when I went through that cancer experience, I had to turn around and take that tether off and face it, figure out what you are going to do. Are you going to continue to carry it, but you have to carry it differently because it is killing you. Or you are going to drop it, just drop it? What does it mean to drop it? And what I decided it meant was that even though this thing happened, it doesn't have to define you. It doesn't define me; it informs how I view the world. Like when you go to the optometrist. You have these little filters, but they don't make up the view. Just like you can take those glasses off and see something differently. That was the way I saw it. And the way that I wrested power from it you know...Alice

Up until this point in Alice's life, she had easily managed to overcome the many obstacles she encountered. Her medical diagnosis presented her with a major challenge, and she knew that she needed to be strong to fight her cancer. Her account exposes her belief that she could not deal with her health issues without first coming to terms with her trauma, that her trauma "was

killing her". Alice's account exposes that her first step towards confronting her past was to acknowledge the pain and emotions she experienced and give herself leave to grieve, the result of which was the unleashing of all the pain and emotional suffering she had long suppressed. My interpretation of Alice's narrative was that the requirement for permission was related to the time that Alice told her mother about the abuse. Her mother's refusal to give credence to the abuse had denied Alice any right to acknowledge the abuse or the ability to process it and, by association, any right to the emotions related to the sexual abuse. It exposes the anguish Alice's mother caused and Alice's recognition of the experience's impact on her. Research suggests that it is important for trauma victims to acknowledge the emotional impact the trauma has had on them (Pal and McAdams, 2004; Pals, 2006; Maitlis, 2009). Studies have shown that allowing emotions to surface is a critical initial stage in recovering from the trauma that can lead to posttraumatic growth (Grossman et al., 1999).

The second step, which was another common theme in the participant's healing process, was the participants' decision to directly confront their abuser. Or, as in the case of Alice, confronting the significant other who was aware of the abuse yet chose "turn a blind eye". Below is the complete excerpt of Alice's memory of the day she confronted her mother.

I realized that this thing happened was because I was harbouring secrets. So, you are just going to have to have these conversations. So, those letters that you thought were just cathartic. Now you are going to have to speak to them, confront them. The whole moment was like, if you ever see a movie and things just sloooow down (LAUGHING), It was like that. She (her mother) is blanched, the way she was blanched when I told her (about the sexual abuse) that day on the sidewalk. So, there was this moment of recognition, of you know what I am talking about, and YOU know what I am talking about. So now, none of us can pretend that this didn't happen. And nobody said a word. It was like real quiet, and she grabbed her - she has always been a lifelong smoker - grabbed her cigarette, and she lit one. And I was like, I notice you do that when you want to say something she was, " I don't have anything on my mind." I am like, oh, are we going to keep the conspiracy going? The bullshit story of nothing's going on. She was like, " apparently, there is something on YOUR mind, so why don't you say it." And so that kind of like opened up the conversation. And it was like, it felt like a confessional. It felt like, at first, it was like I was copping to something.

Like, confessing to your mother that you did steal the M&Ms when you went down to the store. (LAUGHING) and then it caught me at that precise moment. I was like taking back my power...Alice

So, the dynamic was different with my mom, and the way I was speaking about it was different because it wasn't like --- cas I had already worked that stuff out, you know. And the reason why she didn't want to talk about it now, in hindsight, I know. The reason why she never wanted to talk about it then was because she felt just as guilty. She felt just as guilty (CRYING) as I held her guilty. As I held her incapable of mothering me the way that I needed it. She felt incapable of mothering me the way that I needed it...Alice

Alice's narrative exposes that she considered her mother equally guilty as her uncle, who sexually abused her. Her account reveals the liberation she felt once she confronted her mother. As a vulnerable child, Alice was powerless to defend herself against her uncle. Moreover, her mother's response when Alice told her of the abuse demonstrated that her words also held no power or influence over her others. Alice's courage in confronting her mother, the result of which was her mother's acknowledgement of the abuse, gave Alice back the power she felt she conceded as a child, enabling her to understand and forgive her mother.

As noted earlier, the participants had reconciled themselves to their past before confronting their abuser or, as in the case of Alice, those they held accountable. I intimated from the participants' accounts that they each accepted their need to make meaning of their past and how the abuse had impacted them for them to determine a path forward. A path that allowed them to incorporate their trauma in such a way that it was no longer damaging to them. Their accounts revealed that they needed to successfully process and incorporate their history of abuse into their identities to have the strength required to confront their abuser, the final step in their healing journey.

So, my dad and I have a cordial relationship now. Not exactly a father-daughter relationship. We at least have a cordial enough relationship. We have very firm boundaries in place about; really boundaries I put in place about the time we spend together and what that looks like and that certainly...Olive

Each of the six participants that have made peace with their past found the courage to confront their abuser in their own way. For some, such as Olive, the relationship was not repaired. Rather, Olive found a way - for the sake of her younger sister - to allow her father back into their lives. Her account demonstrates her dominant role in the relationship in that it is Olive who has established the terms and conditions of their relationship. Her account reveals that she is unwilling to deviate from her established boundaries and suggests that any deviation would terminate the relationship. As a child, Olive was powerless to defend herself against her father. She has taken back her power by establishing these relational boundaries as an adult.

The participants' early childhood trauma played a foundational role in the development of their self-identities and life stories. Earlier chapters have illuminated how the participants' trauma shaped their behaviours, identity motives, how they saw themselves, how they wished to be seen by others and their life choices. This subsection exposed the magnitude of the damage caused by the trauma. Furthermore, it reveals the impact the resurfacing of memories long suppressed had on the participants and, correspondingly, their identities. As the participants acknowledged and worked through the various ways that they had been affected by their childhood abuse, their ability to disengage from their past grew increasingly (Maitlis, 2009). In turn, they were able to develop strategies for moving forward and finding peace with their past. This sub-section is important to the study as this process of healing and meaning making led the participants to reflect on other aspects of their lives, leading to further identity revisions which will be engaged with in detail in the following sub-section.

While I am mindful that the process by which individuals deal with their childhood trauma is uniquely theirs, the participants' narrative accounts revealed similarities between what they experienced and what I experienced confronting my own history of trauma.

As such, I have elected to share some of my story here to provide additional context to the meaning making process post early childhood trauma.

I never denied what happened to me. I simply accepted it and moved on with my life, never giving it further consideration. Over time, the trauma became a distant and faded memory that sat comfortably amongst my other memories. Similarly to the participants in this study, I overextended myself at school and work. I rose the corporate ladder quickly, becoming a President of a national company by age 29. My salient identity quickly became that of a CEO and, after the birth of my two daughters, a mother. I shared snippets of my experiences with family and the odd close friend but kept most of the details to myself. I was not ashamed; I simply did not deem the events of my past significant. My career success - validated by over a dozen awards - confirmed my self-identities; a resilient, successful businessperson. The success of my daughters validated that I was a good parent. I believed that everything was fine and life, on balance, was good. This study proved me wrong, with the stories I heard serving to "re-open the door" to my own past. To say that the resurfacing of my memories shook my world would be an understatement. It caused me to question absolutely everything: my beliefs, who I really was and more importantly, who I wasn't. It caused me to wonder - if I denied my past, what else had I lied to myself about? Was I a bad parent, a terrible boss? I no longer understood who I was or my place in the world. Moreover, I didn't know how to deal with my past. I completely lost my identity and my understanding of my place in life. Today, I recognize that my trauma is an important part of who I am, and I am in the process of integrating my early childhood trauma into my life story and re-discovering my identity and my own path forward...Researcher Field Notes

9.1.3 Sub-theme # 2 - Identity Reflections, new ways of moving forward

The participants' meaning-making process allowed them to make sense of their trauma, incorporate it into their evolving life stories, and move forward productively with the rest of their lives. It also led them to enter a period of identity reflection wherein they began to profoundly question and re-evaluate their lives and futures. It prompted them to reflect on who they were – their identity. Up to this point in their lives, the research participants all shared the view that they possessed a good understanding of who they were and how they perceived others saw them. Their coming face-to-face with their past changed that for the participants.

This sub-theme engages with this period of identity reflection and retrospection. It reveals how the participants grew to understand the unhealthy and harmful ways their childhood trauma had manifested itself in their management practices and their corporate and personal identities. Drawing upon the life span approach to leader identity and engaging with attachment theory, it exposes the corresponding impact this awareness had on the participants and how it created the environment that resulted in another turning point for the participants, causing further shifts in their leader identities and corresponding behaviours.

The life span approach to leader identity provides opportunities for growth and further development in what McAdams refers to as a life review process (McAdams, 1995). This process includes a period of reflection, elaboration, and editing, which often results in further identity revisions (Shamir and Eilam, 2005). This introspective period resulted in two key outcomes for the participants. The first was an understanding of the impact their childhood experiences had brought to bear on their management practices. More explicitly, all the participants - including the two who have not completely come to terms with their past - recognized that their management practices were a reflection of their earlier childhood trauma. Secondly, how their trauma had adversely impacted their health. The rich and detailed narrative account that follows reveals the narrative process Carol underwent as she reflected on the influence that her childhood trauma had brought to bear on her leadership style and management practices.

*When I was younger, I was very direct and very bold and very aggressive. Anything I wanted, I wanted to power to get to it (the top) and which, you know, is not the right way to do things. I think it did stop people in their tracks and had them pay attention. A lot of times, it worked better for me than not, especially being female, because they were so interested in why I would feel aggressive about this. But today, I really sit back, and I listen, and I consider, and I think about what other people are bringing to the table. I have learned we are better in collaboration and having a diversified perspective than just me. I know that deep within, I was pushing my agenda forward because I never had control when I was younger over what my agenda could be or what my life was gonna be. And I felt like I always had to do that in order to be able to achieve or get what I wanted. But now I realize that I don't need to do that, you know, um, everybody that I work with, everybody in my life, people are good people, and we are all doing good things together for the same purpose and reason. So, there's no need for me to feel like, um, I have to you now propel myself like that. **(Researcher: Was that hard giving up control?)** Absolutely, it was such an important part of who I was. It is a daily struggle for me. It is a daily struggle for me when I feel I should be able to go in there: I know what to do, let's just do it this way (laughing). ...Carol*

Carol's account provides a strong illustration of how she began to appreciate that her management practices were a carry forward from her early childhood. She reveals her awareness that her strong identity motive to succeed was driven by her powerful need for control which she attributed directly to her earlier childhood. She recognized that she was so focused on achieving her life goal that she never took the time to consider what, if any impact, her management practices were having within her workgroups. It was only during this period of identity reflection that she began to understand how her trauma had influenced her leader identity. Her account also intimates that she modelled her behaviour to align with her male colleagues. Individuals derive their identity from the organisations and workgroups to which they belong (Hogg and Terry, 2000), with organisations often providing the answer to the question, "who am I?" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Carol's reference that "others were

interested in her aggressiveness with her being a female” inferred to me that, within her corporate environment, men were more aggressive than their female counterparts. Carol was employed in the telecommunications sector, which, at the time, was typically male-dominated in North America; see researcher field notes below. Her narrative reveals that her aggressive behaviour was rewarded corporately and that it also served to advance her career. Simmons (2002) has argued that individuals develop a self-concept of themselves as a leader by organizing their life experiences in a way that supports and justifies their leadership role. Carol’s reference that her aggressiveness “*worked better for her*” seems to suggest that this command-and-control style of management yielded the desired results for her in the early part of her career. Studies have shown that it was not uncommon for women to adopt their management styles to align with their organisations’ prevailing corporate culture. A study of senior managers of a large UK authority conducted by Ford (2006) found it was common for managers to align themselves with cultures that promoted the achievement of performance targets and the “*masculine values of competition*” amongst colleagues (Ford, 2006, p. 85). Moreover, her study found that organisations in and of themselves have an identity, an identity that is often based upon the androcentric nature of leadership that informs the leader identity of managers employed by them (Ford, 2006).

The acceptance of her management practices, when combined with the accolades and corporate success bestowed upon her, reaffirmed her unhealthy management practices and correspondingly, her leader identity. It was only when Carol paused and reflected upon other ways in which her past had expressed itself did she realize that her management practices were driven by her need to control. Her account reveals, upon reflection - her awareness of the benefits of collaboration which, in turn, stimulated a change in her approach to her management practices that set off new ways of seeing and being.

Equally important to note is that the research participants became senior managers during the 1980s, a time when the domineering style of management – initially practised by Carol - was common within certain industries. While three of the participants were in the services sector,

the remaining five participants were employed in industries that were, during that period of time, male-dominated: two participants were employed in the finance sector, two were employed in the technology sector, and one – Carol - was employed in the telecommunications sector.

I was a senior manager in the telecommunications sector at the same time that Carol was promoted to a senior management role. As such, my interpretations are also based on my own personal experiences. At the time that I was promoted to the Director level, I was the only female director, the only Director without an engineering degree and the only Director under the age of 50. I was in my mid-20s at the time and can attest to the patriarchal and sexist culture – as demonstrated by the language used by and the behaviour of male managers within the company - that existed in North America within this sector during this time...Researcher Field Notes

This more command-and-control management style that surfaced in the participants' accounts of their leadership styles and practices at earlier points in their managerial careers – something that they later reflected on and adapted to a more accommodating set of behaviours and practices was present in all eight participants. Ann's rich and descriptive account that follows provides insight into how the participants came to be aware of both the ineffectiveness and inappropriateness of their management style and why, with their new self-understanding, they chose to modify these management practices.

Well, I began to realize that I treated my employees like my stepfather treated me 'cas that's what I knew. I was so mean. I would have grown men crying. People would cry on a regular basis. But that was just what was modelled for me. So, that is what I did. (Researcher: You framed your answer in such a way as to suggest that you don't have that style anymore) No, no, well, it doesn't serve anyone. (Researcher: How did you recognize that?) Well, how many people have to cry in

your office for you to recognize that I am the common denominator, basically the common denominator here. They didn't come in crying, and they are crying when they are leaving, so obviously, it is me. And I thought, it didn't serve me well, why would I believe that it would serve others well. So, I have to stop it. I have to STOP it NOW!....So, I went from being a total bitch to building the best corporate culture. I am who my company needs me to be. I feel that people want to be part of something bigger than themselves and that people inherently want to make, especially people who would work for this kind of company, inherently want to make a difference. People buy into that, and we're all doing this together. And we all come back and share the stories about how we make a difference. I close the company down once a year, and we all volunteer. They pick the topic, whether it is elderly, homelessness, and we go out across the nation, and you go and build a project for that day, and I will pay you. So, I worked really hard on that, and it is not that I love people. It is just that I didn't like me...Ann

Ann did not reveal if there was a specific event that caused her to reflect on her management style. Unlike the others, at the time of the interviews, Ann had not fully come to terms with her trauma and readily admitted that she has no current desire to “open the boxes of her memories stored away”¹⁵. Despite the absence of a triggering event, Ann also underwent a similar period of identity reflection and introspection as the other participants. I noted that the timing of Ann's period of leader-identity reflection coincided with when her mother – due to her mother's failing health and financial issues – returned to Ann's life. This caused me to question whether that event may have triggered Ann's identity reflection.

Notwithstanding, Ann's narrative reveals a burgeoning awareness of her stepfather's influence on her. It illuminates how her early experiences had created her flawed schemas that both fostered and reflected her distorted beliefs and how these beliefs, in turn, created maladjusted behaviours that later transferred to inappropriate ways of dealing with others. Ann's account exposed that the physical evidence – people crying – of the impact on others of her abusive

¹⁵ See Pages 235 and 236 for full context

management practices led her to begin to question herself. It reveals how she began to identify with her team members' response to her aggressive style by way of her recognizing that she did not benefit from her father's abusive behaviour towards her. So, if the abuse she experienced as a child did not "*serve her well*", why would she have thought it would serve her work members well. Once she understood the impact of her actions, her account demonstrates her commitment to changing her management practices. Moreover, her reference to her "*loving people but not liking herself*" illuminates a self-awareness of her past's influence on her relationships with others and how she viewed herself.

Similarly to the other participants, Ann did not benefit from many strong positive role models in her formative years (Erikson, 1968; 1985). Accordingly, it was not surprising that the study participants' approaches to management had been modelled after their early childhood poor role models. Studies have demonstrated the importance of appropriate role models in terms of providing the guidance and support that is deemed necessary for leadership development (Athanasoulou et al., 2018). Strong positive role models are deemed to be of particular importance to women who generally have fewer practice leadership experiences in childhood (Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014).

A dearth of literature specifically explores the darker side of trauma-inspired leadership wherein the leader exhibits pathological behaviours and negative practices learned from those adverse experiences. However, several longitudinal studies have linked negative parenting styles with adult aggression and negative adult behaviours (Conger et al., 2003). Moreover, Conger and colleagues (2003) findings are consistent with similar research that has revealed the direct and significant relationship that negative parental behaviours had on a range of social behaviours and relationships that extended into adulthood. A theoretical lens that I found useful to assist me in interpreting Ann's initial negative approach to how she managed her team was attachment theory. Attachment theory is a well-established body of work, developed by Bowlby in 1982, with its roots in developmental psychology. Posttraumatic growth theorists have employed attachment theory to aid in the understanding of the different ways that

individuals respond to trauma (Marshall and Frazier, 2019). The theory has also been applied to several areas of leadership studies, including leadership coaching (Drake, 2009); transformational leadership (Popper, Mayseless and Castelnovo, 2000); performance management (Khorakian and Sharifirad, 2019) and abusive leadership practices (Robertson, Dionisi and Barling, 2018). Attachment theory is predicated on the notion that children possess an innate need for attachment that is derived from instinctive behavioural reactions developed in response to the perceived threats to survival. These behavioural patterns form the basis for the individual's cognitive schemas, somatic responses, behavioural preferences, and narrative patterns. The theory posits that the patterns of response that individuals develop as children, in turn, inform part of their identity and how they relate to others. In other words, these early somatic experiences become cognitive structures that are reinforced through the narrative identities developed from these initial relationships. These cognitive structures shaped the way Ann and the others viewed and interpreted their world (Drake, 2009). The four attachment behaviours are – secure, anxious-resistant, avoidant, and disorganized-disoriented. It is believed that individuals that possess a secure attachment have a healthy balanced view of the world that is reflected in the positive relationships they enjoy with others. The remaining styles are considered unhealthy resulting in the individuals' belief that they are unlovable, as was disclosed in Ann's account. They deem the world unsafe and that others are unreliable, unresponsive, or uncaring (Pearce, 2017). Robertson and colleagues (2018) explored the relationship between the leader's attachment orientation and reports by subordinates of abusive supervision across 115 US-based leader-subordinate dyads in a diverse cross-section of industries. Their results indicate that leaders with secure attachments cultivated successful interpersonal relations with no evidence of abusive supervision. Conversely, leaders who possessed negative attachments were found to have engaged in higher levels of abusive supervision. This supported their hypotheses that a leader's "*cognitive representation of their relational world may predispose them to engage in abusive behaviour*" (Robertson, Dionisi and Barling, 2018, p. 222). The better part of the participants' relational world was one of abuse and trauma. In the absence of early strong positive role models, one can see how that would

have predisposed them towards employing abusive management practices that were modelled based upon their earlier experiences.

This sub-theme unveiled a critical time in the participants' lives, a time when the participants reflected deeply on who they were and how they came to be that way - their identity. As the participants afforded themselves this period of rumination, they began to appreciate the many ways in which their past had been expressed in their adult lives, leader identities and management practices. Engaging with attachment theory, this sub-theme exposed how the absence of a safe and supportive childhood environment had denied the participants the ability to form healthy, secure attachments. They had learned incredibly early in life that the world was not a safe place and that they could only rely on themselves. Consequently, the participants developed self-described negative attachment styles that resulted in unhealthy patterns of responding and interfacing with others. Moreover, the participants unknowingly brought these negative patterns with them into their corporate roles. The corresponding negative childhood attachment styles they had developed were compounded by their harmful post-trauma avoidance coping mechanisms. Absent appropriate role models, it showed how this resulted in abusive behaviour and practices that reflected the behaviour that had been modelled for them as children and that informed their narrative and leader identities. While these various coping strategies proved effective at the time, they proved counterproductive later in life. The narrative accounts demonstrated the participants' ability to directly connect their toxic behaviours to their past experiences. It revealed that the participants possessed the necessary cognitive capabilities to recognize the negative effect of their management practices on their subordinates and, more importantly, the ability to modify those practices accordingly.

9.1.4 Sub-theme # 3 - Leadership Identity Transformation: The Final Journey

Armed with a new understanding of the undesirable impact their leadership style and practices had on their workgroups, the participants set about modifying their behaviour. As they aligned their work interactions with their new way of seeing themselves, it launched a transformational narrative process in response to this identity challenge. This sub-theme describes this

transformational process, a process wherein the participants incorporated their new self-understandings - and how they have been positively transformed as a result - into their life stories. It reveals how the participants then continued exploring their earlier adversity as they searched to find meaning in their lives. Finally, it provides insight into the means by which these identity reflections led to revisions in their personal and leader identities. I began the presentation of this sub-theme with the continuation of Alice's life story.

Alice's early career in the corporate financial world had been flourishing right up until her mid-20s when she was diagnosed with cancer. To focus on her health, Alice elected to take a medical leave from the demands of her corporate role. It was during her leave that Alice underwent a re-evaluation of her life and a further period of identity reflection.

The turnaround came with all the healing work and emotional labour that I had to do. If you took the position of things don't just happen, they happen just. I remember hearing a quote from Albert Einstein that the most important decision you ever make in your life is whether you lived in a friendly or unfriendly universe (starts crying). And I remember thinking that I lived in an unfriendly universe. So, it is that idea of authorship, of saying I get to define. I get to say what happens here. I get to say how the story ends. So, like all these little interpretations and little translations of the world happen because I had to get quiet enough, to like ok, I'm done suffering. I am done being a victim of whatever it is that happened to me ...Alice.

Alice's narrative illuminates the impact of this period of rumination wherein she openly explored her earlier childhood experiences. It exposes how this period of identity reflection prompted a re-framing of her illness into an opportunity for further identity reflection and personal transformation (Kerr, Deane and Crowe, 2019) and reveals how she found a positive outcome – *things don't just happen, they happen just* - to her adversity and grew from the experience. It shows how she came to understand that she had unknowingly created for herself "an unfriendly world". A world in which she did not trust others and one she deemed to be unsafe. More importantly, it exposes her desire to incorporate her trauma into her life story differently than she had previously. More explicitly, it reveals her unwillingness to allow the

events of the past to control her in harmful ways and her decision to create a more positive life story, one in which she is the author. These crises of identity serve to undermine the sense of self by disturbing the narrative coherence that formed the basis of their participants' earlier identities (Kerr, Deanne, and Crowe, 2019) and is reflective of their active participation in their evolving life story (McAdams and McLean, 2013). This transformation process that the six participants underwent is further illustrated through the narrative account of Carol that follows.

I went down that path for a very long time until I realized that was not what's gonna make me happy. I achieved so much, and I still felt empty, an empty feeling, right. You know, with my life. I actually left for a couple of years, took a sabbatical, just to clear my mind. It was a bit of a process, but it is like anything else, how I process anything or move through anything. I give myself a road map of the things that need to be done. Things like mindfulness, going to yoga, working out on a regular basis physically. You know to, just to keep my mind off stuff, to keep my body healthy. What I ate, what I drank, resting more, you know. Not wanting to be a perfectionist all the time. Allowing myself to fail and be ok with that, you know, things like that, just working through all of those things that I thought I had to do to make myself a happy person...Carol

Carol's account exposes how this period of further identity reflection served as a catalyst for transformation. It demonstrates her understanding that she needed to make changes beyond modifying her negative management practices to move forward with her life in a healthy and productive manner. It reveals her awareness that the goals she had aspired to achieve, once achieved, did not yield the anticipated level of personal satisfaction. In similar ways to Alice, Carol underwent this additional period of identity reflection while on leave from work. Interestingly, this was another common theme amongst the six participants who have found peace with their past, with all six participants undergoing this process while on medical leave, parental leave, or other temporary breaks from work. This supports earlier theorising that the participants' *busyness* was an avoidance strategy and that, once they were removed from the "*busyness of their lives*", the memories of their childhood resurfaced, compelling them to confront and make meaning of their childhood abuse. It further reveals the participants

increased self-awareness and the degree to which they were not content with their lives surfaced. As the participants struggled to find a different way of moving forward, they stepped back and re-evaluated their life from a broader perspective, which included a re-evaluation of their careers and leader identities.

It is like this idea of I get to say what happens in my life, what I think about it, what I feel about it, what it means to me, what it means to the people I touch, I get to say that. It is my decision; it is my authorship. And again, it started off as deviance. It started off as a fuck you, but it matured into grace, into my contribution to the world. Like how do I turn this around? How do I get to say? And it was so liberating. And I realized that this doesn't have to be the end. You can choose something else. And, um, then I spent some time thinking about my business, where I am going to go. Like now, official. So, now what? Now, like, what are you going to do with the second chance that you prayed for so vehemently. So, all these questions started coming up...Alice

Alice's account provides insight into how her self-awareness began to influence her vocational decisions and set in motion a further period of reflection concerning career choices and an identity that incorporated her ability to overcome her cancer. Moreover, it begins to paint a picture of her transformative process wherein Alice acknowledges her trauma's emotional impact and its impact on her. Posttraumatic growth theories believe that the process by which growth occurs is similar to what Alice followed in that she acknowledged the trauma's impact and analysed its effect and meaning on her. Posttraumatic growth theorists believe that it is this process that leads to "the construction of a positive ending that explains how the self has been transformed" (Maitlis, 2009, p. 51). Alice's narrative reveals the pride she felt in her ability to confront and make meaning with her past without the assistance of others. This self-pride was evident in the narratives of all six participants, with each drawing from the large library of cultural narratives that existed at the time, such as the philosophy of "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger" (Jirek, 2017). Alice's account also provides insight into the participants' desire for a positive ending to their life stories. Moreover, it exposes their desire for a leader identity in the context of pursuing an equally alluring personal life outcome (Mahoney and Granvold, 2005).

This transformative process occurred at different times in the lives of the participants. Alice's period of identity reflection was triggered by her cancer diagnosis while in her mid-20s. For the remaining five participants, their transformative period of identity reflection occurred when they were in their mid to late 40s, a time when they had attained significant corporate success and had achieved the goals which they had established for themselves. A unifying narrative in the recovery stories of the research participants, for those that conquered their past, was their pursuit of a more authentic and rewarding life. Bennis and Thomas (2007) refer to this period of transformation as leadership crucibles. Leadership crucibles are defining experiences that transform the person and create a motivation for prosocial leadership that are typically associated with stories of victory and resilience in the face of adversity. The outcome of which is that the individuals become the authors of revised stories in the sense of "*creating a new and improved version of themselves*" (Bennis, 2003, p. 334).

The accounts suggest that the participants were actively seeking this new and improved version of themselves and were deeply troubled by the knowledge that they had unknowingly displayed negative management practices. More specifically, the participants' accounts revealed that their salient identity was that of a CEO which is supported by the fact that the participants had spent the majority of their lives working and climbing the corporate ladder. As such, their narrative accounts were very much focused on their leadership roles. They had all believed themselves to be effective leaders. Learning this may not have been the case and that their leadership practices were akin to the verbal abuse they endured was devastating for the participants. This knowledge, in turn, proved itself to be a powerful catalyst for change prompting further identity reflection, identity editing and revisions to their life stories.

It gave me new life, new purpose, a new vision, a new drive behind what we do here at the business. And it's been fun. You know that change has also been a change that it is not just about business anymore. It's about purpose. It's about having fun. It's about building a team. It is about making sure people here are successful, um, and you know,

helping them rise to what they feel they need to do to be accomplished in life. So, it has been a real game changer, and it has been a lot of fun.... Carol

Once her health had fully recovered, and she had returned to work, Carol's narrative account describes her newfound motivation to make a difference to others. It provides further insight into this transformative process and its impact on her leader identity. Gardner and colleagues (2005) believe that an individual's personal history is simply a starting point and that as the individual reflects upon these triggering events, an increased self-awareness arises that serves as a catalyst for leadership transformation. The participants' narrative accounts reveal that they each understood that their early childhood trauma was merely a starting point for them - as Alice so aptly said, *this doesn't have to be the end. You can choose something else* -and how that awareness triggered their identity reflection that led to their leadership transformation.

A theoretical lens that contributes to the understanding of how Carol began to transition to a more purpose-driven leader is authentic leadership, which Shamir and Eilam (2005) defined as emerging from leaders' self-knowledge, self-concept, self-concordance, person-role merger, and behavioural expression. Shamir and Eilam (2005) believe that *"authentic leadership rests heavily on the self-relevant meanings that the leader attaches to their life experiences, and that these meanings are represented in the leader's life-story"* (p. 345). Life stories provide leaders with a meaning system from which they *"can act authentically, interpret reality, and act in a way that gives their interpretations and actions a personal meaning such that their values and convictions become their new behaviours"* (Kegan, 1983, p. 220, cited in Shamir and Eilam, 2005). Betty's account that follows provides further insight into how the participants began to transition towards a more purpose-driven leader.

I was beginning to feel very inspired to do something for single mothers because I kind of knew. Now I had a baseline. I had two children in a delivery room by myself and raised them by myself. And then I had this wonderful experience with this baby, and I knew the difference now. One could just see how much easier it was to be married and have the support and all of that. I wanted to give back. And so, in 2007, about mid-year, I started a little small bible study in my house. I went to my local church and said I want to do something for single

moms. They said yes, you can start a little group in your house with three single moms. I was still working in corporate America, and for about one year, I would do this little bible study on weekends, and then it began to grow. In 6 months, three single moms turned into 65 single moms. It was a very quick. They were coming in masses. So, I left Corporate America. It made no sense because of the income and status I had achieved. I left the job because I was miserable. And I felt like God was telling me to leave my job and I needed and wanted to give back...Betty

Betty's account provides insight into how her earlier experiences began to influence her leader identity. The contrast between her experience giving birth and raising her first two children as a single parent "in the projects" to the experience of giving birth as a married woman with full support was stark. Her empathy toward single mothers was overpowering and compelled her to undergo a fundamental change. Moreover, it reveals her desire to derive meaning from her earlier trauma by affecting social good. This desire has been supported by studies that have shown that trauma survivors often founded not-for-profit or social movements related to the causes of their trauma (Wolf Williams and Allen, 2015).

A study by Wiener (2020) found that leaders who experience trauma also develop new leadership identities and approaches that shape the leaders' post-trauma identity. In addition, several studies have shown that posttraumatic leaders frequently respond by engaging in prosocial behaviour, wherein individuals who reported more traumatic events in their lives also reported engaging in more altruistic behaviours (Frazier et al., 2009; Kerr, Deanne and Crowe, 2019).

Furthermore, studies of narrative identity reconstruction, as adaptive growth in relation to mental health recovery, have found that individuals reframe their experiences as "*an opportunity to undergo personal transformation and attain wellbeing through overcoming difficulties and finding renewed purpose and meaning in life*" (Frank, 1995, cited in Kerr, Deanne and Crowe, 2019) often drawing upon the literary metaphor of the hero. The hero's quest is a

fitting metaphor as it captures the trials and tribulations that are invariably encountered in any recovery from trauma (Kerr, Deanne and Crowe, 2019).

I was so proud that I had done this work BY MYSELF, nobody helped me. And it is not like nobody helped me, like poor me. But it was like, wow, look what you can do by yourself. Look what you can take yourself through by yourself...Alice

Alice's account illustrates the participants' great pride in their ability to persevere despite their adversity. Their ability to adapt to the trauma had provided them with clarity as to what was important in life for them on a go-forward basis. In many ways, they came to see themselves as heroines of their own stories. Their trauma and ability to come to terms with their past instilled within each deeply held meaning. These meanings, in turn, provided them with the desire to be of service to others. Studies have found that resilient women who had overcome trauma were shaped by the need to be of help others (Grossman et al., 1999; Frazier et al., 2013). This need to be of service to others was a common theme amongst the participants that stimulated them to make vocational changes that aligned with this new understanding of themselves and their vision for the future. These changes occurred over time, and as their vision unfolded, they began to "see the world in a new light" (Bennis and Thomas, 2007, p. 106). The changes the participants made confirm that it is possible to have a positive outcome to some of life's more tragic circumstances. (Wolf Williams and Allen, 2015) and how transformative events are central to the identities of the individual. Several studies have explored the longer-term impact of trauma-inspired prosocial leadership development, wherein individuals who have experienced trauma are motivated by their traumatic personal experiences to prevent future tragedies similar to theirs. The participants' corporate transitions, detailed in the final postscript of the eight participants on page 247, are consistent with these studies (Fazio, 2009; Frazier et al., 2013; Williams and Allen, 2015).

A Final Postscript on the Eight Research Participants

Alice returned to academia, where she completed two PhDs with her goal to acquire the knowledge and skills “to start her own company and be in control of her own destiny”. Today, the CEO of a successful consulting company, Alice is a bit of a media star. She has used her business success as a platform, in print, radio and TV, to share her story with others with the hope they, they too, may have a happy ending.

Ann continues to work in the service sector, where she is currently CEO. She has since sold her company and started a new company with a completely different corporate culture. A culture that promotes teamwork and fosters collaboration. Ann continues to give back to the community both personally and corporately.

Betty left behind the perks and benefits of her executive position at a national financial services company to start a charity, eating “ramen noodles, rice and beans” to survive initially. After operating out of her home for two years, she secured non-profit status and began to fundraise earnestly. Her charity serves 83,000 single mothers with support groups in 19 countries. She has since authored a book about her experiences.

Carol convinced the shareholders of the for-profit company to convert to a social enterprise, where she remains CEO. She rebranded/pivoted the entire company to a full purpose-driven company and is awaiting regulatory approval for their “B” certification. “We are not about profits anymore. We are about educating females in developing communities. We are purpose-driven, and I feel that we are making a difference and impacting the world, which makes me feel good, that makes feel like I am doing what I should be doing”.

Debbie and her husband sold the company they started in their early fifties. She contemplated starting another company but decided to focus on herself. She adopted a number of healthy lifestyle changes and is in the process of authoring a novel.

Olive continues in her role as CEO of a national health service provider. As much as she loves her role and the organisation, Olive plans to retire early and has put a firm date in place. Olive does not have a vision or a long-term goal for herself. Rather, she is leaving herself open to whatever opportunities come her way, confident in her belief that that life will present her with wonderful opportunities.

Sandy, at the time of the interview, had left her corporate role and is currently exploring new opportunities where “she can give back”. She continues to volunteer and financially support organisations that support women who have “gone through troubling circumstances, addiction or abuse”.

Susan, after selling her company, returned to academia for a post-graduate degree. She subsequently started another company which she then also sold. Susan and her husband bought back the first company, and she returned as CEO. However, following the birth of her child, she stepped back from the role. While Susan admits that she misses the corporate world and the “wheeling and dealing”, she is content to spend time with her immediate family.

9.1.5 Summary

This chapter provided rich descriptive accounts of the circumstances the participants encountered that precipitated the resurfacing of their childhood trauma and the arduous healing process they subsequently underwent as they came to terms with their past. This process included acknowledging their suppressed emotions and directly confronting those they held accountable for their abuse. It outlined how this “reopening of the door to the past” provided the participants with the opportunity to pause and reflect on their childhood abuse and its corresponding impact on them. It exposed how this, in turn, created an identity crisis that caused the participants to question who they were, whom they wanted to become, and whom they believed they should be (Bennis and Thomas, 2007). As the participants worked through this challenging period of rumination and healing, they grew to understand how their early trauma had unknowingly adversely influenced their leadership identities and management practices.

The vivid descriptive accounts that were provided illustrated how the participants learned that their management practices had been patterned after their abusive fathers and other poor role models from their earlier childhood. Increasingly, leadership theorists recognise that individuals' personal experiences are central to their leader development and leader identities and that we draw from these earlier role models to shape our identities (Williams and Allen, 2015). The recognition by the participants that their work interactions were a carry forward from their early childhood resulted in adaptations to the manner in which they interfaced with their staff. The participants' recognition that they had been treating members of their workgroup in the same abusive manner that they had been treated as children created another defining moment for the research participants that led to new understandings and self-definitions (Shamir and Eilam, 2005). These defining moments had a shaping effect on the identity-related goals of the participants (Waterman, 2020) and “*set in motion the development of significant changes in their identity commitments*” (Waterman, 2020, p. 62), what Pal and McAdams (2004) refer to as a transformational narrative process (Pals and McAdams, 2004).

During this further period of reflection, the participants underwent additional identity reflections that resulted in a renewed purpose and meaning in life. Based on the new meanings and understandings of their life experiences, this renewed sense of self translated into inspired vocational choices and revised leader identities. As noted previously, two of the participants have not yet made peace with their past and are in varying stages of a healing process similar to that of the other six participants. While the remaining six participants don't deny the pain and suffering they experienced as children, they are finally at peace with their early childhood trauma after a painful journey of healing. These women saw their trauma as their starting point, and while it informed who they were, it did not define them. Instead, they chose to channel their histories into making a positive difference in the world, as leaders, philanthropists, and women who have endured and overcome significant adversity.

I conclude this section with some final comments by the lead protagonist – Alice – that I believe summarize the transformative power of re-storying trauma.

I was like, why do all these things quote/unquote happen to me? What if they didn't happen to you, what if they happened for you? If you took the position of things don't just happen, they happen just. I could be compassionate to somebody who is heartbroken and doesn't know where to turn because I have been there. So, you could understand that you are not somebody else's mechanism, somebody else's example. You have your own agenda. You have your own curriculum. And you can show yourself that you're strong, show yourself that you are resilient. And so ya for me it's a happy ending not because - in like the traditional you know movie formula, sense of the world. It is because I made it that way (LAUGH). I created that. I worked for that. There's meaning in that in like I fought hard to become her. And that is the story. And the moment that you realize that you DO have it inside and like they say in the story: it has been with you all along, my dear LAUGHING If it doesn't end with you winning, then it is not ending, it is not over yet. It only ends when you win. Otherwise, it is not over...Alice

While two of the participants readily admit that they remain “a work in progress”, the participants in this study all share a common view. Like Alice, they all believe that, while they

would not have chosen their earlier life adversity, it has provided them with something that the participants deem precious: an appreciation of whom they became as a result of their adversity and a newfound appreciation for life.

Chapter 10: Towards a Conceptualisation of Posttraumatic Growth, Identity and Leader Identities: Overview of Research Findings and Discussion

10.1 Chapter Outline

This chapter begins with a summary of the study's research findings detailed in the four preceding chapters and is followed by the introduction of two models that illustrate the participants' narrative re-storying process. The models map this growth process through five identity construction phases that are presented as a complex model of the participants' experiences from childhood to adolescence, through to early and mid and then later career success.

10.2 Summary of Research Findings

The findings presented a series of events and experiences that occurred in the participants' lives that created the conditions and opportunities for the construction of their identities over their life span. The study revealed five identity phases that the participants underwent, which I defined as periods of *Identity Foundations*, *Identity Discoveries*, *Identity Enactments*, *Identity Reflections* and *Leader Identity Revisions*.

Chapter 6 described the early formative years of the participants and the experiences that influenced their early ***Identity Foundations***. It revealed that the participants' trauma occurred during a time when the cultural narrative surrounding sexual abuse was not well developed. The participants' narrative accounts support and extend the current line of theorising in trauma research that trauma studies must consider the context within which the trauma occurred as the social environment may serve to either exacerbate or mitigate the damage caused by trauma (Maercker and Hecker, 2016). The study revealed that there were barriers to disclosure and limited means of communicating abuse in a manner that a child would understand. Consequently, the participants never fully understood what happened to them, allowing them

to escape the stigmatizing victim narrative. The study proposes that the notion of a victim is a social construction that brings with it negative stereotypical behaviours that have since been replaced with the “survivor identity”. The study is not saying that it is wrong to self-identify as a victim. Rather, the study suggests that participants did not take on the negative victim identity and associated behaviours and that this rendered it possible for them to deal positively with the critical turning points they subsequently faced later in life.

More explicitly, chapter 6 disclosed circumstances in the participants’ lives wherein they were compelled to assume roles atypical for children so young. Their ability to successfully perform these various roles and associated responsibilities instilled within each self-reliance and self-confidence. In turn, they each promoted themselves as resourceful, dependable, and independent individuals who were in control of their abusive past and their more successful and positive futures. They drew strength from their ability to have endured their early childhood trauma, and as a result, part of their narrative identity was that of a person who was capable of surviving anything. The chapter concluded with the early development of self-described skills borne out of a need for self-preservation. It reveals how these capabilities, together with their strong work ethic, informed their identities. Adopting the life-span approach to leader development, this chapter showed how the early individual roles the participants assumed began to fuse with their identity such that they increasingly began to define themselves by their role of being “*in charge*”. Thus, sowing the early seeds of identity foundations that would, later in life, be contributory to their leader identity. This chapter contributes to contemporary leadership theories that advocate the importance of early formation years on leader development, leader identity and life trajectories (Day and Thornton, 2018; Lui et al., 2020 and Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021).

Chapter 7 introduced the adolescent and early adult years of the participants. It described this period of ***Identity Discovery*** when the participants, upon commencing school, discovered that others attributed negative identities to them. These negative identities did not align with the participants’ positive self-views, and they disliked the negative attributes assigned to them due

to familial and socioeconomic circumstances. This finding supports the current line of theorising within social identity theory that argues that individuals' desire to belong to a specific group is driven, in part, by our innate need to reduce subjective uncertainty about our role in life. This need is directly associated with aligning ourselves with groups that align with our self-views (Hogg, 2006). Furthermore, once the participants started attending school, many discovered how others lived for the first time. This made them aware of the opportunities available to others and, more critically, the possibilities that existed for them. This knowledge instilled powerful motivations for financial independence and each participant's desire for a better life. These goals provided them with the script for their respective life stories and corresponding life trajectories. Armed with this newfound knowledge, as the participants began to re-story their lives, they began to understand themselves in those narrative terms, making life choices and decisions that aligned with their positive self-identity and supported their evolving life story.

School also provided the participants with ample opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities where, given their comfort level with “being in charge”, they sought out and engaged enthusiastically in extracurricular leadership roles. Through these wide-ranging social experiences, the participants developed an understanding of the traits and behaviours required of them as they performed their roles, sowing the seeds of their leader identities. More generally, school provided the participants with endless occasions to practice their leadership skills, and through these extracurricular activities, the participants advanced skills that contributed to their leader development. While more explicitly providing the participants with an arena for social learning about leadership by creating specific scenarios that allowed them to deploy leadership-related skills, further developing their leadership potential. Correspondingly these activities exposed the research participants to a greater number of positive social groups, and they began to identify with those groups. The positive reinforcement they received from teachers, coaches, and group members as a result of their success in those extracurricular activities reinforced their positive self-identity. Their acceptance by the members of the various social groups to which they belong provided them with social validation, which fortified their emergent identities and further fuelled their desire for a better

life. These findings support current research within leadership studies that ascribe to the view that a leader's identity is the result of defining oneself and others based on the group to which the individual belongs (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Hogg, 2001).

The participants first consensual intimate relationships offered them an alternative view of sex, one that provided them with a more positive narrative from which they could reframe their earlier sexual abuse. This fostered the development of a positive sexual self-image. They also discovered that sex was a means through which they could gain control over others, offering them agency for the first time in their lives. The narrative accounts demonstrated how this sense of control and power helped liberate them from their past trauma by infusing within each of them a sense of agency that translated into a strong desire for power and control. This pursuit of power and control continued into adulthood and shaped their emerging leader identities.

The findings introduced in Chapter 7 revealed how the participant's involvement in extracurricular activities reinforced their positive self-views. It demonstrated how their exposure to leadership-rich experiences, together with their early childhood roles of protector and caregiver, contributed to the nascent construction of their leader identities. It unveiled how the discovery of the opportunities available to them created powerful identity motives that drove their actions and behaviours. The findings in this chapter contribute to contemporary leadership theories that believe that leadership identity and skills are influenced from early childhood and adolescent experiences (Day and Thornton, 2018 and Lui et al., 2020) while offering additional insights in the role of identity motives on life trajectories.

Chapter 8 explored how the participants' envisioned future work selves were enacted as their careers progressed and the manner in which those ***Identity Enactments*** influenced the construction of their leader identities. It revealed how the participants' behavioural responses to earlier life events had integrated into their life stories and self-identities and how those learned behaviours, in turn, were triggered as adults. Specifically, through the participants'

narrative accounts, it demonstrated the participants' ability to directly connect their learned behaviours to their present responses. Moreover, it showed that the participants possessed a clear understanding of the impact these earlier events had on them. The disclosure of their self-reported identity changes provided insight into the role these experiences had on the participants' identity-making process and contributes to posttraumatic growth theories by providing a deeper understanding and further insights into the effects of trauma over the lifespan.

The chapter also illuminated the impact the participants' pursuit of financial independence, power and control had on their careers. It exposed how these identity motives fused into a fervent drive to succeed that was supported by their strong work ethic. It showed how, as the motives were enacted by the participants and rewarded corporately, it fuelled their rapid corporate advancement and revealed how those enactments became integrated into their early adult evolving life stories and leader identities. More specifically, this chapter demonstrated how the participants' strong motivations reinforced their commitment to the role which led to great role salience (Davis and Love, 2017) that was contributory to their success as leaders (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018). The findings in this chapter disclosed competencies the participants believed they acquired as a direct result of their earlier childhood experiences. It exposed how those competencies were enacted and the manner in which the participants believed that the transference of those competencies aided their career advancement. The chapter concluded with demonstrations of the participants' need for social validation that was driven by a need to fill the lack of praise they received as children and to affirm their worth. It revealed how this public recognition provided further validation of their leader identities and how that served to reinforce and become more salient as they developed as leaders, providing further insights into trauma-inspired leadership; an understudied phenomenon (Frazier et al., 2013).

Chapter 9 revealed a period of deep *Identity reflections* for the participants. First, it detailed the life circumstances that caused a resurfacing of their childhood trauma that, in turn,

prompted the participants to confront their past. Second, it described the difficult process the participants underwent and how this retrospective view opened the door for further identity ruminations that extended to their corporate identity. Third, it exposed the various coping mechanisms the participants had unknowingly adopted in response to their trauma and the corresponding consequences it had on the research participants. Fourth, it described how the participants' reflective review created new understandings of themselves, as they recognized the maladaptive ways their earlier trauma had unknowingly manifested in their personal and corporate lives. Armed with this newfound knowledge, this chapter described the process the participants underwent as they employed new ways of being and how that resulted in revisions to their leader identities, management style and practices. Finally, it exposed the impact these ***Leader identity reflections*** had on the participants and provided insight into how this period of deep identity reflection resulted in an identity crisis, a crisis that triggered a process wherein the participants questioned the very essence of who they were and, more critically, whom they wished to become. The chapter concluded with the transformative outcome of this process and how it resulted in further revisions to the participants' leader identities, career trajectories and life choices.

These findings provide a rich and compelling account of the ways in which the research participants' early experiences influenced the construction of their personal and leader identities over their life span, the process through which they re-storied their trauma in positive ways and the impact of their adversity on the formation of their identity motives and competencies.

10.3 Model: Identity Phases of Posttraumatic Re-storying

To aid in the further exploration and interpretation of the research findings, I have developed a model which I refer to as the identity phases of posttraumatic re-storying. The model serves to illustrate the participants' various identity phases over their life span, as revealed through their storied accounts. It depicts the participants' re-storying process that culminated in their trauma-inspired leader identities.

The model – **Identity Phases of Posttraumatic Re-storying**, Figure 6, illustrates the participants' identity work through five distinct identity phases, together with the corresponding outcomes from each of these phases, which enabled them to re-story their lives in positive ways. Presenting the findings in this manner demonstrates the interwoven, multifarious, and complex nature of identity work and the various ways in which the participants' identities were constructed, produced and reinforced through their experiences and within their respective socio-economic and historical contexts.

Model: Identity Phases of Posttraumatic Re-Storying

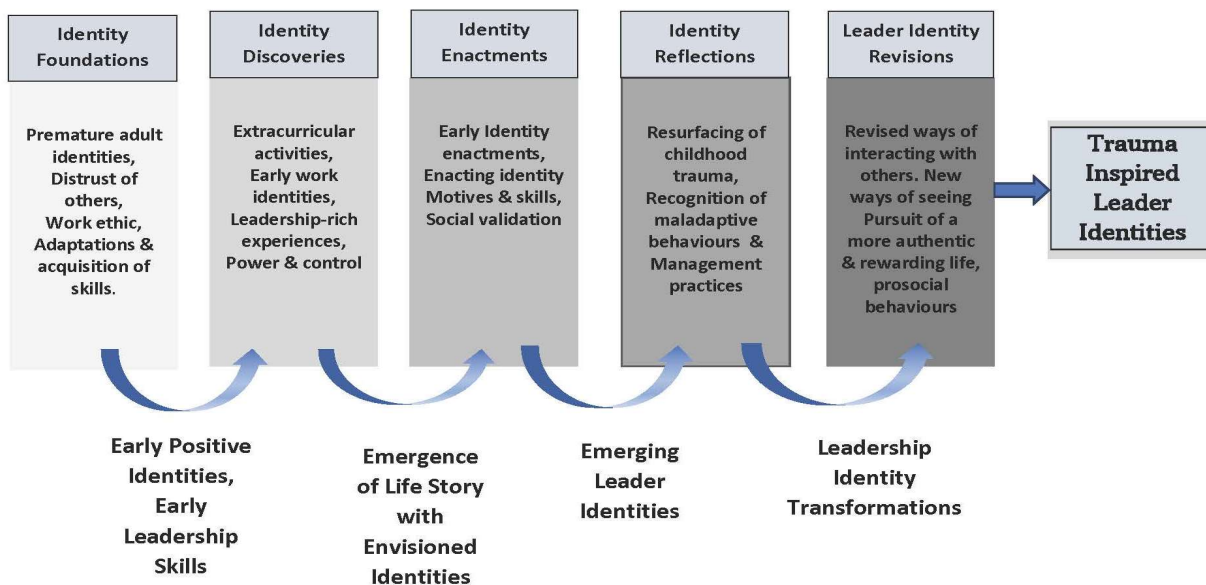


Figure 6: Model of identity phases of posttraumatic re-storying

The following provides a detailed description of each of these five phases, as they relate to and link with the identity work of the participants.

The first stage of the model is the ***Identity Foundations*** Stage: a period of time when the participants' early identity foundations were formed. The model depicts the circumstances that occurred during this phase of the participants' lives, which the study purports led to the development of early positive identities and early leadership skills. During this phase, the participants' narrative accounts revealed the development of strong foundational identities that reflected their sense of pride in their ability to have successfully navigated their early trauma. It is argued that these foundational skills and identities were contributory to their corporate success later in life. It is further suggested that those early identities prompted the participants to seek out activities and experiences in the ***Identity Discovery*** phase that supported their early self-views. The participants' storied accounts revealed their discovery of opportunities that were available to others but denied to them. This created desires for different identities that enabled the participants to move beyond the traumatic selves of their early years. The accounts exposed how these envisioned identities were then enacted in their emerging life stories and how, as they enacted these identities, it led them to seek out further activities that reinforced these evolving self-views. The participants' storied accounts of this phase revealed the importance of the life story narrative as the means through which the participants began to re-story their lives. During this phase, they discovered whom they wanted to be and how they wanted to be seen by others. During this ***Identity Enactment*** phase, as their leader identities were validated socially and the participants became more comfortable in their leadership roles, their leader identities became more central to how they saw themselves. The identity reflection phase was triggered by the resurfacing of the participants' past trauma, which set in motion a period of deep ***Identity Reflections***. This phase of introspection was a long and difficult phase for the participants. It created an identity crisis and resulted in revisions to how the participants viewed themselves and how they wished to be viewed by others. Moreover, this period of deep reflection gave rise to the participants' revised post-trauma identities. It provides insight into how this reflexive period enabled the participants to make

meaning of their early childhood trauma rendering it possible for them to shed the mantle of trauma and abuse and inspiring the positive construction of new and expanded trauma inspired prosocial leader identities.

Each of these identity phases and corresponding outcomes is depicted as separate boxes in the model. The reason for illustrating the identity phases in this fashion was to highlight the ways in which each phase influenced the development of the participants' life stories. However, this may give the impression that the process was linear, with each outcome triggering the next phase. However, the accounts that have been presented and discussed in Chapters 5 - 9 reveal that this was not the case and that the identity phases were much more interwoven, complex, and emergent. This accords with other authors' writings highlighting the complexity of identity work (Ford, 2006; 2010; Ford and Collinson, 2011). Moreover, it is believed that it takes many years for victims of childhood trauma to process and integrate their trauma into their identities (Pasupathi, Mansour and Brubaker, 2007; Jirek, 2017; McAdams, 2019). The complex and iterative nature of identity work related to re-storying trauma has been referred to as "a long and winding road" (Palmer et al., 2020, p. 209), which proved to be the case for the women in this study.

10.4 Model of Identity Construction Life Stages over the Life Span

This second model, **Identity Construction Life Stages over the Life Span**, Figure 7, is an adapted model of Figure 6 that demonstrates the iterative and emergent identity formulation and development processes. It further illustrates the complex, iterative nature of the participants' emergent identities that have not been understood with this level of nuance and illustrative detail.

Model of Identity Construction Life Stages over the Life Span

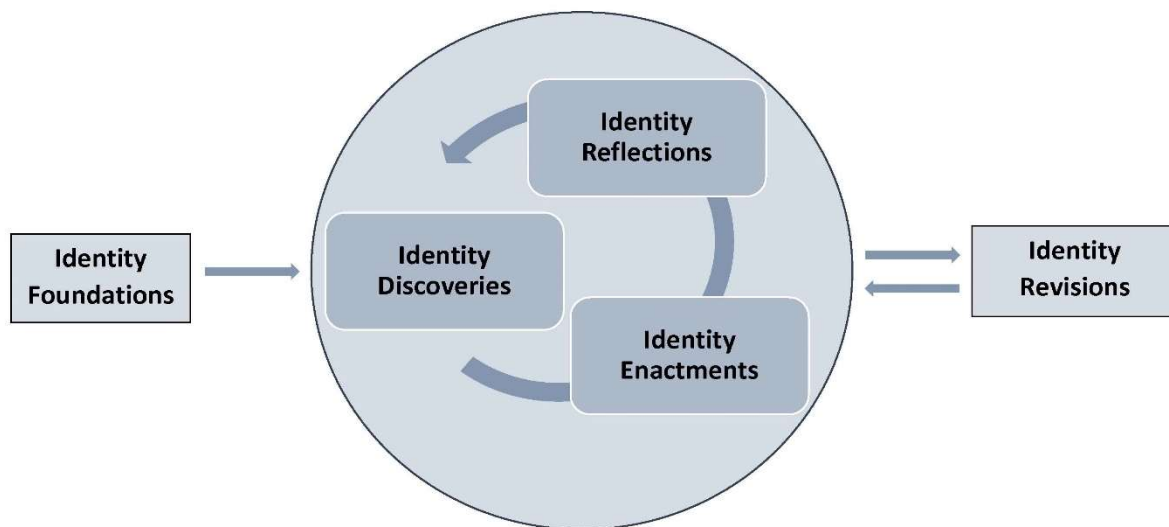


Figure 7: Model of identity construction life stages over the life span

The participants' pursuit of, and involvement in, leadership-rich experiences during the identity discovery phase is an example of the reiterative nature of identity work illustrated by the second model. The participants' early identity work had established within each strong positive self-views that were aligned with "being in charge". Accustomed to such roles, once they commenced school, the participants naturally gravitated to roles that provided them with the familiarity of being in charge. While performing these roles, the participants enacted and demonstrated leadership skills. The positive social reinforcement they received from their

successful execution of these roles motivated them to seek out and discover more activities and experiences that placed them in a leadership capacity. As this cycle repeated itself, the participants became increasingly more comfortable in leadership roles, which in turn reinforced their leader identities. This encouraged them to seek more opportunities to enact leadership skills, further reinforcing their leader identities. This self-perpetuating process has been previously applied in organisational management studies to the study of leader identity development. This line of theorising asserts that these leader identity-development spirals (Day et al., 2009) result in the increased salience and centrality of a leader identity which increases with each new leader experience. When applied more generally, this model of identity construction life stages over the life span would reflect this reiterative identity-making process that is prompted by new experiences and circumstances that serve to either reinforce or refute self-views and envisioned future selves.

The model proposes that individuals form early identity foundations that are developed based on their early life experiences and circumstances and that these early identity constructions serve as a foundation for further identity developments. As individuals become adolescents and acquire the requisite cognitive skills, they enter a phase of discovery. During this phase, the model proposes individuals begin to incorporate their experiences into a schema or life story that enables them to process their experiences in a cohesive and coherent way, while also being retrospective and prospective. New experiences and circumstances that individuals are exposed to over their lifetime lead to new discoveries that can serve as triggers for new motivations and revisions to the life story, as depicted in Figure 7.

This model is not presented as a means to suggest a new generic model. Instead, its purpose is to illustrate the findings of this study as they related to the participants' leader identity construction over the life span. Moreover, this is not to suggest that abuse is a pathway to ensuring future success as a leader. To be clear, the women in this study experienced tremendous pain and suffering, with many of their siblings continuing to experience the deleterious effects of their childhood trauma to the present day. This is consistent with studies

that have shown that some individuals continue to grow in the face of adversity, whilst others in similar positions struggle. Furthermore, the study's findings suggest that the participants' corporate success is not a result of early childhood sexual abuse. Rather, the participants' trauma presented them with particular events and experiences. It was how the participants chose to make sense of those experiences, what they took away from those experiences and their specific social environments which enabled them to re-story their trauma in positive and meaningful ways. These, in turn, influenced the development of their leader identities, all of which contributed to corporate successes.

10.5 Summary

The study suggests that individuals can experience growth post-trauma. It demonstrates the transformative power of narrative and the possibility for trauma victims to re-story their histories of early childhood trauma in positive and growthful ways. The introduction of the two models and identity concepts provides a useful framework to illustrate the process the participants underwent throughout their lives that enabled them to continue to make sense of their trauma. It reveals the influence of their experiences on their identities over their life span and the various ways that this re-storying process influenced their identity construction as they selectively incorporated their past, present, and desired future into an evolving life story.

Chapter 11: Research Aims, Contributions, Study Limitations and Future Research Directions

11.1 Chapter Outline

This final chapter, which consists of five sections, concludes the thesis. Section one details how the findings have achieved each of the three study aims. Section two provides an overview of the contributions of the thesis to the literature on posttraumatic growth, narrative identity, leader identity and development over the life span, together with the unique contributions to knowledge gained by concurrently employing and integrating all three bodies as the theoretical framework. Section three considers the strengths and limitations of the study. In Section Four, I propose recommendations for future scholarship to build on and extend the findings of this study. I conclude with some final reflections on the research project in section five.

11.2 Section 1: Addressing the Research Aims

I noted in my introduction that my curiosity in this subject matter came about as the result of an encounter with several successful female executives whom all had histories of early childhood sexual abuse. What aroused my curiosity was that, while they acknowledged their trauma, they all professed that they had *“come to terms with their past and moved forward with their lives in positive and healthy ways”*. As a person who has enjoyed corporate success and experienced early childhood physical and sexual abuse, I was keen to understand how individuals can emerge successfully from such trauma whilst others continue to suffer the debilitating effects commonly associated with such adversity, as other studies have shown. I was also intrigued by the fact that these women had achieved significant corporate success and wondered if their early life experiences had any bearing on their leader identities or success. Finally, I understood the exceptional and exclusive access I had to these women and the potential to gather exceptionally rich in-depth data from a group of women who have been understudied; the data which I believed could contribute to and extend the field's understanding of positive growth post-trauma and its influence on leader identities. Below, I

return to the initial three research aims that guided this study and provide details on how each of the three aims has been achieved.

11.2.1 Research Aim # 1:

To investigate the influence of the participants' childhood trauma on the construction of their personal and leader identities over their life span.

The study achieved this first research aim by revealing a series of experiences, following the participants' early experiences of abuse, which occurred over the participants' life spans that created the conditions and opportunities that enabled them to re-story their adversity. The first such experience occurred when the participants were very young and were forced to perform the role of adults at chronologically inappropriate ages. They were obliged to function as quasi-adults because the adults in their lives were unable or unwilling to assume those responsibilities. It might have been anticipated that the dire circumstances the participants encountered, while so young, would have rendered them helpless. On the contrary, while those experiences were traumatic, this study's findings show that the participants' ability to successfully execute the roles imposed on them was generative. Thus, it created the opportunity for the foundation of early positive identities - of individuals who were reliable, capable, and resourceful. The narratives of the participants' early childhood years demonstrated and supported posttraumatic growth theorists' view that it is possible for the construction of positive identities to occur from both positive and negative life experiences (Maitlis, 2009). A possible explanation for the participants' positive responses to these early traumatic events was that they were nonvolitional and that there was no significant other adult in their lives at the time. Their response to the situation was borne out of necessity and a desire for survival. The study's findings of the impact of these roles on the identity formation of the participants concur with previous studies. These earlier studies have demonstrated that how individuals define themselves begins with early life experiences (Avolio and Vogelgesang, 2011) and that individuals reconstruct their identities to align with new roles they assume (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). The current study extends this line of theorising by demonstrating how, as

the participants assumed their new roles, they took on the socially constructed practices and identities associated with them. It illuminates the process through which the enacted roles shaped the participants' early identity foundations. Taken together, these findings reveal how the early formation of identity foundations can serve as building blocks for future identity revisions and the role that these identity foundations can play in individuals' evolving life stories.

An interesting finding was that the participants did not assume the victim identity. The study suggests this was attributable to the sociohistorical context within which the trauma occurred. Another possible explanation is that the participants were too young to fully grasp the severity of their situations, which allowed them to move forward in positive ways. The results of this study are consistent with posttraumatic growth studies that have found that such traumatic events can provide individuals with the opportunity to revise their life narratives into a more positive story (McAdams, 1993). The narrative account of Carol's childhood adversity, detailed in Chapter 7, adds to this line of thinking. It provides new insights into the narrative meaning making process by which she incorporated her traumatic experiences into her life story and how, in so doing, they became part of her early identity and - later in life - her leader identity. Most studies on posttraumatic growth do not consider the role post-trauma sensemaking has on the individual's identity (Maitlis, 2009, 2020) or how it affects positive identities and corresponding life trajectories. This study contributes by informing thinking as to the process through which the participants' responses to these specific defining moments, which influenced the development of their early identity foundations, resurfaced in their early adult years. It has revealed how, through these identity enactments, the participants made meaning of those responses and how, through the subsequent enactment of those behaviours, they became incorporated into their emerging leader identities.

The participants' lifelong practice of assuming responsibility for themselves and others continued into adolescence as they sought out leadership-rich experiences that reinforced their self-identities. This finding confirmed Chan and Drasgow's (2001) view of the association

between early experiences, proactive learning, and subsequent leadership development skills by demonstrating that individuals actively seek out opportunities to deploy skills they have executed successfully in the past. Moreover, it supports their belief that - as those skills are performed successfully - they can inform the individual's self-view (Lord and Hall, 2005). It has been proposed that this form of developmental experience results in the formation of a leader identity (Liu et al., 2020). The study has revealed the participants' rejection of identities attributed to them due to their familial and socioeconomic circumstances, with the findings providing new understandings of the relationship between life choices, ongoing identity formation and its impact on individuals' life trajectories (Jirek, 2017). This was demonstrated by the participants' deliberate decisions to pursue activities and relationships that aligned with and reinforced their envisioned future selves.

An important finding of this study was the significant role that extracurricular activities played in the participants' evolving life stories. The study shows the manner in which the participants' early foundational positive identities were enacted through their participation in extracurricular activities. It provides new understandings of the ways that these identity enactments can contribute to identity construction, leader development and leader readiness. Despite the potential importance of leader development in the early years, there is a lack of research on leader development activities or leadership effectiveness before university (Murphy and Johnson, 2011). This study adds to existing knowledge on how the participants' ability to perform well in these pursuits through social categories and group-level processes (Hogg, 2001, 2006) can lead to the surfacing of a leader identity. The study confirms the view of leadership scholars that the formative experiences individuals accumulate throughout their life can influence their ability and desire to assume leadership roles (Avolio and Hannah, 2008) and that what is learned in adolescence becomes integrated with the development of one's self-concept as a leader (Lord and Hall, 2005). This study adds to this stance by showing how – through active participation in leadership-rich experiences – a leadership role can become more central to how the individuals see themselves. The findings demonstrate that, through these wide-ranging social experiences, the participants had developed an understanding of the

traits and behaviours required of them as they performed their roles, which sowed the seeds of their leader identities. By extending the current work on narrative identity and our understanding of narrative origins, the study provides a lens from which we can increase the understanding of how individuals claim and support their leader identities (Zheng, Meister and Cara, 2021).

This study also provides additional insights into the manner in which early life experiences can contribute to the construction of identities over the full life span, a process the study defines as a period of deep retrospective identity reflection. This was well illustrated by the retrospective view the participants underwent as a result of the re-surfacing of their earlier trauma. Little is known as to what specifically causes past trauma to resurface (Palmer et al., 2020). This study provides new understandings and descriptions of potential triggers from a more complete contextual and processual perspective. More importantly, this study provides additional knowledge on the impact of the resurfacing of trauma memories on individuals' identities. For the participants in this study, it set off an identity crisis. An identity crisis that prompted this deep period of identity reflection was triggered when the participants came to understand the maladaptive ways their early trauma had unknowingly manifested in their leadership identities and management practices. The study reveals how these self-discoveries prompted the participants to modify their approach to interpersonal relationships. It provides new knowledge of the potential impact these identity reflections can have on identities and life trajectories and how they can serve as a catalyst for further identity revisions.

11.2.2 10.2.3 Research Aim # 2:

To explore the bearing of the participants' adversity on the formation of their identity motives and skills sets and the relevancy of those competencies to their corporate success.

For me, the most interesting finding of the study was that all eight of the study's participants directly attributed their corporate success to specific skills they believed they acquired as a result of their childhood abuse, with several participants reporting that the abuse "*did not*

happen to them, it happened for them". Lord and Hall (2005) argue that leadership skills are developed from basic skills. These skills inform behaviour, knowledge, and subsequent experiences over time. As these skills develop, the individual's personal identity becomes more aligned with their self-view, resulting in the construction of their leader identity. This is not intended to assert that the participants' success can be attributed to these specific skills. Rather, the study revealed specific competencies that the participants accredited to their success, the means by which they believed they acquired those skills and the self-reported ways the participants applied them successfully to their corporate roles. More notably, it has exposed in what manner their early childhood trauma came to play in their leadership roles and how their self-view transferred to the leader identities. Although the scholarship on youth leadership and youth leadership development is substantial, research that examines the origins of leadership is limited. As such, this study extends both the understanding of the life experiences that can lead children to assume leadership roles (Gottfried et al., 2011) and, more importantly, the process by which events of the past can inform behaviours of the present and influence the development of skills.

An equally important finding from the study was how the participants translated their ability to overcome their abusive pasts to their perceived ability to overcome future adversity. This was shown to have resulted in an expanded narrative identity for the participants, one of personal strength and resiliency. This finding contributes to knowledge of the role that posttraumatic growth has on narrative identity and is consistent with studies of childhood trauma wherein the victim's identity becomes that of a person capable of surviving anything (Berman, Montgomery and Ratner, 2020). This finding surfaces the link between posttraumatic growth and narrative identity that comes from the theoretical integration this study offers.

The study has shown that this sense of fearlessness was expressed by the female participants' willingness to take risks. This is an important finding as numerous studies have linked corporate success of female CEOs to the readiness to take risks (Sandberg, 2013; Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014). The rarity of female CEOs and the dearth of studies on female leaders mean we

still have very limited insights into how women at the top of organisations perceive their career success—or its implications for others (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018). This study contributes to such knowledge by providing in-depth storied accounts of the participants’ corporate success. The study has also identified specific traits and behaviours the participants shared in common – strong work ethic, adaptability, tenacity, resourcefulness, problem-solving and negotiating skills - that the study suggests were developed in response and as a result of their early childhood experiences. The study's findings further suggest that these skills, in conjunction with the participants’ fervent drive to succeed and identity motives for financial independence, power and control, were contributory to their successful ascension to the most senior leadership positions within their respective industries. While this study did not seek to support or refute which traits lead to corporate success, the findings provide insight into traits that the participants believe contributed to their success, which builds on previous studies and addresses Athanasopoulou’s (2018) perceived knowledge gap.

11.2.3 Research Aim #3:

To understand how the participants were able to re-story their childhood trauma in positive ways.

The participants each demonstrated significant resilience in the face of adversity. Notwithstanding their inner resolve, their histories of childhood abuse were discovered to have taken its toll on the women, with all of the participants having shown some form of an unhealthy coping mechanism. These coping strategies included many of the signs of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, such as disassociation, denial, and avoidance strategies. Moreover, the participants’ accounts revealed them to be *“cope-aholics, people who cope with whatever is thrown at them without reliance on others....they are especially averse to sympathy from others”* (Frederickson, 1992, pp 171). The coping mechanism of choice that was revealed as common across all the participants in this study was workaholism. The participants thrived on their “busyness”, attributing their career success to their work ethic and ability to juggle multiple balls simultaneously. However, it was shown that their workaholism robbed them of

the opportunity to engage in the deliberate rumination that has been linked to posttraumatic growth. A large body of posttraumatic research has found that this process of sensemaking post-trauma is essential to the development of posttraumatic growth (Calhoun and Tedeschi, 2006; Walsh et al., 2018; Tedeschi et al., 2018; Maitlis, 2020). A study of 116 survivors of childhood abuse conducted by Krammer and colleagues (2015) found that survivors who chose not to reveal their abuse and that did not seek social intervention experienced trauma symptoms later in life. Further research has discovered that the resurfacing of trauma memories later in life has been linked to a subsequent incidence of trauma (Kaplow et al., 2006). This research has been supported by a series of studies conducted between 1996 and 2001 that found that early childhood trauma is associated with health issues later in life (Maschi et al., 2013). These findings were only partially supported by this study in that only two of the eight participants reported having experienced trauma-related symptoms later in life. There are several possible explanations for this result. One explanation is the stage of life of the two participants. The two participants for whom their trauma was expressed through medically related symptoms were in the mature stage of their careers and had become less busy, thereby removing their avoidance coping strategies. Another possible explanation is that the trauma symptoms are present in the others but have not yet surfaced. While the return of their childhood memories was not triggered by a subsequent traumatic event for all eight participants, the re-surfacing of the past was a common theme that ran across all of the eight participants in this study. The findings from this study are consistent with research that demonstrates that the recovery process from childhood trauma is a dynamic process (Banyard and Williams, 2007). The narrative accounts of Carol and Alice in Chapter 9 provided the lens through which the study had revealed the meaning making process the participants underwent that resulted in a period of deep retrospective identity reflection. Although the counselling literature is rich with descriptions of specific outcomes of childhood sexual abuse, this study is distinctive in its systematic examination of the survival and coping strategies from the perspectives of women who were sexually abused as children. As such, it adds to our existing knowledge of the importance of sensemaking in relation to posttraumatic growth and, more particularly, how this process of deep retrospective identity reflection, which is directly related

to self-identity, can serve as a stimulant for further identity revisions. The accounts of the participants' meaning making demonstrated that when an individual responds with critical reflection, they can open the door to a world of new possibilities and the ability to re-story their lives in ways they never previously considered or thought possible.

11.3 Section 2: Thesis Contributions

The following is a presentation of this thesis's contributions to knowledge, theory, methods, and practice. I begin this section by providing the study's empirical contributions.

11.3.1 Empirical contributions

This study makes an empirical contribution to three theoretical and empirical fields of study: narrative identity, posttraumatic growth and leader identity theories.

Considerable academic attention has historically focused on **posttraumatic growth** as a specific outcome, an explicit change in a person resulting from the trauma. There is little understanding of the first-person perspective of the recovery process following childhood trauma. The breadth and depth of this study expand extant knowledge of recovery from childhood trauma. The research participants' detailed accounts of the meaning making process and how they came to terms with their childhood trauma contribute to a better understanding of these processes, hence offering opportunities for health promotion to others who have experienced trauma (Stige et al., 2013). The study's use of a theoretical framework that integrated **identity theories** enabled the development of a process model that brings together these two lines of theorising related to positive growth post-trauma over a lifetime. It also contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex, cyclical and emergent nature of the links between identity and post-traumatic growth theory. The study adds to the work of Maitlis (2020) and McAdams (2021) by providing additional support for current theorising that emphasises the importance of **narrative identity** and sensemaking as critical components of posttraumatic growth. Moreover, the narrative re-storying model developed from the participants' storied accounts

introduces a new theoretical framework I have titled **Identity Phases of Posttraumatic Re-storying**, which examines the set of interconnected identity phases. These identity phases add new understandings to the recovery process post-trauma and the various ways in which trauma shapes identity.

Additionally, while the literature on leadership development is considerable, few studies span leadership development from birth through to early adulthood (Velsor, 2011; Liu et al., 2020). It is against this wide-ranging backdrop that this study contributes by providing further understanding of how **leadership identity** develops. This is achieved by examining the leadership development process from adolescence through to university and into adulthood, together with an increased understanding of the events and experiences that can lead individuals to seek out leadership roles. This study extends the work of Liu and colleagues (2020) that examines the very early origins of leadership by providing further insight into the influence of the participants' early formative experiences on their leadership development over time. The specific opportunities for leadership experiences presented in this study offer potential windows through which to theorise how leadership can be developed from a range of activities and events (Zheng, Meister and Caza, 2021). It also adds to knowledge of how environmentally related events, such as positive feedback, can influence leadership developmental trajectories, an area that has been understudied by leadership theorists (Day and Thornton, 2018). Zheng and colleagues (2021) argue that, despite its importance, little research has focused on the early origins of leader identity. The richly narrated identity stories of origin provided in this study offer valuable insight into individuals' sensemaking of their leader identities and the role that leader identity plays in leader development. It also contributes to an understanding of the role of trauma in leadership development which has been a missing phenomenon for examination, particularly in the leadership development of female leaders.

Research that explores the relationship between trauma and identity is scarce (Berman, Montgomery and Ratner, 2020), and there is even less scholarship on the theoretical

relationship between trauma, identity, and leadership. Traumatic events set in motion fundamental changes in a person's identity (Waterman, 2020). As noted earlier, the exclusive access I had to the women in this study provided a fertile ground on which to cultivate further insights into the nature of trauma and how it may serve to shape identity-related goals and leadership identity (Waterman, 2020). In particular, this study responds to Epitropaki and colleagues (2017) call for more research into the leader identity process.

Another interesting and unexpected contribution of this study is the role of self-reflection in the development of prosocial leaders' identities. The research illustrates how the final outcome of the participants' period of deep retrospective identity reflection, triggered by their reflections on their childhood abuse, resulted in the development of their prosocial leader identities. While there have been studies that have explored the relationship between trauma and prosocial behaviour, it is not well understood (Frazier et al., 2013) exactly how or why the trauma results in prosocial behaviours. The narrative accounts, which describe the circumstances that led the participants to pursue prosocial activities and how they shaped their prosocial leader identities, extends knowledge of the study of trauma-inspired prosocial leadership. The study builds on the work of Bennis (2009) and Wolf Williams and Allen (2015) by illuminating how these defining moments provoked revisions in the participants' life stories that encompassed a new and improved version of themselves that incorporated their resiliency.

11.3.2 Theoretical contributions

The study also aims to make a theoretical contribution by furthering the emergent identity work perspective advocated by Andrew Brown (2020) that encourages researchers to incorporate more than one line of theorising in their studies. The analytical framework for this study engaged with posttraumatic growth, narrative identity, social identity and leader identities over the life span. It also drew from additional strands of theorising, including attachment, self-enhancement, self-verification and identity motive theories. Applying this conceptual frame allowed for a richer understanding of the participants' leader identity construction,

which resulted in posttraumatic growth. It revealed how these processes developed a narrative identity that fused personal motivations, work identity, and career choices, resulting in a life span approach to understanding posttrauma leadership and posttrauma leadership identity construction processes. The use of an expanded theoretical framework, such as that adopted in this study, aligns with current thinking within leadership studies that recognize the links between leadership and identity processes (Ibarra et al., 2014; Brown, 2015; Caza, Vough and Puranik, 2018; Liu et al., 2020). This study supports the movement within organisational studies towards research that recognizes the complex, dynamic, contextually and embedded leader identity processes that evolve over time. Despite this shift, the use of conceptual frameworks that incorporate multiple strands of contemporary scholarship identity remains sparse. By drawing from established posttraumatic growth, narrative identity, contemporary leader identity theories and leadership development over the lifespan, this study stimulates the use of expanded frameworks.

The thesis, through its development of a narrative re-storying model that depicts the discovery of a set of inter-linked identity phases, outcomes, and processes, makes a conceptual contribution that adds new insights into the manner in which posttraumatic and leader identities can be narrated by exploring the means by which these women came to identify themselves as leaders. More specifically, this study introduces a conceptual framework that provides new ways to theorise the inter-related ways in which posttraumatic growth, identities and leader identities emerge from the interpretative analysis of the narrative accounts of the women in the study.

In summary, the main theoretical contribution of this work is the bringing together of disparate theories of identity and posttraumatic growth and how, by integrating them and applying a life cycle model, it resulted in a deeper and more dynamic understanding of the lived experience of the female leaders in this study.

Methodological contributions

The thesis contributes methodologically to the study of highly sensitive topics through the use of narrative inquiry and storytelling that incorporates embodied reflexivity. It provides additional insights into the challenges of a researcher when they are a member of the group that is under research and the corresponding need for additional transparency. The decision to include embodied reflexivity and embed my reflexivity within the text of the thesis offers an alternative approach to demonstrating transparency and another means by which a researcher can provide openness with respect to the impact of their personal experiences on the interpretation of their data. The use of embodied reflexivity in the study sensitized me to the emotional nature of the study. This, in turn, enabled me to listen emphatically, to “hear” the participants' stories, and be continually conscious of any perceived emotional stress while remaining aware of the impact these stories of trauma were having on me as the researcher.

This approach contributes to existing research on the importance of empathetic listening when researching trauma and its role in helping participants feel safe and accepted, such that no harm is done (Rogers and Farson, 2015; Gilbert, 2017; Isobel and Thomas, 2022). Using the life story approach to interviewing the participants provided a useful – yet unstructured – framework. This approach to interviewing yielded many positive benefits, including providing the participants control over how their stories would be shared. A potential challenge of unstructured interviews is that participants often don't know where or how to begin (Bihu, 2020). This approach created a broad framework for how the participants could begin to share their stories. The richness and volume of data amassed and analysed - related to trauma recovery processes - that the approach yielded was extraordinary, if not entirely unprecedented. It is hoped that this narrative approach to understanding the long and arduous recovery from trauma and its role on identity over the individual's full life span will prove useful and provoke future theorising. It is also hoped that the style and the manner with which I managed, analysed, and incorporated my reflexivity will stimulate thought as to the diverse range of approaches available to researchers, both within and outside similar fields of study.

11.3.3 Contributions to Practice

Overall, this study has potential implications for trauma survivors and therapeutic practice. These include reframing the narrative of childhood sexual abuse from that of victims to that of survivors, which this study suggests can promote positive self-identity. Moreover, the findings suggest that it is possible to emerge from trauma. It supports the notion that effective, prosocial leadership or prosocial action offers a potential opportunity to reframe trauma experiences in positive and growthful ways. Additionally, the study provides new understandings of the development of prosocial leadership development and how that can provide victims of abuse with the ability to re-story their lives from that of victims to survivors, from pain to purpose.

11.4 Section 3: Limitations

The findings of this study have offered noteworthy contributions. However, the limitations of this study must also be addressed. I begin with a consideration of the diversity and size of the participant pool as the small sample size, and lack of diversity may be critiqued by those less familiar with the narrative inquiry approach to research. As highlighted in Chapter 4, it was not the intention of this thesis to offer generalisations or suggest that the study participants were somehow representative of a wider population. The study was an exploration of the lived experiences of eight female CEOs who experienced early childhood sexual abuse. Such in-depth narrative accounts were only made possible with the smaller sample size. However, it is important to acknowledge that the study was limited in its focus on women within North America who were similar in age, albeit varied more considerably in relation to socioeconomic and ethnicity indicators.

Finally, as my introduction stated, this research is very much informed by my proximity to the subject matter of my study and the intimacy of my experiences with early childhood sexual abuse. Where relevant, I included extracts from my personal research journal that reflected my musings and disclosed how my experiences influenced the interpretation of the data. As a

researcher, as well as a female CEO with similar experiences to those I studied, I brought to the study my own perspectives, influences, and life history. As I presented the stories, I made decisions on what to include, what aligned with the study and research aims, and which findings were deemed contextually relevant. Another researcher, using the same study design, participants and research aims, may have chosen to represent the data in a different manner with different outcomes. Nevertheless, despite the expressed limitations, this study extends extant research on the relationship between trauma, identity and leader development over the life span while offering several potential mitigants to trauma. In addition, it provides insight into factors that may promote the development of healthy identities that have implications for possible interventions and therapeutic practice in the future.

11.5 Section 4: Suggestions for Future Research

There are several areas of future research suggested by the findings of this study. First, a study using a larger sample size with greater diversity in gender, age and country of residence will prove useful in determining if the findings extend to a broader sample. Of particular interest would be whether the data from other studies would support the narrative re-storying model and corresponding identity phases models presented in this thesis. Moreover, the model suggests therapeutic applications in the recovery from childhood trauma. An exploration of the applicability of the models would extend the utility of a process model to recovery from early childhood sexual abuse.

The data gathered in the study was detailed and voluminous. However, there were so many different ways a researcher could approach the study, and in the case of so many qualitative research studies, the thesis was limited in its ability to explore all possible areas of interest. One such illustration - that was a common theme across all eight narrative accounts - was the participants' disclosure that their siblings continue to struggle with various mental health and PTSD symptoms. This was most evident in the account of Betty, who had a twin sister. Betty and her twin sister were typically physically and sexually abused together. Betty's narrative reveals that she experienced posttraumatic growth and has made peace with her past.

However, she reported that her sister experiences challenges with day-to-day living and continues to struggle with her childhood trauma to this day. It would be interesting, for example, to conduct another in-depth exploration of possible explanations for the divergent responses amongst siblings in the aftermath of trauma.

There are several further opportunities to extend the research presented by the rich data gathered in this study, which would serve to enhance our understanding of the role that early childhood sexual abuse plays on an individual's identity formation and how it is possible to experience growth post-trauma. One such opportunity for future research is the role of secure attachments. Studies have identified that the early formation of secure attachments has positively contributed to posttraumatic growth (Jirek, 2017) and leadership development potential (Popper and Amit, 2009). However, this study does not support these findings. On the contrary, the participants in this study were devoid of early secure attachments. The fact that the participants in this study did not benefit from secure emotional attachments suggests that additional research is needed to explore the potential mitigants to a lack of secure attachments, with this study pointing to the importance of understanding potential early and ongoing circumstances that inform leader identity and that can lead to posttraumatic growth.

This was a qualitative study that did not seek to confirm the findings. Rather it provided some possible theorising that could provoke future studies. One such finding was the alignment of the participants' self-reported skills - that they attributed to their adversity - to skills that existing studies (Glass and Cook, 2016) have found to be contributory to successful CEOs. It would be interesting to explore the association between successful CEOs and early trauma in future studies. The focus on changes in personal and life outlook is useful. However, it would be equally interesting to understand if the participants' traumatic experiences did result in new skills and competencies, the degree to which they contributed to their corporate success and whether these skills can be developed in others.

11.6 Section 5: Final Reflections

At the outset of this journey, I failed to fully appreciate the unparalleled and extraordinary access I had to this group of very senior women and the benefits the research would offer in terms of new insights into an understudied group. As such, I sought to make the absolute most of this privileged access.

However, as an early researcher with over 30 years in the financial services sector, I brought an ingrained positivist background and struggled to find my academic voice. Moreover, one of the inevitable challenges that a researcher encounters when the topic under study is of a sensitive nature is the risk of harm to the researcher. Studies have found that doctoral students are often ill-equipped to deal with the emotional demands of sensitive research (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018), with studies on topics such as childhood sexual abuse often proving overwhelming for novice researchers (Jackson et al., 2013). I have learned much from this study and, with the benefit of hindsight, would like to offer recommendations to other researchers such that they may safeguard themselves when conducting similar sensitive research.

When considering the ethical issues associated with the sensitive nature of my research, my personal concerns and those of my university's ethics committee quite appropriately centred on protecting the research participants and ensuring no harm was done. My university's ethics committee expressed concern about the study's impact on me, given the growing body of literature on the risks to researchers with higher risks noted for early researchers (Woodby et al., 2011). However, I did not foresee such issues applying to me, given my personal familiarity and proximity to the subject matter. This confidence, combined with the demands of my career, prevented me from exploring the various resources offered by my university.

At a minimum, researchers studying sensitive topics should establish an informal support network of friends, family, and colleagues. I have since learned that there are a wide number of diverse doctoral student groups. I would encourage researchers to seek out such associations and encourage active participation at the outset of their studies.

The unstructured method adopted for this study encouraged the participants to share their stories freely and openly. This approach provided me with little control over the topics raised or the extent of the details shared, with many of the participants providing graphic details related to their physical and sexual abuse. Research has shown the potential for trauma among researchers studying inherently sensitive or emotional topics (Lalor et al., 2006; Sikic et al., 2019) that can lead to health issues (Dickson-Swift, 2006). A recommendation would be for the researcher to work collaboratively with their university when considering the potential risks and develop mitigating emotion management strategies. Most universities provide access to counselling with expertise in such topics. I would encourage students to avail themselves of such services and their universities to encourage them to do so. I have also since discovered a body of literature that specifically addresses the issue of research vulnerability and risks with well-researched mitigating strategies. I recommend that the student seek out such publications to better equip and familiarize themselves with recommended self-care and coping strategies related to the potential adverse consequences of researching sensitive areas prior to the commencement of their research.

Research has found that scheduling sensitive interviews to allow for time in between interviews is an effective means of managing the emotional impact of the interviews (Cook & Bosley, 1995, as cited by Lalor et al., 2006). My participants were located throughout North America, with many locations taking over twelve hours of air travel to reach. Intending to make efficient use of my time, I opted to immerse myself in the data by taking a three-month sabbatical from work. As such, when I was not interviewing, I was transcribing or analyzing emotionally sensitive accounts. This approach afforded me no time for self-care. I would highly recommend that researchers purposely allocate time for their personal well-being. This could be as simple as going to see a movie or planning nature walks. Studies have shown that researcher self-care – such as creative pursuits, yoga, or meditation – are effective mitigants for researchers of emotionally sensitive areas of study (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018).

The challenge of researching such a sensitive topic was compounded by the heavy burden I carry to do justice to the women in my study, women who had entrusted me with their most painful memories. As a result, my PhD journey has been one of discovery in more ways than one. Through the stories shared with me, I came to a new understanding of myself, my own history of trauma, and the influence my trauma has brought to bear on my own identities and life choices.

The study has also shown me the capacity of individuals to re-story life's most challenging circumstances. It provides hope for others who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, to learn that others – who have been through similar trauma - are functioning well and living happy lives. I hope these storied accounts of integrated personal change, strength and positive growth may be as inspiring to the readers as they have been for me. To honour the women in this study, I believe it is only fitting to provide them with the final word.

People need something to have hope in. They need to know that where they are today is not where they are destined to always be...Betty

I think that is the lesson. We all spend our entire life looking for our hero when in the end, it was within us all along. We are authors of our own story, the heroines of our stories...Alice

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List of Appendices

Appendix 1 - Posting



17 November 2017

Ground Breaking Research – You can make a difference!


Do you know the social costs of childhood abuse in the US is estimated at \$124 billion annually? What if you could potentially change that? What if you could help increase the chances of victims of childhood abuse leading happy lives and making a positive contribution to our society? Research has shown statistically that most victims of childhood trauma never recover while a smaller percentage return to baseline, only with the help of therapy. But there is emerging research that shows that there are others who are stronger as a result.

At a private meeting, attended exclusively by highly successful women CEOs who have risen to the top of their profession in the United States and Canada, it emerged through anecdotal and private discussions that they all had experienced childhood abuse over an extended amount of time. Further, this meeting revealed that these accomplished leaders did not identify themselves with their negative childhood experiences nor did they view themselves as victims of abuse. Rather, they were all successful and productive members of society.

Such insights led me to question whether there was a more general phenomenon in women who hold similar senior level positions. A preliminary, informal survey of female CEOs was conducted that indicated that childhood abuse was a variable present in most of the research participants. These findings ignited my desire to carry out formal research to investigate the potential relationship between early childhood abuse and senior corporate leadership in North America. As part of a doctoral program with Durham University in the UK and under the supervision of two experts associated with the university, I intend to study the effects of abuse as a potentially predictive factor on the success of female CEOs of mid to large sized corporations.

How can you help? I am looking for 24 CEOs, in Canada or the US, who have experienced sustained childhood abuse, have gone on to lead successful, meaningful lives and who are willing to participate in this very important research. It is hoped that this research will lead to case interventions that will significantly improve the life opportunities of those who have suffered abuse. Furthermore, this research has the potential to help reduce the exorbitant social and financial costs of childhood abuse on our society. We have a unique opportunity to make a big difference in the lives of so many.

Please email Cam at [redacted] for more information or to participate in this critically important research. Thank you.

Cam Miller has created this discussion in the  Network

Appendix 2 – Informed Consent Form

View and Reply to Discussion
Reply Privately to Sender

Informed Consent Form

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in the study, The Effects of Childhood Abuse on the Success of Female CEOs in North America, conducted by Carole-Ann Miller. I understand the nature of this study, appreciate the risks and benefits, and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation without penalty. I further understand that my consent must be provided prior to the interview to publish and that there is no further consent post-interview required.

I have had adequate time to think about the research study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. My signature below indicates my consent.

Participant

Date _____

Principal Investigator

Date _____

Study Information Sheet

Date:

Name of Participant:

Study Name: Childhood Abuse and Corporate Success; A Study of Female CEOs in North America

Researchers: Carole-Ann Miller, 5184 Bishop Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3J 1C9
c.miller@camsa.ca
Candidate for PhD, Durham University
Supervisors: Dr Jackie Ford, Professor of Leadership and Organisational Studies and
Dr Olga Epitropaki, Professor in Management

Purpose of the Research: I am proposing to study the effects of childhood abuse as a potentially predictive factor on the success of female CEOs. Specifically, I am seeking to answer what role – if any – does early childhood abuse play in a woman's ability to progress to the C-Suite?

As a successful female CEO, you are being invited to participate in this study. The study will interview 8 to 15 women residing in North American who have experienced childhood abuse and who have succeeded in the corporate world, as evidenced by their attainment of a CEO or executive level position.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: My initial research will include in-depth interviews. There will not be pre-established questions. Rather, the interviews will be free-flowing and simply start with: "Tell me your story". I will come to you and interview you at a location of your choosing. Due to the nature of the research, a private location, rather than a public setting, is preferable. The initial interview time should be approximately 4 hours and the subsequent interview will be approximately 2 hours which will be followed by a short survey.

Risks and Discomforts: I do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research study and you reserve the right to decline to answer any questions that you prefer not to answer. Notwithstanding the above, I understand that discussing these childhood adverse experiences may trigger or awake dormant memories either during or after this interview.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: The societal costs associated with the negative outcomes resulting from early childhood abuse have been well researched and documented. These adverse outcomes have translated into a growing need for, and reliance on, social services and psychiatric treatment and care. Yet a meaningful percentage of women who have succeeded in the business world have not only survived these childhood traumas and demonstrated resilience but have been seen to be significantly better after the adverse event that they were prior to the childhood abuse. It is hoped that the findings from this study will inform practice in the fields of social services and therapeutic practice and serve to mitigate the damage of the trauma resulting in positive individual and societal outcomes.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision to opt out of the study and to volunteer as a participant will not influence the relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff or the nature of your relationship, if any, with Durham University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer a question, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, Durham University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event, you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: The code of conduct in terms of total and complete confidentiality for YPO/YPO Gold will be strictly maintained. The data associated with the study, which will be collected via handwritten notes, audio tapes and digital devices, and will be held in the strictest of confidence. All confidential data, interview data and consent forms will be stored on a USB device that will be securely stored in a locked fireproof safe with access restricted to the research staff associated with this study. Please also take note that as an additional step, I will continue to transcribe my interviews immediately following the meetings. As I transcribe, I delete any reference to names, or places or dates that would potentially reveal the identity of my research participants. As such, there will not be any identifying information associated any data gathered as part of this study. Unless you choose otherwise all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research.

Dissemination of Research Results: Once all the data are collected and analysed for this study, I plan on sharing the information with Durham University or, as appropriate the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, journal articles, etc., As a participant, once the study is complete, you will have access to the findings.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact my Supervisor, Jackie Ford. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Durham University Internal Research Ethics Panel.

Appendix 3 – Durham University Ethics Approval



BETTER BUSINESS THINKING

Carole-Ann Miller (student)
Durham University Business School

24 July 2018

Dear Carole-Ann:

Project title: "The effects of early childhood abuse
on the success of female executives in North America"

I would like to confirm that your project has been granted ethics approval as it has met the review conditions.

Should there be a material change in the methods or circumstances of your project, you would in the first instance need to get in touch with me for re-consideration and further advice on the validity of the approval.

I wish you the best of luck on the completion of your research project.

Yours sincerely,

[electronic signature by email]
Dr Danny Chow
Chair of the ethics sub-committee

Email: danny.chow@durham.ac.uk
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Appendix 4 – Bradford University Ethics Approval

From: foml.ethics [mailto:foml.ethics@bradford.ac.uk]
Sent: Tuesday, June 27, 2017 9:46 AM
To: Carole-Ann Miller <c.miller@camsa.ca>
Cc: Jackie Ford <J.M.Ford@bradford.ac.uk>
Subject: RE: response to questions from the Ethics Committee.

Dear Carole-Ann Miller

You can go ahead with the research.

All the best in your research.

Andrea

Andrea Buttle
FoML Research Ethics Administrator
FoML.ethics@bradford.ac.uk

From: Carole-Ann Miller [mailto:c.miller@camsa.ca]
Sent: 23 June 2017 19:09
To: foml.ethics
Cc: Jackie Ford
Subject: FW: response to questions from the Ethics Committee.

Good afternoon

Enclosed is the revised informed consent form together with the information sheet. I confirm that the information sheet will be provided at least 24 hours prior to the interview taking place. Please confirm that these changes are satisfactory and that I may commence the study. Best...Cam

Carole-Ann Miller

From: foml.ethics [mailto:foml.ethics@bradford.ac.uk]
Sent: Wednesday, May 24, 2017 10:19 AM
To: Carole-Ann Miller <c.miller@camsa.ca>

My Reflexive Journal

Questions to ask myself and to reflect upon after each interview

Preliminary Interview

1. How did the interview go, did it provide any answers or themes?
2. How did the location affect the interview?
3. What was the overall flow of the interview?
4. What was the connection between me and the research participants?
5. Were there any issues in terms of rapport?
6. How did I influence the interview process?
7. Were there issues with the interview process?
8. How did I feel about the interview?
9. Is there anything I should do differently?
10. What was my biggest take-away?
11. What did I learn?
12. In what way did my theoretical assumptions affect the interview process?

Follow up Interview

1. How do I feel the interview went, as compared to the first interview?
2. Was the rapport the same?
3. How did she respond to the more structured format?
4. Were my questions effective, did they provide me with more insight?
5. Were there issues with the interview process?
6. How did I feel about the interview?
7. Is there anything I should do differently?
8. What was my biggest take-away?
9. In what way did my own theoretical assumptions affect the interview process?
10. How was the interview left?

Analysis

1. How did the participant and I respond emotionally and how did that affect the generation of my data?
2. In what way did my own theoretical assumptions affect my analysis and interpretation of the data?
3. How can I use my own personal experiences to enhance my understanding of the stories I have heard?
4. What other interpretations, other than mine, are possible?